

China calls for talks on Iran sanctions

Tehran sends envoy, sees sanctions talk as empty threat

AFP, BEIJING/ UNITED NATIONS/ Tehran

China said yesterday it was working for a "peaceful resolution" of the Iranian nuclear standoff, as Tehran sent its top negotiator to Beijing for talks on its disputed atomic programme.

The comments from the Chinese government, which has opposed the imposition of tough new sanctions on the Islamic republic, came after the United States said Beijing appeared ready to engage in "serious" talks on the issue.

"China has agreed to sit down and begin serious negotiations here in New York," the US ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, said on CNN television Wednesday.

"This is progress, but the negotiations have yet to begin in earnest," Rice said.

Foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang

meanwhile announced that Hu would attend a nuclear summit in Washington on April 12-13, amid strained ties between the two nations on multiple fronts.

"On the Iranian nuclear issue, China will continue to endeavour toward a peaceful resolution," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang told reporters.

Iran said yesterday the talk of sanctions by world powers against the Islamic republic over its nuclear programme is just an empty threat that has been ineffective against Tehran for the past 30 years.

"The nuclear programme of the Islamic republic is fully peaceful and the talk of sanctions is a threat that has been ineffective over the past 30 years," foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said.

"We recommend that all countries

accept the legal rights (of Iran) under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), instead of using wrong methods such as sanctions and pressure," Mehmanparast said, according to Mehr news agency.

Tehran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili arrived in China on Thursday to discuss the Islamic republic's atomic programme with Beijing, an Iranian embassy spokesman said, without providing details on his visit.

Jalili was to meet high-ranking officials in Beijing and hold "bilateral talks and discuss the nuclear issue," Iran's official IRNA news agency reported Wednesday.

His visit comes amid mounting pressure against Iran to abandon its suspect nuclear programme, with US President Barack Obama saying Tuesday he wants sanctions agreed upon within weeks.

Israel ends probe into Palestinian's death

AP, Jerusalem

Israel's military says it will not file any charges in the death of a Palestinian protester last year.

Thirty-one-year-old Bassem Abu Rahmeah was killed when a tear gas canister fired by troops hit him in the chest during a protest last April against Israel's West Bank separation barrier.

The army claimed Abu Rahmeah was in a group of people throwing rocks at troops. But video footage showed the protesters shouting at soldiers, not throwing anything.

The Israeli military said Thursday it closed the investigation after determining the canister was not intentionally aimed at Abu Rahmeah.

The death occurred near Bilin, a village that holds weekly protests against the barrier. Israel says the structure is for security.

New blast rocks Russia, kills two

Medvedev promises 'crueler' measures

AFP, AP, Moscow/ Makhachkala

A car packed with explosives blew up in Russia's restive North Caucasus yesterday with the country on high alert after an Islamist group claimed the Moscow metro bombings and warned of more strikes.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has made a surprise visit to the violence-wracked southern province of Dagestan, telling authorities to use tougher, "more cruel" measures to fight terrorism.

Medvedev told local officials on Thursday "the measures to fight terrorism should be expanded, they should be more effective, more harsh, more cruel."

In the latest unrest, two people were killed in Russia's restive North Caucasus district of the North Caucasus region of Dagestan during the night when their car suspected to have been packed with explosives blew up.

Many of the 39 killed in Monday's suicide bombings on the city metro were to be buried on Thursday and the country has also been shaken by the double suicide strike in

the North Caucasus on Wednesday that killed 12.

"According to preliminary information, the explosive materials that were in the car went off accidentally," the Interfax news agency quoted a security source as saying.

The Islamist group the "Emirate of the Caucasus", which is waging an insurgency to impose an Islamic state based on Sharia law, the North Caucasus, claimed the metro attacks in a video message from its shadowy leader.

Doku Umarov, who has been the target of several attempts to kill him by the Russian security forces, said he personally gave the order for the metro attacks.

"It is a legitimate act of revenge for the continued assassinations of civilians in the Caucasus," he said in the video posted on the kavkazcenter.com website which is frequently used by militants to post messages.

Umarov, who uses the nom de guerre Abu Usman and had last month pledged a "holy war" of attacks throughout the country, chillingly warned Russians to expect more strikes.



Gen VK Singh takes charge as Indian Army chief

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

General Vijay Kumar Singh, who on Wednesday formally took charge as the chief of Indian Army, had taken part in the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971.

Gen Singh, 59, who participated in the Bangladesh liberation war as a young captain, took over the charge from Gen Deepak Kapoor who retired on Wednesday after over four decades in service.

Before taking over as the Army chief, Gen Singh was the General Officer Commanding of the Eastern Command headquartered in Kolkata.

Awarded a medal for his distinguished service in anti-LITTE operations in Sri Lanka, Gen Singh will be the chief of the world's second largest army after China for two years.

47 students

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Bangladesh Technical Education Board while four each from Madrasa and Dhaka boards, three each from Rajshahi and Dinajpur boards and one each from Jessore and Barisal boards.

Last year, 45 examinees were expelled on the first day of the examination.

A total of 6,802 examinees were absent yesterday, which was 5,291 last year. The number of absentees was 1,701 in Dhaka Board, 887 in Technical Board, 836 in Madrasa Board, 741 in Rajshahi, 685 in Jessore, 597 in Comilla, 444 in Dinajpur, 365 in Chittagong, 320 in Sylhet and 226 in Barisal Board.

The examination of Bangla First Paper was held yesterday and the Bangla Second Paper exam will be held on Monday.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid visited the Dhaka College centre in the capital and talked to the examinees, centre officials and guardians.

Talking to reporters there, he expressed satisfaction over the peaceful atmosphere and said the tendency of adopting unfair means in the public examinations has reduced significantly.

Adopting all kinds of unfair means in the examination would be strictly regulated, he added.

About ongoing power crisis, he said the education ministry has already sent a letter and talked to the authorities concerned. They gave assurance of providing smooth power supply to the examination halls, he added.

Later, he visited Savar University College, Savar Islamiya Fazi Degree Madrasa and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Academy centres.

A total of 7,36,373 candidates are taking the exams this year in 2,037 centres under 10 boards.

China wants good relations with India, Pakistan

ANI, New Delhi

China's envoy to India Zhang Yan yesterday said that his country wants to have good relations with India and Pakistan, and added that Beijing does want its relations with one country to affect the other.

Speaking exclusively to ANI on the sidelines of a function at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), which was organized to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and China, Yan said both India and Pakistan were close neighbours of China.

"We don't want to see relations of one country affect relationship with the other country, that's not our policy," Yan said.

"We hope the three countries (India, Pakistan and China) join efforts to work

together for the betterment of the region and for betterment of three countries," he added.

China and Pakistan are seen as all weather friends. The Asian dragon is making investments in building huge dams in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and restive Baluchistan province. China has also helped Pakistan with the building of that country's nuclear reactors and also remained a key supplier of arms and ammunition.

China's cozy relationship with Pakistan is seen with a sense of scepticism by India, which is competing with China for economic supremacy in Asia and, both countries have a festering border dispute on which several rounds of discussions have taken place among the special representatives of the two countries, but has achieved very little.

Speaking on the border issue, Yan said: "We conduct our relations in a more broader way, not just focus on border issue. We have more other important areas of cooperation, more urgent issues to work together."

Emphasizing the underlying tensions, Yan said: "Like any other country, there are problems and differences but, that's not a big difficulty. I agree we should handle our relationship more actively and in a more positive way, especially to appropriately handle the difficulties and the remaining problems between our two countries."

Making a veiled reference to the shrill media reports of Chinese incursions, which dominated the media of both countries, Yan stressed that both countries should guide public opinion in fair and just manner.

Maritime watchdog issues piracy alert

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A maritime watchdog yesterday issued an alert to vessels plying the waters off East Africa after five ships were attacked within 12 hours by heavily armed Somali pirates.

"It is a dangerous time for ships with the end of the monsoon season," Noel Choong, head of the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) piracy reporting centre in Kuala Lumpur, told AFP.

"The pirates are lurking out there and are looking for ships to hijack," he warned.

In the most violent attack, Somali pirates used automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenades on a North Korean vessel heading to Mombasa port in a bid to board it on Wednesday. Nine seafarers were seriously wounded.

India kicks off world's biggest census

AP, New Delhi

India kicked off the national census of its billion-plus population yesterday with a 2.5 million strong army of census-takers fanning out across the country to conduct what has been billed the world's largest administrative exercise.

The census, conducted every 10 years, has a new element this year with the collection of biometric data in which every citizen over the age of 15 will be photographed and fingerprinted, information that will form the base of a new National Population Register of the country's 1.2 billion population.

"It is for the first time in human history that an attempt is being made to identify, count, enumerate and record and eventually issue an identity card to 1.2 billion people," Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram said.

So far, India has not had a system of issuing a national identity number or card to its citizens. The collection of biometric data using a combination of fingerprint and facial identification will be linked with another massive exercise launched last year to ensure that every Indian gets assigned a single identity number.

Islamic scholars urge 'extremists' to repent

AFP, Riyadh

Muslim scholars from around the world who met this week in Saudi Arabia's holy city Medina have denounced "terrorism" and appealed to "extremists" to repent, a statement said yesterday.

The four-day Islamic conference, sponsored by Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul-Aziz and organised by the Islamic University of Medina, drew some 500 participants, according to press reports.

The scholars condemned "all acts of terrorism wherever they take place and whoever is behind them," said the concluding statement from the conference, which wrapped up late Wednesday.

The scholars also criticised "the harm inflicted on unarmed civilians and civilian facilities under the pretext of combating international terrorism."

The statement published on the organisers' website called on extremists to "return to their senses and follow the path of groups that have announced repentance and rejected acts of terrorism."

30 Yemeni prisoners escape after blast at jail

AFP, Sanaa

Around 30 prisoners escaped after a bomb explosion at a prison in southern Yemen yesterday, police said, identifying the fugitives as sympathisers of a secessionist movement.

They said a dispute broke out at a police post next to the jail between policemen and sympathisers of the break-away movement arrested for having taken part in a protest in Daleh, 280 kilometres (170 miles) from Sanaa.

The detained protesters

hurled a bomb, according to police, who said two policemen and three of the demonstrators were wounded. About 30 of those just arrested managed to escape in the mayhem.

Members of the movement for the independence of south Yemen told AFP the bomb was thrown by police.

Elsewhere on Thursday, police shot dead one protester and wounded five others in the nearby city of Radfan as they opened fire to disperse a demonstration led by southern separatists, according to the secessionists.

Bashundhara chief

FROM PAGE 1

Maghrib prayers.

Biddyt yesterday gave a confessional statement before Magistrate Zulfiqur Hayet, court sources said. In the statement, Biddyt also said Dakat Shahid engaged them to kill Ahmed Hossain, councillor for DCC ward-70.

Deputy Commissioner Monirul Islam of the DB told The Daily Star that Nazimuddin confessed before interrogators his hiring of Dakat Shahid to have the councillor killed as Ahmed Hossain obstructed Shah Alam from buying the LPG unit of Pak-Bangla Household Manufacturing Ltd.

He said, "We will summon Shah Alam very soon to verify the information."

Quoting Nazimuddin, Additional Deputy Commissioner Mahubur Rahman of DB said in 2005 Shah Alam visited the factory of Pak-Bangla Household Manufacturing Ltd. He was invited to invest in the factory, as it was short in working capital.

Nazimuddin said Shah Alam thought the factory would be profitable and he engaged Nazimuddin to acquire the factory for him removing the owners.

As Dhaka City Corporation councillor Ahmed Hossain resisted Nazimuddin's effort to have the factory sold to Shah Alam, he informed Shah Alam of the matter and the decision to have Ahmed killed was made, Mahubur said quoting Nazimuddin.

Quoting Nazimuddin, Assistant Commissioner Sanwar Hossain said in 2004 Ahmed Hossain, his elder brother Mohammad Hossain, a Pakistan national of Bangladesh origin, his young

er Brother Maksud Hossain and Nazimuddin signed a memorandum of understanding to set up Pak-Bangla Household Manufacturing Ltd in Keraniganj.

He said the factory project had an estimated cost of Tk 4 crore and Mohammad Hossain got 2,040 shares, Nazimuddin got 1,360 shares, Ahmed Hossain 400 and Maksud 200 shares.

Mohammed Hossain imported all the machines and got experts from Pakistan while Nazimuddin gave 10 kathas of land on which the factory was set up.

Sanwar said Nazimuddin in collaboration with Shah Alam tried to get Nazimuddin's partners to agree to Nazimuddin not providing the promised capital as he had already given land for the factory.

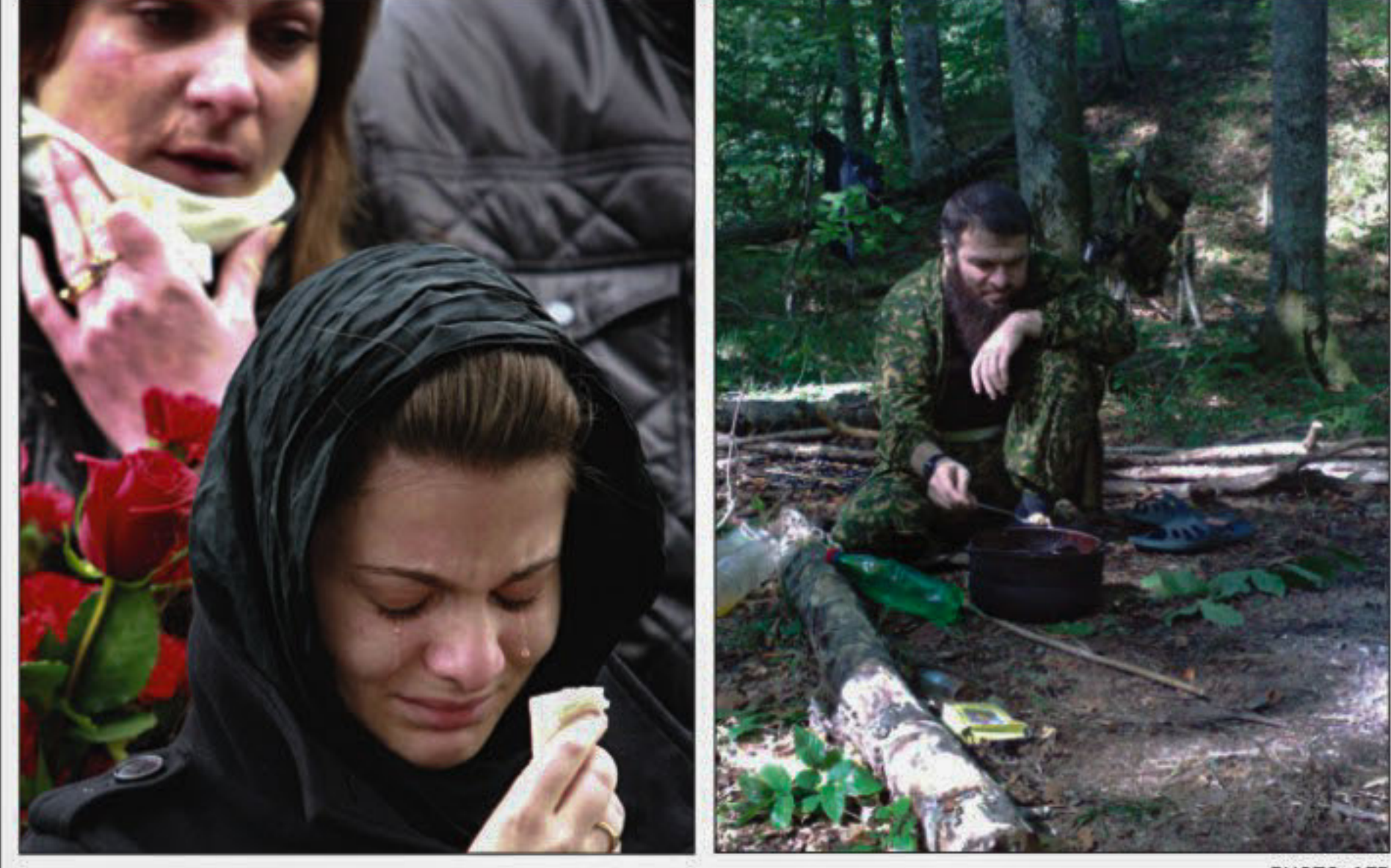
Ahmed Hossain's brothers Maksud Hossain and Mohammad Hossain declined to talk about Shah Alam with The Daily Star.

Family members of Ahmed Hossain claimed Nazimuddin had discussions with Ahmed about the sale of the factory to Shah Alam a few days before his murder.

Media Adviser Mohammad Abu Tayeb of Bashundhara Group told The Daily Star that Shah Alam was not involved in the killing and he never showed any intent to buy the factory or any part of it.

He termed the information provided by police about Shah Alam baseless, biased and ill-motivated. He said Bashundhara Group had no business or transaction with the deceased.

Law enforcers have so far arrested six people in connection with the killing of Ahmed Hossain.



Relatives of victims of the March 29 twin suicide bombings in the metro attend a church service during a funeral ceremony in Moscow on Tuesday. Russia mourned the 39 victims killed when two female suicide bombers blew themselves up on the Moscow metro on Monday, state television said. In the below pictures (1), a relative of a victim cries at the funeral ceremony. 2nd right picture shows Chechen rebel Doku Umarov eating in a forest, who claimed to be behind the Moscow suicide attacks.

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