Iran warns UN against tough nuke resolution

Ahmadinejad asks Israel to pack up and go

AFP, *Tehran*

Iran warned yesterday it would retaliate if the UN Security Council passed a resolution ordering it to stop sensitive nuclear work, but also made a fresh appeal for negotiations "without preconditions".

"Any harsh measures will face a proportionate reaction," foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters.

"If the other side chooses anything but the path of negotiations, our attitude will change accordingly," he added, without elaborating on how Tehran could retaliate.

The warning came as a draft resolution was circulated in the UN Security Council. If adopted, Iran would be legally obliged to suspend all uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities, at the centre of fears the country could acquire nuclear weapons.

Iran insists that it only wants to enrich uranium to make reactor fuel, and argues that this is a right under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Several senior Iranian officials have already warned that the Islamic republic could end UN inspections and leave the NPT.

"Iran will clearly not give up its rights. Our rights are non-negotiable," Asefi said, while at the same time appealing for negotiations "without any preconditions" to resolve the nuclear standoff.

The five permanent Security Council members plus Germany decided to send the Iran nuclear dossier back to the Security Council after Tehran failed to respond to an offer of incentives in exchange for a halt to enrichment.

Iran has said it is prepared to negotiate, but not suspend first.

"Everything should be a result of negotiations," Asefi said, adding that Iran was still studying the proposal.

"After the committees' work is done, we will give a response and start talks for achieving results," he said.

Iran has promised to reply by August 22.

Meanwhile, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday told arch-foe Israel to "pack up" and move somewhere outside the Middle East, the state news agency Irna reported.

"I advise them to pack up and move out of the region before being caught in the fire they have started in Lebanon," said Ahmadinejad, who has repeatedly called for the Jewish state to be relocated elsewhere on the planet.

Iran refuses to recognise Israel and opposes any two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ahmadinejad has in the past called for Israel to be "wiped off the map" or relocated as far away as Alaska.

Israel launched its offensive in Lebanon on July 12 after Shia Hezbollah militiamen captured two Israeli soldiers and killed eight others in attacks on the Israel-Lebanon border.

The Jewish state is also continuing with its attacks on the Gaza Strip, with the aim of retrieving a soldier snatched by Palestinian militants and stopping rocket fire.

"Zionists have launched their own destruction by attacking Lebanon," Ahmadinejad added, while accusing Britain and the United States of being "accomplices in this regime's crimes".

Iran, like Syria, has been accused of financing and arming Hezbollah but has always maintained it only gives "moral" support.

India transfixed by dramatic rescue of boy from well

AFP, *New Delhi*

A six-year-old Indian boy trapped in a well for more than two days was rescued on Sunday -- his birthday -- by army soldiers in a drama that gripped the nation.

Prince, who has only one name, accidentally fell into the well -- one foot (0.3 metres) in diameter -- on Friday while playing near his house in the city of Kurukshetra in the northern state of Haryana.

Hundreds of anxious onlookers erupted in cheers and applause as a rescue worker was pulled out of the well holding the little boy, bundled up in a white sheet.

Well-wishers held up a pink poster that read "Happy Birthday Prince" and garlanded the boy before he was taken away for a medical examination.

India has been mesmerized by footage of Prince sitting at the bottom of the 60-foot (18.2 metre) well -- caught on closed-circuit television cameras lowered into the pit by rescuers to pinpoint his location.

Though the boy looked a little shaken and scared, he appeared unharmed despite his steep fall, according to television footage.

His parents, relatives and a large crowd of onlookers, joined by soldiers and scores of journalists, have kept vigil at the mouth of the well ever since Prince fell.

Rescue workers gave him food and rehydration fluids, and also pumped extra oxygen into the pit during the two-day ordeal.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said Sunday that Prince would be given complete medical care once he was rescued.

Army engineers in charge of the rescue operation were forced to dig a passage to reach the area where Prince was trapped.

The plight of the six-year-old -- shown live by satellite channels -- evoked a strong wave of support and sympathy, with prayers being offered for the boy from across the country.

PHOTO: AFP

Indian army personnel carry Prince (C) after his rescue from a well in Kurukshetra yesterday. Indian police and army soldiers scrambled to rescue the six-year-old boy trapped in a well for more than 40 hours in a drama which has gripped the nation. Prince, who has only one name, accidentally fell into the well -- one foot (0.3 metres) in diameter -- while playing near his house in the city of Kurukshetra in the northern state of Haryana July 21.

19 Taliban killed in fighting

3 cops slain, 3 others kidnapped

AFP, *Kandahar/ Khost*

Afghan security forces yesterday killed 19 Taliban guerrillas and captured 17 others during a major operation against the rebels in volatile southern Afghanistan, a deputy governor said.

Two Pakistani militants were among those captured during the sweep near Lashkar Gah, the capital of troubled Helmand province, deputy provincial governor Mullah Amir Akhundzada said.

"We've launched a big operation in the area and it's ongoing right now," Akhundzada told AFP.

The operation was launched after village elders complained to the local government that Taliban fighters were intimidating them in various ways, including allegedly extorting money.

Earlier Taliban militants killed three policemen and kidnapped three others after they attacked a checkpoint in southern Afghanistan, police said Sunday.

A police company commander was shot dead with two colleagues after the rebels attacked their post in Ghazni late Saturday, a provincial police official said.

"The Taliban attacked and killed three policemen and kidnapped three others," the official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

Meanwhile, police detained a suspected would-be bomber in the eastern city of Khost, located in the province of the same name bordering Pakistan, provincial police chief Mohammad Ayoob said.

The man was carrying several rocket rounds, detonators and other bomb-making materials across the city, Ayoob said.

Insurgents often use home-made bombs against Afghan and foreign troops who have been here since the fall of the extremist Taliban government in late 2001.

A home-made bomb exploded near the US embassy in the Afghan capital Kabul late Saturday but caused no damage or casualties. Nato-led troops found and defused a second one nearby Sunday.

Afghanistan's small police force comes under regular attacks by insurgents.

Pak militants extend ceasefire after talks

REUTERS, *Miranshah*

Pro-Taliban militants extended a ceasefire with Pakistani forces for another month on Saturday to give more time for tribal elders to broker peace in a restive tribal region, officials said.

The militants last month announced a month-long ceasefire to allow tribal elders to try to end the conflict in the North Waziristan tribal region near the Afghan border, where hundreds of people have been killed in battles between security forces and rebels over the past year.

The truce was extended after a series of talks, under a jirga or traditional council, between elders and government officials with militants.

"The talks were successful and will continue for the period of the ceasefire to restore peace in North Waziristan," tribal elder and lawmaker, Maulana Nek Zaman, who has been mediating between the government and militants, told Reuters.

As part of the ceasefire the government released 32 tribesmen this week while militants freed four paramilitary troops kidnapped from checkpoints in April.

The tribal jirgas are seen as part of the government's latest strategy to use political means to restore peace in the semi-autonomous tribal belt where hundreds of people have been killed in battles over the past three years.

North Korea will take centre-stage at ARF

REUTERS, *Kuala Lumpur*

North Korea will take centre-stage at a meeting of Asian and Western powers in Malaysia this week, but there is little optimism for a breakthrough in their standoff over the reclusive state's nuclear programme.

Preparations for the Asean Regional Forum, where Southeast Asian nations host talks with the world's major powers, have already revealed discord over the issue, with Japan pushing for a sternly worded communique.

"We want a statement to condemn the missile tests," a Japanese diplomat said, referring to North Korea's July 5 tests that angered the international community, particularly Tokyo.

"Asean is preparing a statement but it will not include this North Korean issue because Malaysia is worried that if they push North Korea too hard they won't attend the meeting."

Malaysia, hosting the summit as chair of the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean), has said the gathering would be an ideal venue for progress on the North Korean issue because it brings together all six parties engaged in the issue.

North Korean Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun is due to attend the talks along with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and counterparts from China, Japan, South Korea and Russia.

"If we could have a six-party meeting in Kuala Lumpur, I would be very happy to attend," Rice was quoted at the weekend as telling Asian reporters in a Washington briefing.

Six-party talks stalled last November after North Korea objected to US financial sanctions based on accusations that it counterfeited US currency and trafficked drugs. Washington also wants the North to abandon its nuclear weapons activities.

PHOTO: AFP

People watch floodwater rushing out the Hoa Binh power dam on Saturday on Da river in the northern province of Hoa Binh in Vietnam. Heavy rains in the last two weeks have caused flash floods in parts of northern Vietnam where 16 people have been killed or missing.

UN asks Nepal to resettle Bhutanese refugees

AFP, *Kathmandu*

A senior UN official has called for Nepal's new government to resettle some of the 100,000 refugees living in camps here after being evicted from neighbouring Bhutan more than a decade ago.

Judy Cheng Hopkins, assistant high commissioner of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, said Nepal should look beyond repatriating the refugees and think about letting them stay permanently or move to other countries.

"The government of Nepal has given top priority to repatriation as the primary solution. It should be flexible and look at other options including third country resettlement and local integration," she told a press conference Saturday.

Hopkins visited refugee camps in eastern Nepal during a two-day visit and met UN and government officials to discuss the fate of the ethnic Nepalese evicted from Bhutan in the early 1990s and stripped of citizenship.

Hopkins expressed concern over the growing "radicalisation" and "militarisation" in the camps, which could threaten security and "hamper the repatriation and resettlement process."

But she said the government's decision to let 16 refugees settle abroad was a promising start.

She added the interim administration, which came to power after street protests ended the king's direct rule, had given the UNHCR permission to carry out a census in the camps.

Talks between the Nepal and Bhutan on the status of the refugees have stalled, angering the refugees many of whom lost property in the evictions.

Bhutan, a reclusive Himalayan kingdom of around 635,000 people, says many of the ethnic Nepalese were recent immigrants and therefore not eligible for citizenship.

However, human rights groups have accused Bhutan of discrimination and forcible eviction without recourse to appeal.

India tests missile

AFP, *Bhubaneshwar*

India yesterday tested its surface-to-air Trishul missile from a site in the eastern coastal state of Orissa, defence officials said.

The Trishul (Trident) test comes after New Delhi's nuclear-capable Agni III ballistic missile, with a range of 4,000 kilometres (2,480 miles), failed during a trial launch earlier this month.

Trishul, which was last tested in December, is designed for use by the army, air force and the navy and can carry a 15-kilogram (33-pound) conventional warhead up to nine kilometres (5.5 miles).

Lanka placed on alert as LTTE marks Black July

AFP, *Colombo*

Sri Lanka yesterday stepped up its already tight security arrangements in the capital as Tamil Tiger rebels marked "Black July," or the 23rd anniversary of anti-Tamil riots here, police said.

Police and troops set up more road blocks and tightened security at key installations amid fears that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could carry out attacks, a police official here said.

A Tiger landmine attack that killed 13 soldiers sparked anti-Tamil riots in this majority Sinhalese country in July 1983. An estimated 400 to 600 Tamils were killed by Sinhalese mobs as the then government tacitly backed rioters.

The 1983 riots were a watershed in the island's drawn-out Tamil separatist conflict and saw the escalation of guerrilla activity.