

Fresh US sanctions move angers Iran

Russia sees threat to nuke deal

REUTERS, Vienna/moscow

A breakthrough agreement to end the standoff over Iran's nuclear programme appeared to face its first major difficulty yesterday with Russia warning that expanding a U.S. sanctions blacklist could "seriously" complicate its implementation.

Russia, which, along with the United States, is among the six world powers that negotiated the November 24 interim accord with Tehran, echoed Iran's criticism by saying Washington's decision violated the spirit of the deal.

The United States on Thursday blacklisted additional companies and people under existing sanctions intended to prevent Iran from obtaining the capability to make nuclear weapons. Iran denies any such aims.

Diplomats said Iran, in what appeared to be a response, interrupted technical talks in Vienna with the six nations over how to implement the agreement, under which Tehran is to curb its atomic activities in return for limited sanctions easing.

The developments highlighted potential obstacles negotiators face in pressing ahead with efforts to resolve a decade-old dispute between the Islamic Republic and the West that has stirred fears of a new Middle East war.

Western diplomats said the inconclusive outcome of the December 9-12 expert-level discussions should not be seen as a sign that the deal hammered out nearly three weeks ago was in trouble. But Russia made its concerns clear.

"The US administration's decision goes against the spirit of this document," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, referring to the Geneva agreement.



Activists of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Pakistan offer absentia funeral prayers for Bangladeshi convicted war criminal Abdul Quader Mollah a day after his execution in Karachi, yesterday. Inset, JI activists of shout slogans during a protest in Lahore. Mollah, who became the first war criminal to be hanged for his role in the 1971 war, was dubbed as the 'Butcher of Mirpur' for his numerous crimes against humanity during Bangladesh's Liberation War.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWSIN brief

Lalu Prasad granted bail in India

TNN, New Delhi

The Indian Supreme Court yesterday granted bail to RJD chief Lalu Prasad in a fodder scam case, in a relief to the politician who is behind bars for the last two months after being awarded a five-year jail term.

Lalu Prasad, who lost his membership of Parliament after being convicted in the case, was convicted by a special CBI court in the fodder scam case involving fraudulent withdrawal of Rs 37.7 crore from Chaibasa Treasury during

Ukraine opposition rejects talks offer

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's opposition yesterday rejected an offer from president Viktor Yanukovich to sit down for talks as thousands of protesters reinforced their positions in Kiev.

The talks snub came as demonstrators prepared for another mass rally tomorrow to pressure the president to turn away from historical master Moscow

Drone hits Yemen wedding; 17 killed

AFP, Sanaa

A drone strike on a wedding convoy in Yemen killed 17 people, mostly civilians, medical and security sources said yesterday, adding grist to mounting criticism of the US drone war.

The US military operates all unmanned aircraft flying over Yemen in support of Sanaa's campaign against al-Qaeda and has killed dozens of militants in attacks this year.

Philippines typhoon death toll tops 6,000

AFP, Manila

The number of people dead after one of the world's strongest typhoons struck the Philippines has risen above 6,000, the government said yesterday, with nearly 2,000 others still missing.

Five weeks after Super Typhoon Haiyan destroyed entire towns across the nation's central islands, the government put the official

Indian PM accepts Pak visit invitation

DAWN ONLINE

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday got a formal invite from his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif for visiting that country, which was accepted. The Economic Times said.

UN confirms Syria chemical arms use

AFP, Damascus

A UN report has concluded chemical weapons were used at least five times before Syria agreed to dismantle its arsenal, as Washington called setbacks for moderate rebels a "big problem".

The report cites "credible evidence" and "evidence consistent with the probable use of chemical weapons" at Ghouta, Khan al-Asal, Jubar, Saraqeb and Ashrafieh Sahnaya.

"The United Nations Mission concludes that chemical weapons have been used in the ongoing conflict between the parties in the Syrian Arab Republic," said the report, prepared by a team led by Swede Ake Sellstrom.

However, the report does not attribute blame for the attacks, as this was beyond the team's mandate from the UN Security Council.

The report has been distributed to Security Council members, and UN chief Ban Ki-moon is due to present it to the

General Assembly later on Friday.

The United States, meanwhile, has called military setbacks for Syria's Western-backed opposition a "big problem".

Washington would continue to support "moderate" forces but will withhold non-lethal aid until it can assess who controls arms depots and border crossings, Pentagon chief Chuck Hagel told reporters.

Meanwhile, a former US Central Intelligence Agency chief said a victory for Assad could be the best outcome to avoid a regional spillover.

Michael Hayden, who headed the CIA until 2009, saw three possible outcomes. The first was for conflict between ever more extreme Sunni and Shia factions, and the second, which he deemed the most likely, was the "dissolution of Syria".

"Option three is Assad wins," Hayden told the annual Jamestown Foundation conference of terror experts, terming it as the best of the other three "ugly" options.

DIPLOMAT'S ARREST India summons US envoy

TNN, New Delhi

India has summoned US ambassador Nancy Powell over the arrest of one of its diplomats in New York.

Devyani Khobragade, a mid-level Indian diplomat, was served the arrest warrant when she was dropping her daughters to school on Thursday morning. She was later released by a Manhattan court on a \$ 250,000 bond on Thursday evening.

India is shocked and appalled by what the US has done to its diplomat in New York, the ministry of external affairs said in a statement.

Calling the US action unacceptable, the MEA statement said India will forcefully take up the issue with the US.

Kerry hopeful on ME peace deal

AFP, Jerusalem

US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday said he hoped to help achieve a peace agreement encompassing Israeli security needs and Palestinian sovereignty, as he wrapped up his regional visit.

"We are working on an approach that both guarantees Israel's security and fully respects Palestinian sovereignty," Kerry told reporters in Tel Aviv before boarding a plane to Vietnam.

Kerry insisted the goal remained for the sides "to reach a final status agreement - not an interim agreement", and said Israel will release as planned a new group of Palestinian prisoners on December 29.

On Friday morning, Kerry met Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for what the Israeli premier described as a discussion on how to "advance our goals of peace and security."

Kerry, who completed his second visit to the region within a week, said that US military expert General John Allen outlined in talks with Abbas a security plan for the West Bank and Israel, which could be implemented following a peace accord.

But Abbas rejected US proposals for Israel to keep a military presence in a future Palestinian state along its strategic border with Jordan, a source close to the

US TROOP DEAL

Karzai warns against 'intimidation'

AFP, New Delhi

Afghanistan will not be bullied into signing a security pact allowing US troops to stay on after next year, President Hamid Karzai said yesterday as he pressed India for more military hardware.

Karzai met Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid at the start of a three-day visit, with the United States hoping New Delhi can persuade him to ink the troubled pact.

India-educated Karzai has close ties with India, which is keen to ensure that the exit of some 75,000 US-led Nato troops at the end of 2014 does not trigger a return to power of the hardline Taliban militia.

But speaking to Indian television, Karzai said he would not be "intimidated" into signing the pact which would allow 12,000 US troops to stay in Afghanistan after 2014 and sets out their terms of engagement.

"Aggressive rhetoric won't work... We are not a nation that is known for giving into intimidation," he told NDTV.

"If they have not recognised this they should, it will be good for them to recognise."



Correction

This photo shows Pakistan's Chief Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani. We on Thursday inadvertently published Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain's photo on page 8 with Tassaduq Hussain Jilani's name. We regret the mistake.

Divided US House passes budget

AFP, Washington

House lawmakers on Thursday resoundingly approved a two-year budget deal that repeals billions of dollars in painful automatic cuts and crucially avoids the prospect of a US government shutdown next year.

The agreement hammered out between top Democratic and Republican negotiators is seen as a chance to end the brutal cycle of fiscal crises that have plagued Washington in recent years.

The legislation, which passed 332-94 with sweeping bipartisan support, sets discretionary spending caps at \$1.012 trillion for 2014 and \$1.014 trillion for 2015, and rolls back several arbitrary cuts -- known as sequestration -- that were to hit the Pentagon and domestic departments on January 1.

In its final act of the year, the chamber also passed a massive defense authorization bill that lays out Pentagon spending for 2014.

But the deal, negotiated by Ryan and Senate Democrat Patty Murray, notably does not address the debt ceiling, which will reach its limit in February.



South African police struggle to control visitors who want to pay respect to late Nelson Mandela in Pretoria, yesterday. Hundreds of people broke through a police cordon yesterday in a last-gasp bid to join the estimated 100,000 people who viewed Nelson Mandela's remains during three days of lying in state.

PHOTO: REUTERS

N Korea executes Kim's 'traitor' uncle

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday said it has executed the uncle of leader Kim Jong-Un, branding veteran fixer Jang Song-Thaek a "traitor for all ages", as the US and South Korea voiced concern at the shock purge.

In a stunning downfall, Jang -- who had been seen as Kim's political regent and the country's unofficial number two -- was executed on Thursday immediately after a special military trial, state news agency KCNA.

In a viciously worded attack it said he committed such a "hideous crime as attempting to overthrow the state by all sorts of intrigues and despicable methods with a wild ambition to grab the supreme power of our party and state."

The report portrayed Jang as decadent and corrupt, "stretching his tentacles" into every area of national affairs. It also blamed him for the failings of the hungry and impoverished nation.

Jang, 67, played a key role in cementing the leadership of the experienced Kim when he succeeded his father Kim Jong-Il in 2011, but analysts said his power and

American missing in Iran worked for CIA: Report

AFP, Washington

An American who went missing in Iran six years ago worked for the CIA and was not in the country on a business trip as US officials had claimed, US media reported Thursday.

In a case that had long been shrouded in secrecy, the Associated Press and The Washington Post published lengthy reports revealing how retired FBI agent Robert Levinson had been paid by the CIA to gather intelligence.

Levinson flew to an Iranian resort, Kish Island, in March 2007 to investigate corruption in the country, with hopes of also gleaned information about Tehran's suspect nuclear program, the reports said.

But he vanished, and US officials have publicly said that he was a private citizen traveling on private business.

In violation of CIA rules, a team of analysts had hired Levinson -- a seasoned FBI agent with expert knowledge about Russian criminal circles -- to gather intelligence, the AP and the Post wrote.

When Congress finally learned what had taken place, the agency sacked three analysts and seven others faced disciplinary action. To preempt a potentially embarrassing lawsuit, the Central Intelligence Agency also paid Levinson's family \$2.5 million.

As a result of Levinson's case, the spy agency introduced new restrictions on how analysts can work with outsiders.

But the scandal and the agency's response had remained secret until Thursday's reports.



Vote-buying acceptable! Says Indonesia voters

AFP, Jakarta

More than 40 percent of Indonesian voters consider politicians seeking to buy support at elections acceptable, a survey showed yesterday, months before national polls in the graft-ridden country.

In what it described as an "alarming" survey, Jakarta-based pollster Indikator found that 41.5 percent of 15,600 people interviewed did not have a problem accepting cash or a gift from would-be lawmakers. This compared to 57.9 percent who thought vote-buying was unacceptable, according to the survey. A tiny fraction were undecided on the matter.

However doling out money does not guarantee victory for a candidate, the poll showed.

Streets to nuke particle Mandela's name lives on throughout the world

AFP, Johannesburg

He has had streets, parks, a landfill and even a non-existent sub-atomic particle named after him: rarely has a man been so honoured during his lifetime as Nelson Mandela.

Long before Mandela's death brought a global outpouring of tributes to the man who led South Africa out of apartheid, his name had been memorialised on places, projects and discoveries ranging from the profound to the quirky.

Whether on flowers, a prehistoric bird, a slum or his own UN-endorsed day, from South Africa to Europe to the Americas and beyond, Mandela's name is ubiquitous.

In July 2012, French and German biologists who had discovered the fossil of a prehistoric woodpecker -- the oldest ever found on the African continent -- baptised it Australopicus nelsonmandelai.

And in 1994, the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden in Cape Town named a yellow variety of strelitzia, or bird of paradise flower, "Mandela's Gold".

In 1973 -- when Mandela was still in jail on Robben Island -- researchers at the University of Leeds in Britain named a newly discovered nuclear particle for him. But it turned out their equipment was faulty and the "discovery" actually wasn't.

The list of tributes also includes the airport in Cape Verde's capital, Praia; a favela, or shantytown, in Rio de Janeiro; and the Mandela landfill in Georgetown, the capital of Guyana, which regularly frightens locals by catching fire.

In 2009, the United Nations declared his birthday, July 18, Nelson Mandela International Day, calling on people around the world to spend 67 minutes helping others on that date each year, in memory of Mandela's 67 years of public service.

ODDLY enough

'Time to die'

Clock tells patient

AFP, Paris

Doctors at a British hospital were startled when an upset patient told them that the clock in his ward had announced his time was up, the British Medical Journal (BMJ) reported on Thursday.

"The clock is telling me to die," the doctors quoted the patient as saying. "Turning to the wall, we confirmed that the clock indeed said, 'DIE,'" said a doctor. "We discovered that the radio-controlled clock had reverted to German and was displaying an abbreviation of 'Dienstag,'" meaning