



## US House approves new Iran sanctions bill

Tehran test-fires missile

AFP, Washington/ Tehran

The US House of Representatives on Tuesday overwhelmingly approved sanctions legislation aimed at forcing Iran to freeze its nuclear programme by depriving the Islamic republic of gasoline.

The measure would empower US President Barack Obama to effectively block firms that supply Iran with refined petroleum products, or the ability to import or produce them at home, from doing business in the United States.

"The prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran is the most serious and urgent strategic challenge faced by the United States, and we must use all of the diplomatic means at our disposal -- including tougher sanctions -- to prevent that from becoming a reality," said Democratic Representative

Howard Berman.

Meanwhile, Iran yesterday test-fired what it said was a faster version of its Sejil medium-range missile with a range that would allow it to reach targets inside Israel, prompting rebukes from Britain and France.

The defiant test of the Sejil 2 missile comes as world powers mull fresh sanctions against the Islamic republic for its controversial nuclear enrichment programme.

"It hit the defined target," state television reported, without giving further details.

The House passed the bill, which has yet to clear the Senate, by a 412-12 margin with four voting 'present'.

A top US senator said recently that body will not act on Iran sanctions in 2009.

Because of a lack of domestic refining

capacity, oil-rich Iran is dependent on gasoline imports to meet about 40 percent of domestic consumption.

Iran gets most of those imports from the Swiss firm Vitol, the Swiss/Dutch firm Trafigura, France's Total, the Swiss firm Glencore and British Petroleum, as well as the Indian firm Reliance.

Berman, the measure's lead author and chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said US lawmakers had to act because Iran had rejected Obama's attempts at engagement with "contempt."

Democratic Representative Stephen Lynch criticised the bill, comparing it to the US embargo on Cuba and warning it would cause Iranians to "rally around the flag" against the United States and "undermine" pro-democracy protesters.



A handout (R) released by the official website of Iran's supreme leader shows Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (R) during his meeting with Khaled Meshaal, the exiled leader of the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, in Tehran on Tuesday.

## Suu Kyi meets party elders

AP, Yangon

Myanmar's detained opposition leader was allowed out of her home Wednesday to meet three ailing elders of her political party, with whom she discussed a reorganisation of its leadership.

Reporters were not allowed to observe the meeting, but witnessed cars driving both Aung San Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest, and her National League for Democracy colleagues to a state guest house usually used for meetings with the detained opposition leader.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Suu Kyi, 64, met for about 45 minutes with party chairman Aung Shwe, 91, Secretary U Lwin, 86, and Lun Tin, 88. Suu Kyi was last allowed to meet with her party's leadership at a state guest house in January 2008.

U Lwin told reporters afterward that Suu Kyi told them she wanted to reorganise the party's Central Executive Committee and needed their permission to do

so.

He said that they agreed to the proposal and told her that they would continue "to support and stand for the party."

Myanmar's military government has said it will hold a general election year, but has not yet set an exact date or passed the necessary laws. Suu Kyi's party won the last election in 1990, but the military refused to allow it to take power.

The constitution adopted last year that set up next year's polls was considered undemocratic by the NLD, and it has not yet committed to taking part. The constitution has clauses that would ensure that the military remains the controlling power in government, and would bar Suu Kyi from holding office.

U Lwin said Suu Kyi paid her respects in a traditional manner to the elders, kneeling in front of them, and gave them gifts of baskets containing fruit and nutritional drinks and medicine.

He said Suu Kyi was happy

to see them and they felt the same way.

"We haven't seen her for a long time. She looks a bit thinner," said U Lwin.

The meeting came more than a month after Suu Kyi sent a letter to junta chief Senior Gen. Than Shwe. In it, she sought permission to meet several elderly colleagues, and separately with other members of her party's central executive committee. She also requested a meeting with the junta chief to discuss how they can cooperate for the national interest.

The government's liaison with Suu Kyi, Relations Minister Aung Kyi, informed her last week that she would be allowed to meet the elderly party leaders, though not where she requested at their homes but at a place arranged by authorities.

Suu Kyi's legal team will present their arguments at the Supreme Court next Monday appealing against this year's extension of her house arrest. She has been detained for about 14 of the past 20 years.



A file picture taken on November 4, 2009 shows Myanmar's detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi as she greets a US delegation during a rare public appearance at a hotel in Yangon. Myanmar's junta allowed Suu Kyi to meet with three elderly senior members of her party on Wednesday in a rare concession by the military regime.

## Pakistan awaits response to dialogue requests

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Pakistan is waiting for India's response to 'repeated requests' for dialogue, the country's High Commissioner Shahid Malik said here.

"It is unfortunate that India and Pakistan are at a stage where there is no dialogue," Malik said Tuesday evening. He was speaking at the launch of an autobiography of the late Baloch leader Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, organised here by the Policy and Planning Group (PPG) at the Indian Islamic Cultural Centre.

"We have made repeated requests for dialogue and Pakistan is awaiting a response," the envoy said.

Recalling the controversial Sharm-el Sheikh joint statement signed in July this year between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Yusuf Raza Gilani, Malik said the two leaders had agreed that dialogue was the only way to move forward.

"We hope that the July statement will be acted upon soon," he said.

The relationship between the two countries was frozen after last year's Mumbai terrorist attack, which India blamed on Pakistan-based terror outfits. India has been asking Pakistan to bring the perpetrators of the 26/11 attacks to justice before restoring the dialogue process.

## Graft, violence hit Lanka's post-war recovery: Watchdog

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's recovery from its decades-long civil war has been marred by graft, violence and a culture of lawlessness, a global watchdog said Tuesday.

Transparency International rapped the government -- which crushed the Tamil Tiger separatist rebels in May -- for a lack of democracy, accountability and transparency.

"The latter half of 2009 marks a period of hope and potential for Sri Lanka. Yet, winning the war seems to have been easier than winning the peace," said the report by the body's local branch.

"Nowhere is this more clear than in the case of the government's record on human rights and media freedom."

It said the authorities had cracked down on dissent in the final stages of the war, with journalists, diplomats and aid workers reprimanded or deported for making critical comments.

## Shiela Dikshit survives no-trust motion

Uproar over Babri Mosque remark

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

The no-confidence motion against the Delhi government was defeated in the state assembly Wednesday. However, the house witnessed an uproar when Chief Minister Shiela Dikshit touched upon the Babri Masjid issue.

While replying to the no-confidence motion which was moved by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader V.K. Malhotra Tuesday, Dikshit said: 'We were hoping that there will be something constructive in what the opposition will be saying. But we were disappointed as their discussions were based on newspaper

reports and all their figures were incorrect.' 'What was the purpose of this no-confidence motion? The people had sent us to the assembly with a thumping majority,' she added.

After this, the chief minister accused the BJP of being responsible for 'demolishing' the Babri Masjid and 'playing with people's emotions'.

The remark resulted in an uproar in the house, giving way to slogan shouting and a brief adjournment.

Dikshit later said: 'If I have hurt anybody's feelings, I apologise.'

## Close-up snaps of dying star shows how our Sun's going to snuff out

ANI, Washington

Astronomers have captured close-up photos of a star writhing in its death throes, which is indicative of the fate that our Sun awaits in the future.

Chi Cygni, the star in question, which is about 550 light-years from Earth, has swollen in size to become a red giant star so large that it would swallow every planet out to Mars in our solar system.

Moreover, it has begun to pulse dramatically in and out, beating like a giant heart.

New close-up photos of the surface of this distant star show its throbbing motions in unprecedented detail.

"This work opens a window onto the fate of our Sun five billion years from now, when it will near the end of its life," said lead author Sylvester Lacour of the Observatoire de Paris.

As a Sun-like star ages, it begins to run out of hydrogen fuel at its core. Like a car running out of gas, its "engine" begins to splutter.

On Chi Cygni, scientists see those splutterings as a brightening and dimming, caused by the star's contraction and expansion.

## How Titan's ice erodes easily

ANI, Washington

A new research has determined that Saturn's moon Titan's ice is stronger than most bedrock found on earth, yet it is more brittle, causing it to erode more easily.

San Francisco State University Assistant Professor Leonard Sklar carried out the research.

At the American Geophysical Union fall meeting, Sklar and his team presented new measurements from tests on ice as cold as minus 170 degrees Celsius which demonstrate that ice gets stronger as temperature decreases.

Understanding ice and its resistance to erosion is critical to answering how Titan's earth-like landscape formed.

## Pakistan rebuffs US plea for more military action

AFP, Washington

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari has rebuffed an appeal from US President Barack Obama for a speedy expansion of military action in tribal areas, the Washington Post reported yesterday.

Citing US and Pakistani officials, it said Zardari had written to Obama to pledge that his military would fight insurgents in Pakistan's lawless border region with Afghanistan, but on its own

schedule.

Zardari also "called on the United States to speed up military assistance to Pakistani forces and to intervene more forcefully with India, its traditional adversary," the Post reported.

Zardari's three-page letter to Obama, in response to a letter Obama sent last month, did not mention India directly, but "made repeated reference to Pakistan's core interests, unresolved historical conflicts and conventional imbal-

ances," the newspaper reported.

Pakistan has launched several major military operations this year, mainly targeting the Pakistani Taliban in south Waziristan and the Swat Valley, but the Obama administration wants to see action taken against the so-called Haqqani network.

That group, based in north Waziristan, is active across the border in Afghanistan where US troops are among its targets.

## Bombs, ambushes kill 18 in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A surge of bomb attacks and ambushes killed at least 18 people, including four Nato soldiers and six civilians, in flashpoints across Afghanistan ahead of an expected US surge, officials said yesterday.

The string of isolated attacks on Tuesday underscored the dangers in rural parts of Afghanistan, where government authority is often weak, and the deadly nature of

roadside bombs, or improvised-explosive devices (IEDs).

In the bloodiest attack, gunmen ambushed a station wagon, raking the vehicle with gunfire and killing six Afghan civilians in eastern Nangarhar province, said a statement from the presidency.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai condemned the attack.

In the south, the deadliest battlefield for Nato and US troops in Afghanistan and heartland of the Taliban insurgency, bomb attacks killed

four Nato soldiers -- two British, an Estonian and an American.

IEDs killed the Estonian and the US soldiers, while the British died with two Afghan soldiers in a suicide motorbike attack, said Captain Roy Hermkens, a spokesman for the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf).

The makeshift IEDs, usually planted at the side of a road, are the biggest killers of foreign soldiers in Afghanistan and the Taliban's weapon of choice.



United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Radhika Coomaraswamy (L) meets with Maoist Chairman, Prachanda at his residence in Kathmandu on Wednesday. Coomaraswamy is in Nepal to speed up the discharge of about 3,000 disqualified former rebel combatants from the seven UN-monitored cantonment camps.

## Sonia will not go back on Telangana, say MPs

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Congress president Sonia Gandhi will not go back on her pledge to set up a separate Telangana, party MPs favouring the new state said here yesterday.

"There is no 'if' and 'but' in her dictionary. She will not go back from her promise," said Sarvey Sathyanarayana, the Congress MP from Malkajgiri Lok Sabha constituency from Telangana region.

"She has already given a promise. She did justice to us," the MP told IANS.

Meanwhile, Congress MPs who want Andhra Pradesh to remain united met top leaders of the party and the government

separately at parliament house.

While Congress MPs from coastal Andhra and Rayalseema region met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Congress MPs from Telangana met Congress general secretary M. Veerappa Moily and Mukherjee.

"I am for United Andhra Pradesh," Minister of State for Human Resource Development (HRD) D. Purandeswari told IANS, before meeting the prime minister and Mukherjee.

The MPs from coastal Andhra and Rayalseema region said they told the prime minister and Mukherjee to issue a clarification on the 'controversial statement' of

Home Minister P. Chidambaram last week that a separate Telangana state would be formed.

"We requested them to give us a direction to contain the temper of the people in the region," said an Andhra MP on condition of anonymity. "There should be some assurance from the government for maintaining the peace (in the region)."

At the same time, Congress MPs from Telangana region told Mukherjee: "You gave us a very good gift. And don't take it back."

Meanwhile, both sides said the party in the state was divided only over this issue but united on all other matters.



Afghan citizens leave Kabul airport on Wednesday following their deportation from France. Nine Afghan failed asylum seekers returned home from France yesterday, an aid worker and an AFP reporter said.

## Putin's 'girlfriend' gives birth to his first son

ANI, New York

Vladimir Putin's alleged girlfriend Alina Kabaeva has given birth to a baby boy, whom sources claim to be the Russian Prime Minister's first son.

Kabaeva, the gorgeous, 26-year-old rhythmic gymnastics champion, recently gave birth to a boy in Moscow and named the baby Dimitry.

Kabaeva has been identified as Putin's girlfriend ever since she retired from competition in 2006 after winning two Olympic medals and 18 World Championship medals to become the most decorated gymnast in history.

In fact, two years ago, she was elected to the Duma, the Russian parliament, as a candidate of Putin's political party.