

### EU proposes Iran nuke talks from Nov 15-18

AFP, Brussels

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton has proposed reconvening long-stalled talks between world powers and Iran over its controversial nuclear programme in a month's time, her spokesman said yesterday.

"It is from 15th to 18th of November," spokesman Darren Ennis said, if possible in Vienna.

Ashton, who represents world powers in the nuclear dialogue with Iran, won a favourable response from Tehran after proposing November talks in the Austrian capital on Thursday.

"We have always said that dialogue on cooperation with the Islamic republic of Iran is the only option," top nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili told state television.

## Thousands in China, Japan rally over island claims

AP, Beijing

Thousands of Chinese protested against Japan and its claim to disputed islands at demonstrations yesterday that were far larger than past protests over the competing territorial claims.

Photos from the southwestern city of Chengdu and the central city of Zhengzhou show hundreds of people marching with banners and signs protesting Japan's claim on what China calls the Diaoyu islands. Japan calls them the Senkaku islands.

The state-run Xinhua News Agency said more than 2,000 protested in Chengdu and thousands of college students gathered in the northern city of Xian.

The report was in English only. The protests were not reported in Chinese-language state media.

Protests in China are often quickly shut down or heavily controlled. It was not clear whether the organizers had permission to demonstrate Saturday.

In central Tokyo, about 2,500 people held up flags and marched near the Chinese Embassy to protest China's claim to the islands. Some also called for the release of Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Chinese dissident who is serving an 11-year prison sentence for subversion.

Police in the Chinese cities of Chengdu, Xian and Zhengzhou would not confirm the protests Saturday, saying they would not talk to media.

"It was peaceful, with no clashes," said an employee of a Starbucks next to the square in Chengdu where protesters gathered.

The man, surnamed Fu, said by phone that a large number of police had kept order and that the protest had ended.

In downtown Xian, a woman answering the telephone at the Bell Tower Hotel said crowds were still in the streets Saturday evening.

"It started in the early afternoon," the woman said. "There are still quite a

lot of people here."

Smaller protests took place outside the Japanese Embassy in Beijing and the Japanese Consulate in Shanghai last month, when tensions were high over a collision between a Chinese fishing boat and two Japanese coast guard ships near the islands in the East China Sea.

China repeatedly demanded the return of the detained fishing boat captain. Japan released the captain, but Beijing shocked Tokyo by demanding an apology.

Earlier this month, the tensions seemed to calm after the prime ministers of the two countries held an impromptu after-dinner meeting in the corridor of an Asia-Europe summit.

It was not clear why the protesters chose Saturday to demonstrate. The Xinhua report cited some students saying they had heard about plans for the protest online.

### All but two Chile miners back home

AFP, Copiapo

All but two of the 33 miners rescued in Chile were back home after doctors gave them the all clear to pick up their lives again, as gruesome details of their underground suffering emerged.

Regional health director Paola Neumann said the two remaining miners, who were not named, had been transferred to clinics for more treatment, one for dental surgery, the other suffering from spells of dizziness.

The 28 miners released Friday were driven discreetly from the hospital in the northern mining town of Copiapo without stopping to speak to the horde of journalists camped outside hoping for interviews.

The miners face a surreal readjustment to their sudden fame as they head home and ponder tempting offers of holidays and cash.

### US disappointed at Israel's settlement move

AFP, Washington/Jeddah

The United States said Friday it was "disappointed" with Israel's plans for 238 new settler homes in east Jerusalem, saying it undermined US efforts to revive Middle East peace talks.

"We were disappointed by the announcement of new tenders in east Jerusalem yesterday. It is contrary to our efforts to resume direct negotiations between the parties," State Department spokesman Philip Crowley told reporters.

He said US officials had expressed their disappointment to Israel counterparts when they were informed of the settlement plans.

When asked if US Middle East envoy George Mitchell was planning to return to the region, Crowley said: "We're still evaluating... what the appropriate next steps are. I've got nothing to announce."

The plans for new housing in the settlement neighbourhoods of Pisgat Zeev and Ramat were approved on Thursday by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's Ynet news website said.

Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erakat said it proved Israel was intent on "killing" every opportunity to revive peace talks between the two sides. "Netanyahu has made his choice: settlements over peace," he said.

Middle East peace talks launched in early September by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ground to a halt within weeks after the expiry of a 10-month moratorium on the construction of new Jewish settler homes.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas has refused to hold further negotiations while settlement construction in the West Bank continues and last week Arab League foreign ministers gave US negotiators a month to resolve the impasse.

### High black turnout could shape US polls: Experts

AFP, Washington

African-Americans are fired up and ready to vote in the upcoming mid-term elections, and a large black voter turnout could upend predictions of a drubbing for the Democratic Party, experts said Friday.

"If there's a big black turnout, which would not surprise me at all, I do not think there would be as much damage to the Democrats as is being forecast right now," David Bositis, a senior political analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (JCPES), told AFP.

Many pundits had predicted that the November 2 elections will see the Democratic Party lose its majority in the House of Representatives to the Republicans, who need to gain just 39 seats to take control of Congress.

"In 20 of the House districts where the election is competitive, there are a significant number of African-Americans, and they can make a big difference there," said Bositis, who on Thursday released a JCPES report about how African-American turnout could shape the election.

African Americans comprise about 12 percent of the US population and are a reliably Democratic voting bloc.

"Overall, what black voters can certainly help the Democrats do is minimize their losses, and if the Democrats minimize their losses, they could conceivably hold onto the House of Representatives," Bositis told AFP.



A man holds up a banner with the words "Unite all the Chinese, fight against the little Japanese, protect Diaoyu Island" as he joins thousands of protesters in a demonstration against Japan over disputed islands known as Senkaku by Japan and claimed under the name Diaoyu by China in Zhengzhou, north China's Henan province yesterday.

### N Korea threatens '1,000-fold' increase in arms

AP, Seoul

North Korea's media yesterday threatened "1,000-fold" military build-up as the United States ruled out lifting sanctions to try to coax Pyongyang into resuming talks aimed at its nuclear weapons programs.

Last year, North Korea quit the nuclear disarmament talks and later tested an atomic device that drew tightened UN sanctions. But the North has recently expressed willingness to rejoin the negotiations, which include the US, South Korea, China, Japan and Russia.

North Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan said this week that his country will not return to the disarmament-for-aid talks unless sanctions are lifted, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

### Yemen under very high risk of attack

Warns Australia

AFP, Sydney

Australia has lifted its travel warning for Yemen to its highest possible level, saying there was a "very high threat of terrorist attack" in the Arabian peninsula's poorest nation.

The updated travel advisory released late Friday comes just days after United States President Barack Obama warned that al-Qaeda was pursuing a "murderous agenda" in the increasingly violent state.

"The overall level of the advice has increased to 'do not travel' because of the very high threat of terrorist attack," Australia's foreign ministry said in a statement.

The statement advised Australians against travelling to Yemen because of the volatile security situation and urged those already in the country to leave.

"Terrorist attacks are likely and could occur at any time anywhere in Yemen with little or no warning," it said, adding that embassies and hotels could be targeted for suicide attacks.

### Paris airport fuel running short amid pension strikes

BBC ONLINE

France's main airport, Charles de Gaulle, has enough fuel to last only a few days, the transport ministry has warned amid strikes against government plans to raise the retirement age.

A ministry spokesman said officials were working to restore aviation fuel supplies. Economy Minister Christine Lagarde urged people "not to panic".

Oil refineries and fuel depots have been hit by the latest strikes.

Meanwhile unions are holding fresh mass protests over the pension plan.

On Saturday thousands of students are expected to join a fifth day of demonstrations in less than six weeks. Unions have called for more than 200 marches nationwide.

Trapil, the company that operates the fuel pipeline to the Paris airports, told French media on Friday that supplies had stopped and that Roissy-Charles de Gaulle could run out of fuel as early as next week.

On Saturday a transport ministry spokesman confirmed to AFP news agency that reserves would last until late on Monday or Tuesday.

But he said the pipeline was now working intermittently, adding: "We are exploring possible solutions to supply the airport [at Roissy]. We are confident."

All 12 oil refineries in France have been hit by the strikes. Ten have shut down or are in the

process of closing.

A number of fuel depots have been blocked.

Officials have insisted that France has enough fuel to see out the industrial action. On Saturday Lagarde said: "There is no reason to panic over this... I am sure that we will unblock the situation through intelligent social dialogue."

However, some 10% of filling stations have run out of petrol and panic buying has broken out in some areas.

Meanwhile more than 200 marches nationwide are planned on Saturdays. The protesters are opposed to President Nicolas Sarkozy's plan to raise the minimum retirement age from 60 to 62, and from 65 to 67 for a full state pension.

More than a million people took to the streets in the latest national protest on Tuesday, according to police. Trade unions organisers said 3.5m had taken part.

The last weekend day of demonstrations was Saturday 2 October, when the numbers were about 900,000 according to police and 3m according to unions.

A sixth day of nationwide strikes and protests is planned for Tuesday 19 October.

Seventy percent of people polled this week think the sporadic strikes will build into a national protest movement like the one in 1995 and over half of those questioned said they would support it.

### Pentagon bracing for release of 400,000 secret Iraq reports

AFP, Washington

The Pentagon said Friday it was scouring through an Iraq war database to prepare for potential fallout from an expected release by WikiLeaks of some 400,000 secret military reports.

The massive release is set to dwarf the whistleblower website's publication of 77,000 classified US military documents on the war in Afghanistan in July, including the names of Afghan informants and other details from raw intelligence reports. Another 15,000 are due out soon.

In order to prepare for Monday's anticipated release of sensitive intelligence on the US-led Iraq war, officials set up a 120-person taskforce several weeks ago to comb through the database and "determine what the possible impacts might be," said Colonel David Lapan, a Pentagon spokesman.

### 15,000 rapes committed in DR Congo last year

AFP, UN

More than 15,000 rapes were committed last year in a strife-torn region of Democratic Republic of Congo where peacekeepers cannot guarantee civilian security, a top UN official said Friday.

With accusations now being made against DR Congo government troops of new cases of raping and killing in the east of the country, the head of the UN force, Roger Meece, said "the scale of the problem is enormous."

The chief of the UN Mission in DR Congo, MONUSCO, appeared before the UN Security Council the day after a UN envoy said government troops were attacking women and killing in the same villages where mass rapes were reported in July and August.

Meece was unable to give details of the new attacks, but he said: "The best data available, for example, suggests that over 15,000 rapes were committed last year in eastern DRC."

Armed groups operate over a wide area and often mix with the civilian population, he added.

"In this vast area -- larger than the size of Afghanistan -- it is not possible for MONUSCO to ensure full protection for all civilians. To approach this goal would require vastly greater force levels and resources," Meece told the Security Council.



A woman signs one of the 10,000 plates set up by international humanitarian organisation "Action against Hunger" in front of the Eiffel tower for a "Banquet against Hunger", an event taking place as part of the World Food Day yesterday in Paris. The 10,000 plates symbolize the number of children dying of malnutrition each day.

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