

'Tough' Iran nuclear talks leave a mountain to climb

AFP, Vienna

Iran and six world powers left themselves with a lot to do in a short amount of time after a difficult fifth round of nuclear talks ended in Vienna yesterday.

The aim of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany is to secure a mammoth deal by July 20 to reduce in scope Iran's nuclear programme and ease fears the Islamic republic will get atomic weapons.

Iran denies wanting the bomb and wants punishing UN and Western sanctions lifted. Neither Israel nor Washington have ruled out military action to stop Iran getting the bomb.

The parties had "begun the drafting process" and would start the next round of talks on July 2, said a spokesman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, chief negotiator for the six world powers.

"We have worked extremely hard all week to develop elements we can bring

together when we meet for the next round," said the spokesman, Michael Mann, after five days of discussions.

"We presented each other with a number of ideas on a range of issues, and we have begun the drafting process."

But officials on both sides said the drafting process had begun, but that haggling over language concerning the thorniest problems was being put off until later.

"We have not reached agreement on the main issues. In some cases, we can see light for agreement but in some others, there is none yet," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told Iran's media in the Austrian capital.

He said the draft document contained "more brackets than words", implying that many sections were far from finalised.

"It has been another really tough round," said a diplomat from one of the "P5+1" powers late on Thursday, although he said this "doesn't surprise

me or particularly dismay me".

Another diplomat said earlier this week that Iran was refusing to budge on most issues.

"It is worrying that there is no evolution on the part of the Iranians on most subjects," the diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity, including "major" differences on the key issue of uranium enrichment.

This process can make nuclear fuel for civilian purposes but also, when highly purified, for a nuclear weapon. It has been the main sticking point in negotiations with Iran for the past decade.

Western countries want Iran to slash the number of centrifuge enrichment machines in order to make it harder for Iran to process enough material for a bomb in a short period of time, if it chose to do so.

Other thorny issues include the duration of the mooted accord, the pace of any sanctions relief and a reactor being built at Arak that might give Iran weapons-grade plutonium.

US fired depleted uranium on civilian in Iraq war: Report

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

US forces fired depleted uranium (DU) weapons at civilian areas and troops in Iraq in breach of official advice meant to prevent unnecessary suffering in conflicts, a report has found.

Coordinates revealing where US jets and tanks fired nearly 10,000 DU rounds in Iraq during the war in 2003 have been obtained by the Dutch peace group Pax. This is the first time that any US DU firing coordinates have been released, despite previous requests by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Iraqi government.

According to PAX's report, which is due to be published this week, the data

shows that many of the DU rounds were fired in or near populated areas of Iraq, including As Samawah, Nasiriyah and Basrah. At least 1,500 rounds were also aimed at troops, the group says.

This conflicts with legal advice from the US Air Force in 1975 suggesting that DU weapons should only be used against hard targets like tanks and armoured vehicles, the report says. This advice, designed to comply with international law by minimising deaths and injuries to urban populations and troops, was largely ignored by US forces, it argues.

A six-page memo by Major James Miles and Will Carroll from the international law division of USAF's Office of the Judge Advocate General concluded in March 1975 that DU weap-

ons were legal. But it recommended imposing restrictions on how they were used.

"Use of this munition solely against personnel is prohibited if alternative weapons are available," the memo stated. This was for legal reasons "related to the prohibitions against unnecessary suffering and poison".

The memo also pointed out that DU weapons were "incendiary" and could have indiscriminate impacts in urban areas. "They may cause fires which spread thereby causing potential risks of disproportionate injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects," it said. "Precautions to avoid or minimise such risks shall be taken in the use of this weapon or alternate available weapons should be used."

62pc rise in Swiss bank deposits

FROM PAGE 1

the Swiss authorities.

SNB's official figures do not include the money that Bangladeshis or others might have in Swiss banks in the names of entities from different countries.

Switzerland is not the only country that has received the Bangladeshi funds, as experts have added the names of Canada, Malaysia and the UAE to the list.

Lawmakers and government officials raised the issue during pre-budget discussion with the finance minister. The latest revelation from the Swiss central bank shows that the outflow of money was higher than anytime in the past.

Officials said businessmen put their money in foreign countries due to lack of safety, while politicians and bureaucrats who earned money through illegal means did the same fearing a government changeover or takeover of a regime like the 2006-07 army-backed caretaker administration that clamped down on illegal money holders.

Salehuddin Ahmed, a former governor of Bangladesh Bank, blamed the chaotic politics and a lack of security in 2013 for the rise in the flows of money to Swiss banks.

He, however, said he does not think that all of those money were laundered from Bangladesh.

"Many Bangladeshis have stashed their incomes from external sources with the Swiss banks," he told The Daily Star.

He said Bangladeshi money is also being invested in other countries such as Malaysia and Canada in the real estate sector.

"Those who are earning illegally are also sending their money to countries deemed safe havens."

Salehuddin Ahmed also said the funnelling of money outside the country has not stopped, as uncer-

tainty still persists and there is serious lack of good governance.

"For stalling the illegal flow of the money, the government will have to rise over partisan politics and take some punitive measures. The law and order situation and the governance have to be improved."

Zahid Hussain, lead economist of the World Bank in Dhaka, said many including businessmen did not consider Bangladesh a safe place to keep their money due to the deadly violence and a strong possibility of a government changeover in 2013.

"The money has flown outside through both official and unofficial channels," he said.

Talking about the unofficial channel, the economist said the difference between the formal and informal market rates of US dollar was Tk 4 second half of last year.

Normally, the difference between the two markets remains below Tk 1.

Zahid Hussain said the official channel comprises under- and over-invoicing.

The country produces a significant amount of food although the food import went up recently. Besides, the imports of capital machinery were also higher although investment is scarce.

Food imports stood at \$1.19 billion in the first 10 months of the current fiscal year. Additionally, letters of credit worth \$1.13 billion were opened at the same time, according to figures from Bangladesh Bank.

During the same time, imports of capital machinery were \$2.09 billion. LCs worth \$3.09 billion were opened for future imports.

"In the current perspective, the figures are questionable," said Hussain.

Nazneen Sultana, a deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank, said the central bank and the National Board of

Revenue are working together to stop irregularities in cases of under- and over-invoicing.

"Bangladesh Bank's data on import and export are becoming automated. The Customs data of NBR will also be automated. Both will have access to each other's database," she said.

"The integrated system will soon be activated. Then we will be able to stop this type of irregularity."

Bangladesh has enacted anti-money laundering laws and signed agreements with some countries to stop the illegal flow of money.

The latest development came less than a year after the country became a member of global anti-money laundering body EGMONT Group.

However, the government has not signed any agreement with Switzerland on information sharing on money laundering issue, said Mahfuzur Rahman, an executive director of Bangladesh Bank.

"Bangladesh will not be able to get required information from countries such as Switzerland. To get information, Bangladesh will have to approach the foreign banks or authorities with adequate evidence of irregularities and verdicts from courts. Then the external parties will cooperate," said Rahman, who heads the central bank's anti-money laundering department.

For several decades, Switzerland has provided wealthy families around the world a convenient and safe place to stash their money.

The country's political neutrality, stability, and tradition of bank secrecy have kept their fortunes beyond the reach of national governments and the most determined tax collectors.

Although Switzerland is facing growing pressure from many other countries to share foreign client details, Geneva still has appeal -- if not for secrecy, then for stability.

British monk freed on bail in Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

A senior British monk stripped of his clerical status and accused of defaming Buddhism was released from custody in Myanmar on bail yesterday, his lawyer said, several days after he was detained in a controversial monastery raid.

Uttara and four other monks were greeted by hundreds of supporters outside the Yangon court, an AFP reporter said, after their release from Myanmar's notorious Insein prison.

He was arrested in a late-night swoop several days ago apparently triggered by a dispute over ownership of monastic property.

The five have not been officially charged with defaming the religion, their lawyer Aye Ko said, adding they will return for a second hearing on June 27th.

"They have been released on bail," he said, adding local guarantors had agreed to pay the \$20,000 sum on their behalf if they broke bail conditions by leaving the country.

The British embassy has called on Myanmar to ensure full legal representation for Uttara, a UK passport holder who is believed to have moved to Britain in the early 1990s and was back in Myanmar on a working visit.

Ecuador vows long-term Assange asylum

AFP, Quito

As Wikileaks founder Julian Assange marked Thursday the second anniversary of his stay at the Ecuador embassy in London, the Latin American country vowed its asylum offer was for the long term.

International agreements and Ecuador's constitution both mean it is a "complete impossibility" for the country to turn over someone who has been granted asylum, Ecuador's Foreign Affairs Minister Ricardo Patino said.

Patino insisted that nothing would change, even under a new government. Ecuador's next presidential election is scheduled for 2017.

Assange first sought refuge at the embassy on June 19, 2012, to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he is under investigation on allegations of sexual assault.

The onetime Australian computer hacker, now 42, fears the extradition is a pretext for transferring him to the United States, where WikiLeaks sparked an uproar with its publication of a trove of secret government documents.

Health card

FROM PAGE 16

services in big hospitals and clinics," he said at an international conference at a city hotel.

Nasim said poor people could hardly avail health services at private hospitals and clinics.

"It is very sad. Only the rich can afford costly treatment in private hospitals and clinics," he said.

The health minister urged the authorities of big hospitals and clinics to come forward and deliver health services to poor people.

He also suggested them to provide treatment to poor free of cost at least once a week.

Bangladesh Association of Cardiac Vascular and Thoracic Surgeons organised the conference.

A third of Ctg

FROM PAGE 16

"I had to waste through filthy water overflowing from roadside drains to buy medicines for my ailing mother," said Ratan Barua, a resident of Bakalia.

He blamed Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) for their negligence in sewerage management.

"Cleaners had piled up the dirt of the drains along KB Aman Ali Road, but did not take them away for disposal. The filth went back to the drains with the rainwater, choking the drains again and creating waterlogging in the area," he said.

Ruhul Amin, a laundryman in DC Road area, was seen throwing out water from his shop early in the morning. He said most of the clothes at his shop were spoiled by dirty water.

The waterlogging also brought miseries to the low-income people.

Hasmat Ali, a rickshaw puller of Kapasgola area, said he went out with his battery-run rickshaw in the morning but it went out of order as water damaged the batteries.

When contacted, Shafiqui Mannan Siddique, chief conservancy officer of CCC, however, said there was no waterlogging anywhere in the city.

"The incessant rainfall created all these, but the situation worsened as the monsoon and high tide started together," he said.

"We have been working since morning to clean the drains from getting clogged," he added.

McCarthy wins US House majority leader post

AFP, Washington

Republican Kevin McCarthy was selected Thursday as the new US House majority leader, capping a whirlwind week for a party scrambling to heal internal rifts after the ouster of GOP number two Eric Cantor.

With the even-keeled McCarthy elected to the position vacated by Cantor, his job as House majority whip was won by far-right up-and-comer Steve Scalise of Louisiana, who pledged to bring a more conservative value set to Republican leadership.

McCarthy emerged this week as the consensus candidate to fill the majority leader role at a time of deep divisions within the Republican Party ahead of November's congressional elections.

"I make one promise: I will work every single day to make sure this conference has the courage to lead, with the wisdom to listen," McCarthy told reporters after the closed-door vote.

The loss of establishment giant Cantor to an even more conservative but virtually unknown Tea Party-backed challenger last week reopened a rift between moderate Republicans and the far-right wing that has rattled the party in recent years.

McCarthy, 49, was elected to Congress just eight years ago and has experienced a meteoric rise in Washington.

He will now be deputy to House Speaker John Boehner, who is eager to bring a renewed sense of stability in his fractious caucus in the run-up to November and the eventual presidential race of 2016.

McCarthy insisted he has "grown up through the grassroots" in largely Democratic California.

"They elected a guy who is a grand-

son of a cattle rancher, son of a firefighter. Only in America do you get that opportunity," he said.

While some conservatives expressed concern about elevating a lawmaker from a non-red state to run the House floor, McCarthy had the backing of several committee chairmen, including Paul Ryan, the 2012 vice presidential nominee.

But McCarthy was challenged for the post by fiercely conservative Raul Labrador.

The two-term congressman from Idaho had the support of the far-right wing, which launched an unsuccessful coup against Boehner last year. But Labrador's candidacy did not gain broader traction.

The election to leadership of Scalise, who heads the caucus of House conservatives known as the Republican Study Committee, crucially gives the far-right a spot at the top of the party.

"I'm looking forward to bringing a fresh, new voice to our leadership table and joining with this team to help confront the challenges that people all across this country are facing," Scalise said.

But his victory did little to placate conservatives who wanted to see a firebrand from the right wing of the party -- not a preserver of Washington status quo -- named to the crucial majority leader role.

"We didn't achieve what we wanted," congressman Justin Amash told reporters.

Constituents "wanted us to pursue a more conservative agenda, and I don't think grassroots Republicans are going to be satisfied with the outcome today."

They will have another shot at the leadership positions in just five months, when Republicans gather after November's election to decide on

Rabbi among 10 injured

FROM PAGE 16

assaulted during the attack, they claimed.

"It proves they [Osman family] won't spare anyone speaking against them," said Rafiur Rabbi, a civil rights and cultural activist who wanted to contest the by-polls but his nomination was cancelled on grounds of loan default.

The injured in yesterday's attack include Narayanganj Sangskritik Jote President Pradip Ghosh Babu, Arif Babul, Monir Hossain, Amal Akash, Jahangir Alam and Anwar Hossain.

They all were campaigning for independent candidate Akram Hossain Khan.

The constituency fell vacant following the death of Nasim Osman, Selim's elder brother on April 30. Selim's another brother Shamim Osman became the MP of Narayanganj-4 uncontested with Awami League's ticket in January 5 polls.

The Osman family is dreading in the area allegedly for their control over the city's underground activities.

Pradip said their campaign was intercepted by Mizan, sub-inspector of

Narayanganj Sadar Model Police Station, and some JP men at Charagop late afternoon.

An altercation ensued between the two groups when local JP leader Akram Ali Shahin came with another 20-30 of his followers and attacked them, alleged Pradip.

The SI, however, refuted the allegation and said the campaigners had violated the electoral code of conduct by distributing leaflets.

JP leader Shahin said the campaigners were calling the Osman family a family of killers and had been asking people not to vote for them. He also filed a general diary with the local police on Thursday over the matter.

He said he had informed the police when the campaigners were distributing leaflets yesterday.

"They tried to escape when police questioned them about the matter," Shahin claimed.

The Taqi Mancha was floated to press for justice for the murder of 17-years-old Tanwir Muhammed Taqi, Rabbi's elder son, last year.

Shamim's nephew Azmeri Osman is widely blamed for the brutal murder.

Russia to back Iraq

FROM PAGE 16

Meanwhile, Iraq's top Shia cleric yesterday urged all people to unite and expel the Sunni insurgents, as Maliki came under growing pressure to quit power at home and abroad.

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a revered cleric whose stature dwarfs that of any other figure among the Shia majority, called for Iraqis to band together against the insurgents before it was too late.

If ISIL is not "fought and expelled from Iraq, everyone will regret it tomorrow, when regret has no meaning," al-Sistani's spokesman announced yesterday.

The reclusive Sistani, who heads a council of senior clerics, also said Iraq's next government must be "effective" and avoid "past mistakes", an apparent rebuke to Maliki, premier since 2006.

His remarks came after several senior American figures pushed the premier, who is seeking to retain his post after winning a plurality in April 30 elections, to work with Iraq's Sunni Arab and Kurdish minorities.

US Vice President Joe Biden, Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Martin Dempsey and David Petraeus, the former top US commander in Iraq, have all either called for Maliki to be more inclusive or outright criticised him.

Washington has already positioned an aircraft carrier in the Gulf and is flying manned and unmanned surveillance flights over Iraq.

On the ground, Iraqi security forces were battling militants in several areas yesterday, with 34 members of the security forces killed in a town on the border with Syria, while 30 pro-government Shia militiamen died in a firefight with insurgents northeast of the capital in Diyala province.

A source close to Maliki told Reuters that the government planned to hit back now that it had halted the

advance which saw ISIL seize the main northern city of Mosul, capital of Nineveh province, 10 days ago and sweep down along the Sunni-populated Tigris valley towards Baghdad.

Elsewhere, the battle for the strategic northern town of Tal Afar entered its sixth day. Witnesses said security forces clashed with militants, who still hold significant ground.

Meanwhile, UN aid agencies said they were rushing supplies to Iraq to help more than one million people driven from their homes by the current fighting and unrest earlier this year.

Earlier this week, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warned that the conflict threatened to spill over Iraq's borders, interlocking with the civil war in neighbouring Syria, where ISIL is also fighting.

Berlusconi's under-age sex appeal trial opens

AFP, Milan

Silvio Berlusconi's appeal trial against a conviction for paying for sex with an underage prostitute opened Friday without the former premier, who was doing community service for a separate tax fraud conviction.

The 77-year-old former premier was sentenced last year to seven years in jail and banned from holding public office for having sex with "Ruby the Heart Stealer" at what prosecutors described as erotic parties at his luxury home.

A definitive guilty verdict could hamper Berlusconi's liberty: while Italy tends to be lenient towards over-70s found guilty of non-violent crimes, the billionaire would no longer be eligible for community service and would likely be sentenced to house arrest.