

US Senate votes to slap new sanctions on Iran

AFP, Washington

The US Senate voted Thursday to slap tough new sanctions on Iran, targeting its thirst for gasoline imports in a bid to force Tehran to bow to global pressure to freeze its suspect nuclear programme.

"The Iranian regime has engaged in serious human rights abuses against its own citizens, funded terrorist activity throughout the Middle East, and pursued illicit nuclear activities posing a serious threat to the security of the United States and our allies," said Democratic Senator Chris Dodd.

"With passage of this bill, we make it clear that there will be appropriate consequences if these actions continue," said Dodd, the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee and a key sponsor of the legislation.

The sweeping measure, which passed by voice vote, must now be blended with a similar bill in the House of Representatives to forge a compromise measure for both sides to approve and send to President Barack Obama.

The Senate bill aims to punish non-Iranian firms that do business in Iran's

energy sector or help the Islamic republic produce or import refined petroleum products like gasoline by blocking them from doing business in the US market.

Oil-rich Iran, which denies the West's charges that it seeks to develop nuclear weapons, lacks refining capability and relies on imports to satisfy 40 percent of its thirst for gasoline.

US Senators have increasingly favoured unilateral sanctions as Obama's year-old offer of engagement has failed to get Tehran to freeze its uranium enrichment programme, which can be a key step towards an atomic arsenal.

"The Iranian regime has shown no interest in limiting its nuclear ambitions. And an entire year was lost as Iran moved closer and closer to its goal," said Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

"Iran is closer to realising its nuclear aspirations, and the US has nothing to show for the outreach," he said.

The bill would close US markets to Iranian carpets, caviar, and pistachio nuts -- which then-president Bill Clinton exempted from a US trade embargo in an olive branch to Tehran.

It also requires that the president report to congress when non-US companies become eligible for sanctions, under a 1996 law that punishes investments of more than 20 million dollars in Iran's energy sector.

Iran gets most of its gasoline 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.

The measure also expands the 1996 law to cover oil and gas pipelines and tankers, and requires the administration to freeze the assets of any Iranians, including members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, found to be active in weapons proliferation or terrorism.

It would also enable US investors, including states' pension funds, to divest from energy firms that do business with Iran.

It would prohibit the US government from purchasing goods from firms that do business in Iran's energy sector, or provide sensitive communications technology to Iran -- a measure that could affect telecommunications giants Siemens and Nokia.



Protesters demonstrate outside the QE2 centre in central London as former British prime minister Tony Blair gives evidence at the Iraq war Inquiry yesterday. Blair began giving evidence to the public inquiry into the Iraq war on Friday, starting an eagerly awaited day of questioning into his account of the conflict.



Haiti criminals raping quake survivors

Medicine running out at hospitals

ANI, AP, Port-au-Prince

Bandits are reportedly preying on vulnerable earthquake survivors, even raping women, in makeshift camps set up in the capital after the disaster, Haiti's police chief has revealed.

"With the blackout that's befallen the Haitian capital, bandits are taking advantage to harass and rape women and young girls under the tents," The Telegraph quoted Police Chief Mario Andresol, as saying.

"We have more than 7,000 detainees in the streets who escaped from the National Penitentiary the evening of the earthquake... It took us five years to apprehend them. Today they are running wild," he added.

Figures for the number of crimes were not available but women's organisations have already detailed a number of cases and alerted the United Nations mission in Haiti, Andresol said.

His warning came a day after UN human rights chief Navii Pillay said that gangsters and child traffickers could try to exploit the chaos triggered by Haiti's devastating earthquake to step up their criminal activities.

The January 12 earthquake killed around 170,000 people and left more than a million others homeless, many of whom are living in makeshift camps in the ruined capital.

Security had been tenuous in Haiti before the 7.0-magnitude quake, but Andresol said the police force itself had been crippled by the disaster.

Meanwhile, doctors and aid workers say treating the tens of thousands of Haitians injured by the earthquake is taxing the country's devastated hospitals as well as the efforts of physicians from around the world who are providing emergency care.

Basic medical supplies such as antibiotics and painkillers are running dangerously low at some hospitals and clinics in Port-au-Prince, the capital, and in the countryside, alarming doctors who are struggling to keep up with demand.

Obama to propose abandoning US return to Moon

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama's 2011 budget, to be submitted to Congress Monday, will propose abandoning a programme to return US astronauts to the Moon, two Florida newspapers said Thursday.

Citing administration and NASA officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity, the reports said the White House would call on the US space agency to focus on other programmes, including the development of commercial services to ferry US astronauts to the International Space Station.

Florida Today and the Orlando Sentinel, two papers based in the area around the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, said Obama would seek to boost NASA's budget by six billion dollars over five years, despite a pledge to freeze most discretionary spending.

Anti-war protesters stage demo against Blair

AFP, London

Anti-war protesters accused former British prime minister Tony Blair of being a "coward" Friday after reports that he was driven into the building hosting the Iraq war inquiry through a side entrance.

Blair, due to make his long-awaited appearance at the inquiry to account for his decision to take British troops into the 2003 conflict, did not enter the central London conference centre through the front exit, reporters said.

A motorcade swept into a side entrance of the building at 0730 GMT, two hours before Blair was due to give evidence, although there was no immediate confirmation that Blair was in one of the vehicles.

Hundreds of demonstrators outside the Queen Elizabeth II centre chanted "Tony Blair, War Criminal" as police lines held them behind crash barriers.

Activists said they were convinced Blair had given them the slip.

Lindsey German, convener of the Stop The War Coalition, said: "He doesn't have the decency or honesty to face up to the public, military families, and Iraqis who will be here today in huge numbers to show their opposition to the war."

15 Somalis killed in Mogadishu fighting

AP, Mogadishu

Somali insurgents sparked the heaviest day of fighting in the capital in months Friday, launching simultaneous attacks on government forces and peacekeepers that killed at least 15 people, residents and a medical official said.

A spokesman for the Islamic insurgency said the early morning attacks on multiple government bases and African Union peacekeeping troops were a response to a plan for peacekeepers and the government to wrest back control of Mogadishu.

"The fighting was a response to the so-called government and the (African Union) peacekeepers trying to intimidate us by saying that they will take control of the whole capital," Sheikh Ali Mohamoud Rage said.

Friday's attacks come a few days before the first anniversary of President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed's government. At the time it was hoped that

Hamas blames Israel for death in Dubai of top militant

AFP, Gaza City

The Islamist Hamas movement blamed Israel yesterday for the death in Dubai earlier this month of one of the founders of its military wing who a relative charged was killed by electrocution.

"Mahmud Abdul Rauf al-Mabhuhi died a martyr in Dubai on January 20, 2010 in suspect circumstances that require an inquiry in cooperation with the United Arab Emirates authorities," Hamas said in a statement released in its Gaza stronghold.

"We hold Israel responsible for the assassination of our brother and leader," the statement said, adding Hamas would "retaliate for this Zionist crime at the appropriate moment."

There was no immediate Israeli reaction to the accusation.

A brother of Mabhuhi charged that Israel's Mossad overseas intelligence agency was behind the killing believed to have been conducted by two people, but did not say whether there was any evidence to back this up.

"The first results of a joint investigation by Hamas and the (United Arab) Emirates show he was killed by an electrical appliance that was held to his head," Faye al-Mabhuhi, who lives in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip, told AFP.

"Material was sent to a Paris laboratory which confirmed he was killed by electric shock," he said, adding there was also evidence of strangling.

He said his brother was in charge of obtaining weapons for Hamas and was in Dubai on a mission for the Islamist movement.

The Hamas official had already been targeted in the past, his brother said, adding that several months ago he was taken in a coma to a hospital in Damascus where doctors later told him he had been poisoned.

Russia unveils stealth fighter seen as rival to F-22

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday unveiled a new fighter aircraft touted as a rival of the US F-22 stealth jet and developed amid the highest secrecy as part of a plan to modernize the armed forces.

The fifth generation fighter, manufactured by the Sukhoi company and known as the PAK FA, made a maiden flight of just over 45 minutes at the firm's home base of Komсомolsk-on-Amur in the Far East region.

"The flight lasted 47 minutes during which all the aircraft's systems were tested. It was successful," Sukhoi spokeswoman Olga Kayukova told AFP.

Cyber thugs attacking power-water plants

AFP, San Francisco

Power plants, oil refineries and water supplies increasingly dependent on the Internet are under relentless attack by cyber spies and thugs, according to a McAfee report released Thursday.

The "Critical Infrastructure in the Age of Cyber-War" analysis by the US-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies said the price of "downtime" from major attacks exceeds six million dollars a day.

"If cyberspace is the Wild West, the sheriff needs to get to Dodge City," concluded the study commissioned by McAfee, which sells computer security software.

In most developed countries, operating systems of critical infrastructure including power grids and oil refineries are linked to the Internet where they can be targeted for attacks.

"There are absolutely foreign entities that would definitely conduct (cyber) reconnaissance of our power infrastructure," said Michael Assante, chief security officer of the North American Electric Reliability Corporation.

"They would be looking to learn, get a foothold and try to maintain sustained access to computer networks."

Researchers surveyed 600 IT and security executives from critical infrastructure enterprises in 14 countries in September of 2009.



Foreign tourists help to make a barrage to contain the waters of the overflowed Vilcanota river in Aguas Calientes, near the Machu Picchu archaeological site in Peru on Thursday. Heavy rains and mudslides in Peru have blocked the train route to the ancient Inca citadel, leaving nearly 2,000 tourists stranded.

APARTMENT TO-LET IN GULSHAN

BRAND NEW MODERN APARTMENT

3 Bedroom, 3 Bath, Drawing, Dining, Kitchen Store, Servant room.

Contact: Tel: 01713 002071, 01819 228689
email: shehruq_mawla@hotmail.com, fax: 8114876
Plot no: CES 38, Road no: 122, Gulshan, Dhaka

Singapore School & Kinderland

Your Child Deserves A Winning Education

Facilities

- Singapore School Based Curriculum
- Trained & Dedicated Teachers
- Singapore School Based Textbooks
- Computer Based Teaching / Learning
- Excellent Classroom Facilities

Special For Working Moms Full Day Care Center Facilities 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

Pre-School

- Full Day Care Centre (8:30 am - 4:30pm)
- Pre-Nursery & Nursery Classes
- K1 & K2 (3 1/2 Hrs Session)

Primary Level

- Primary 1 - Primary 4
- Primary 5 & 6 intake for 2010/2011
- Grade 7 to Cambridge O/A Level (Planning)

Admission open Register now

Contact Details: House-32, Road-123, Gulshan-1, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh
Phone: 8853427, 01713 035631, E-mail: admin@sbes.org, Visit: www.sbes.org

Recruitment of a Communications Specialist

Cowater International Inc. (www.cowater.com) is the executing agency for a project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), "Strengthening Comptrollership and Oversight of Public Expenditures" (SCOPE). This is a capacity development project, working with the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OCAG) of Bangladesh. We are seeking applicants for a part-time consultant as the **Communications Specialist**. The primary responsibilities of the Communications Specialist will be to assist SCOPE, working closely with OCAG and an international Parliamentary Relations Expert to:

- develop and refine external communications strategies and action plans, including a Public Relations Handbook, PAC Handbook and Media Handbook;
- develop and refine internal communications strategies;
- lead orientation workshops and seminars for OCAG;
- help OCAG to establish a Communications Unit;
- provide advice with respect to the development of an OCAG website; and
- provide ongoing assistance to OCAG with respect to their communications activities, including press releases, media lock-ups in advance of tabling audit reports.

Desired qualifications include the following:

- relevant University education at the undergraduate level and preferably graduate level;
- at least 10 years of directly relevant experience;
- experience in developing or improving handbooks, guides, and other tools;
- familiarity with the work of Supreme Audit Institutions;
- very good understanding of the public sector in Bangladesh
- demonstrated skills and experience in facilitating workshops or other training events;
- fluency in English; and
- excellent communication and writing skills.

The anticipated level of effort for the position is approximately 4 months between February and June 2010, then approximately 4 months per year (part-time) for the next two years. Applications are being sought from individual consultants only, not from firms and other organizations. Please send your CV and remuneration expectations by **10 February 2010 to:**

Peter J. Armstrong
Field Project Manager
SCOPE Project
2nd 12-Storey Government Building
(9th floor), Segunbagicha, Dhaka-1000.

Applications can also be sent by fax or by email:
Fax: 88 02 9362447
Email: parmstrong@cowater.com