

Iran warns UNSC ahead of key vote

AFP, Tehran

Iran warned yesterday a new UN resolution against its disputed nuclear programme will face a "proportionate" response and that it was ready to pay the price for pursuing its atomic ambitions.

"Adopting new resolutions by the Security Council ... will face Iran's proportionate response," Abbas Araghchi, deputy foreign minister in legal and international affairs, said in a meeting with foreign ambassadors.

"Iran is completely ready for both paths of cooperation and confrontation and as there is a precedent for paying a price to

preserve its independence and rights, it is now ready to pay these prices," he said.

The UN Security Council is set to meet this week for a vote on new sanctions against Tehran for its repeated refusal to suspend uranium enrichment, a process that can be used to make atomic weapons as well as nuclear fuel.

Iran's hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said he will participate in the council meeting to defend his country's nuclear rights, even though he has previously slammed the UN body as illegitimate.

As a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran

says it has the right to enrichment and insists its nuclear programme is purely for peaceful purposes.

The West fears Iran could seek to develop nuclear weapons under the guise of a civilian nuclear programme. Iran denies the allegation.

On Wednesday the full council is to review a draft resolution agreed by its five permanent members -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- plus Germany.

The new text toughens sanctions already adopted by the council in December against Iran's missile and nuclear programmes.

Iraqis pessimistic on war anniversary

AFP, Baghdad/ London

Iraqis are increasingly pessimistic about their future, according to an opinion poll published yesterday as the nation battles to curb relentless bloodshed four years on from the US-led invasion.

Highlighting the sectarian conflict that has seen Iraq slide towards all-out civil war, gunmen on Monday killed three civilians in attacks in the mainly Shia town of Hilla, south of Baghdad.

Another 14 Iraqis were killed and seven US troops were reported dead on Sunday as the nation prepared to mark the fourth anniversary on Tuesday of the US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

Estimates of civilian casualties since the United States unleashed its firepower on Iraq on March 20, 2003, vary wildly but the British website Iraq Body Count's figure of 58,800 is among the more conservative.

Nearly 3,500 foreign troops -- most of them American -- have also died.

According to an opinion poll commissioned by the BBC and US broadcaster ABC News, Iraqis are feeling increasingly pessimistic and insecure about their future.

Barely a quarter of respondents - 26 percent -- said they felt safe in their own neighbourhoods and 86 percent expressed concern about someone in their household being a victim of violence.

About 78 percent opposed the presence of foreign forces and 69 percent said their presence made the security situation worse.

ABBC survey in November 2005 painted a much brighter picture, with 71 percent saying things were good in their lives.

But since then, Iraq has been torn by a brutal sectarian conflict that has left nearly two million people displaced in the country and another 1.8 million refugees abroad.



PHOTO: AFP

Anti-war demonstrators carry signs during a march and rally on Sunday in San Francisco. Thousands of protestors took to the streets to mark the fourth anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq.



PHOTO: AFP

Nepal's Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Bhoj Raj Pokharel (C) briefs the country's political leaders Maoist Chairman Prachanda (R), Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala (2R) and Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal (3R) about the preparation of the forthcoming Constituent Assembly (CA) election in Kathmandu yesterday.

Diplomatic boycott of Palestinian govt eases

REUTERS, AFP, Gaza

A year-old diplomatic boycott of the Palestinian government eased on Monday when Norway's deputy foreign minister met in Gaza with Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas.

The meeting was the first between Haniyeh and a senior European diplomat since Western powers imposed an economic and diplomatic blockade on the

Palestinian Authority in March 2006 to pressure the ruling Hamas group to recognise Israel, renounce violence and accept interim peace deals.

Norway restored full political and economic ties with the Palestinian Authority after Haniyeh's Hamas movement and President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah faction formed a unity government on Saturday.

Earlier the United States on Sunday said it will deal with the new

Palestinian government only if it agrees to forgo violence and fully recognise Israel.

US national security adviser Stephen Hadley laid down that hard line in remarks on US television, after Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniya, in a speech to parliament, insisted on his new government's right to all forms of resistance, rejecting a key international condition for acceptance.

'Cooking smoke killing 1.6 million poor a year'

REUTERS, New Delhi

More than 1.6 million people are dying every year from the effects of breathing in poisonous smoke from animal dung, wood and coal used for cooking, experts said yesterday.

More than three billion people -- half the world's population -- rely on the burning of solid fuels to prepare their meals because they cannot afford cleaner alternatives or don't have access to electricity.

Environmental experts said in New Delhi the cooking smoke was killing women and children in India, China, Africa and elsewhere.

"There is an enormous massacre happening in the world, yet little attention is given to this," said Ashok Khosla, chairman of Development Alternatives, an Indian voluntary group that promotes clean technology for rural communities.

"Most of those that suffer are women who cook in the rural kitchens of the Third World and their young children who spend much time indoors with their mothers."

Burning solid fuels emits carbon monoxide, particulates, benzene and formaldehyde, which can result in pneumonia, asthma, blindness, lung cancer, tuberculosis and low birth weight, the group says.

India to boost security along Bhutan border

AFP, Guwahati

India is to post 3,000 more security personnel along its unfenced border with Bhutan to plug gaps that allow rebels from India to freely slip across the frontier, an official said yesterday.

The new deployment will increase the number of Indian personnel along the 643km border with the tiny Himalayan Kingdom to about 12,000.

"The decision to raise the strength of personnel ... was taken after Indian Home Secretary VK Duggal met the king of Bhutan, the country's prime minister and other officials over the weekend in Thimphu," said the intelligence official, who wished to remain unnamed.

It followed fresh reports of rebels from India's northeast and West Bengal states trying to set up bases inside Bhutan.

Bhutan launched a military operation to evict the rebels in December 2003 and said it had smashed up to 30 camps, ousting the militants.

India says many of its northeastern rebel groups including the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) and the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation that operates in West Bengal, have camps in neighbouring countries -- Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar.



PHOTO: AFP

Activists of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) torch a poster of President Pervez Musharraf during a demonstration against the sacking of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in Karachi yesterday.