

G-8 nations press Iran sanctions drive

AP, Ottawa

Top diplomats from the world's leading economies are ramping up pressure on Iran to prove its nuclear ambitions are peaceful, renewing calls for the country to be hit with new international sanctions if it fails to comply.

In meetings outside the Canadian capital yesterday, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and her fellow foreign ministers from the Group of Eight main industrialized nations will warn Iran again it faces fresh penalties if it doesn't come clean on its nuclear program.

But with Iran refusing to comply, their message will be largely directed at a country not represented at the talks here: China, a permanent member of the UN Security Council that is not a member of the exclusive G-8 club.

Support from China, a vocal opponent of sanctions, is critical as it wields veto power on the council. Until recently, it had balked at the mere suggestion of taking additional punitive steps against Iran. That, Hillary suggested, may now be changing.

In an interview with Canadian television on Monday, Hillary said China shared the view of the US, its European allies and Russia that "a nuclear-armed Iran is not acceptable."

"I think as the weeks go forward and we begin the hard work of trying to come up with a Security Council resolution, China will be involved, they will be making their suggestions," she said.

Publicly, China reiterated its stance that the countries should seek a solution through negotiations, not new sanctions.

"We hope relevant parties could fully show their flexibility and make further efforts toward a proper resolution of this issue through diplomatic means," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said Tuesday at a regular news briefing.

China opposes nuclear weapons for Iran, but said the country has the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Iran is already under three sets of UN Security Council sanctions and China had been holding up consideration of a fourth. But last week it softened its position in a conference call among senior officials

from the six nations working most closely on the matter, according to diplomats.

A senior US official told reporters traveling with Hillary that the Chinese "have said now that they will engage on the elements of a sanctions resolution." The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing diplomatic negotiation.

In Washington, meanwhile, President Barack Obama met Monday with China's incoming ambassador to the United States. The White House said Obama stressed to the envoy the need for the two countries "to work together and with the international community on critical global issues, including non-proliferation and pursuing sustained and balanced global growth."

Hillary and other Obama administration officials have said they want the new sanctions to target Iranian companies and government elements, like the country's Revolutionary Guard Corps, and not the Iranian people. US diplomats and their colleagues have been discussing various options for months, but until now China had stayed out of the conversation.

Japan worried about China execution

AFP, Tokyo

Japan said yesterday it was "apprehensive" about the imminent execution of one of its nationals in China, the first time a Japanese has been put to death there since the nations normalised diplomatic ties in 1972.

Beijing has told Tokyo a Japanese man was soon to be executed for reportedly attempting to smuggle 2.5 kilos (5.5 pounds) of narcotics out of China, to Japan, in 2006.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano stressed that the decision was up to the Chinese judiciary, but said it "affects the sentiment of the Japanese public."

"We wish to express our sense of apprehension," Hirano told a regular press conference.

Japan itself has the death penalty for cases involving multiple murders.

China welcomes Obama's 'positive attitude'

AFP, Beijing

China said yesterday it welcomed US President Barack Obama's pledge to develop a positive relationship with Beijing, as the two countries try to overcome deep strains in their ties.

"China praises the positive attitude of US President Barack Obama... in promoting China-US relations," foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang said in a statement.

He said Beijing "values the reaffirmation by the United States of its commitment to China on the Taiwan and Tibetan issues" -- referring to the "one China" policy, under which the US recognises Taiwan and Tibet as part of China.

Qin was reacting to comments made by Obama after he received the credentials of China's new ambassador to the United States, Zhang Yesui.

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said the US president had reaffirmed his support for the efforts made by Beijing and Taipei to reduce tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

Taiwan and China have been governed separately since 1949, but Beijing considers

the island part of its territory. Relations between the two have improved considerably since Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou came to power.

Sino-US ties have gone through a rough patch in recent months, with the value of the Yuan, Taiwan and Tibet topping the list of sticking points.

Washington angered Beijing with its 6.4 billion-dollar arms sale to Taiwan in January and Obama's talks with the Dalai Lama at the White House the following month.

The United States is also pressuring China to allow the Yuan to appreciate, with lawmakers pushing the US Treasury to label Beijing a "currency manipulator" in a report due out next month.

Qin acknowledged the recent difficulties, saying they were "not in the interest of the two countries."

"China and the United States are nations that have important influence in the world," he said.

"A good Sino-US relationship is in the fundamental interest of the two countries and their people, and is beneficial to peace, stability and prosperity in Asia and the world."

Berlusconi makes election gains

AP, Rome

Premier Silvio Berlusconi's coalition made a strong showing in regional elections across Italy, winning crucial races and snatching four areas from the opposition, final returns showed yesterday.

Berlusconi emerged as the political victor after two days of balloting that had been largely depicted as a test of his popularity. His government ally, the Northern League, also fared very strongly.

Overall, the conservatives won six regions compared with the two they controlled going into the vote, while the centre-left opposition held on to seven.

The most resounding success for Berlusconi came overnight in two races that went down to the wire: Lazio, which includes the capital; and Piedmont, a region in the country's industrial north. Both were previously held by the opposition.

Final turnout stood at 64 percent high by the standards of many Western democracies, but 8 percent down from the last Italian regional elections in 2005. Around 41 million people were eligible to cast ballots in the country of 60 million.

Analysts had predicted that a low turnout would hurt the governing power as it did with French President Nicolas Sarkozy in recent regional balloting in France.

But Berlusconi repeatedly urged his supporters to go to the polls ahead of the vote Sunday and Monday. In the last couple of weeks, the 73-year-old premier went on the offensive and stepped up his campaign through numerous media appearances and a big rally in Rome.

In the end, the voters who deserted the polls appeared to come from both sides.



Palestinian youths wave their national flag and set tyres on fire as they clash with Israeli soldiers at the border fence near Gaza City on Tuesday during a protest marking Land Day. Land Day commemorates the killing of six Palestinians during a 1976 protest against land confiscation.

'Teen killed' in Gaza clashes

AFP, Gaza City

A Palestinian teenager was killed and 12 people were wounded, including children, as Israeli troops opened fire at "Land Day" demonstrators near the Gaza border, Palestinian medics said yesterday.

Hundreds of demonstrators marched to the border, east of the town of Khan Yunis, to mark Land Day, an annual commemoration of Israel's killing of six people during a 1976 protest by Israeli Arabs against land confiscations.

Near the site of fierce clashes, which left two Israeli soldiers and two Palestinians dead over the weekend, protesters hurled stones at troops along the border, who responded with live fire, witnesses said.

Muawiya Hassanein, the head of Gaza emergency services, said 11 people, including children, were wounded. One of them, nine-year-old Raid Abu Namus, was in serious condition, medics at a nearby hospital said.

Israeli troops earlier shot dead 15-year-old Mohammed al-Faramawi in an incident near the southern Gaza town of Rafah, Hassanein said. Witnesses said he had arrived near the border just ahead of a similar march.

Another Palestinian, 14, was shot and wounded during a Land Day demonstration in the Maghazi refugee camp of central Gaza, Hassanein said.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment on the reports.

The borders of the Islamist Hamas-ruled Gaza have been mostly quiet since a December 2008-January 2009 Israeli assault on the territory that killed 1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis.



Grieving family members arrive at the Wangjialing mine in Xianning, northern China's Shanxi province on Tuesday. Rescuers raced to find 153 workers trapped in a flooded coal mine in northern China, as workers angrily accused mine management of ignoring warning signs of the impending disaster.

MOSCOW BLASTS Putin orders to hunt down militants

AFP, Moscow

Strongman Vladimir Putin yesterday ordered Russia's security forces to hunt down the organisers of the metro bombings that killed 39, saying they should be "scraped out" from the bottom of sewers.

His tough comments came as Moscow marked a day of mourning for Monday's double blasts carried out by female suicide bombers at two busy metro stations at the height of the early morning rush.

Grieving Muscovites added to heaps of flowers and placed photographs of the dead under memorial plaques at the stations. Flags at government buildings flew at half mast and television channels cancelled entertainment programmes.

"We know that they (the organisers) are lying low," Putin said in comments broadcast on state television.

"But it is now a matter of honour for the security forces to scrape them out from the bottom of the sewers and bring them out into the light of day."

"This will be done," he added.

Putin's language was strikingly reminiscent of his famous promise in 1999 to strike at rebels even in the "outhouse" which heralded the adoption of tougher tactics by the authorities against Chechen militants.

Those comments, made while Putin was prime minister under then president Boris Yeltsin, were seen as instrumental in projecting a tough-guy image that would catapult him to become Russia's number one.

Thailand's red protesters refuse more talks

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's anti-government "Red Shirts" yesterday rejected the prime minister's offer of more talks and said negotiations had failed because he would not meet their 15-day deadline to call elections.

Leaders of the red-clad protest movement have held two rounds of televised talks with premier Abhisit Vejjajiva since Sunday, but they appeared to make little progress towards ending weeks of disruptive mass rallies in Bangkok.

"Negotiations have completely failed and have already ended. No more talks, everything is finished," a defiant Red Shirts leader Jatuporn Prompan told reporters, refusing Abhisit's offer to hold fresh discussions on Thursday.

During talks late Monday, Abhisit offered Jatuporn and two other Red Shirt representatives a compromise deal, saying he was willing to call elections by the end of the year, one year ahead of schedule.

"We need 15 days, while the government needs nine months," Jatuporn said after the two sides parted without agreement. "The government is insincere."

The supporters of ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra say the government is elitist and undemocratic because it came to power through a parliamentary vote after a controversial court ruling removed Thaksin's allies from power.

Tony Blair returns to campaign trail

AP, London

Britain's former leader Tony Blair will be making a foray back into domestic politics ahead of the national election with a speech to his old local constituency.

Blair will return to the stump to praise his successor Gordon Brown's record, and launch a personal attack on opposition leader David Cameron.

Blair has made few appearances in Britain since he quit as prime minister in 2007, though his January testimony defending his actions in Iraq to the country's inquiry into the war marked a dramatic return to the limelight.

Despite lingering anger over the war, his record of having won three consecutive elections makes him an asset in the tight race.

Blair will speak Tuesday in his former parliamentary district in northern England.

Investigators collect books, documents

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termining it risky although essential.

The noted criminals lawyer made the observation when separate delegations of National Awami Party, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Chhatra Union-student wing of the CPB, and Bangladesh Mohila Parishad called on him at his Rajshahi residence.

On his team's visit to the Liberation War Museum, chief investigator Abdul Matin said, "We collected 10 books and booklets on Liberation War from the museum authority and they have assured us of providing further documents and information to this end."

"We will go through all the materials and compile relevant information," the former additional secretary of the law ministry told The Daily Star.

Mofidul Hoque said, "The investigation team briefed the museum authority about the overview of their task and we assured the team of giving

all kinds of cooperation.

"Initially, we have given them some documents and papers of the first and second genocide conference held in Dhaka in 2008 and 2009," he said, adding that their cooperation will continue.

On the collection of evidence against four suspected war criminals, the police officer told news agency BSS, "We are keeping close watch on the alleged war criminals and collecting documents and papers proving their crimes against humanity."

"They all have their ancestral home in Faridpur. We are also collecting detail information on their past and roles during the Liberation War to prepare their bio-data."

Jamaat leaders Mojaheed and Molla stayed most of the time in Dhaka during the Liberation War, but they had major role in the atrocities in Faridpur during the war.

Quoting investigating officials in Faridpur, BSS also

added that television anchor Azad, locally known as Bachchu Maulana who currently lives in Dhaka, in 1971 sided with the Pakistani troops and allegedly took part in murders, arson, looting and other criminal activities against humanity.

Two criminal cases were filed against Azad last year in Faridpur for his alleged role in 1971 but he is now on bail following a High Court directive.

The investigators said Ingu Kazi of Bhanga upazila was believed to have killed mercilessly 17 people in a single operation in Jandi village on May 2, 1971 as a collaborator of the Pakistani troops.

Locals said all the 17 were businessmen and belonged to the minority Hindu community.

When contacted, Azad refused the allegations, saying he had no links with the Pakistani troops or the Razakars, Al Badr and the "peace committee" formed

during the war although he stayed home during the entire period of the war.

Azad said he had supported the then Jamaat-Islami candidate in the 1970 general elections as he was his relative and neighbour but he has never been involved with any political party including Jamaat.

He claimed that a list of 20 razakars of the locality prepared soon after the war did not have his name but he became the "victim of local politics because of his support for the Jamaat candidate in 1970 elections".

Ingu Kazi also denied the allegations against him. He declined to linger the talks with the BSS citing reasons of problems in speaking because of old age complications as he is now nearly 90.

But his daughter Fatema Begum told the BSS that her father is innocent and had no link with the Jandi killing and that some people "out of enmity" branded him as a collaborator.

Ashraf warns

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conference yesterday.

The AL organised the press conference, held at party chief Sheikh Hasina's political office at Dhanmondi in the capital, to protest different statements by Leader of the Opposition and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

On Monday, Khaleda said at a public rally in Chittagong she would soon announce an agitation programme to overthrow the government for 'failure' to tackle power, gas and water crises.

Ashraf, also spokesperson for the ruling party, alleged that the main opposition party wants to foil war crimes trial since a number of influential leaders and workers of BNP are "war criminals", and anti-liberation force Jamaat-Islami is its close ally and partner. He also termed BNP an "anti-liberation" party.

The AL leader mentioned that they have urged BNP to

give the names of war criminals within the party but it is not doing so. BNP could help reach a national consensus (on war crimes trial) by providing their names, and cooperate with the government in this regard, he said.

Ashraf, also LGRD and Cooperatives Minister, voiced the government's determination to bring to book top BNP-Jamaat leaders who amassed huge money by resorting to corruption, and against whom there are corruption cases.

Referring to corruption cases against Khaleda's family members, he said none will be spared. Without naming her sons Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko, the LGRD minister said stern action will be taken for siphoning off money from home.

"The government already has information about siphoned off money. And if it finds proofs through investigation, tough actions will be taken

in money laundering cases," he said.

On Khaleda's allegation that the caretaker government had tried to send her abroad by injecting sedatives, Ashraf said they had never heard this earlier. It is a "new allegation".

About the opposition leader's allegation of "leaving out Bangladesh to India", the AL general secretary asserted that it is his party that brought independence of the country, and will protect along with the people its sovereignty at any cost.

In reply to a question, the minister said the government will go tough against students involved in unlawful activities in the name of student politics.

Other AL leaders present at the press conference included Mannan Khan, Hasan Mahmud, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, Mrinal Kanti Das, Afzal Hossain and Sujit Roy Nandi.

Atom smasher achieves record power 'Big Bang' collisions

AFP, Geneva

Scientists at the world's biggest atom smasher at CERN said yesterday that they had collided protons at record power, mimicking conditions close to the Big Bang that created the universe.

"This is physics in the making, the beginning of a new era, we have collisions at 7 TeV (tera-electronvolts)," said Paola Catapano, a scientist and spokeswoman at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, referring to the record energy levels achieved.

Cheers erupted in separate control rooms around the 27-kilometre (16.8-mile) long Large Hadron Collider (LHC) as the detectors recorded the collisions of beams of subatomic particles at close to the speed of light.