

Russia praises new Iran sanctions resolution

But wants some changes

REUTERS, United Nations

Russia praised a European draft UN resolution imposing sanctions on Iran's nuclear materials but objected to a travel ban and wanted to ease a freeze on financial assets on Tehran officials.

"It should not take too long," Moscow's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told reporters on Monday when asked about a possible vote by Christmas. But he quipped that the "Russian Christmas is on the 7th of January."

Britain and France presented the draft, a softer version of the original one, to the full 15-member Security Council in hopes of a vote by Christmas.

"The intent of the resolution (is) to stop any risk of proliferation of

sensitive nuclear and missile technologies and at the same time to convince Iran (to) go back to negotiations," said Britain's UN Ambassador Emyr Jones Parry. "If Iran complies, the process stops. That much is clear."

The resolution bans imports and exports of materials and technology relating to uranium enrichment, reprocessing or heavy-water reactors as well as ballistic missile delivery systems for a bomb, which Moscow approves.

The proposals are a reaction to Iran's failure to comply with an August 31 UN deadline to suspend uranium enrichment, which can produce fuel for nuclear power plants or for bombs.

Iran says it is pursuing nuclear power for peaceful purposes, while

the West believes its research is a cover for bomb making.

France's UN Ambassador Jean-Marc de la Sabliere reminded reporters that Iran "for 13 years has concealed its activities and this has created mistrust."

The US-backed resolution, drawn up by Britain, France and Germany, would impose a travel ban and freeze the assets of institutions and individuals involved in Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

But China's UN Ambassador Wang Guangya made clear Beijing and Moscow were uneasy about those provisions. "The travel ban will always be regarded as a humiliation," he said.

Added Churkin: "We do have some doubts about the appropri-

ateness of the travel ban in this resolution."

Churkin said the financial freeze should also be refined to make sure an agency on the list that engaged in both prohibited and legal activities would not necessarily be punished.

An annex to the resolution, obtained by Reuters, singles out 11 agencies or businesses and 12 individuals involved in Iran's nuclear and ballistic missiles programs.

A key concession to Russia was allowing the continued construction and supply of fuel to an \$800 million light-water reactor it is building at Bushehr in southwest Iran. The original draft was ambiguous on fuel supplies.



PHOTO: AFP
Nobel Peace Prize winner Prof Muhammad Yunus (L), Norwegian Crown Prince Haakon and Crown Princess Mette-Marit attend the annual Nobel Peace Prize concert in Oslo Monday.

Saddam faces quick execution

AFP, Baghdad

Saddam Hussein and two top aides convicted with him will be executed immediately after an appeals court confirms their sentences and could be buried in secret, an Iraqi official said yesterday.

A senior Iraqi government official said he expected the judicial panel studying the ousted dictator's appeal to confirm death sentences on Saddam, his half brother Barzan al-Tikriti and a former judge, Awad Ahmed al-Bandar.

"We are considering the possibility of executing the three, Saddam, Barzan and Bandar at one time on the same day," the official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity because the court is supposed to be independent.

"We may bury Saddam at a secret location," he said.

"His body may later be handed over to his relatives, as under Muslim rituals we can exhume the body after it is buried. But one thing the government will ensure is that there is no memorial built for Saddam anywhere in Iraq."



PHOTO: AFP
Holding up a poster showing images of three siblings killed Monday in Gaza City, Palestinian school children rally on the streets of the West bank city of Jenin yesterday.

Hamas gunmen open fire on Fatah protest

AP, REUTERS, Khan Younis

Hamas gunmen opened fire on demonstrators from the rival Fatah movement in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, wounding four people in the first factional violence following the fatal shooting of three children of a Fatah loyalist, officials said.

The demonstration was organised to protest the deaths of the children, whose car was riddled with bullets as they were driven to school Monday morning. Fatah officials have accused Hamas of being behind the shooting. The children's father is an intelligence officer who is considered an enemy of Hamas.

Saleh Hammad, a local Fatah leader, said the demonstration was peaceful, though he acknowledged that some children had provoked the Hamas militiamen by throwing rocks at them.

"Even if one or a few children lost their temper and stoned the members of the unit, this is not a reason to be fired at," he said.

Hospital officials confirmed that four people were wounded, one

moderately and the others lightly. The demonstration quickly dispersed, and there were no further signs of fighting.

Meanwhile Palestinian security forces loyal to President Mahmoud Abbas traded gunfire with Hamas policemen in Gaza yesterday as tensions soared after the killing of three young sons of one of Abbas's top intelligence officials.

Hospital officials said two members of Abbas's security forces had been wounded, one seriously. A spokesman for the governing Hamas Islamist movement's police force said two of their men had been wounded. One was in critical condition.

Stop shelling civilians

UN tells Lanka army, rebels

REUTERS, Colombo

Deadly artillery shelling of civilians by both Sri Lanka's military and the Tamil Tiger rebels is violating human rights, a deeply concerned United Nations said on Tuesday, appealing to both sides to stop.

More than 1,200 civilians have been killed so far this year in the crossfire of renewed civil war between the state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), according to truce monitors, and thousands are fleeing fighting in the east.

The Tigers say dozens of civilians have been killed by army

artillery fire in and around the rebel-held town of Vakarai in the eastern district of Batticaloa since Saturday, while the army accuses their foes of using them as human shields.

Around 30,000-35,000 displaced minority Tamils are living in camps in Vakarai, while more than 3,000 majority Sinhalese in government-held territory in neighbouring Trincomalee district have fled rebel artillery fire.

"All fundamental rights are currently being breached in areas like Vakarai and villages in Trincomalee district," Amin Awad, Acting UN Resident

Representative and Humanitarian Coordinator said in a statement.

"It is imperative that direct shelling where civilians reside stops and the civilian population must be granted full and unhindered freedom of movement, away from military operations," he added.

Thousands of civilians have sought refuge in Buddhist temples and schools in the government-held town Kantale in the far northeast, while tens of thousands more live in constant fear in the northern army-held Jaffna peninsula, which is cut off from the rest of the island by rebel lines.

Annan paints grim picture of ME

'Just' Israel-Palestinian peace key to settling conflicts

AFP, United Nations

Outgoing UN chief Kofi Annan, in a report released Monday, painted a grim picture of Middle East turmoil, insisting that a "just and comprehensive" Israeli-Palestinian settlement was the key to resolving other regional conflicts.

The report, which will be Annan's last on the issue before he leaves office at the end of the month, will serve as a basis for a debate on the Middle East during a ministerial session of the UN Security Council scheduled for Tuesday.

"Today, the Middle East faces grim prospects, and is more complex, fragile and dangerous than it has been for many years," the Ghanaian UN secretary general said. "The various unresolved but increasingly interconnected conflicts in the region both feed and feed off a growing sense of estrangement between peoples of different faiths, with consequences throughout the world."

Calling the failure to settle the

"long-festering Arab-Israeli conflict...the major underlying source of frustration and instability in the region," he urged a "regional approach" to resolve the interconnected crises and conflicts.

"I am convinced that the search for stability in Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere will be greatly served by a concerted effort to address the legitimate aspirations of Israelis, Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese to achieve two independent and secure states of Israel and Palestine, an end to the occupation of Arab land both in the occupied Palestinian territory and the Golan Heights" as well as peace in Lebanon, he noted.

In this context, Annan said the roadmap, the blueprint for peace drawn up by the diplomatic quartet - the European Union, the United States, Russia and the United Nations - remained "the reference point around which any effort to re-energize a political effort on the Israeli-Palestinian track should be centred."

He urged the quartet to "find a

way to institutionalize its consultations with the relevant regional partners" and "to engage the parties directly in its deliberations."

One immediate priority, the UN chief said, was finding "new ways of protecting Palestinian and Israeli civilians" from the continuing violence.

"There is a pressing need for mechanisms for the protection of civilians, and I hope that such possibilities, such as international observers, will be further explored, with the strong backing of the quartet and the (Security) Council," he added.

Annan made it clear that he saw "an active and systematic third party role" as essential to consolidate the current ceasefire in Gaza, promote "unconditional and open-ended talks" between Israeli and Palestinian leaders and establish clear parameters for the settlement of final status issues such as the fate of Jerusalem and the return of Palestinian refugees.

Suicide bomb, US forces kill 13 in Afghanistan

AFP, Kandahar

A suicide bomber blew himself up at a governor's house in southern Afghanistan Tuesday, killing eight people, while US-led security forces shot dead four militants and a teenage girl.

The violence came as President Hamid Karzai attended a high-level security conference in Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban regime, to urge foreign forces to do their best to avoid civilian casualties.

Six bodyguards, a district chief and a civilian were killed when the suicide bomber sneaked into the heavily guarded residence of the governor of troubled Helmand province, provincial police chief Mohammad Nabi Mullahkheil told AFP.

"Governor Mohammad Daud was about to leave and as his motorcade and bodyguards were prepared the attacker penetrated into the governor's house and tried to approach the governor," Mullahkheil said.

"The bodyguard suspected he might be an attacker and stopped him but then the man exploded himself," he said, adding that eight other bodyguards were injured.

Nepal seeks Indian help to resolve Bhutanese refugee crisis

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal is seeking Indian help to resolve the problem of Bhutanese refugees languishing in eastern Nepal for more than a decade, officials said yesterday.

A seven-member team led by Bhutanese refugee leader Tek Nath Rijal met with Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on Monday to press their demands to be repatriated.

"The prime minister said that he has been in regular touch with India and is seeking Indian government's help to resolve the refugee crisis," Balram Poudel, the chairman of the exiled Bhutan People's Party, told AFP.

But he quoted the prime minister as saying that New Delhi continues to view the crisis as a "bilateral issue between Nepal and Bhutan".



PHOTO: AFP
Outgoing twelfth King of Malaysia Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (R) greets officials before boarding a flight to his northern home state of Perlis, at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang yesterday. Malaysia's twelfth king, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, on Tuesday stepped down from his post after a five-year reign to make way for the next monarch in a send-off steeped in colour and tradition.