

# Tehran considering US 'proposals' for Iraq talks

'New UN sanctions on Iran to be incremental'

AFP, Tehran/ Washington

Iran is considering "proposals" which it has received from the United States for talks about Iraq's security, the foreign ministry spokesman said on Saturday.

"The Americans have recently contacted Iran through different channels requesting talks about Iraqi issues and in particular that country's security," Mohammad Ali Hosseini told state television.

"We are studying these proposals," he added.

Hosseini did not specify if he was referring to a security conference on Iraq planned for March, which is set to include both the United States and Iraq's neighbours including Iran.

"We are ready to put all our resources at the Iraqi government's disposal to improve stability and security," the spokesman added.

Iran's top security official Ali Larjani said last week that Tehran would take part in the conference so long as it was in the interests of its violence-plagued neighbour.

Iran and the United States have had no diplomatic relations since Washington severed ties in 1980 in the wake of the seizure of its embassy in Tehran by Islamist students.

Any official contacts between the two sides would mark a major break in the frozen relations, which have been marked by mutual recriminations and enmity over almost three decades.

Washington, which has repeatedly accused Tehran and its close ally Damascus of fomenting the violence in Iraq, said it would join the conference and would not rule out possible contacts between US envoys and Iranians.

The move is seen as a potential policy shift for the United States, which also accuses Iran of seeking to develop nuclear weapons and is leading an international campaign to force Tehran to stop its controversial nuclear work.

But the White House has rejected bilateral talks with Iran and Syria amid speculation that joining the conference together with these two countries was a sign of Washington's warming toward the two US arch-rivals in the Middle

East.

Meanwhile, senior US and European officials indicated Friday that new UN sanctions being drawn up against Iran to curb its nuclear programme will involve only a relatively minor tightening of measures imposed by the world body in December.

"This is going to be an incremental resolution," said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack.

"It will be proportionate to the response that the Iranians have given the international community to this point," he told reporters as diplomats from the big five UN Security Council states plus Germany pursued talks on the new resolution.



PHOTO: AFP

Policemen try to put out a fire on a burning car near the Ungdomshuset youth centre in the Noerrebro area of Copenhagen, early yesterday on the third day of the running battle with riot police in the Danish capital triggered by the eviction of the youth house.

## Danish police battles protesting youths, 100 detained

REUTERS, Copenhagen

Danish police fought night battles on Saturday with groups of youths who had set fire to cars during protests over the eviction of squatters from a Copenhagen youth centre.

Police said that least 100 people were detained when an illegal but peaceful demonstration and a street party with live music in the multi-ethnic, working class Noerrebro neighbourhood turned into clashes after midnight in St Hans Square. At least one person was injured and taken to hospital.

"Some 100 people were taken into custody so far," said Copenhagen Police Spokesman Flemming Sleen Munch.

Witnesses said police used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators, who fought back with Molotov cocktails and stones. Television footage showed cars, including at least one police vehicle, on fire. A local school was also trashed by demonstrators.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Dalit, Christian and Muslim women listen to leaders during a rally against the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for its recent rejection of the demand for reservation for Dalit, Christians and Muslims in New Delhi yesterday. Thousands of protestors, church leaders, nuns and activists of the National United Christian Forum urged the United Progressive Alliance Government to provide equal rights and reservation for the Dalit, Christians and Muslims.

## Pakistan test fires short-range missile

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan successfully test-fired a short-range nuclear-capable, surface-to-surface ballistic missile on Saturday, the military said.

The Hatf-II Abdali had a range of 200 km, it said in a statement. "The test was aimed at validation of the desired technical parameters which has been successfully achieved."

Pakistan and arch-rival India routinely carry out missile tests, and have agreed to inform each other of tests in advance.

The foreign ministers of Pakistan and India met in New Delhi in February and signed an accord to reduce the risk of accidents linked to their nuclear arsenals.

Last week Pakistan test-fired a long-range nuclear-capable, surface-to-surface Hatf VI missile, which can hit targets within 2,000 km.

Pakistan's Hatf series of missiles is named after an ancient sword mentioned in Islamic historical books.

The Hatf-II was last reported to have been tested in February 2006.

Diplomats have discerned no pattern in the timing of missile tests in the past.

Pakistan carried out tit-for-tat nuclear weapons tests in 1998, days after India had conducted similar tests.

## UN top court urges India to scrap draconian military law

AFP, New Delhi

A panel of the UN's top court urged India yesterday to scrap a draconian law giving the military sweeping powers to curb insurgencies.

Eight legal experts appointed by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) Friday met officials including Indian Home Minister Shivraj Patil to press for a repeal of the 1958 legislation, the group said in a statement.

The act allows the military to arrest without warrant and to shoot-to-kill in disputed Kashmir and seven insurgency-hit northeastern states.

"We informed the Indian government that there was a broad consensus that recommendations of

the review committee to repeal the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) should be given effect," said former South African chief justice and panel chairman Arthur Chaskalson.

A government forum last year also called for the scrapping of the law.

Premier Manmohan Singh promised a review of the law after large protests when Indian soldiers allegedly raped and murdered a 32-year-old rights activist last July in troubled Manipur state.

The AFSA, originally designed to stem strife in India's remote northeast, was later extended to Kashmir where Islamic separatist militancy has claimed more than 44,000 lives since 1989.

## Lanka steps up security for diplomats

5 bodies of execution-style killing found

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka is stepping up security for diplomats following a Tamil rebel attack against a helicopter in which envoys were travelling, the foreign ministry said Saturday.

The ambassadors of Italy and the United States and a UN coordinator were among more than a dozen people wounded in a shell attack carried out by Tamil Tiger rebels on Tuesday.

"The government will take immediate measures to enhance security for embassies or international organisations," the ministry said in a

statement.

It said diplomats had expressed concern about security following the attack, one of the worst against foreigners in the country's civil war.

Meanwhile, the bodies of five men shot in the head with their hands tied together and blindfolded were found yesterday by Sri Lankan police, who called the deaths an apparent "execution-style killing".

The grisly find in a marsh at Kandana, 15km north of the capital, was made after a child spied one of the bodies in the marsh, a police spokesman said.



PHOTO: AFP

Leftist protesters march on the streets of Manila, waving banners condemning the government of President Gloria Arroyo for allegedly condoning a spate of extra-judicial killings yesterday. Recent reports by a UN special envoy and the government's own commission on inquiry have implicated the military in the killing of leftists and other government critics.

## Strike on Iran would destabilise region Says France

REUTERS, Paris

Any military strike against Iran in the dispute over its nuclear programme would risk destabilising the region, French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin said in an interview released on Friday.

"For France, a military intervention is not the solution," he said in comments to be published on Saturday in the London-based Arabic newspaper Al Hayat.

"I add that a military strike against Iran would have unforeseeable consequences, which would be deeply destabilizing for the whole region."

Vice President Dick Cheney has said all options are on the table after Iran refused to heed a UN deadline for halting uranium enrichment, a

process that can produce nuclear fuel for power plants or bombs.

An Iranian deputy foreign minister responded by saying Iran was prepared even for war.

Villepin said Tehran had to choose dialogue and return to the negotiating table.

"If Iran makes the gesture of suspending its enrichment activities, the (UN Security) Council will be able to suspend the sanctions in return," he said, referring to measures passed by the Council in December.

The United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany, seeking to pressure Iran to suspend enrichment, are now discussing new, stiffer sanctions.

## China warns US on Taiwan arms sales

AFP, Beijing

China warned visiting US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte that plans to sell American missiles to Taiwan threatened to harm Sino-US ties, a Chinese spokesman said Saturday.

Negroponte arrived Saturday for a three-day visit and met with Deputy Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo for talks the US State

Department had said would touch on a range of issues including Iran, Iraq, the North Korean nuclear pact and trade.

But they spent Saturday explaining their positions on touchy bilateral topics such as the perceived threat of China's military rise and US plans to sell 450 air and ground missiles to Taiwan, Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang told reporters.

## Ahmadinejad visits KSA amid crises

AFP, Riyadh

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was due in Saudi Arabia on Saturday for talks with King Abdullah expected to focus on the sectarian bloodshed in Iraq, the crisis in Lebanon and Tehran's nuclear row with the West.

The hardline Iranian leader will meet the king, whom he previously saw at an Islamic summit in Mecca in December 2005, after flying into Riyadh, a Saudi official said.

An Iranian diplomatic source said that Ahmadinejad, who will arrive at around 1300 GMT, will stay only a few hours in the kingdom.

Relations between the two regional heavyweights have been strained over non-Arab Iran's growing influence in Iraq and its perceived backing of Shia militias at war with the once-ruling Sunni minority there.

## US appeals court throws out CIA torture case

AFP, Washington

A US federal appeals court on Friday upheld a refusal to hear the case of a Lebanese-born German man who says he was tortured by the CIA, citing national security reasons.

Khaled el-Masri claims was detained by the CIA for several months in 2004 on suspicion of links to terrorism.

Masri, 43, filed suit in December 2005 saying he had been snatched while on a trip in Macedonia, taken to Afghanistan, jailed, beaten and harassed before being set free without charge after five months.

He demanded an explanation and an apology from the United States for his detention, as well as 75,000 dollars in damages.

## Pakistan blasts US hot pursuit claim

American, Pak agents interrogating Taliban leader

AP, AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan vehemently denied yesterday the US military's claim that coalition forces in Afghanistan have the authority to pursue Taliban fleeing across the border into Pakistani territory.

"There is no authorisation for hot pursuit of terrorists into our territory," Maj Gen Waheed Arshad, spokesman for the Pakistan Army, told The Associated Press on Saturday. "Whatever actions are needed to fight terrorism, we are taking them."

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry rejected an assertion by Lt Gen Douglas Lute, chief operations

officer for the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, that his forces routinely fire on and pursue Taliban into Pakistan.

"No foreign forces are allowed to cross into our territorial border," said Ministry spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam. "Pakistan and United States are partners in the war on terror not adversaries."

Aslam's and Arshad's comments came two days after Lute told the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington that "we have all the authorities we need to pursue, either with (artillery) fire or on the ground, across the border."

Lute provided a detailed description of when US forces can

fire on and pursue insurgents across the border into the Islamic nation of Pakistan, an important ally of the US in its campaign against terrorism.

Meanwhile, US and Pakistani agents were interrogating the Taliban's former defence minister Saturday in the hope that he can help them hunt down other militant leaders, security officials said.

Mullah Obaidullah Akhund, who had a one-million-dollar bounty on his head posted by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), was arrested with four other suspects on Wednesday in the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta.

## Delhi, Naga rebels talk peace

AFP, Guwahati

Separatist tribal rebels from India's northeast and government negotiators launched fresh talks in New Delhi yesterday in a bid to keep alive a peace process in the restive region, rebel officials said.

The meeting was taking place, after a gap of three months, in the presence of a Dutch mediator who works for a Hague-based conflict resolution group, the rebels said.

"The talks are very crucial for the peace process to continue," said Phunghthing Shimranga, a senior

leader of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM).

A ceasefire, which expires in July in the region, "is now in its 10th year and people are getting edgy with no solution reached as yet," he said.

New Delhi entered into the ceasefire with the separatist group in 1997.

The Naga rebels, who are seeking to carve out a "Greater Nagaland" in the northeast, have accused New Delhi of dragging its feet in seeking a resolution of the revolt.

Labour Minister Oscar

Fernandes headed the government side at the talks while the rebels were led by self-exiled guerrilla leader Thuingaleng Muivah.

"They're looking for a solution to the problem and it's up to the government of India to expedite the process," senior NSCN-IM leader Phunghthing Shimrang said.

The two sides met in Amsterdam last December in a bid to resolve the group's 60-year-old drive for a "Greater Nagaland" which seeks to encompass large swathes of territory in India's northeast.

## BBC gagged over political funding scam

REUTERS, London

The British Broadcasting Corporation has been stopped from broadcasting a story about a political funding scandal that has cast a shadow over Prime Minister Tony Blair's final months, police said yesterday.

The injunction against the BBC on Friday followed a police request over concerns disclosure of "certain information at this stage would impede their enquiries".

Blair, who is set to step down this year after a decade in power, has been questioned twice as a witness by detectives investigating whether political parties awarded state honours in return for loans.

Top government lawyer Attorney General Lord Peter Goldsmith obtained the injunction following the police request.

"The Attorney General acted in this regard completely independent of government and (in) his independent public interest capacity," the Metropolitan Police said in a joint statement with Goldsmith's Office.

The BBC had argued its reporting of the story was a matter of public interest.