



Iran's top nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili (L) is pictured before a meeting on nuclear issues with European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana (R), and US Under-secretary of State William Burns (3R) yesterday in Geneva. Iranian, European and US officials began talks in Geneva's historic Town Hall in a bid to resolve the dispute over Tehran's nuclear programme.

Iran press hails US presence at talks

AFP, Tehran

Iran's press on Saturday hailed the presence of a US envoy at talks in Geneva on the nuclear crisis as a "taboo-breaking" move, calling on Tehran's arch foe to recognise its atomic rights.

"The meeting is important. First of all the United States is participating in a meeting that is already aware that Iran's red line is suspending uranium enrichment," the reformist Etemad newspaper wrote.

"Secondly, in the past 30 years

these are the highest level talks between Washington and Tehran," it added.

World powers have repeatedly called on Tehran to suspend uranium enrichment over fears it could be used to make a nuclear weapon, but Iran has always refused to make concessions on the issue.

In a major shift by Washington, US Under-secretary of State William Burns will attend Saturday's talks in Geneva between Iran's top nuclear negotiator and the EU foreign policy chief aiming

to end the crisis.

Also present will be representatives from Britain, China, France, Russia and Germany.

"The fact Iran has accepted to talk to the United States has broken the taboo of talking to Washington, but it is too soon to talk about a thaw between them," said Etemad.

Hardline newspapers such as Jomhuri Eslami and Kayhan, the voices of Iran's clerical establishment, expressed glee over the US presence at the talks and interpreted it as a sign of US weakness.

Brown wants to cut troops in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, speaking after talks with his Iraqi counterpart in Baghdad, said on Saturday he wanted to cut the number of Britain's troops in Iraq but would not set some artificial timetable for this.

"Our intention is to reduce our troop numbers but I am not going to set out an artificial timetable," Brown told reporters in the Iraqi capital where he was meeting Iraqi leaders to assess the country's security and economic development.

After a nearly hour-long meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, Brown went into a meeting with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. He also met several Iraqi MPs.

Before heading to the southern city of Basra, the British premier told a news conference that he saw four stages as crucial to the development of Iraq, particularly in the Basra region where Britain's 4,000 troops are based.

"We have set four clear objectives for what we want to achieve in those areas where we have had

responsibility," Brown said.

"The first is to train Iraqi forces themselves, so that they are in a position to take full responsibility for the security of the Iraqi people and for the area.

"The second is to make sure that we can push forward the local government elections and train also the police," he added.

Focusing particularly on Basra improvements, Brown said: "The third is to pursue the economic and social development of the Basra area so that the people can enjoy prosperity, jobs and businesses.

"And the fourth is the airport for which we have responsibility (which) will be transferred, where it can be, from military to civilian use."

Brown told reporters that "there have been great steps forward in all these areas.

He described them as "the building blocks for the future. It is absolutely crucial to complete these tasks."

Brown's spokesman earlier said that the "key aim (of the visit) is to speak to both the troops on the ground and the Iraqi leaders ahead of a statement to parliament next week."

McCain backer riles Muslims with 'kneel or kill' comments

AFP, Washington

A supporter of Republican presidential hopeful John McCain on Friday said that Muslims wanted to kill Americans, provoking anger among Muslims and a hasty clarification from the campaign.

"The Muslims have said either we kneel or they're going to kill us," former prisoner of war in Vietnam Bud Day said on a conference call with reporters organised by the Florida Republican party.

"I don't intend to kneel and I don't advocate to anybody that we kneel, and John doesn't advocate to anybody that we kneel."

Day was a prisoner of war at the same time as McCain, and was a member in 2004 of the "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth" group that sought to discredit then Democratic White House hopeful John Kerry's statements about his own service in the Vietnam war.

McCain campaign spokesman Michael Goldfarb sought to clarify Day's remarks after the conference call, saying: "The threat we face is from radical Islamic extremism."

However, Day's words prompted a quick reply from US-based Muslim groups.

Bush, Maliki, agree on 'time horizon' for US troop cut

Iraqi Sunnis end govt boycott

AFP, Tucson

US President George W. Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki have agreed to set a "time horizon" for US troop withdrawals as part of a long-term security pact.

But White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said Friday any reduction in the US force presence "would be based on continued improving conditions on the ground and not an arbitrary date for withdrawal."

The two leaders, speaking by videoconference, also settled on a "common way forward" in stumbling talks to craft a long-term pact governing diplomatic ties and the US military presence, said Perino.

Washington says the agreement is necessary to lay the ground rules for US forces that will still operate in the war-torn country after the United Nations mandate for their presence expires at year's end.

But the talks have sputtered over the Baghdad government's demands for a timetable for US troops to withdraw as well as Washington's demands that its soldiers and other staff be immune from Iraqi prosecution.

In their latest talks, "the leaders agreed on a common way forward to conclude these negotiations as soon as possible," Perino said in a statement that made no mention of Bush's hopes that the accord would

be sealed in July.

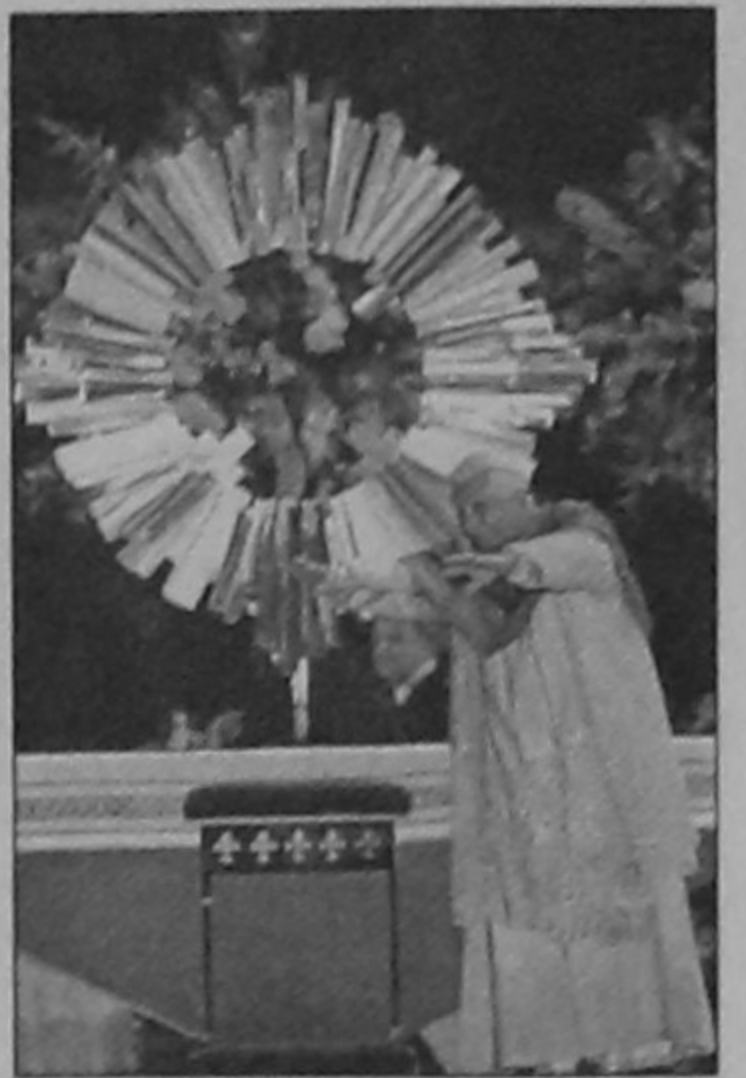
They also agreed that the pact would "include a general time horizon for meeting aspirational goals -- such as the resumption of Iraqi security control in their cities and provinces and the further reduction of US combat forces from Iraq," she said.

The announcement came at a pivotal time in the US presidential campaign, with Democratic candidate Barack Obama expected to visit Iraq soon amid Republican rival John McCain's attacks on his plan for pulling US combat forces out of Iraq within 16 months after the White House changes hands in January.

Meanwhile, Iraq's main Sunni Arab bloc yesterday ended an almost year-long boycott of Shia Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government, in a major boost for the country's reconciliation programme.

Parliament overwhelmingly endorsed the appointment of six Sunni ministers from the country's main Sunni bloc, the National Concord Front, in a session attended by 190 MPs of the 275-member assembly.

The MPs also approved the appointment of four independents to replace ministers from the political bloc of radical Shia leader Moqtada al-Sadr, which has boycotted the government since April last year.



Pope Benedict XVI waves to pilgrims during the evening vigil for a World Youth Day prayer ceremony in Sydney yesterday.

Pope apologises for clergy sex abuse

AP, Sydney

Pope Benedict XVI used some of the strongest language yet in his apology yesterday for the sexual abuse of children by Australia's Roman Catholic clergy, but his words were just more of the same for the victims.

The pope said he was "deeply sorry" for the sexual abuse, delivering a strongly-worded apology that described their acts as evil and a grave betrayal of trust.

"I am deeply sorry for the pain and suffering the victims have endured and I assure them as their pastor that I too share in their suffering," Benedict said during an address at a Mass in Sydney.

"Those responsible for these evils must be brought to justice," he said.

US does not have any problem with Pak govt

PTI, Washington

The United States has said it does not have any problem with the Pakistani government and stressed that fighting terrorism is not the only issue in the relationship between the two countries.

"I don't think we've had any problem dealing with the Pakistani government over the past several years, no matter who is sitting in what chair. We continue to have contact with President Musharraf, as we do with other members of the government, including the prime minister, as is evidenced by his upcoming trip here in about 10 days," State Department spokes-

man Sean McCormack said in Washington on Thursday.

He said, "We have a very good relationship with Pakistan. It is a broad, deep relationship. We're looking to broaden and deepen it."

"There are issues related to, for example, security and fighting terrorism that we're working intensively with this government. I think Admiral Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was recently in Pakistan, and I think he met with several members of the government. He met with the military. He met with civilian leadership. And he also met with President Musharraf as well," he said.

Obama visits Afghan war zone

AP, Kabul

Democratic presidential contender Barack Obama arrived in Afghanistan yesterday, the first stop on a campaign-season tour of war zones, a spokesman said.

Less than four months before the general election, Obama's first visit to Afghanistan, with a subsequent stop in Iraq, was rich with political implications, although the Illinois senator flew as part of an official congressional delegation.

Rival John McCain has criticised Obama for his lack of time in the region, and the Republican National Committee had a running ticker tally-

ing the more than 900 days since his last visit to Iraq.

Spokesman Robert Gibbs said Obama arrived in Kabul early Saturday.

"I look forward to seeing what the situation on the ground is," Obama told a pair of reporters who accompanied him to his departure from Andrews Air Force Base on Thursday.

"I want to, obviously, talk to the commanders and get a sense both in Afghanistan and in Baghdad of, you know, what the most, their biggest concerns are, and I want to thank our troops for the heroic work that they've been doing," he said before his flight overseas.



Former South Africa's president Nelson Mandela reacts as former Zambia's President Kenneth Kaunda, unseen, makes a joke during his 90th birthday celebrations at his house in Qunu, South Africa yesterday.

Mandela hosts new generation of leaders at birthday bash

AFP, Qunu

Nelson Mandela, fresh from being feted at home and abroad on his 90th birthday, hosted a banquet Saturday for the new generation of South African leaders as well as hundreds of friends.

Thabo Mbeki, who went from being Mandela's deputy to succeed him as the country's second black head of state in 1999, and Jacob Zuma, head of the ruling ANC party and tipped to become president next year, were among the first of the 500 guests to arrive for the lavish celebrations in the rural Eastern Cape.

Mandela's fellow Nobel peace prize winner Desmond Tutu and former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda were also expected for a feast which had traditional food such as tripe and sheep's heads on the menu.

Also there was George Bizos, the lawyer who defended Mandela and other anti-apartheid leaders dur-

ing the era of white rule, and one of his doctors, Peter Friedland, who said, "For a man of 90, he's in very good shape."

But heavily-armed police on duty at his homestead in the dury village of Qunu barred entrance to a number of would-be gatecrashers who were not on the guestlist.

Mandela's grandson Mandla said "unfortunately we had to politely turn them away, irrespective of their stature."

"I was under the impression that as government officials we would be let in. I am disappointed about the Mandelas for doing this to us," said one politician who did not want to be named.

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বিজিএমইএ

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জরুরী বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা সম্মানিত সকল সদস্যের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড শতভাগ রপ্তানিমুখী পোশাক শিল্প প্রতিষ্ঠান কর্তৃক আমদানিকৃত যন্ত্রপাতি খালারের বিপরীতে দাখিলকৃত ইনডেমনিটি বন্ড অবমুক্তকরণের সময়সীমা আগামী ৩০/০৯/২০০৮ইং তারিখ পর্যন্ত বর্ধিত করেছেন। এ সময়সীমা কোনভাবেই জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড আর বৃদ্ধি করবে না মর্মে অফিস আদেশ জারী করেছেন।

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