

US, EU vow to indict Tehran

AFP, Washington

The US and the EU vowed to hold Iran to account for its disputed nuclear programme but Tehran warned that it would stop cooperating with UN inspectors if a decision is taken to refer it to the UN Security Council.

The United States and European Union said they would lobby for Iran's referral to the UN Security Council at an emergency meeting of the UN atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), set for February 2.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said the

onus was on Iran to defuse mounting international concern over the nature of its nuclear project and dismissed Tehran's latest call for negotiations as disingenuous.

Rice said the message from Washington's European allies, which had been negotiating with Tehran, was "there is not much to talk about" after Iran moved to resume sensitive nuclear research last week.

"I think it's up to the Iranians to demonstrate that they are not just talking but they are serious," Rice told reporters before meeting with Solana at the State Department.

"It was the Iranians who walked away from the negotiations, who broke the moratorium (on nuclear

activities)," Rice said of the effort led by Britain, France and Germany to resolve the crisis.

While diplomats predicted the 35-nation governing board of the IAEA would refer Iran to the Security Council for possible sanctions, Iran raised the stakes and said it would respond by blocking access to the agency's international inspectors.

Dr Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's ambassador to the IAEA, said the UN monitoring agency's inspectors would no longer be allowed short-notice access to nuclear facilities and military sites if Tehran's activities were reported to the Security Council. In an interview on BBC News 24 television late Wednesday, Soltanieh

was asked directly whether Iran would halt cooperation if the IAEA board votes for referral.

Echoing views by Iran's national security spokesman Hossein Entemazi, he replied: "I think that is clear..."

"All the activities which we are voluntarily doing in accordance with additional protocols, including the complementary accesses (and) short notice access that we have granted... even to the military sites, will not be continued any more."

Iran agreed to an additional protocol in 2003 under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, permitting more intrusive, snap inspections of its nuclear sites.

Battle in Kenya leaves 38 dead

AP, Lodwar, Kenya

A battle for livestock between Ethiopian and Kenyan nomads has left 38 people dead in drought-stricken northern Kenya, officials and aid workers said yesterday.

Dongiro warriors crossed into Kenya from Ethiopia Friday and attacked Turkana herders to steal their animals, said Njenga Miiri, district commissioner for Turkana. The fighting killed 30 of the raiders and eight Kenyan women and children.

The clashes took place in the remote village of Lokamarinyang along the Kenya-Ethiopia border, about 260 miles north of the regional capital of Lodwar, said Lucas Ariong, an aid worker in the area.



PHOTO: AFP
Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) (C) attends a press conference to unveil the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress Wednesday in Washington, DC. Democrats proposed the legislation in reaction to the alleged corruption and scandals involving some GOP lawmakers and lobbyists.

IVORY COAST PROTEST UN HQ stoned, Gbagbo's call ignored

AFP, Abidjan

Supporters of Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo yesterday ignored his call for an end to violent protests, manning roadblocks, stoning UN headquarters and paralysing Abidjan for a fourth day.

Militant backers of the president have protested in the west African country's economic capital since Monday over a recommendation from a UN-mandated working group that the parliament stand down as its term had ended.

Several hundred demonstrators were besieging the United Nations headquarters in Abidjan, which they had tried to storm on Tuesday and Wednesday before being beaten back by Jordanian peacekeepers firing shots in the air.

"Between 200 and 300 of them are continuing to hassle us, throwing rocks. We have been replying with tear gas," a UN military source told AFP.

Up to 300 demonstrators also maintained a sit-in in front of the embassy of France, Ivory Coast's former colonial ruler which along with the UN has thousands of peacekeeping troops in the divided country.

The pro-Gbagbo "Young Patriots" also seemed to be maintaining control over state television, which they had invaded on Wednesday. After a favourable

evening news bulletin a continuous on-screen message Thursday called for reinforcements to come to broadcasting headquarters "to defend your television."

Public transport was at a standstill in the city, while the few motorists who ventured out were being checked at roadblocks around the city manned by the protesters.

Abidjan's streets were empty of pedestrians and security forces again were virtually invisible, despite an official ban on demonstrations.

On Wednesday evening, the president had urged the so-called Young Patriots to end the street violence and return to work.

The call, made jointly with Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny, was issued after crisis talks with Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, the current head of the African Union.

All three leaders said the international working group, whose job is to oversee the implementation of a United Nations resolution passed in October 2005, had no power to enforce its controversial recommendation made last weekend.

The UN resolution extended Gbagbo's term in office for a year pending elections after the failure to hold polls on time or disarm the rebels holding the north of the country since an abortive coup against Gbagbo in 2002.

Twin blasts kill 16 Iraqis

AP, AFP, Baghdad

Simultaneous suicide and roadside bomb blasts in the same Baghdad street killed at least 16 Iraqis and wounded 25 yesterday, police and hospital officials said.

A man with an explosives belt strapped around his waist walked into a crowded coffee shop on Saadoun Street and detonated his bomb, killing 12 people and wounding 20, said police Maj. Mohammed Younis.

Just seconds later, a bomb planted underneath a parked car outside the nearby al-Mathak restaurant exploded, killing at least four people and wounding five, including two women, Younis added.

Alaa Abid Ali, a medic at Baghdad's Kindi Hospital, said 16 bodies have been received from the attack scene.

The violence came as authorities prepare to announce the

results this week of the Dec. 15 election. US and Iraqi officials expect more attacks as religious and ethnic groups jockey for power in the new government.

Iraq's December general election was marked by some fraud, but nothing that would call into question the final results, according to a team of foreign experts Thursday.

"Fraud and other violations did take place," the International Mission for Iraqi Elections said in a 10-page report.

Fraud had forced the independent electoral commission to nullify the results from several dozen polling stations "where significant offenses occurred".

However, the IMIE added that "the team did not receive definitive evidence of other significant shortcomings in the conduct of the elections."

The December 15 general elections, whose final results

have not yet been announced, were held to elect a new four-year term parliament, the first such body since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003.

The IMIE team studied the results of voting at the request of the electoral commission after Sunni-based and secular parties complained of what they alleged was widespread fraud.

"A large number of complaints could not be treated with requisite rigor" because of lack of technical and human resources, according to the team, which noted that the law provided for an appeal process once final election results were published.

"The result of this election confirmed to the team that there is an urgent need, at this period in the history of Iraq, for a formation of a government of true national unity," the experts said.

US ties Syrian official to Iraq insurgency

AFP, Washington

The White House on Wednesday for the first time named a Syrian official as having "directly contributed" to support for the insurgency in Iraq, as the United States moved to freeze his assets.

The charge came after the US Treasury Department slapped the financial sanctions on the official, Syrian military spy chief Asset Shawkat, the brother-in-law of President Bashar al-Assad.

"Mr. Shawkat, as Syria's chief of military intelligence, has directly contributed to Syria's support for terrorism, including the insurgency in Iraq, Palestinian terrorist groups given shelter in Damascus, and Hezbollah and other terrorist groups in Lebanon," said White House spokesman Scott McClellan.

'UK doubts legality of CIA flights'

REUTERS, London

Britain believes the CIA's reported secret transfer of terrorism suspects to foreign countries for interrogation is illegal, according to a leaked government document published yesterday.

The Foreign Office memo says the practice, known as extraordinary rendition, "could never be legal" if the detainee is at risk of torture, according to extracts printed in the Guardian newspaper.

It adds that British cooperation "would also be illegal if we knew of the circumstances," according to the newspaper.

Iran president visits close ally Syria

AFP, Damascus

Iran's hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday began a two-day visit to Syria, Tehran's only regional ally, as both countries struggle to fend off mounting international pressure.

Ahmadinejad is on his first trip to Damascus since his shock election in June with his government facing possible UN sanctions over Iran's disputed nuclear programme.