

UK fears new cold war over Iran

US, EU cautiously optimistic on nuke talks

AFP, London

Iran's nuclear ambitions could trigger "a new Cold War" more perilous than that between the West and the Soviet Union, British Foreign Secretary warned on Friday.

William Hague said Iran obtaining a nuclear bomb would spark an atomic arms race that could rival Middle Eastern nations that have been more dangerous than the original Cold War because the old "safety mechanisms" are missing.

"If (the Iranians) obtain nuclear weapons capability, then I think other nations across the Middle East will want to develop nuclear weapons," he told Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper.

"The most serious round of nuclear proliferation since nuclear weapons were invented would have begun with all the destabilising effects in the Middle East," he continued.

"And the threat of a new Cold War in



William Hague

the Middle East without necessarily all the safety mechanisms... would be a disaster in world affairs."

Iran faces four sets of UN sanctions and a raft of unilateral US and EU sanctions designed to halt a programme the West fears conceals a drive for nuclear weapons.

Tehran denies this charge, saying its nuclear project is for purely peaceful purposes.

In response to feverish speculation in recent weeks that Israel is preparing to mount a pre-emptive strike on Iran's

nuclear programme, Hague said Iran being "attacked militarily" would have "enormous downsides".

"We are very clear to all concerned that we are not advocating military action," he told the Telegraph.

"We support a twin-track strategy of sanctions and pressure and negotiations on the other hand."

"We are not favouring the idea of anybody attacking Iran at the moment," he added.

Earlier Friday, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the European Union's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton voiced cautious optimism about the prospect for Iran to return to stalled nuclear talks with six world powers.

In a February 14 letter to Ashton, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili said Tehran is ready to resume talks at the "earliest" opportunity as long as the six powers respect its right to peaceful atomic energy.

Iran warships enter the Mediterranean

AFP, Tehran

Iranian warships entered the Mediterranean Sea after crossing the Suez Canal yesterday in a move aimed at showing Iran's "might" to regional countries, navy commander Admiral Habibollah Sayari said.

Sayari said the naval deployment to the Mediterranean would show "the might" of the Islamic republic to regional countries, and also convey Tehran's "message of peace and friendship."

The first Iranian presence in the Mediterranean in February 2011 provoked strong reactions from Israel and the United States, with the Jewish state putting its navy on alert.

US bill seeking Pak province autonomy triggers outcry

AFP, Washington

A US lawmaker on Friday introduced a resolution calling for self-determination in restive Baluchistan, triggering an angry response from Pakistan, although the measure looked unlikely to pass.

Republican Representative Dana Rohrabacher said that Baluchis -- divided now among Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan -- should be allowed to choose their status. Pakistan's Baluchistan has been torn by insurgency since 2004.

A resolution sponsored by Rohrabacher and two fellow Republicans said the Baluchi people "have the right to self-determination and to their own sovereign country, and they should be afforded the opportunity to choose their own status."

"The political and ethnic discrimination they suffer is tragic and made more so because America is financing and selling arms to their oppressors in Islamabad," Rohrabacher said in a statement.

There was no sign of significant support for the proposal by Rohrabacher, a longtime



Yousuf Raza Gilani Dana Rohrabacher

critic of Pakistan's government who sought unsuccessfully to cut off all aid after US forces found and killed Osama bin Laden on Pakistani soil.

Pakistan, where anti-US sentiment is widespread, quickly condemned Rohrabacher's introduction of the resolution.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani yesterday condemned the resolution.

"This resolution violates our sovereignty and we condemn it," Gilani told reporters in a televised interaction with media in the port city of Karachi.

WB to select new head by April 20

AFP, Washington

The World Bank said Friday it would select a new president to succeed Robert Zoellick by April 20, the start of the World Bank and IMF's spring meetings in Washington.

But even as the huge development lender set out what it said would be "a merit-based and transparent process" to choose its 12th head from among candidates from around the world, it appeared all but certain to be filled by an American.

Zoellick announced Wednesday he would step down at the end of his five-year term on June 30.

The World Bank said nominations will be accepted through March 23; candidates can come from any of the Bank's 187 member countries.

US Capitol bomb plot thwarted

AFP, Washington

A Moroccan immigrant was arrested Friday as he tried to carry out an al-Qaeda suicide bombing at the US Capitol, under the watch of the FBI in a sting operation, officials said.

The FBI said it conducted the undercover operation as part of a longstanding terrorism probe of the suspect, who was arrested blocks from the Capitol building as he planned to detonate what he believed to be live explosives in a vest he wore.

Both the explosives and a MAC-10 automatic gun were given to him by undercover federal agents, who had first rendered them inoperable, according to court documents.

The Justice Department identified the man as Amine El Khalifi, a 29-year-old immigrant from Morocco living illegally in the US state of Virginia, which borders the capital Washington.

The Justice Department said Khalifi had originally considered several different targets, including US military offices, a synagogue and a restaurant frequented by US military officials, but eventually settled on the US Capitol.

Friday's arrest was startling because it marked a plot by a US-based suspect apparently intent on blowing himself up, whereas several previous sting operations foiled plots that did not necessarily involve suicide attacks.

UN members move toward arms trade treaty

REUTERS, United Nations

Negotiators on Friday narrowly averted the collapse of talks on a world arms trade treaty to regulate the \$55 billion global weapons market, agreeing on ground rules for negotiations after days of procedural wrangling.

Delegates and advocates for tougher oversight of global arms sales said the agreement set the stage for a monthlong conference in July to draft the treaty.

Arms control campaigners say one person every minute dies as a result of armed violence and that a convention is needed to prevent illicitly traded guns from pouring into conflict zones and fueling wars and atrocities.

Earlier on Friday, arms control activists and diplomats said the talks were nearly derailed by disputes over procedure - above all whether participants can effectively veto an agreement in July - although those issues were eventually resolved.

There are also divisions over whether human rights should be a mandatory criterion for determining whether governments should permit weapons exports to specific countries.

Brian Wood of Amnesty International said Russia, China and several other arms-exporting nations were "resisting proposals from the overwhelming majority for criteria in the treaty that would stop arms transfers" when there was reason to believe they could be used for serious human rights violations.

He said Washington also had misgivings and was concerned that human rights criteria would discourage states like Syria, a major purchaser of Russian arms, from joining the treaty.

Iranian exiles move out of camp Ashraf

AFP, Baghdad

Several hundred Iranian exiles were travelling to a UN-approved site near Baghdad yesterday after leaving Camp Ashraf, where Iranian opposition members have been based for decades.

The move is part of a December 25 deal between the UN and Iraq, which was reached after extensive talks, under which around 3,400 Iranians opposed to the regime in Tehran will be relocated, as part of a process that aims to see them resettled outside Iraq.

Iraq had previously aimed to close Camp Ashraf, which Saddam Hussein allowed the People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran to set up during his 1980-88 war with Iran, by the end of the year.

NEWS IN brief

Japan emperor's surgery successful

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Emperor Akihito underwent a successful four-hour heart bypass operation yesterday and hopefully should be fit to play tennis again, officials said amid lingering concerns over his declining health.

It was the first surgery for the 78-year-old emperor since 2003 -- when he had an operation for prostate cancer -- after tests showed a narrowing of two of his coronary arteries.

His physicians, a team from the University of Tokyo



Akihito

Pope appoints 22 new cardinals

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Benedict XVI led a solemn ceremony in Saint Peter's Basilica yesterday to induct 22 new cardinals into the prestigious college that will one day elect his successor.

The 84-year-old pope, who entered the vast basilica on a rolling platform wearing red and gold vestments, presented the new "princes of the Church" with scarlet-red birettas and gold rings during the consistory that Vatican observers say could increase the chances of the next pope being Italian.

Critics say the appointments show a strong bias towards Europe as out of the 125 "elector cardinals," 67 are now from Europe, with just 22 from South America, 15 from North America, 11 from Africa and

Murdoch launches new weekly

AFP, London

Rupert Murdoch said on Friday that he would launch a Sunday version of his top-selling British tabloid The Sun, vowing to stand by demoralised staff despite the arrest of senior reporters over bribery claims.

In an email to staff at News Corporation's British newspaper division, where he visited the newsrooms Friday, Murdoch said: "We will build on The Sun's proud heritage by launching the Sun on Sunday very soon."

He paid tribute to the "superb work" of journalists at The Sun, the first British newspaper he bought in 1969, adding that the tabloid "is part of me".

The announcement confirms rumours circulating since mid-2011 that Murdoch would seek to publish an alternative to the News of the World, which had a circulation of 2.7 million when it was closed down.

China urges end to Syria violence

AGENCIES

A senior Chinese envoy yesterday called for all sides in Syria to stop the violence and for elections to go ahead peacefully after Damascus talks with President Bashar al-Assad, state media said.

The meeting came after a day of violence in which a human rights watchdog said at least 30 people were killed as protests spread to several well-to-do neighbourhoods of the capital for the first time and security forces unleashed their heaviest pounding yet of the flashpoint central city of Homs.

Activists called for a "day of disobedience" in Damascus today to galvanise support for the protest movement.

"The position of China is to call on the government, the opposition and the rebels to halt acts of violence immediately," Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun said after his talks with Assad.

"We hope that the referendum on a new constitution as well as the forthcoming parliamentary elections pass off calmly," Zhai said.

On Thursday, Syrian opposition groups rejected a newly drafted constitution that could end nearly five decades of single-party rule, and urged voters to boycott a February 26 referendum on the charter.

Zhai's meeting with Assad followed talks with his counterpart, Faisal Meqdad, late on Friday after which he said the international community must respect Syria's sovereignty.

On Thursday, before heading to Damascus, Zhai said Beijing opposed armed intervention and forced "regime change" in Syria.

New Chinese envoy

FROM PAGE 20

his best and cooperate with the government and people of Bangladesh to improve further the ties between the two countries.

He also said China and Bangladesh are good neighbours. Since 1975, the bilateral relationship has always been developing in a smooth manner and bilateral cooperation in various areas has been deepened.

Prior to his appointment, Li Jun had been serving as the minister of the Chinese Mission to the European Union.

Li held various prestigious positions in International Department of Communist Party of China (IDCPC) during most of the

time of his long service career.

He had discharged duty as third secretary, second secretary, deputy director and director at second bureau of IDCPC.

Born in August 1959, Li Jun took up teaching in 1982 at China Northwest Institute of Politics and Law and served there for nearly two years.

He completed his post-graduate degree in Japanese literature from Graduate School of China's Jilin University in 1986.

Foreign ministry and Chinese embassy sources said the new ambassador was expected to present his credentials to President Zillur Rahman soon.

Restore caretaker or quit power

FROM PAGE 1

ground in Laxmipur yesterday.

She threatened to launch tougher anti-government programmes if the BNP's demand for restoration of the caretaker government system was not met before the March 12 rally in Dhaka.

"We will go for tougher programmes that will eventually force the government either to restore the caretaker system or step down."

Khaleda asked the government not to create any obstruction in the party's programme. Opposition workers and supporters from across the country will gather in the capital on March 12 to press the demand for a restoration of the caretaker system.

The BNP chief said the Awami League had put democracy in trouble by getting the caretaker system scrapped.

"The ruling party must

accept the demand for restoring the caretaker system for the sake of democracy. The Awami League is not a democratic party at all. It believes in one-party rule. It doesn't even hesitate to invite the army to usurp power. It is also involved in militancy."

Khaleda said the Awami League has a godfather in every district. BNP leader Nurul Islam was murdered in Laxmipur but the president pardoned his killers, she said.

Laxmipur district BNP organised the rally to protest the deaths of two persons in police firing on a BNP procession on January 29.

She criticised the government for failing to arrest the killers of journalist couple Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi more than one week after the murders.

"The government definitely has an interest in the killings. Otherwise, why is it

not arresting the murderers? The Awami League can never ensure normal deaths of people."

Khaleda said at least 14 journalists were killed during this government's tenure but not a single case had come to trial.

Terminating the government as failed, worthless and murderous, she said people wanted to get rid of this government.

"Please do not lose heart. There is no time for it...start to protest and take to the streets. I got involved in politics to save the people."

Khaleda said the relationship between Bangladesh and India should be based on a sense of equality. The BNP is neither against nor in favour of India. "It is in favour of the people."

"The Awami League cannot get anything from India. It can only give."

Khaleda claimed that

there was no electricity crisis during the BNP government's tenure. "The present government has created the electricity crisis to loot people's money."

Party leaders, workers and supporters in their thousands attended the rally. Hundreds of arches were put up from Comilla to Laxmipur to welcome the leader of the opposition.

People were seen standing on both sides of the road to have a glimpse of the BNP chairperson.

Khaleda left the capital for Laxmipur shortly after 11:00am and reached there at about 3:30pm. She started addressing the rally at 4:55pm.

Acting BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, and party leaders Moudud Ahmed, Abdul Moyeen Khan, and Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annee, among others, spoke at the rally.



Workers of El Universo newspaper march carrying a mock coffin in protest towards the government palace in Quito on Friday. Ecuador's National Court of Justice on Thursday confirmed a lower court ruling that sentenced the three top El Universo executives and a journalist to three years in prison, and awarded President Correa \$40 million in damages who filed the libel suit against them. The case has been widely criticised by rights groups as a blow to freedom of speech. PHOTO: AFP