

ROW OVER IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

# Tehran tests missile as US tightens sanctions

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday it tested a new medium-range missile during war games near a vital Gulf oil transit channel, hours after US President Barack Obama signed a law tightening sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear programme.

A military spokesman also announced that Iranian ships and submarines will today carry out manoeuvres designed to allow them to shut the strategic channel, the Strait of Hormuz, if Tehran so wishes.

The show of military muscle underlined a threat by Iran to shut the narrow strait -- a through point for 20 percent of the world's oil -- if more Western sanctions were applied over its nuclear programme.

The potential for that scenario, and possible confrontation with US warships that patrol the Gulf, was given

impetus when Obama on Saturday signed tough new sanctions targeting Iran's central bank and financial sector.

Under the measures, foreign firms will have to choose between doing business with the Islamic republic or the economically mighty United States.

The aim is to put the squeeze on Iran's crucial oil revenues, most of which are processed by the central bank.

The new US sanctions were "unjustifiable," Mohammad Nahavandian, the head of Iran's chamber of commerce, told the ISNA news agency. He said previous sanctions had "failed to halt Iran's trade."

Iran has said new sanctions, including a possible oil embargo being mulled by the European Union, could push it to close the Strait of Hormuz. Its war games underlined the threat.

"From tomorrow morning (Monday), a vast majority of our naval units -

- surface and underwater, and aerial -- will implement a new tactical formation, designed to make the passage of any vessel through the Strait of Hormuz impossible if the Islamic Republic of Iran's navy so chooses," navy spokesman Commodore Mahmoud Mousavi was quoted as saying by the ISNA news agency.

Mousavi said yesterday that "for the first time, an anti-radar medium-range missile was successfully fired during the massive naval drills," according to state media.

Oil market analysts is watching developments near the Strait of Hormuz closely.

Oil prices climbed briefly after Iran's vice president, Mohammad Reza Rahimi, vowed Tuesday that "not a drop of oil will pass through the Strait of Hormuz" if more sanctions were imposed.



PHOTO: AFP

Fireworks explode near Malaysia's landmark Petronas Twin Towers during the New Year 2012 celebrations in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

## Anna Hazare hospitalised

PTI, Pune

Anna Hazare, who has been admitted to a private hospital in Pune after suffering from a viral infection, is recovering and he should not fast at least for the next one month, doctors attending on him said yesterday.

74-year-old Hazare was admitted to the hospital Saturday night and is being monitored by a team of doctors.

After examining his health, the doctors said they have advised Hazare not to fast at least for the next one month till there is some improvement in his condition.

"For another one month he should not fast. If the condition deteriorates then it would be difficult. In five days, we will stop giving antibiotics to him and we expect some improvement after that," a doctor attending on him said.

## Pakistan, India swap lists of nuclear sites

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan and India yesterday exchanged lists of their nuclear sites under an accord which prohibits both sides from attacking these locations, the foreign ministry in Islamabad said.

Under the 1988 agreement, the nuclear-armed neighbours are required to submit the lists of all their respective nuclear installations and facilities -- civilian and military -- on January 1 every year.

"In accordance with the aforesaid agreement, a list of requisite facilities in Pakistan was given to the Indian high commission official at the foreign office today," a statement from Pakistan's foreign ministry said.

The Indian side also handed over its list to the Pakistan high commission official at the ministry of external affairs in New Delhi, it added.

Relations between India and Pakistan, which have fought three wars since the subcontinent was partitioned in 1947, have been plagued by border and resource disputes, and accusations of Pakistani militant activity against India.

Two of the three wars were over Kashmir, which both countries claim in full. The neighbours and rivals were on the brink of nuclear conflict in 2002 over the Kashmir tensions.

A slow-moving peace process resumed in March 2010, after 166 people were killed in the 2008 Mumbai attacks blamed on Pakistani extremists.

As part of the resumed dialogue process, experts from the two countries recently held peace talks in Islamabad on nuclear confidence-building measures.

## Denmark takes over EU presidency

AFP, Copenhagen

Non-euro nation Denmark takes over the European Union's rotating presidency yesterday, voicing determination to solve the eurozone crisis by promoting consensus among all 27 EU members.

The Scandinavian country, one of the few in Europe with a left-leaning government, will quietly pick up the baton from Warsaw as it takes the helm of the EU for the seventh time.

No major events are planned to mark the shift until European Commission representatives arrive for a ceremony on January 11.

Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt stressed that Copenhagen was eager to make bridge between the eurozone and non-euro countries.

# Nigeria in state of emergency

REUTERS, Lagos

President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency on Saturday in parts of Nigeria plagued by a violent Islamist insurgency, and ordered shut the borders with Cameroon, Chad and Niger in the northeast.

Coming nearly a week after radical sect Boko Haram set off a series of bombs across Nigeria on Christmas Day, including one at a church that killed at least 37 people and wounded 57, Jonathan told state television the measures would aim to restore security in troubled parts of Nigeria's north.

In a separate, unrelated incident, clashes between rival ethnic groups in southeastern Nigeria's Ebonyi state on Saturday killed at least 50 people, the state government spokesman said, and police said mobile units had been sent to the state to quell the violence.

There was no suggestion they had anything to do with wider security problems, but the clashes are likely to add to Jonathan's

woes at a time when his forces are already stretched.

"The temporary closure of our borders in the affected areas is only an interim measure designed to address the current security challenges and will be resumed as soon as normalcy is restored," Jonathan said.

He added that his chief of defence staff had been instructed to take other "appropriate" measures, including setting up a special counter-terrorism force.

Earlier Saturday, Jonathan visited the scene of the deadliest Christmas attack, on St. Theresa's Catholic church in Madalla, on the outskirts of Abuja.

"We will crush the terrorists," he told weeping relatives of the victims gathered in the church for a vigil.

The blasts have raised fears that Boko Haram, a movement styled on the Taliban and whose name means "Western education is forbidden," is trying to ignite sectarian strife in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and top oil producer.

## BJP to launch anti-Congress campaign

PTI, New Delhi

Alleging that the Congress did not want the Lokpal Bill to be passed in the Rajya Sabha, the Bharatiya Janata Party yesterday said it will launch a week-long campaign across the country to "expose" the ruling party.

"There was no conviction by the UPA in Rajya Sabha for passing a strong Lokpal Bill and that is why people are disappointed. The BJP will launch the Loktantra bachao, Congress hatao (save democracy, remove Congress) campaign at district level from January 3-10," BJP spokesperson Nirmala Sitharaman told reporters in New Delhi.

With the battle in Parliament on Lokpal issue now put to rest till the budget session, the BJP has decided to take to the streets on the issue.

## NEWS IN brief

### N Koreans urged to defend Kim

BBC ONLINE

North Korea called on the country yesterday to defend the new leader, Kim Jong-un, to the death, in a New Year message.

The army, ruling party and people should be prepared to act as "human shields" for the son and successor of Kim Jong-il, the message released by state media said. The message also said the "burning issue" of food shortages was one the nation's leaders must work to solve.

Kim Jong-il, who had ruled since 1994, died on 17 December.

His son, Kim Jong-un, took over after his death and has in recent days quickly consolidated his power in the country.

### Powerful quake rocks Tokyo

AFP, Tokyo

A major 7.0-magnitude earthquake rocked Tokyo yesterday as Emperor Akihito led Japan's New Year celebrations by urging people to work together in rebuilding the nation from March's quake-tsunami disaster.

The tremor struck at 2:28pm local time with its focus deep at about 370 kilometres, Japan's Meteorological Agency said. The US Geological Survey put the depth at 348 kilometres.

Its epicentre was located near Torishima, a north-western Pacific island about 560 kilometres south of Tokyo.

There were no immediate reports of damage or injury and no tsunami warning was issued.

### Iraq deaths down sharply in 2011

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's death toll from violence in 2011 fell sharply from previous years, figures showed on Sunday, as Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki called for the country to kick-start rebuilding with US troops gone.

A total of 2,645 people were killed as a result of violence last year, according to an AFP tally. The data showed that 1,578 civilians were killed in attacks last year, along with 609 policemen and 458 soldiers. Overall, 4,413 Iraqis were wounded in the violence, the figures showed.

The death toll represents a marked decline from previous years -- a total of 3,605 were killed in 2010, and 3,481 in 2009 -- and is sharply lower than when a brutal sectarian war engulfed Iraq in 2006 and 2007.

## Nasa probes enter lunar orbit

AFP, Washington

The first of two Nasa lunar probes on a mission to study the Moon's inner core so as to better understand the origins of planets went into orbit Saturday, the US space agency said.

The first Gravity Recovery and Interior Laboratory (Grail-A) began orbiting the Moon at about 2201 GMT on Saturday and Grail-B is expected to follow suit yesterday (Sunday) at around 2205 GMT, according to officials at Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

"Pop the bubbly & toast the moon! @NASA's #Grail-A spacecraft is in lunar orbit," the space agency posted on Twitter.

Grail head researcher Maria Zuber, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said in a statement that the mission "will rewrite the textbooks on the evolution of the Moon."

The \$500-million pair of washing machine-sized satellites were launched on September 10 that have taken three months to reach the Moon as opposed to the usual three-day journey taken by the manned Apollo missions. Objective of the mission is to map the Moon's inner



PHOTO: AFP

This Nasa image shows how the probes will map the moon's gravity field.

core for the first time.

Beginning in March 2012, the two unmanned spacecraft will send radio signals that allow earth-based scientists to create a high-resolution map of the Moon's gravitational field, helping them to better understand its sub-surface features and the origins of other bodies in the solar system.

Scientists believe that the Moon was formed when a planet-sized object crashed into the Earth, throwing off a load of material that eventually became our planet's airless, desolate satellite.

## FEAR OF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE UN on high alert in S Sudan

AFP, Juba

UN peacekeepers remain on high alert in South Sudan's flashpoint town of Pibor where escalating tribal violence has prompted thousands to flee, a senior UN official said yesterday.

The United Nations has deployed peacekeeping reinforcements in Pibor in the troubled Jonglei state over the past four days as a column of 6,000 armed youths from the Lou Nuer tribe marched on the town pursuing a rival tribe.

"We remain on high alert and are very concerned that civilians may be at risk," a UN source said.

The Lou Nuer youths, several hundred of whom had arrived on the outskirts of Pibor on Friday, were pursuing members of the Murle tribe who began fleeing towards Pibor several days ago after the Lou Nuer raided the town of Lukangol.

That town, the MSF spokesman said, has been reduced to ashes.

A group calling itself the Nuer Youth White Army issued a statement on December 26 vowing to "wipe out the entire Murle tribe... as the only solution to guarantee long-term security of Nuer cattle."

The group accuses the Murle of raiding Nuer cattle and killing members of their tribe since 2005.

## BNP standing

FROM PAGE 20

night sat with the party chairperson at her Gulshan office with her in the chair.

Meeting sources said a number of parties including Liberal Democratic Party and Kalyan Party will be included in the new alliance. As per the decision of Thursday's meeting, Khaleda Zia will finalise the name of the new alliance.

Sources also said the committee members also discussed the party's preparation for Chittagong road march.

Khaleda Zia will lead the two-day road march on January 8 and 9 and is likely to announce fresh agitation programme from the Chittagong rally.

The details of the agitation programmes will be finalised by the standing committee members just before the road-march programme, said a senior leader of the party preferring not to be named.

## Child sacrificed, liver offered to gods in India

AFP, Raipur

A seven-year-old Indian girl was murdered in a tribal sacrifice and her liver offered to the gods to improve crop growth, police in the central state of Chhattisgarh said yesterday.

The body of Lalita Tati was found in October one week after her family reported her missing.

"A seven-year-old girl was sacrificed by two persons superstitiously believing that the act would give a better harvest," Narayan Das, the police chief of Bijapur district, told AFP by telephone.

The two men was arrested on Wednesday on suspicion of killing the girl and offering her liver to the gods in a grisly tribal cere-

mony. Police said the men had confessed to the crime.

The girl was murdered in a jungle district of Chhattisgarh that is a stronghold of rebel Maoists who have tapped into disaffection among local tribal groups.

Human sacrifices occasionally make headlines in deeply religious and superstitious India, and usually occur in poor areas where some people revere practitioners of black magic.

Two suspected child sacrifices were reported in Chhattisgarh in 2010, while in the same year the decapitated body of a factory worker was found in a temple in the eastern state of West Bengal.

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