

West irked by India's Iran trade links

AFP, New Delhi

The EU on Friday pushed India to use its influence to get Iran to resume talks over its disputed nuclear drive, a day after New Delhi said it wanted to boost trade with the Islamic republic.

India, a major buyer of Iranian oil, has emerged as a potential spoiler as Western nations look to ratchet up pressure to force Tehran to abandon its atomic programme, which Iran insists is for peaceful purposes.

New Delhi on Thursday announced it would send a large business delegation to Tehran this month to exploit trade opportunities created by US and European sanctions.

Speaking at a news briefing for the EU-India summit in New Delhi, European Council President Herman Van Rompuy made no mention of India's trade plans, but expressed "deep concern" about Iran's nuclear ambitions which the West fears is aimed at building a nuclear bomb.

India, which has refused to join the Western sanctions, should "use their leverage to get Iran back to the negotiating table", he said.

Premier Manmohan Singh sidestepped Van Rompuy's call for action, but conceded "there are problems with Iran's nuclear

program."

New Delhi had a great interest in ensuring "stability" in the Middle East region, Singh said, adding that "we sincerely believe that this issue can be and should be resolved by giving maximum scope to diplomacy."

Indian foreign policy experts have previously suggested New Delhi could act as an interlocutor with Iran to help the world community engage with Tehran.

India's business delegation plan comes as it examines ways to step up trade with Tehran amid trouble in settling its oil bills with the country due to the sanctions campaign, which is drying up banking routes.

Iran has reportedly agreed to accept Indian rupees for up to 45 percent of oil exports, while India sees opportunities to sell tea, wheat and rice, as well as iron and steel, among others.

"If Europe and the US want to stop exports to Iran, why should I (India) follow suit? Why shouldn't we tap that opportunity?" India's commerce secretary Rahul Khullar was quoted as saying on Thursday.

He described the planned delegation of government officials and business leaders as "huge," adding that India was bound only by United Nations sanctions on Iran, not embargoes imposed by other countries.



PHOTO: AFP

President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso, *left*, shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, *centre*, as president of the European Council of the European Union Herman Van Rompuy looks after the agreement signing in New Delhi yesterday.

Turmoil expected after Pak PM's contempt appeal rejected

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's Supreme Court's rejection of an appeal against a summons in a contempt case yesterday is likely to bring fresh political turmoil to the chronically unstable country.

If convicted, Yusuf Raza Gilani could be forced to step down and face up to six months in jail. The case, which has raised tension between Pakistan's civilian leaders and the Supreme Court, could drag on and paralyse decision-making.

If Gilani is removed, it does not necessarily mean the government will fall as the ruling coalition has the numbers in parliament to elect a replacement.

But a protracted court battle could weaken the administration and damage the ruling Pakistan People's Party's chances in the next general election expected by 2013.

Political instability and

NEWS ANALYSIS

in coming months as repayments on IMF loans begin in February.

While Pakistanis have grown accustomed to hostility between civilian leaders and generals, the Supreme Court has increasingly asserted itself over the last few years, making the political landscape more combustible.

"I think this is definitely a setback to the system. The government's perfor-

mance was already affected by its confrontation with the military," said Talat Masood, a retired general and political analyst.

The legal tussle stems from thousands of old corruption cases thrown out in 2007 by a controversial amnesty law passed under former military ruler and president Pervez Musharraf.

The contempt accusation arises from Gilani and his advisers ignoring court orders to ask Swiss authorities to re-open money laundering cases against President Asif Ali Zardari, the most prominent beneficiary of the law.

Pakistan's current government is the longest serving civilian administration in the country's history.

It hopes to be the first to serve out its full term in the South Asian nation which has been ruled by the military for more than half of its 64-year history through coups, or from behind the scenes.

MEMOGATE SCANDAL Key witness to testify abroad

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani judges yesterday agreed to allow star witness in a major scandal threatening President Asif Ali Zardari to testify abroad, resurrecting an investigation that appeared to come unstuck.

American businessman Mansoor Ijaz alone implicated Zardari in a controversial memo seeking US help to rein in Pakistan's powerful military last May, but has refused to travel to Pakistan, citing fears for his safety.

His testimony is considered key to any case against the president, who faces frenzied speculation that he could be forced out of office over the scandal that dates back to chaotic days after US troops killed Osama bin Laden.

FBI files question Jobs' honesty and morality

BBC ONLINE

The FBI files of Steve Jobs have been released, showing a man who commanded respect as an innovator but was questioned on his honesty and morality.

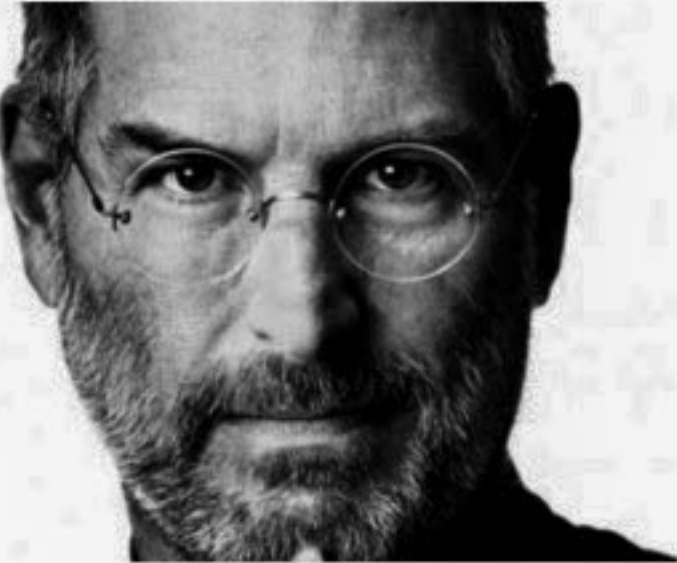
The file was prepared on the Apple founder as he was considered for a presidential appointment in 1991 during George H.W. Bush's time in office.

Documents also revealed that Jobs had been the victim of an extortion bomb threat in 1985.

Jobs' files note, too, his conversion to Buddhism and admissions of drug use.

The documents were made public on Thursday through freedom of information laws, and posted to the FBI's website.

"Several individuals questioned Jobs' honesty stating that Jobs will twist the truth and distort reality in order to achieve his goals,"



Steve Jobs

said a summary of the FBI background check.

A former business associate who blamed Jobs because he had not received lucrative stock he thought was due to him characterised the Apple founder as an "honest and trustworthy individual; however, his moral character is questionable".

Others told the interviewer that Jobs was difficult to work with, no surprise given details of his volatile temperament that emerged in his biography last year.

Jobs died in October after a years-long struggle with cancer.

The interviewees' names have been redacted by the FBI, with the exception of Jobs himself.

The Apple founder admitted to experimenting with drugs, including LSD, in the 1970s.

NEWS IN brief

Somalia's al-Shabab join al-Qaeda

BBC ONLINE

Islamist militant group al-Shabab, which controls much of Somalia, has released a joint video with al-Qaeda, announcing the two groups have merged.

Al-Shabab leader Ahmed Abdi Godane, known as Mukhtar Abu Zubair, said he "pledged obedience" to al-Qaeda head Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The two groups have long worked together and foreigners are known to fight alongside Somali militants.

The announcement comes as al-Shabab is under pressure on several fronts.

China envoy in Iran for nuke talks

AFP, Beijing

China announced yesterday it was sending an envoy to Iran, as tensions mount over the Islamic republic's atomic programme and speculation Israel may launch a military strike on Tehran's nuclear facilities.

Assistant foreign minister Ma Zhaoxu will visit Iran on February 12 and 13 to exchange views on the issue, ministry spokesman Liu Weimin told reporters.

"Dialogue and cooperation is the only right way to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue," Liu said.

"We are ready to work together with the parties concerned to seek an early resumption of talks between the P5-plus-one countries and Iran."

Israel and much of the international community believe that Iran's nuclear enrichment programme masks a covert weapons drive -- a charge Tehran denies -- while China, a key ally and top trading partner, opposes sanctions.

Myanmar detains key monk

AFP, Yangon

A prominent Buddhist monk who was one of the leaders of a 2007 anti-government uprising has been detained for questioning by Myanmar authorities, less than a month after he was freed from jail.

Gambira was one of hundreds of political prisoners released in January, cutting short a 68-year jail term imposed for his key role in the 2007 "Saffron Revolution", which was brutally crushed by the former junta.

Since he was freed, Gambira has breached regulations by breaking into monasteries closed by the government after the mass monk-led demonstrations, a government official told AFP Friday on condition of anonymity.

Israel rejects Palestinian unity govt

AFP, United Nations

Israel's foreign minister told UN envoys on Thursday that a new Palestinian unity government including Hamas would be a setback to peace attempts, diplomats said.

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman briefed 15 UN envoys, including nine Security Council ambassadors, on the Middle East peace talks and the growing confrontation with Iran in a meeting at a New York hotel.

Lieberman said an accord signed this week by the heads of Fatah and Hamas "does not contribute to the advancement of peace negotiations or the well being of the Palestinian people," Israel's UN mission said in a statement.

Fatah, which is led by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, and Hamas, the militant group which rules Gaza, signed an accord which calls for a government of "independent technocrats" to oversee reconstruction in Gaza and to "facilitate" new elections in the Palestinian territories.

So far there is no suggestion that Hamas will have a role in the interim government.

Lieberman said the accord "reflects the personal interests" of Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, the Israeli mission added.

"Israel will not accept a Palestinian government that includes Hamas, unless it changes its current policies, recognises Israel's right to exist and accepts all Quartet conditions," Lieberman said.

Talks between Israel and the Palestinians have been frozen since September 2010. The Palestinians have demanded that Israel halt settlement construction in the Palestinian territories.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters clash with riot police during a 48-hour general strike in Athens yesterday. Greek protesters threw stones and firebombs at riot police who responded with tear gas in Athens as clashes erupted on the sidelines of a protest against new austerity cuts.

Security forces shoot dead two Tibetans

AFP, Beijing

Security forces shot dead two Tibetan brothers who were on the run after protesting against Chinese rule, US-based broadcaster Radio Free Asia said, a day after a monk reportedly set himself alight.

The incidents are said to have taken place in two provinces bordering the Tibet autonomous region, as tension in Tibetan-inhabited areas intensifies over perceived religious, political and cultural repression.

China launched a clampdown after at least two other Tibetans were killed in a series of protests last month, in what Beijing says is a battle against forces trying to split Tibet from the rest of China.

The Himalayas lost no ice in past 10 years: Study

GUARDIAN ONLINE

The world's greatest snow-capped peaks, which run in a chain from the Himalayas to Tian Shan on the border of China and Kyrgyzstan, have lost no ice over the last decade, new research shows.

The discovery has stunned scientists, who had believed that around 50bn tonnes of meltwater were being shed each year and not being replaced by new snowfall.

The study is the first to survey all the world's icecaps and glaciers and was made possible by the use of satellite data. Overall, the contribution of melting ice outside the two largest caps - Greenland and Antarctica is much less than previously estimated, with the lack of ice loss in the Himalayas and the other high peaks of Asia responsible for most of the discrepancy.

The melting of Himalayan glaciers caused controversy in 2009 when a report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change mistakenly stated that they would



disappear by 2035, instead of 2350. However, the scientist who led the new work is clear that while greater uncertainty has been discovered in Asia's highest mountains, the melting of ice caps and glaciers around the world remains a serious concern.

The scientists are careful to point out that lower-altitude glaciers in the Asian mountain ranges sometimes dubbed the "third pole" are definitely melting. Satellite images and reports confirm this. But over the study period from 2003-10 enough ice was added to the peaks to compensate.

AUSTERITY BILL Greece braces for 48-hour strike

AFP, Athens

Greek unions unleashed a 48-hour strike against new austerity measures to go before parliament and required by the European Union and the IMF in exchange for badly needed aid.

The strike was marked with violence.

Television footage showed youths in hoods and motorcycle helmets breaking masonry around central Syntagma Square and throwing stones at police, who responded with bursts of tear gas. At least one person was injured.

Athens was deprived yesterday of bus, metro and trolley services, and security forces manned positions in the centre of the capital.

Legal challenge launched to Suu Kyi's candidacy

AFP, Yangon

Aung San Suu Kyi's bid for a seat in Myanmar's Parliament has been challenged by a rival candidate.

Suu Kyi's spokesman Nyan Win said yesterday that Tin Yi of the Party for Unity and Peace had submitted a complaint to the district election commission that she was not eligible to run in the April 1 by-election.

The basis for his protest was a constitutional provision barring persons enjoying the benefits of a foreign citizen from serving in parliament.

Nyan Win said Suu Kyi's party submitted a rebuttal stating that the complaint was based on hearsay and false information.