

Iran may face same fate as N Korea: Rice

EU set to back limited sanctions

AFP, REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice warned Iran Monday that it could face sanctions and international isolation over its nuclear programme such as those faced by North Korea.

"I expect the Security Council to begin work this week on an Iran sanctions resolution," Rice told reporters. "So the Iranian government should consider the course that it is on, which could lead to simply to further isolation."

The European Union was set to back limited United Nations sanctions against Iran yesterday after Tehran spurned conditions for opening negotiations on its nuclear programme.

Diplomats said the EU's 25 foreign ministers were due to discuss possible incremental measures targeted initially at individuals and materials involved in Iranian uranium enrichment activities, which the West suspects is aimed at making a bomb.

"The most important thing is to have a united response as we showed with North Korea. We must

show Iran that the international community is completely determined to remain united," European External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner told reporters.

The UN Security Council unanimously voted for wide ranging sanctions against North Korea over its defiant nuclear test last week.

The United States is gathering international support to also punish Iran for defying a UN Security Council decision calling on the Islamic republic to halt uranium enrichment, a process that could lead to nuclear bomb-making.

After four rounds of unsuccessful talks aimed at securing an enrichment suspension, the European Union is set to return the Iranian nuclear file to the UN Security Council Tuesday for possible enforcement action.

"The greatest challenge to the nonproliferation regime comes from countries that violate their pledges to respect the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The North Korean regime is one such case, but also so is Iran," Rice said.

The Islamic republic is a member

of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The Iranian government, she said, had been watching the developments surrounding the North Korean case and "it can now see that the international community will respond to threats from nuclear proliferation."

But Iran says it will buckle under pressure.

"Pressure and threats against Iran's nuclear programme will not affect Iran in any way," the student news agency ISNA quoted Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as saying.

Uranium enrichment lies at the heart of Western concerns over Iran's nuclear programme. The process can be used to make the fuel for civil reactors but in highly extended form can also produce the fissile core of an atom bomb.

Iran insists its nuclear programme is solely for civilian energy purposes, but Tehran's arch-foe Israel and the United States suspect the real aim is a covert weapons programme.

Prosecutors draft rape charge against Israeli president

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli prosecutors have begun to draft an indictment against President Moshe Katsav on charges including rape, army radio reported yesterday, amid speculation on who could succeed the embattled leader should he resign.

The draft indictment will be presented within two weeks to Attorney General Menahem Mazuz, who will then decide whether to formally charge Katsav, local media said.

Israeli police announced on Sunday that evidence gathered during a weeks-long investigation was enough to charge the 60-year-old head of state with rape, sexual harassment and wire-tapping.

Katsav has vigorously denied the allegations -- the most serious ever levelled against a national leader -- and has so far refused to step down from his largely ceremonial post.

The president thinks that an indictment will not be filed -- previous police recommendations against top officials have not always been followed by formal charges -- but will resign should he be indicted, his attorney said.

"If attorney general decides to present a formal indictment, the president will immediately resign, he will not remain president for a second longer," Zion Amir, one of Katsav's lawyers, told army radio.



Sri Lankan sailors remove bloodied military equipment from the wreckage of buses in Habarana yesterday after the island's worst-ever suicide bombing. At least 103 people were killed and 150 wounded in the attack on October 16 against Navy personnel at a transit point for sailors and officers heading home on leave.

'Lankan govt, Tigers don't want to talk'

AFP, Colombo

The worsening cycle of violence in Sri Lanka, where Tamil Tiger rebels this week launched their bloodiest-ever suicide attack, is a sign that neither side in the brutal ethnic conflict is ready to sit down for talks slated for next week, analysts said yesterday.

In the latest carnage, more than 100 people -- most of them sailors -- were killed when Tiger suicide bombers detonated a truck packed with explosives next to a convoy of naval buses near the restive district of Trincomalee.

The government, which last week also suffered a major battlefield defeat in the northern peninsula of Jaffna with the loss of at least 133 soldiers, has hit back with air strikes.

"Both sides are stubborn," said Harry Goonetilleke, a retired air force chief and a political advisor to a former president.

"It seems the Tigers want to provoke air attacks. That will be their excuse for not going for talks. The government is playing into their hands," he said, adding that the recent debacles should encourage the government to adopt a more conciliatory attitude.

Former Tamil rebel turned politician, Dharmalingam Sithadthan,

argued that neither side was keen on talks partly because they had no political basis to negotiate.

"Even if they go for talks, what they want is to use the international audience to expose the other side as insincere," Sithadthan said. "There is no genuine effort to talk peace. This is a charade."

Sri Lanka's main peace broker Norway is nevertheless trying to keep alive plans for a meeting.

Norway has been working to restore the February 2002 ceasefire and end spiralling violence which has claimed more than 2,300 lives since December. More than 60,000 people have been killed in the three-decades-old conflict over a Tamil homeland on the Sinhalese-majority island.

Special envoy Jon Hanssen-Bauer was due to meet with officials here Tuesday on the proposed peace talks in Switzerland from October 28 to 29 under an agreement reached last week just before the latest fighting flared.

Japan's top peace envoy Yasushi Akashi has also held talks in Colombo with President Mahinda Rajapakse on resuming peace negotiations and ending an eight-month deadlock in the process.



Indian policemen check the bags of shoppers at the entrance to Ghaffar Market in New Delhi yesterday. Security has been tightened across the Indian capital ahead of the festivals of Diwali and Eid in the wake of intelligence reports of potential terrorist strikes.

China urges N Korea not to escalate tensions

AFP, Beijing

China called on North Korea not to escalate international tensions after Pyongyang on Tuesday dismissed the UN resolution imposing sanctions over its nuclear weapons test as a "declaration of war."

"We have noticed the statement by the DPRK (North Korea)," foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said when asked about the comments released earlier by the regime's official news agency.

"The important thing right now is that all parties concerned should refrain from taking any action that may further escalate the tensions."

Liu called the UN Security Council's resolution on Saturday an "important message" to North Korea in response to its atomic test and

urged Pyongyang to "seriously treat and respond" to the appeal.

"We hope the DPRK will adopt a responsible attitude and fulfil its commitment on realising the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula," Liu said.

He repeated China's call for North Korea to return to stalled six-nation talks, established in 2003 in an effort to curtail North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

China hosts the talks, which also involve the two Koreas, the United States, Japan and Russia.

North Korea has refused to return to the six-nation forum until the United States lifts separate sanctions imposed last year for counterfeiting and money laundering.

Naga rebels accuse Delhi of arming rivals

REUTERS, Guwahati

A powerful separatist rebel group in Nagaland accused the government of arming a rival faction, as violence between the two groups intensified ahead of peace talks yesterday.

Naga rebels have been fighting since 1947 for a separate homeland for the mainly Christian Naga people on India's border with Myanmar, in a insurgency which has killed more than 20,000 people.

A ceasefire between the rebels and the government came into force in 1997 but despite several rounds of

talks, there has been little progress.

As a fresh round of talks was due to begin in Amsterdam, top leaders from the Isaac Muivah faction of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) complained that security forces were helping the rival Khaplang faction (NSCN-IM).

"During the talks, (we) will question the role of the Indian security forces in supplying weapons and ammunition to Khaplang to fight against us," a senior NSCN-IM leader in Dimapur told Reuters. He declined to be identified because he was not authorised to speak on the record.

US assures Delhi of push for nuke deal

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

US President George W Bush spoke to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh over telephone and assured New Delhi that Washington was committed to pushing through the civilian nuclear deal in the next session of the Senate.

During the ten-minute conversation, the two leaders also exchanged notes on North Korea's nuclear test and sanctions as part of an exercise to firm up a consensus on how to persuade Pyongyang to halt its nuclear programme.

Bush and Singh discussed the future of Indo-US nuclear deal, which was reached by the two leaders on July 18, 2005, but could not be taken up for vote by the US Senate during its session last month ahead of the November 7 congressional elections.

India hoped that the Bush administration would push the deal through the "lame duck" session of the Senate next month. The House of Representatives has already overwhelmingly voted for the bill.

Nepal businesses close in strike against extortion

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Shops, industries and transport services were closed in many parts of Nepal on Tuesday in a strike called by a business lobby group to protest against extortion by Maoist rebels.

The powerful rebels, who are fighting to overthrow the constitutional monarchy, say they collect "voluntary donations" to maintain their 35,000-strong force.

Highways were deserted and thousands of people were stranded as a result of the strike called by the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI).

"Extortions and threats by the Maoists or their trade unions are continuing," said Chandi Raj Dhakal, the federation president.

One dead in Rome metro train crash

AFP, Rome

A young woman died and scores of people were injured, five seriously, when a Rome metro train smashed into the back of another one that was standing in a station early on Tuesday, police and rescue workers said.

The crash, believed to be the first fatal accident ever to hit the Italian capital's metro system, occurred during the morning rush hour.

Some 15 ambulances rushed to the scene of the crash, taking the most seriously injured to hospital. Among them was a French tourist who was bleeding badly from a head wound.

Israel again threatens to intensify offensive

3 more Palestinians killed

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel again warned yesterday that it would up its offensive in the Gaza Strip, a day after the ruling Islamist Hamas movement threatened to teach the Israeli army a "lesson it will not forget".

"Gaza should not become a second Lebanon," Immigrant Absorption Minister Zeev Boim told public radio, reiterating a phrase used by Israeli leaders in the past few days.

"Apparently we will not have any other choice but to launch an

expanded operation, like Defensive Shield, in order to destroy the stockpiles of weapons and to hit the terrorist organisations," said Boim, a close ally of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Defensive Shield was launched by Israel in 2002, the largest military operation in the West Bank since the 1967 Six Day War, which left more than 200 Palestinians and 29 Israeli soldiers dead and some 5,000 Palestinian detained.

"We have to completely stop the rocket fire and not to allow the

terrorists to smuggle modern arms that would upset the balance of power between the forces," Boim said.

Israel has already been pounding Gaza for nearly four months after militants seized a soldier and killed two others in a cross-border raid in late June.

Three Palestinians, including a militant from the radical Islamic Jihad group, were killed Tuesday by the Israeli army in northern West Bank, security and medical officials said.

6 shot dead as violence surges in Thai south

AFP, Yala

Six more people have been shot dead as violence surged this week in Thailand's Muslim-majority south, police said yesterday.

The latest attacks brought to 13 the number of killings since Sunday, and came despite signs that Thailand's new military-backed government may seek a peaceful solution to the two-year insurgency that has killed more than 1,500.

One policeman was shot dead Tuesday by suspected Islamic militants who opened fire at police officers guarding a bank in Yala, one of three restive southern provinces bordering Malaysia.