

NAM SUMMIT BEGINS TOMORROW

Ban talks nuke standoff with Iran

AFP, Tehran

UN chief Ban Ki-moon yesterday held talks with Iran's leaders on its nuclear activities, the Syria conflict and human rights ahead of a summit at which Tehran aims to boost its international standing.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit will begin here tomorrow.

Ban met with the Islamic republic's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei after separately seeing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and parliament speaker Ali Larijani, Iranian media said.

After his meeting with Larijani, Iran's parliamentary news website quoted Ban as saying: "We have concerns about the human rights situation in Iran... Also I will discuss the nuclear issue with the Islamic Republic of Iran officials."

He said "Iran can play an important role in solving the Syrian crisis peacefully," adding that "the Syrian people have suffered a lot... with more than 20,000 dying in the past 18 months."

Larijani, for his part, said "unfortunately, some big countries have acted adventurously in the region and have created disruption in the region like what we are witnessing in Syria."

Iran, the chief ally of Syria's regime, accuses the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar of



Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad meets with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in Tehran yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

sustaining the armed revolt in Syria.

The UN chief was to leave on Friday, after attending the two-day summit of the 120-member Non-Aligned Movement.

The United States and Israel had criticised Ban's presence at the summit, even though the NAM represents nearly two-thirds of UN member states.

That has led Iran to seize upon Ban's atten-

dance as a victory over its enemies and a sign it is not as isolated on the international scene as the United States has claimed.

Iran is locked in a deepening showdown with the United States and the rest of the UN Security Council over its disputed nuclear programme. It has also been threatened with possible Israeli air strikes on its nuclear facilities.

The West fears the programme is aimed at developing a nuclear weapons break-out capability. Iran denies that, insisting its atomic activities are exclusively peaceful.

The UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, is expected to release its latest report on Iran's nuclear programme this week -- perhaps coinciding with the NAM summit.

The report is likely to highlight Iran's expanding uranium enrichment activities -- which the Security Council has repeatedly demanded be suspended -- and Tehran's refusal to allow IAEA inspectors into a military site, Parchin, suspected of hosting explosives tests for nuclear warhead designs.

On Wednesday, the IAEA moved to create a special Iran "task force" to scrutinise the country's implementation of its nuclear obligations and its compliance with IAEA and Security Council provisions.

France opens Arafat murder enquiry

AFP, Paris

French prosecutors have opened a murder enquiry into Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's 2004 death near Paris following claims he may have died of polonium poisoning, sources told AFP Tuesday.

The probe comes after

Arafat's family launched legal action in France last month following reports the veteran Palestinian leader may have died from radioactive polonium.

Arafat's widow Suha and his daughter Zawra lodged a murder complaint on July 31 in the Paris suburb of Nanterre. Arafat died at age 75 at a military hospital near Paris in 2004.

"A judicial murder enquiry has been opened, as expected following the complaint from Mrs. Arafat," a source close to the matter told AFP.

Confirming the enquiry, Pierre-Olivier Sur, a lawyer for Arafat's widow and daugh-



ter, said they were "happy" at the decision but would not comment further "so as to leave the judges to lead all investigations necessary to find the truth...."

The Palestinian Authority also welcomed the move, with senior Palestinian official Saeb Erakat expressing hope that "we will reach the full truth on Arafat's death and who stands behind it."

"We hope the French investigation will satisfy our desire for truth, and that there will be a serious investigation to reveal the whole truth, in addition to an international investigation to identify all the parties involved in Arafat's martyrdom," he told AFP in Ramallah.

Allegations that the Nobel Peace laureate was poisoned were resurrected last month after Al-Jazeera news channel broadcast an investigation in which experts said they found high levels of polonium on his personal effects.

Australia reaches out to NAM states

AFP, Tehran

Australian envoys attending a Non-aligned summit in Tehran tomorrow are to reach out to several participating countries, but will walk out of the event if Iranian leaders air their anti-Israeli rhetoric, an Australian foreign ministry spokesman said.

Australia's UN ambassador, Gary Quinlan, and a prime ministerial special envoy, Joanna Hewitt, will be attending the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit on Thursday and Friday as invited guests, the spokesman told AFP by telephone yesterday.

"If there is any anti-Israel rhetoric by Iranian officials, we will not attend, we will walk out," he said.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is to open the summit on Thursday, and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have both called Israel a "cancerous tumour" that should vanish from the Middle East. Ahmadinejad in the past has also denied the Holocaust that occurred during World War II.

Meanwhile, leaders from many of the world's developing states will gather in Tehran from tomorrow (Thursday) for a two-day summit expected to sharply attack the policies of the United States and other top developed countries.

Host nation Iran, in particular, is hailing the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) meeting as a blow to Western efforts to isolate it over its disputed nuclear activities.

UK PHONE HACKING

Another journalist arrested

AP, London

British Police investigating computer hacking and privacy offenses arrested a journalist yesterday at his home.

The 28-year-old man was being questioned at a London police station for alleged hacking related to the identification of an anonymous blogger in 2009. He is also suspected of perverting the course of justice, police said.

Police did not identify the journalist by name but the Press Association said he was Patrick Foster, a former reporter at The Times.

The journalist was the 11th person arrested by detectives from Operation Tuleta, one of three parallel police investigations triggered by the phone-hacking scandal that has rocked Britain and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. media empire.

Mashiur must go

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Anti-Corruption Commission.
MOZENA HOPEFUL OF WB FUND

US Ambassador Dan W. Mozena yesterday expressed the hope that talks between Bangladesh and the World Bank on its funding for Padma bridge would be successful.

The USA, India and Japan made efforts to persuade the WB to review the scrapping of the loan for the project, he told journalists after emerging from a meeting with the finance minister.

"I am very happy that the WB reconsidered and made the loan possibility available again," the US envoy said, adding the WB was actively engaged in the ongoing discussion on this issue.

The finance minister, meanwhile, told journalists at his secretariat office that the talks between Bangladesh and the WB were at a crucial stage now and that no statement should be made at this time.

Two days were left and he was hopeful of regaining the WB loan for the bridge, Muhith added.

The deadline for loan effectuation by co-financiers Asian Development Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) will expire on August 31.

Asked whether they (ADB and Jica) would be requested to extend the time, Muhith said, "We may request them to extend the deadline. But I am not sure if it is necessary."

Earlier, seeing off Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Dhaka Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Muhith said Hasina, before leaving, had empowered him to take any decision on Padma bridge issue.

The PM's absence for three days from yesterday due to NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) conference in Iran would not be a problem in taking a decision in this regard, he added.

Asked whether the PM had given him the authority to take any decision regarding her adviser Mashiur Rahman, the finance minister said, "No comment".

The US ambassador said he had conveyed to the finance minister that America had been very much supporting the Padma bridge project. This bridge would do so much for Bangladesh that it would increase the annual GDP (gross domestic product) by 1 to 1.5 percent, helping many people out of poverty.

The bridge is very important for the economic integration of the South Asia, central Asia and South East Asia, Mozena added.



PHOTO: AFP

An uprooted and fallen tree is positioned in front of a house in New Orleans, Louisiana yesterday as Hurricane Isaac battered the city.

Isaac batters US coast near New Orleans

AFP, New Orleans

Hurricane Isaac battered New Orleans yesterday, flooding homes and driving stormy waters over the top of at least one levee, seven years to the day after Katrina devastated the city.

Isaac, packing vicious winds of 80 miles per hour and rolling slowly over Louisiana, dumped huge quantities of rain on the renowned US jazz city as residents cowered in their homes.

More than half a million people were left without power after the hurricane snapped utility poles and downed power lines.

The National Hurricane Centre said the category one storm had forced a "dangerous storm surge" onto the northern Gulf Coast, with waters mounting to 11 feet in Louisiana and patches of coastal flooding.

Heavy rains are likely to continue throughout Wednesday, it said.

Storm-driven waters spilled over a levee south of New Orleans and inundated a residential area that had been ordered evacuated, a local official said.

The flooding in Plaquemines Parish, part of a tongue of land extending into the Gulf of Mexico south of New Orleans, saw water deluge over levees on the east bank

of that strip.

Even a relatively high-lying area that had never flooded in a hurricane is now under five feet of water, Nungesser told National Public Radio.

Nungesser said damage from Isaac in some areas is worse than that wrought by Katrina. He cited his home as an example.

"I stopped there to change clothes earlier. Part of my roof is missing. The back wall has moved and the water is being pushed through the bricks into the house," he said.

Nungesser added: "I don't know who is calling this a category one but this is no category one."

Powerful winds knocked over trees and ripped down power lines, leaving some 512,000 people without power, according to Entergy Louisiana, a local utility.

More than 4,000 members of the Louisiana National Guard had been mobilised, with 48 boat teams deployed around New Orleans, according to the office of Governor Bobby Jindal, who had warned residents to prepare for the worst.

New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu said Tuesday that the city could expect up to 16 inches of rain or more from the slow-moving hurricane.

More time needed to win battle, says Assad

Turkey urges safe zones; Rebels destroy 5 choppers

AFP, Damascus

President Bashar al-Assad said his regime needs more time to win the battle for Syria and scoffed at the idea of creating buffer zones for displaced people, as fighting raged across his country yesterday.

Assad's statements, in an interview with pro-regime Addounia channel to be screened on Wednesday night, came a day after a car bomb rocked a funeral in a Damascus suburb killing 27 people, and as a watchdog reported 189 people killed countrywide on Tuesday.

"I can summarise in one phrase: we are progressing, the situation on the ground is better but we have not yet won -- this will take more time," Assad said in advance excerpts of the interview broadcast by the private channel.

Assad also rejected an idea being championed by Turkey of creating buffer zones within Syria to receive those displaced by the conflict so that they do not flood across the borders into neighbouring countries.

"Talk of buffer zones firstly is not on the table and secondly it is an unrealistic idea by

hostile countries and the enemies of Syria," he said.

Meanwhile, an enormous exodus of refugees from Syria is pressuring Turkey to seek UN-backed safe zones for those displaced, but Damascus rebuffed the idea yesterday as "unrealistic" attempts by its enemies.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu yesterday said Ankara is in talks with the United Nations on ways to shelter thousands of people fleeing the Syrian conflict on Syrian soil, and expects the world body to take concrete steps.

"We expect the United Nations to step in for the protection of refugees inside Syria and if possible housing them in camps there," Davutoglu was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency.

The foreign minister did not explicitly use the term safe zones or buffer zones but hinted at the need for international backup which would require military protection.

Syrian rebels said they destroyed five helicopters in a raid on a military airport between the northern cities of Aleppo and Idlib yesterday, while state television said

US PRESIDENTIAL POLLS 2012

Mitt Romney wraps up Republican nomination

AFP, Tampa, Florida

Mitt Romney wrapped up the Republican presidential nomination on Tuesday as wife Ann prepared to sell their family values and personal love story to US voters in a prime-time convention speech.

In a state-by-state roll call of delegates on the convention floor in Tampa, Florida that reflected the results of the Republican primary elections, Romney soared past the 1,144 threshold needed to formally earn the nomination.

The process removed any shadow of doubt that the man who will take on President Barack Obama in the November election could face a last-minute challenge.

The 65-year-old multi-millionaire businessman will formally take up the nomination with his all-important acceptance speech on Thursday, the climax of three days of rousing convention addresses by party grandees and rising stars.

Romney lies neck-and-neck with Obama in national polls 10 weeks before an election that should be his for the taking, given the sour economy and an unemployment rate that is lingering stubbornly above eight percent.

The Republican hopeful flew to Tampa two days early to attend an opening night of speeches headlined by his wife Ann's attempt to capture the lighter side of a candidate who has struggled to connect on a human level with many voters.



Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and wife Ann wave to the crowd at the Tampa Bay Times Forum in Tampa, Florida, on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Speaking to Americans "from my heart about our hearts," the would-be first lady will tell a packed convention center that her loving husband is "the man America needs," according to speech excerpts.

Romney's decision to fly to Florida two days earlier than expected to hear the speech fueled speculation that he might take to the podium and kiss Ann afterwards in a headline moment imitating Al Gore and wife Tipper in 2000.

Ann Romney was to use the biggest speech of her life to invite Americans into her 43-year marriage to see how her husband's commitment to family, hard work and good deeds can help lead the country to a better place.

"Tonight I want to talk to you about love," she will say.

The Romney campaign has been eager to promote the gregarious, 63-year-old Ann as a conveyor of the family story, a mission intended to humanize a candidate who trails Obama badly in terms of likability and can come across as stiff and aloof.



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