

## Sanctions threat against Iran back on front burner

AFP, London

The United States, following crunch talks in London, geared up Saturday for tough negotiations with other world powers over a draft UN resolution to impose sanctions against Iran for its nuclear programme.

Senior US official Nicholas Burns said the five permanent UN Security Council members — the United States, Russia, China, Britain, and France — plus Germany would start drafting next week a sanctions resolution.

However, he conceded that the tough part would be deciding the extent of punitive measures following the talks here that involved US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and top diplomats from the five other nations.

In a statement issued by host Britain, the group agreed to discuss sanctions and lamented Tehran's refusal to suspend uranium enrichment, but insisted that the door remains open to negotiations if

Tehran were to back down.

Burns, the US under secretary of state for political affairs, said that work on a new Security Council resolution under Article 41 of the UN charter, which allows for diplomatic and economic sanctions, would start next week.

It would probably kick off Tuesday or Wednesday with a video conference involving him and his five counterparts before it is pursued a day later at the level of the ambassadors at the United Nations of the six powers, he added.

"I am quite confident that we are now heading towards a sanctions resolution," Burns told BBC radio on Saturday.

"There will be tough negotiations ahead to define the specific nature of those sanctions. This is always a complex business."

He could not give an estimate of how long the talks would last.

Burns played down suggestions that Russia and China remain reluctant to pursue sanctions

against Iran, despite its refusal to comply with an earlier Security Council resolution calling on Tehran to suspend uranium enrichment.

"It is very clear that this group of countries is united," Burns said. "The Iranians believed, apparently, that they could divide this group. They haven't succeeded in doing that."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, whose country has balked at US-led calls for sanctions on Tehran, reiterated after the talks here Friday that the standoff still could be resolved through negotiations.

British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, who chaired the talks, also cautioned that the sanctions debate "will require a great deal of work and understanding."

French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy said "the door to dialogue will remain open," allowing for the Islamic republic to back down.

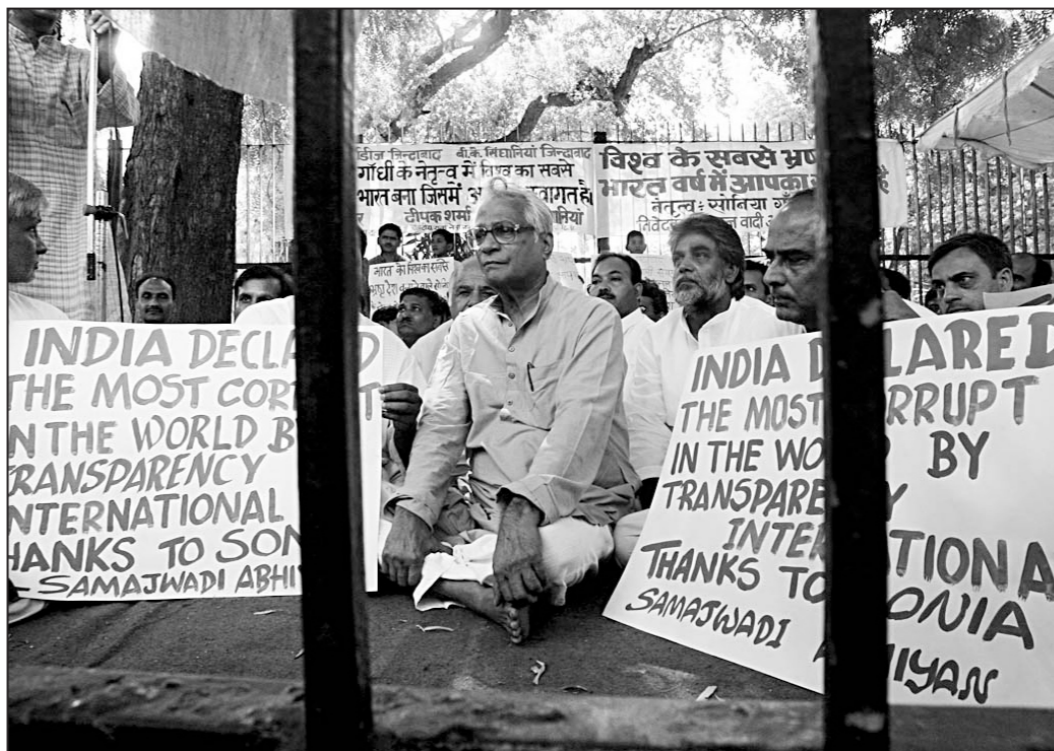
"We decided in unison to work

together in the coming days" on "sanctions which are proportionate and reversible," he said.

Washington has long led charges that Iran's nuclear program is a covert grab for atomic weapons, something that Tehran has hotly denied. Tehran argues that the nuclear program is purely for civilian energy purposes.

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana has held a series of talks with Iranian negotiators in recent months in order to get them to consider EU trade proposals in exchange for halting nuclear enrichment, but pressure for an accord intensified after Iran failed to meet a UN deadline by August 31.

Rice has said the United States wants a graduated series of sanctions, to be implemented through multiple UN resolutions that would ramp up pressure on Iran if it persists with its nuclear program.



Former Indian Defence Minister, George Fernandes (C) and activists from Samajwadi Abhiyan (Socialist campaign) protest against Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi and Congress-led UPA government during a demonstration in New Delhi yesterday. In a global recognition of a different kind, India has been ranked as the worst performer by Transparency International on its global Bribe Payers Index, which is based on the propensity of companies from the world's 30 leading exporting countries in bribing abroad.

## Russia keen to expand nuke activity with India

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Chandigarh

Russia, an influential member of the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), has said it is keen to expand civilian nuclear cooperation with India, but underlined that issues regarding the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the NSG regime needed to be resolved to accelerate the process.

"We are keen to expand our activity in the nuclear sector with India. The enhancement of bilateral peaceful nuclear cooperation is also in the interest of our countries," Russian ambassador to India Vyacheslav I Trubnikov said at a seminar in Chandigarh.

"Russia is ready to interact in this sphere provided it will not violate Russia's existing international obligations," he said as he alluded to the Kudankulam nuclear power project being built in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu with Russian help.

"However, the concrete prospects and possibilities of such cooperation are closely geared to resolving the issues related to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the NSG regime," he said.

## Hamas PM unshakable on Israel's recognition

AFP, Gaza City

Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniya was adamant Friday that Hamas would not recognise Israel, vowing to withstand huge international pressure to soften the stance of his ruling Islamist movement.

"We will not recognise Israel, we will not recognise Israel, we will not recognise Israel," Haniya thundered over the cheers of tens of thousands of party supporters rallying in support of his embattled Palestinian government.

The prime minister instead repeated that his movement would be willing to enter into a truce with the Jewish state in exchange for a Palestinian state created on land occupied by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war.

"We are for the creation of a Palestinian state on the territories occupied in 1967 with Jerusalem as its capital in exchange for a truce but not recognition of Israel, which would amount to renouncing the land of our ancestors," he added.

Israel rejects any question of a truce and demands that the Palestinian government accept international conditions in order to resume dialogue and end a boycott

that has sent the territories into economic freefall.

"It is ridiculous to contemplate a truce with someone who in the same sentence refuses to recognise your existence," said spokesman Avi Pazner.

After Hamas refused to recognise Israel, renounce violence and abide by past peace agreements, the West suspended direct aid to the Islamists took office in March, giving rise to a crisis of unprecedented proportions.

But in a speech summing up his government's record after six months, Haniya rejected "diktats" imposed by the European Union, Russia, United Nations and United States, known as the so-called Middle East quartet.

"We reject foreign interference in the affairs of the Palestinian people and the diktats of the quartet," Haniya said.

"We insist on non-recognition of the legitimacy of occupation and we will never renounce an inch of our land, refugees' return and the creation of a Palestinian state enjoying full sovereignty with Jerusalem as its capital."

## Army offensive may derail talks: LTTE

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers said they might pull out of peace talks planned later this month if the military continues a new offensive in the east, as sporadic artillery duels continued yesterday.

The army was around 5 km inside Tiger territory in the restive eastern district of Batticaloa early on Saturday, officials said, after pushing through the rebels' forward defence lines on Friday to the alarm of aid workers and truce monitors.

The rebels have threatened to withdraw from the truce completely if attacks by the military continue, while the government says it reserves the right to retaliate if the Tigers attack security forces.

"Unless the Sri Lankan military halts its actions, we will be forced into an unfortunate situation where we will have to re-examine our decision (to hold talks)," Tiger political wing leader SP Thamilselvan said in a letter sent to Norwegian peace envoy Jon Hanssen-Bauer overnight and obtained by Reuters.

The military justified Friday's offensive saying the Tigers had

attacked their frontline positions in Batticaloa and in the besieged army-held northern Jaffna peninsula, which is cut off from the rest of the island by rebel territory.

The military said the rebels had destroyed a bridge north of Batticaloa as security forces advanced towards a village called Ponichchankeni.

"Our troops pushed past the rebel forward defence line as far as Ponichchankeni," a military spokesman said, asking not to be named. "There is artillery and mortar fire on and off," he said, adding that the military was trying to rebuild the bridge.

Across the water from the village, and a further 3 miles north lies the rebel-held town of Vakara, where the Tigers have a large base and where thousands of displaced civilians are sheltering. International aid agencies had already pulled staff out of Vakara because of security fears.

Officials said many Tiger casualties were lying near the forward defence line that separates rebel from government territory in Batticaloa on the east coast.

## UNSC asks N Korea to abandon nukes

AP, United Nations

With speculation mounting of a North Korean nuclear test as early as this weekend, a unanimous UN Security Council urged the secretive, communist nation Friday to abandon all atomic weapons as it promised last year and cancel plans to detonate a device.

Japan hinted the North could face sanctions or possible military action.

A statement adopted by the council expresses "deep concern" over North Korea's announcement that it planned a test which would confirm strong suspicions it is a nuclear power and warns Pyongyang of unspecified consequences if it carries through. The message also urges the North to return to six-party talks on scrapping its nuclear weapons programme.

With tensions rising, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il met hundreds of his top military commanders and urged them to bolster the nation's defences, as officers cheered, "Fight at the cost of our

lives!" the North's official Korean Central News Agency reported earlier Friday.

A North Korea expert in China, the North's closest ally, said only the removal of American economic sanctions against Pyongyang could dissuade the country from carrying out a nuclear test.

"North Korea has already made a decision to carry out a test," said Li Dunqiu, of China's State Council Development Research Centre, a Cabinet-level think tank. But "if the US removes sanctions ... then tensions can be eased. Otherwise launching a nuclear test is unavoidable for North Korea."

The United States imposed economic sanctions on North Korea last year to punish it for alleged counterfeiting and money laundering. For the last 13 months, North Korea has boycotted six-nation talks aimed at persuading it to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

North Korea said Tuesday it decided to act in the face of what it claimed was "the US extreme threat

of a nuclear war," but gave no date for the test. Washington has repeatedly said it has no intention of invading North Korea.

Both China and Russia have urged the United States and North Korea to hold talks, which Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said Friday "could be useful in resolving the situation." But he said US Ambassador John Bolton informed the council that there would be no North Korean-US talks except in the margins of resumed six-party talks.

Bolton said the Security Council needs to adopt a long-term strategy to deal with North Korea but the top US priority now is to stop a nuclear test.

"We take the threat by North Korea seriously. We don't think this is an attention-getting device of people waving their arm to say 'see me, see me.' We think this would be consistent with the unfortunate logic that North Korea has been following," he said.

## Gunmen shoot dead 2 German journalists in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Unidentified gunmen shot dead two German journalists while they were camping in a tent in northern Afghanistan early yesterday, the interior ministry said.

The two, a man and a woman, were shot in the province of Baghlan at about 1:20 am, said a spokesman for the interior ministry which handles police affairs.

They had camped in Baghlan en route to the central province of Bamayan, ministry spokesman Zemaral Bashary told AFP. "They were killed by unidentified people in their tent... They were shot dead with AK-47s," he said.

Bashary said the pair worked for the Deutsche Welle network. The attack was in the province's Tala Wa Barfak district. "The investigation is ongoing," he said.

A Deutsche Welle employee who did not want to be identified said the car, passports and most of the belongings with the pair were left with the bodies after the attack.



Pakistani earthquake survivors gather outside the office of the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) during a demonstration in Islamabad yesterday. Some two thousand survivors of the October 8, 2005 earthquake staged a demonstration against ERRA. The international aid group Oxfam said this week that a year after the 7.6 magnitude earthquake, 1.8 million people were still living in temporary shelters.

## Japan PM set for Asia trip amid DPRK worry

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is set to begin a landmark fence-mending trip to China and South Korea but it could be overshadowed by the crisis over North Korea's threatened atom bomb test.

Abe, long seen as a hardliner towards Asian neighbors, flies Sunday to Beijing for the first visit by a Japanese premier in five years. It is his first foreign trip since he became prime minister on September 26.

He will hold talks with President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao before heading to South Korea on Monday to meet President Roh Moo-hyun.

The region's security is likely be high on the talks' agenda after the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a statement Friday which expressed "deep concern" over the North's planned test but made no explicit threat of sanctions.

"Not only Japan but also the international community will take severe action to North Korea" if the secretive communist state goes ahead with the test, Abe told reporters.

"Together with the international community, Japan will send a message to make North Korea understand that things will get worse if it fails to respond to the international community's concerns," he said.

Abe had earlier said that he would try to find common ground with his counterparts from China and South Korea during his two-day trip. The two neighbours have so far preferred to take a softer approach towards the North.

"It's important to share the same understanding of the situation between Japan and China, and also between Japan and South Korea, during the summits," Abe said.

## Iraqi violence kills 25

AP, Baghdad

A suicide bomber rammed a police checkpoint in northern Iraq with an explosives-laden vehicle Saturday, killing 14 people, including some who died when their homes collapsed in the blast.

The suicide bombing in Tal Afar a city cited by President Bush earlier this year as an example of improving security in Iraq was the deadliest attack on a day when more than two dozen people died in violence around the country.

Four policemen and 10 civilians were killed when the vehicle detonated after speeding into the checkpoint, police Brig. Sabah al-Maamari said. Some of the victims died when parts of nearby homes collapsed from the force of the blast in the city about 30 miles from the Syrian border.

Separately, more victims of Iraq's Shia-Sunni violence were found, with seven bullet-riddled bodies in Baghdad, where US and Iraqi troops have been trying for more

than a month to put down sectarian killings in intensified neighborhood-by-neighborhood sweeps.

One American soldier with the 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, died Friday near Beiji, 155 miles north of Baghdad, the military said Saturday. No other details were given.

In the city of Mosul, gunmen killed a woman who was walking with her 5-year-old son, Mosul police Col. Abdel-Karim al-Jubouri said. The boy was not harmed, he said.

The US military had predicted a spike in violence with the onset of Ramadan two weeks ago something that the chief US military spokesman Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell said had been borne out.

"Unfortunately, as expected, attacks have steadily increased in Baghdad during these past weeks," he said Wednesday, adding that the number of car bombs found and cleared were at an all-time high.

## 4,000 Iraqi police killed in last 2 yrs

AP, Baghdad

About 4,000 Iraqi police have been killed and more than 8,000 wounded in the past two years, the US commander in charge of police training said Friday, but he said the force's performance was improving and officials are working to weed out militants.

Beefing up Iraq's security forces is a cornerstone of efforts to stop the violence that has torn the country since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Police have been a prime target for attacks by Sunni insurgents.

Sunnis accuse the Shia-led police of helping fuel sectarian violence that has killed thousands this year. They say the police have been infiltrated by Shia militias and turn a blind eye to death squads who kidnap and kill Sunnis.

## 'Stakes high in Nepal's renewed peace talks'

AFP, Kathmandu

The stakes are high for today's second set of talks between Nepal's government and rebel Maoists in determining whether a slow-moving peace process to end a decade-old insurgency remains on track, analysts say.

The rebels have warned that if the peace talks break down, they will call crippling, mass protests in the capital Kathmandu.

"The rebels' threat of protests in the capital cannot be taken lightly. They are a political group who have weapons, and they have concentrated their cadres in Kathmandu," said Rabintra Khanal, who teaches politics at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan University.

Both sides have observed a ceasefire since protests, spearheaded by the Maoists and political parties in a loose alliance, forced King Gyanendra to end 14 months of absolute rule in April and restore parliament.

But little progress has been made in ending the insurgency, which has killed at least 12,500 people, and the rebels have accused the government of dragging its feet and renege on promises.

"We can't expect the meeting between the prime minister and the rebel chief to resolve all issues," said Kapil Shrestha, who also teaches political science at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan University.

"But it will be crucial in showing how the two sides can move forward."

The areas of dispute between the rebels and government, and within the multi-party government itself, are manifold.

They include the future of the monarchy, disarmament of the rebels and control of the army and bringing the insurgents into an interim government.

The first meeting between Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and rebel leader Prachanda in June led to a breakthrough announcement that a temporary constitution would be drafted within a month that would allow the Maoists to join a new interim government.

In addition the two sides agreed to hold elections for a constituent assembly that would rewrite the constitution permanently, a key rebel demand.

But little headway has been made since then.