G20 leaders to grapple with climate, taxes, Trump comeback

AFP – G20 leaders gather in Brazil on Monday to discuss fighting poverty, boosting climate financing and other multilateral initiatives that could yet be upended by Donald Trump's impending return to the White House.

US President Joe Biden will attend his last summit of the world's leading economies but only as a lame duck whom other leaders are already looking beyond.

The main star of the show is expected to be Chinese President Xi Jinping, who has cast himself as a global statesman and protector of free trade in the face of Trump's "America First" agenda.

Brazil's left-wing President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will be using his hosting duties to highlight his championing of Global South issues and the fight against climate change.

The summit venue is Rio de Janeiro's stunning bayside museum of modern art.

Security is tight for the gathering, which comes days after a failed bomb attack on Brazil's Supreme Court in Brasilia by a suspected far-right extremist, who killed himself in the process.

The summit will cap a farewell diplomatic tour by Biden which took him to Lima for a meeting of Asia-Pacific trading partners, and then to the Amazon in the first such visit for a sitting US president.

Biden, who has looked to burnish his legacy as time runs down on his presidency, has insisted his climate record would

survive another Trump mandate.

– Spotlight on climate –

The G20 meet is happening at the same time as the COP29 climate conference in Azerbaijan, which has stalled on the issue of greater climate finance for developing countries.

All eyes have turned to Rio for a breakthrough.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for G20 members, who account for 80 percent of global emissions, to show “leadership and compromise” to facilitate a deal.

A Brazilian diplomatic source said fast-developing nations like China were refusing pressure by rich countries to join them in funding global climate projects but added that he was hopeful of progress at the summit.

The meeting comes in a year marked by another grim litany of extreme weather events, including Brazil’s worst wildfire season in over a decade, fuelled by a record drought blamed at least partly on climate change.

At the last G20 in India, leaders called for a tripling of renewable energy sources by the end of the decade, but without explicitly calling for an end to the use of fossil fuels.

One invited leader who declined to come to Rio is Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose arrest is sought by the International Criminal Court and who said his presence would “wreck” the gathering.

Lula, 79, told Brazil’s GloboNews channel on Sunday that the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East would be kept off the summit agenda to focus on the poor.

“Because if not, we will not discuss other things which are more important for people that are not at war, who are poor people and invisible to the world,” he said.

– Taxing billionaires –

The summit will open on Monday with Lula, a former steelworker who grew up in poverty, launching a “Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty.”

“What I want to say to the 733 million people who are hungry in the world, children who go to sleep and wake up not being sure if they will have any food to put in their mouths, is: today there isn’t any, but tomorrow there will be,” Lula said on the weekend.

Brazil is also pushing for higher taxes on billionaires.

Lula had faced resistance to parts of his agenda from Argentina but on Sunday a Brazilian diplomatic source said negotiators from all G20 members had agreed on a draft final statement to be put to their respective leaders.

AFP