

Diplomats fail to reach deal on Iran sanction

AP, United Nations

Britain's strategy for getting Iran to give up its nuclear ambitions would be to try to get Russia and China, key Tehran allies, to impose sanctions that could be enforced militarily if diplomacy fails, according to a letter obtained by The Associated Press.

But Britain and its Western allies the United States, France and Germany face an uphill struggle in getting Moscow and Beijing even to agree on a UN Security Council statement calling on Iran to comply with demands by the UN nuclear watchdog, the Inter-national Atomic Energy Agency, to suspend uranium enrichment.

US Ambassador John Bolton had expressed hope that the statement could be adopted after council discussions Tuesday afternoon. But US Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns told reporters Monday night after a 4 1/2-hour

meeting of senior diplomats from the six countries that more time was needed for negotiations.

"We remain convinced that we will achieve a presidential statement," Burns said. "It may take a little bit of time, but it's going to be worth the time because when we do achieve that statement, it will be yet another clear unified message by the international community that Iran has to heed the words of both the IAEA and the UN Security Council."

He reiterated that the six countries oppose Iran seeking a nuclear weapons capability and agree that Tehran is not complying with its international commitments and "is now travelling down a road toward enrichment and reprocessing which will be fundamentally detrimental to the interests of the world of nonproliferation and of peace and security."

But serious differences remain on the best way to get Tehran to halt uranium enrichment.

The senior diplomats from the six countries agreed on a brief statement which said their meeting "built on progress" at a London meeting of their foreign ministers on Jan. 30.

"We share a deep concern that Iran has failed to respond positively to the IAEA resolution of Feb. 4, continues enrichment and has ceased cooperation under the (IAEA) additional protocol" which allows surprise inspections, it said. "We will remain in close touch, particularly to finalize draft Security Council action."

Diplomats said the Russians and Chinese have not budged from their opposition to tough language in the proposed council statement including a demand for a report in 14 days on Iran's compliance with IAEA demands. Moscow and Beijing have said that is too short, with China suggesting 30 to 45 days.



PHOTO: STAR
Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is holding talks with Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi yesterday. Khaleda is in India on a three-day visit.

India, Pakistan hold talks on fighting crime

New police agency Saarcpol proposed

REUTERS, New Delhi

Crime fighters from arch rivals India and Pakistan began their first talks in 17 years yesterday to coordinate police work along their border and set up a South Asian police agency, along the lines of Europe's Europol.

Called Saarcpol, the agency would fight crime in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) region, which groups India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives, an official statement said.

The body would be modelled on Europol, which fights cross-border crime in Europe, said the statement from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Indian agency, which is holding talks with Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency officials.

Human trafficking and the smuggling of goods, narcotics and counterfeit currency routinely take place along the India-Pakistan border

which is already troubled by an Islamic insurgency in the northern disputed territory of Kashmir.

The talks would also look at appointing special officers for "quick and timely exchange of information on criminal matters," the statement said.

A formal news conference is expected on Wednesday, a CBI official said.

Media reports said the two sides were also likely to discuss immigration issues and an Interpol red corner notice against India's most wanted criminal Dawood Ibrahim, who is believed to be in Pakistan.

The last talks between the CBI and its Pakistani counterpart were held in 1989 in Islamabad.

Nuclear rivals India and Pakistan are currently engaged in a peace process to resolve a range of disputes including their core row over Kashmir, where tens of thousands of people have died in an insurgency against Indian rule since 1989.



PHOTO: AFP
Hundreds of protesters cross a footbridge on their way to the Pentagon to seek an audience with US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld during a protest Monday in Washington, DC marking the third anniversary of the Iraq invasion. About 25 protesters were arrested when they crossed a police line on the perimeter of the Pentagon complex.

US OFFICIAL SAYS

India, Pakistan making progress on Kashmir

ASIAN NEWS INTERNATIONAL, Washington

The US has said that India and Pakistan were making good progress on the Kashmir issue.

In an exclusive interview to ANI, Richard Boucher, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia said that New Delhi and Islamabad had made some visible progress on the contentious issue and were taking forward the Composite Dialogue process in a very careful manner.

"You've seen some really good progress between India and Pakistan in the composite dialogue including on the aspect of Kashmir," said Boucher.

"They've had now confidence building measures--started bus lines, railroads, people back and forth in a way that they never had before, and each of them has stepped forward with I think some new ideas, some new thoughts, some new contacts in terms of political parties and the interest of different groups in-in Kashmir, so there's a fair amount of thinking

going on -- new ideas coming forth and -- and new steps being taken and that's good," he said.

"They've--they've got a flow of people and goods back and forth; that can always be expanded and confidence building measures can be expanded, but they're also setting up now a new set of discussions and the whole composite dialogue including Kashmir and that's important that they just keep at it because they've been doing the right thing and we want to see them keep at it," he added.

Iraqi rebels attack police post: 28 die

15 more bodies found

AFP, AP, Baghdad

Rebels stormed an Iraqi police station yesterday in a pre-dawn raid to free inmates, triggering the deadliest firefight this year that left at least 18 police and 10 insurgents dead.

Army and police commando reinforcements were rushed to the town of Muqdadiya northeast of Baghdad to hunt down the large rebel force and recapture the 32 prisoners freed in the assault.

Officials said at least 18 policemen and guards were killed, along with 10 rebels, in the raid, which targeted a compound consisting of the main police station, the courthouse and municipal offices.

The fighting also left 13 members of the government forces wounded and led to the capture of 16 insurgents who were injured and left behind when other rebels made their escape.

Police said 32 prisoners who had been held in police cells on "terrorist-linked charges" had escaped.

The large rebel force arrived in cars and pick-up trucks at about

5:45 am and opened fire on police with automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenades, destroying some 20 police cars and setting part of the municipal offices on fire.

The insurgents, who escaped after the raid into neighbouring orchards, also set booby-traps along roads leading into the town, 100 kilometres (70 miles) from the capital, to ambush government reinforcements.

Those caught in the ambush included a police commando who was killed and another who was wounded when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb.

As the Iraq war entered its fourth year, police found the bodies of at least 15 more people including that of a 13-year-old girl dumped in and near Baghdad. The discoveries marked the latest in a string of execution-style killings that have become an almost daily event as Sunni and Shia extremists settle scores.

Quake hits Algeria: 4 killed

AFP, Algiers

An earthquake hit the northeast Algerian town of Laalam east of Algiers late Monday killing at least four people and injuring 67, local authorities in Bejaia district said quoted by national radio.

About 30 houses collapsed, Algerian news agency APS quoted the authorities as saying, adding that large quantities of rescue material had been sent to the affected region.

A radio journalist in Bejaia said those killed were three children aged 5, 9 and 13, and a 26-year-old adult.

The main quake was followed by several aftershocks, forcing people to spend the night outdoors, he added.

The director of Bejaia's health department told the radio that the injured were not seriously hurt, suffering from fractures or shock.

Algerian national radio said the quake measuring 5.8 on the Richter scale shook the Kherrata region at 1944 GMT.

Its epicentre was situated near the town of Kherrata, between Bejaia and Setif (respectively 260 and 300km--east of the capital).

The tremor was strongly felt in the east of Bejaia region over around 100km, causing panic among the population.

'Saddam's FM was on CIA payroll'

REUTERS, Washington

In the period before the Iraq war, Saddam Hussein's foreign minister Najji Sabri, was a secret paid source of the CIA, "NBC Nightly News" reported on Monday.

Citing unnamed current and former US intelligence officials, NBC said Sabri provided details of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction that turned out to be more accurate than CIA estimates.

Intelligence sources said Sabri was paid more than \$100,000 through an intermediary in a September 2002 deal brokered by the French, NBC reported.

Sabri may have thought he was working with the French, but some US intelligence officials believe he knew it was the CIA, NBC said.

The CIA questioned Sabri through a go-between about Saddam's WMD programme, the report said.

According to the intelligence sources, Sabri indicated that Saddam had no significant weapons programme and that while the

deposed Iraqi leader desperately wanted a nuclear bomb it would have taken more time for him to build one than the CIA's several-months-to-a-year estimate, NBC reported.

Both the CIA and Sabri said Saddam had stockpiled chemical weapons, but both were wrong, NBC said.

WMD were the main justification for President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq three years ago, but no such weapons have been found.

Citing intelligence sources, NBC said the CIA's brief relations with Sabri ended after he refused to defect to the United States. The agency had been hoping for a public relations coup, the network said.

Sabri was not named among the former senior Iraqi officials on the US most-wanted list of 55 Iraqi fugitives.

NBC said it found Sabri teaching at a university in the Middle East, but was not revealing his location for security reasons.

BUSH SAYS

US won't abandon Iraq

REUTERS, Cleveland

President George W. Bush said on Monday he understands that unrelenting violence in Iraq has shaken Americans' confidence but pledged the United States will not abandon the country as the fourth post-invasion year begins.

In a series of speeches, Bush is trying to convince an increasingly sceptical public that he has a winning strategy for Iraq amid widespread concerns that sectarian violence is turning into civil war.

Speaking to the City Club of Cleveland, Bush sprinkled his characteristic optimism with a more sombre description than usual of the situation, saying bluntly that Iraq remains an uphill battle three years after the US-led invasion.

"The situation on the ground remains tense. In the face of continued reports about killings and reprisals, I understand how some Americans have had their confidence shaken," Bush said. "They wonder what I see that they don't."

But he insisted progress was being made that the news media are not covering and he cited as an example the northern Iraqi town of Tal Afar.

US and Iraqi forces have wrested the town from the grip of al-Qaeda and insurgents, he said, and it is now "a free city that gives reason for hope for a free Iraq."

US and Iraqi forces had said the town was used as a conduit for smuggling in equipment and foreign fighters from Syria on the way to cities across central Iraq.

Bush is struggling with public approval ratings that have dropped to all-time lows of his presidency as the public becomes increasingly gloomy about US involvement in Iraq, where more than 2,300 American troops have died.

He faced some sceptical questioning, including from a woman who asked him whether he believed the Iraq war was a sign of the Apocalypse. But he also heard some friendly comments such as a man who invited him to a Hungarian-American celebration in October. A Newsweek magazine poll conducted last week showed Bush's approval rating fell to 36 percent, down 21 points from a year ago, amid discontent about Iraq. The survey said 65 percent of Americans were dissatisfied with Bush's handling of the war.

Lanka extends state of emergency

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday extended a state of emergency first imposed after the assassination of its foreign minister six months ago, but said violence had fallen sharply since talks with Tamil Tiger rebels in February.

Introduced after Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar was gunned down by a suspected Tiger assassin last year, the state of emergency gives the police and army wide powers.

It was extended first for a November presidential election and then again every month as violence rose.

Some two hundred people died in less than two months in December and January as suspected Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacks on the military almost destroyed a 2002 ceasefire, but officials say violence has since slumped.

"Last month, the killings and attempted killings came down," Prime Minister Rantasinghe Wickremesinghe told parliament. "This is a good trend. We want it to continue and so we need to extend the state of emergency."

With most parliamentarians away campaigning ahead of March 30 local elections, Tuesday's extension was passed without voting. The

Tamil National Alliance, political proxies of the rebels, abstained.

Wickremesinghe said there had only been 10 killings and nine attempted killings since the two sides met last month in Switzerland for their first high level talks since 2003 -- a vast improvement on earlier in the year. The army says not a single soldier has been wounded in the last month.

But divisions between the two sides remain vast, President Mahinda Rajapakse has repeatedly ruled out Tiger demands for a Tamil homeland and the rebels have threatened a return to a decade-war that has killed more than 64,000 if they do not win concessions.

The Tigers demand the government disarm a renegade group of ex-rebels who they say are now acting as army-backed paramilitaries, and some diplomats fear that without concrete moves from the government the next round of talks in April might not take place. Sri Lanka's stock market, hit hard by the string of attacks at the beginning of year, has since recovered much of its losses but traders say many investors are holding back, waiting to see the outcome of the next meeting in Switzerland.