

# Major powers fail to strike accord on Iran talks

AFP, Shanghai

The five veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany and the EU, failed yesterday to agree on an agenda for negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme, an official said.

But the envoys agreed to continue to work on a joint proposal aimed at bringing Tehran back to the negotiation table and in line with UN resolutions.

"We discussed how to conduct dialogue and negotiations with Iran... we have agreed on most points in the proposal, however there are some outstanding issues that remain to be resolved," China's assistant foreign minister He Yafei said.

"As soon as an agreement is reached on this proposal... it will be referred to the Iranian side and at that time we hope the Iranian

side will respond positively to it and make its own contributions to a proper settlement."

Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States and Germany and the European Union took part in the talks.

He did not give a timeline for when they hoped to resume negotiations with Tehran, but he said the agenda for the talks should lay out "a comprehensive, durable and proper solution" that covers nuclear energy, political security and economic areas.

Wednesday's one-day deputy-ministerial-level meeting was held after Tehran announced last week it had begun operating hundreds of new centrifuges at its uranium enrichment plant, in violation of a raft of UN resolutions.

Western governments have warned Tehran that it faces further sanctions if it continues to expand

its nuclear programme, which they fear is a cover for a drive to develop an atomic weapon.

Tehran insists its programme is entirely peaceful and aimed at generating energy.

But its official IRNA news agency said last week it was now operating 492 new centrifuges at the Natanz uranium enrichment plant, in defiance of UN calls to freeze the process.

The United States said last week that Tehran risked further isolation and new international sanctions for its continued refusal to comply with UN resolutions.

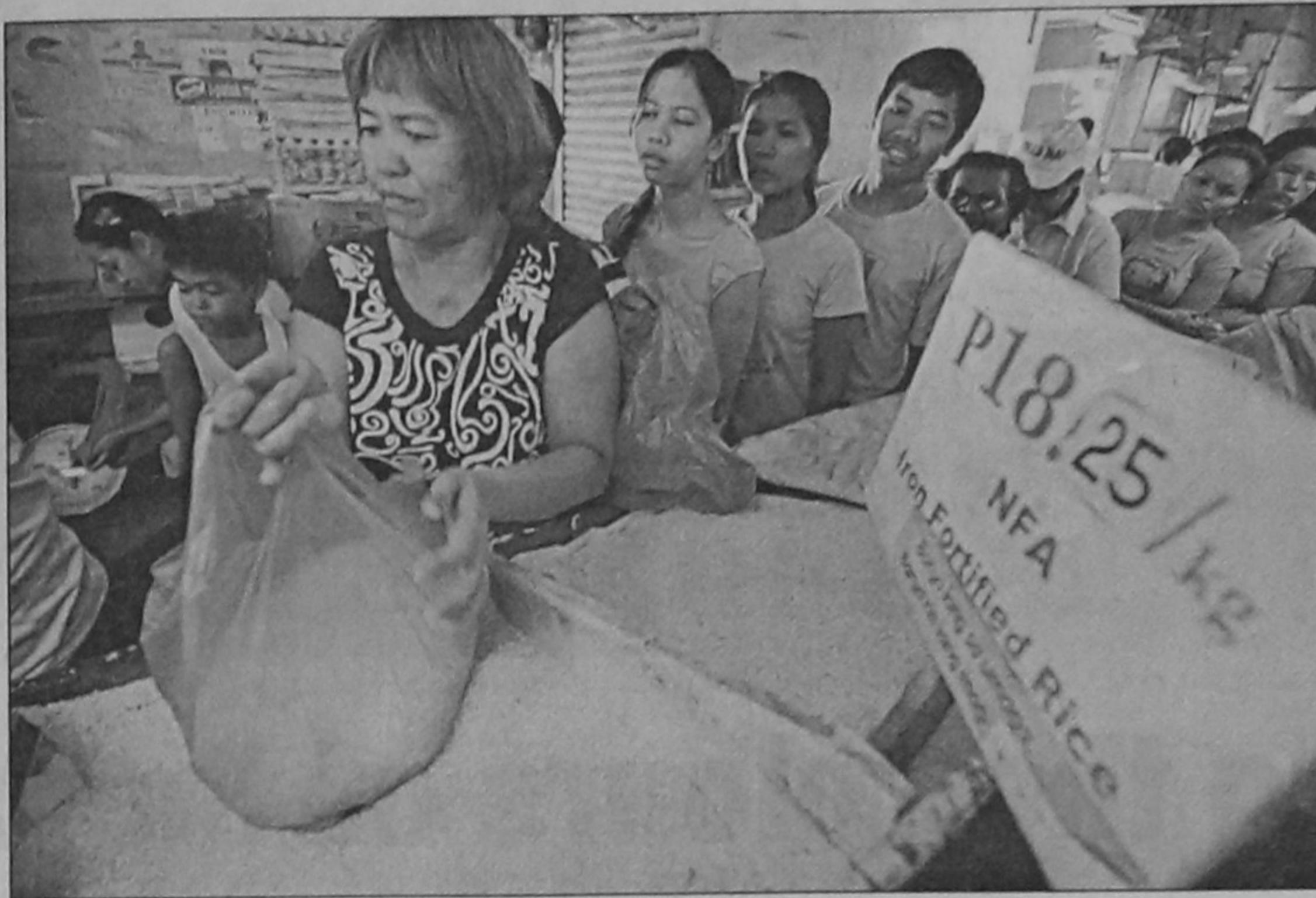
"The Iranian government continues to be in violation of multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions and with each step it takes it continues to isolate its people and risk further international financial and diplomatic sanctions," White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe said.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner issued a similar warning, saying the international community must consider "reinforced" sanctions if Iran does not respond to concerns about its nuclear work.

Earlier Admiral Michael Mullen, the US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Iran "is at the heart of a great deal of discontent and disruption and instability in that part of the world."

"So I have expectations that Iran will remain front and centre certainly for at least the next three to five years," he said, responding to questions after a speech at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank here.

Mullen added that all options needed to be kept on the table, but "I am not arguing that that is where the next conflict occurs."



Ahmadinejad casts doubt on 'suspect' Sept 11

AFP, Tehran

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Wednesday reaffirmed his doubts about the accepted version of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, describing the strikes as a "suspect event."

"Four or five years ago a suspect event took place in New York," Ahmadinejad said in a speech to a public rally in the holy city of Qom broadcast live on state television.

"A building collapsed and they said that 3,000 people had been killed, whose names were never published."

"Under this pretext they (the United States) attacked Afghanistan and Iraq and since then a million people have been killed," he said.

India, Brazil should work for UNSC berth: Patil

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Brasilia

Growing ties between the governments of India and Brazil should move to the level of partnership between the people of two countries, President Pratibha Patil said in Brasilia while addressing the Brazil Senate.

In her speech on Tuesday, Patil said both countries should work within the framework of the G-4 countries (India, Germany, Brazil and Japan) to pursue the "rightful and long overdue permanent membership of the UN Security Council".

Manila residents buy cheap government subsidised rice at a Manila market yesterday. Philippine authorities intensified efforts to stave off a crisis over soaring food prices, declaring war on rice hoarders and appealing to the United States to help boost government stocks.

## Lanka steps up airstrikes

### 12 rebels killed in fighting

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka stepped up air attacks against Tamil Tiger rebels yesterday, deploying jets and helicopter gunships as 12 guerrillas were killed in ground battles, defence officials said.

Fighter jets bombed a suspected Tamil Tiger base in the northern town of Oddusudan overnight while Mi-24 helicopter gunships were deployed to attack rebel bunkers further north in the Jaffna peninsula, officials said.

The defence ministry said at least 12 rebels were killed in separate ground attacks since Tuesday.

Earlier Sri Lankan war planes bombed a communications centre inside rebel-held territory Tuesday after heavy ground battles left seven Tamil Tigers dead, the

defence ministry said.

The target was taken on Tuesday afternoon as ground troops battled the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) along the de facto border of their mini state in the north of the island, the ministry said.

"Pilots confirm that the target was hit accurately," the ministry said without elaborating.

The air attack came as the ministry reported seven Tiger rebels had been killed in fighting since Monday.

## Dozens arrested in Zimbabwe

AFP, Harare

President Robert Mugabe's security forces clamped down hard on unrest during a general strike in Zimbabwe, arresting dozens of opposition supporters before the stoppage fizzled out on Wednesday.

The security forces scaled back their presence in the capital as it became clear that the call from the Movement for Democratic Change for people to remain off work until the results of March presidential elections are released had failed.

"They have arrested a lot of people, more than 50, mostly MDC staff members, including a member of parliament," Nelson Chamisa, a spokesman for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, told AFP.

Police have confirmed the arrest of 30 opposition supporters for offences linked to the general strike, which was launched on Tuesday but struggled to win much support in a country where unemployment stands at over 80 percent.

## Thais want new polls if parties dissolved

THE NATION/ ANN, Bangkok

Most Thais want a general election if any political parties are disbanded, according to results of a survey released Tuesday.

Of the 2,625 people surveyed, 64 per cent wanted a general election if some parties were disbanded, 17.4 per cent said the disbanded parties should join other parties, and 18.6 per cent wanted a new government.

Half of the people surveyed said they would vote for the People Power Party if they go to the polls again, 46.9 per cent said they would vote for the Democrats, and 3.1 per cent would vote for other parties.

Assumption University Research Centre director Noppadon Kannika said the survey was conducted from April 2 to 14 on 11 eligible voters in Bangkok and the surrounding provinces.

Of the respondents, 47.6 per cent support Samak Sundaravej as prime minister, 26.3 per cent do not back him and 26.1 per cent said they do not side with any political camp. Those who support Samak reasoned he should be given a chance as they believe he does not offer merely lip service.

Interested candidate are requested to apply with CV, cover letter mentioning post, recent passport size photograph, Contact Cell/Phone number to The Branch Office Manager, HOPE'87 Bangladesh, 15 New Eskaton Road, Gaousnagar, Dhaka-1000 on or before 26th April 2008.

Only short listed candidates will be invited for interview.

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