

Nuclear double-standard on Iran justified, says US

Negotiation still best option to settle row: IAEA

REUTERS, AFP, Berlin/Vienna

The United States acknowledged yesterday it was employing a double-standard in its divergent approaches to India and Iran's nuclear programmes, but said its policies were justified by the behaviour of the two countries.

"Is there a double-standard? Yeah. There should be," said US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher, when asked whether a civilian nuclear cooperation deal between Washington and New Delhi might send the wrong message to Iran.

Boucher, who is in charge of central and south Asian affairs in the State Department, was in Berlin for

discussions with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on topics ranging from Afghanistan to India and central Asia.

Back in March, when the US nuclear deal with India was unveiled, Steinmeier said the timing of the agreement was "not helpful" given continuing talks with Iran over its nuclear programme.

The deal would enable India, long treated as a nuclear pariah, to receive American atomic technology and fuel, even though it has not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and has already developed atomic bombs.

The United States, supported by Europe, is demanding that Iran, which is a member of the NPT and

does not have nuclear weapons, halt key aspects of its nuclear programme because it suspects the country plans to develop atomic bombs.

Iran, which says its nuclear programme is for purely peaceful purposes, concealed its uranium enrichment program from the nuclear watchdog of the United Nations for 18 years before declaring it in 2003.

"When you have a country that kicks out inspectors, violates its commitments, goes back on its obligations, tears up agreements ... they should be treated differently than a country that has a good record in non-proliferation ... and which wants to bring itself more in

alignment with the international community," Boucher said.

He added that he did not believe Iran decided its policies based on how Washington dealt with India.

Meanwhile, UN nuclear watchdog chief Mohamed ElBaradei said yesterday that negotiation remains the best option to settle the Iranian nuclear crisis, amid reports of Tehran offering a short-term suspension of uranium enrichment.

"I still believe that negotiation is the best option to find a durable solution," ElBaradei told reporters as a meeting began in Vienna of the 35-nation board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Saddam accuser targets foreign arms merchants

REUTERS, Baghdad

A US-based Iraqi doctor, testifying in the genocide trial of Saddam Hussein yesterday, demanded compensation from foreign companies she said supplied him with chemicals he is accused of using to gas Kurdish rebels.

Saddam himself used his presence in court after a three-week recess to intervene on a political issue that has set Kurds and Arabs at odds this past week, over whether the Iraqi flag should be changed because of its association with Saddam. The ousted leader defended the flag, before the judge shut his microphone.

Katherine Elias Mikhail described campaigning as a socialist rebel with Kurdish peshmerga guerrillas in the late 1980s when their mountain bases were bombed from the air with weapons that choked and blinded hundreds of people, including herself.



PHOTO: AFP
The sun rises over ground zero as families gather at the World Trade Centre site yesterday in New York to mark the fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Clinging to floral tributes and photos of their loved ones, tearful families and friends of those killed in the September 11 attacks five years ago gathered for commemorations at the World Trade Centre Monday.



PHOTO: AFP
A protester is removed by security officers from the press conference of British Prime Minister Tony Blair (L) and Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora in Beirut yesterday. Blair, who began his first visit to Lebanon greeted by angry demonstrators protesting his stance on Israel's month-long war with Hezbollah guerrillas, promised that his government would provide help in building its armed forces so that they can control the entire country.

Blair runs into protests on Lebanon visit

REUTERS, Beirut

About 1,500 Lebanese protested against British Prime Minister Tony Blair's visit to Beirut on Monday, accusing him of backing Israel's 34-day war with Hezbollah guerrillas.

Troops, riot police and barbed-wire barriers kept the demonstrators well away from the government building in downtown Beirut where Blair met Prime Minister Fuad Siniora.

"I'm standing here because Blair is the killer of Lebanese children," said Ibad Malak, a 19-year-old student.

Blair angered many Lebanese by his refusal to call for an early ceasefire in the conflict, which killed nearly 1,200 people in Lebanon, mainly civilians, and 157 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

He was discussing with Siniora a UN truce in effect since August 14

and Britain's contribution to postwar reconstruction.

"Beirut is free, Blair out," chanted the protesters. Some carried placards reading "Thank you Blair for delivering the intelligent bombs" — referring to US flights laden with bombs for Israel that refuelled in Scotland during the war.

"Blair you killer, go to hell," read another placard.

"Tony Blair supports America and Israel and has supported the war, so how can we welcome him here," said Ali Shahine, 21, a hotel worker who was among the protesters.

Security sources said about 1,500 people had turned out for the protests, organised by Hezbollah and its pro-Syrian allies.

Blair had been due to meet Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, an ally of Hezbollah, but an aide to the Shia Muslim leader said he had left on a private visit abroad on Saturday.

Moment of silence marks Sept 11 attacks

AP, New York

The USA began a solemn observance of the fifth anniversary of the Sept 11 attacks yesterday, with sorrowful family members clutching photos of the victims at the World Trade Centre site and quiet remembrances planned around the country.

A moment of silence was observed at ground zero at 8:46 a.m., commemorating the moment American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the trade centre's north tower.

On the 16-acre New York City expanse where the World Trade Centre once stood, three more moments of silence are planned for 9:03, 9:59 and 10:29 a.m., the times when the second jetliner struck one of the twin towers, and when each tower fell.

Family members began arriving before 7 a.m. at the trade centre site, some clutching bouquets of roses and framed photos of their loved ones. Others wore pins bearing pictures of the victims.

"I think it's important that people remember as years go on," said Diana Kellie, of Acaconda, Mont., whose niece and niece's fiancé were killed on one of the planes. "The dead are really not dead until they're forgotten."

Firefighter Tommy King and others stood beside a fire truck with a windshield emblazoned with the names of two comrades who died on Sept. 11.

"It's just weird being back here," King said outside the World Financial Centre, where he hasn't been for five years. "This building here was a morgue."

Spouses and partners of the 2,749 people who died at the trade centre were to read the names of the victims as families of the victims descend to roam the site and lay flowers.

President Bush visited ground zero Sunday and on Monday was to visit the two other attack sites: Shanksville, Pa., where 40 people were killed when a jet crashed into the ground, and the Pentagon in Arlington, Va., where 184 died.

Bush also planned a prime-time address from the Oval Office.

There were also moments of silence set for 8:46 a.m. in the American and United terminals of Logan International Airport in Boston. American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 took off from Logan before slamming into the towers.

Tigers accuse Lanka of scuttling new peace bid

AFP, Colombo

Troops and Tamil Tigers traded artillery fire across the island's north-east yesterday, a day after the guerrillas accused the government of sabotaging efforts by Norway to broker peace.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) hit the Kadjuwatte army camp in the east of the island using long-range mortar fire and troops retaliated using arti-

lery, official sources said. They said there were no immediate reports of casualties.

Similar long-range attacks continued across a de facto frontline in the northern peninsula of Jaffna where the military lost 28 soldiers killed at the weekend while advancing into rebel-held territory to destroy bunkers before retreating, the sources said.

On Sunday, the defence ministry said government forces killed at least

115 Tigers during the clashes in Jaffna while the pro-rebel Tamilnet.com said the military suffered heavy losses.

Neither of the claims could be independently verified.

The latest fighting in the bitter three-decade-old ethnic conflict came after the LTTE said it had been prepared to withdraw from a strategic coastal town that was the scene of weeks of deadly fighting in August and September.

Global media abhors US response to 9/11

AFP, Paris

Newspapers across the world yesterday strongly criticised the US response to September 11, accusing the Bush administration of bungling its "war on terror" and squandering global goodwill by invading Iraq.

On the fifth anniversary of al-Qaeda's assault on New York and Washington, editorials united in condemning the attacks and expressing revulsion for the Islamic extremists who carried out the atrocity.

While papers said many people

were still grappling with the immensity of what happened on that day, nearly all agreed the world had since become a more dangerous and uncertain place.

Much criticism, especially in the Middle East and Europe, was reserved for US President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq under the banner of the "war on terror".

The New York Times acknowledged the United States had lost the feeling of unity and purpose, which gripped the nation in the aftermath of the attacks, and lamented a lost opportunity.



PHOTO: AFP
Activists of the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) shout anti-government slogans during a rally in Lahore Sunday. The ARD, along with other opposition parties, held a public rally to protest against the killing of tribal leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti.

US calls for sanctions if N Korea rejects talks

AFP, Seoul

Sanctions aimed at curbing North Korea's military threat should be enforced unless it returns to six-nation disarmament talks, the US envoy to those talks said Monday.

Christopher Hill described the communist state's missile launches in July as "blackmail" and said the missile-related sanctions ordered by the United Nations Security Council were a response to that threat.

The North "needs to understand that if they get involved in this type of production of weapons of mass destruction, if they fire off missiles as an effort to intimidate their neighbours, as an effort to create a situation of blackmail, they should not be surprised if nations take actions which are essentially designed to protect us and our financial systems," Hill said.

He was speaking after talks with South Korean Unification Minister

Lee Jong-Seok, on the last leg of an Asian tour aimed at restarting the stalled talks.

At the discussions last September, the impoverished North agreed in principle to give up its nuclear weapons program in exchange for aid and security and diplomatic guarantees.

But it boycotted the talks two months later to protest US sanctions on a Macau-based bank accused of laundering and counterfeiting money for the North.

"I hope they want to come back to talks but I cannot make hope the basis of our policy," Hill told reporters. "We have to take measures to protect ourselves and we certainly have to take measures to implement (Security Council Resolution) 1695."

"It's very important that when the Security Council speaks as it did, and it spoke very clearly with one voice, it's very important that what the Security Council says gets implemented."