



US Secretary of State John Kerry (L) meets with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif (2nd R) at a hotel in Vienna, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Talks to miss deadline

Say parties; Zarif returns to Tehran for consultation

AFP, Vienna

Iran and major powers admitted during tense talks yesterday that their fast-looming deadline to nail down a historic nuclear deal would be missed as they struggled to overcome major differences.

Officials in Vienna said however that tomorrow's target date would only be missed by a few days, with Iran saying there was "no desire or discussion yet" on a longer extension.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif meanwhile was set to return to Tehran for consultations, officials said, although the US said this was not a matter of concern.

British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said as he joined the talks with US Secretary of State John Kerry and other foreign ministers that the six powers were prepared to walk away if needed.

"We still have very big challenges if we are going to be able to get this deal done," Hammond told reporters.

"No deal is better than a bad deal. There are red lines that we cannot cross and some very difficult decisions and tough choices are going to have to be made by all of us," Hammond said.

Earlier Sunday, EU foreign policy head Federica Mogherini said "political will" was still needed to get a deal after almost two years of intense diplomatic efforts to resolve the 13-year-old standoff.

"It is going to be tough, it has always been tough but not impossible," Mogherini told reporters.

IRAN NUKE DEAL: MAIN STICKING POINTS

SANCTIONS: Iran's main purpose in coming to the negotiating table is to win a lifting of a complex web of economic and trade sanctions which have been gradually tightened over the past decade. The sanctions have choked the Iranian economy, frozen more than \$100 billion in oil revenues in bank accounts around the world, and barred the country from lucrative oil markets. Tehran wants to see the immediate lifting of all EU, UN and US sanctions as soon as a deal is reached. But the P5+1 powers leading the talks -- Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States -- are insisting sanctions should only be lifted progressively as Iran takes steps to reduce the capabilities of its suspect nuclear programme.

MILITARY SITES: Iranian leaders have repeated many times in the past weeks that they are opposed to inspections of sensitive military sites by the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), insisting that it is a question of national sovereignty. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has made such inspections one of his "red lines" and refused interviews with Iranian scientists, and access to documentation. Some countries such as France are insisting that the need to address the lingering PMD issue is clearly defined and written into any final deal.

SANCTIONS 'SNAPBACK': Western nations in particular are stressing that a mechanism needs to be put into place to allow any UN sanctions lifted under the deal to be quickly put back into place if Iran violates the accord. Iran however is believed not to be in favour of such an arrangement.

LENGTH OF A DEAL: Global powers want to curtail the Iranian nuclear programme for at least 10 years, and some parts of it for longer. But Khamenei has opposed to that. Khamenei is also insisting

Iran and the P5+1 group -- Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States -- are seeking to flesh out the final details of an accord that builds on a framework deal reached in Lausanne in April.

Zarif's deputy Abbas Araghchi suggested parts of that framework no longer applied because other countries had changed their positions.

"Some of the solutions found in

Lausanne no longer work, because after Lausanne certain countries within the P5+1 made declarations... and we see a change in their position which complicates the task," he told Al-Alam television. It is hoped a deal would end a standoff dating back to 2002 which has threatened to escalate into war and poisoned the Islamic republic's relations with the outside world.

TERROR ATTACKS ON THREE CONTINENTS

BEHEADING IN FRANCE

Suspect admits to killing his boss: source

REUTERS, Paris

The suspected Islamist militant held over an attack against a French chemical plant has admitted killing his boss, a source close to the investigation said on Sunday.

Yassin Salhi, 35, told detectives he had killed Herve Cornara in a parking area before arriving at the plant in Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, 30 km (20 miles) south of Lyon, where he attempted to cause an explosion on Friday, the source told Reuters.

Police found the 54-year-old victim's decapitated body and head, framed by Islamic inscriptions, at the plant owned by US group Air Products. There were no other casualties.

Examination of one of Salhi's mobile phones revealed that he took a "selfie" with the severed head before his arrest and sent the image via a messaging application to a Canadian phone number. Canadian police are now investigating.

According to French media reports, Salhi told police he had clashed with his boss as well as his own wife before the killing. One of their work colleagues, quoted on the website of television station i-Tele, also said the two men had argued days earlier after Salhi dropped a pallet of fragile equipment.

The suspect, whose wife and sister are also being questioned, is known to have associated with hard-line Islamists over more than a decade and had previously been flagged by French security services as a potential risk.

KUWAIT SHIA MOSQUE ATTACK

Suicide bomber was Saudi man

REUTERS, Kuwait

Kuwait yesterday identified the suicide bomber behind its worst militant attack as a young Saudi Arabian man, and said it had detained the driver of the vehicle that took him to a Shi'ite Muslim mosque where he killed 27 people.

The disclosure of the bomber's Saudi nationality is likely to focus the attention of authorities investigating Friday's suicide bombing on ties between Islamists in the small Gulf state and those in its larger, more conservative neighbor.

The interior ministry named the bomber as Fahd Suliman Abdul-Muhsen al-Qabaa and said he flew into Kuwait's airport at dawn on Friday, only hours before he detonated an explosives-laden vest at Kuwait City's Imam al-Sadeq mosque.

It was not immediately known where Qabaa had arrived from, but the timing of his arrival suggests he had a network already in place in Kuwait. The ministry said it was searching for more partners and aides in this "despicable crime", adding Qabaa had been born in 1992, putting him in his early 20s.

Islamic State's Saudi Arabian arm claimed responsibility for the attack on the mosque, where 2,000 worshippers were praying at the time. It was one of three attacks on three continents that day apparently linked to hardline Islamists.

The bombing has sharply heightened regional security concerns because Islamic State appears to be making good on its threat to step up attacks in the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

TUNISIA BEACH CARNAGE

UK warns of more attacks

AFP, London

The British government yesterday cautioned that other attacks "are possible" in Tunisia after the mass shooting two days ago that left 38 people dead including at least 15 Britons.

Interior minister Theresa May said there had been no change in the British toll, the worst in a terror attack since the 2005 London bombings, but told the BBC "We are expecting that to rise."

Foreign Office minister Tobias Ellwood said Saturday that several British tourists had been seriously injured, while desperate families have said that some relatives are still unaccounted for.

The attack led to the largest British loss of life in a terror attack since 52 people died in suicide bombings on the London transport system on July 7, 2005.



Tourists mourn at the site of a shooting attack on the beach in front of the Riu Imperial Marhaba Hotel in Port el Kantaoui, on the outskirts of Sousse south of the capital Tunis, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



This frame grab from video footage provided by Apple Daily from reader Miss Huang yesterday shows revelers being engulfed by flames at the Formosa Fun Coast water park in Pali district, in New Taipei City, on late Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Taiwan water park fire hurts more than 500

AFP, Taipei

Witnesses described the scene at a Taiwan water park as "hell" after a ball of fire ripped through a crowd, with authorities putting the injured at more than 500 yesterday, almost 200 of them seriously hurt.

The injury toll in the blast late Saturday, which came as coloured powder being sprayed on the partygoers ignited, more than doubled as officials began to track down victims who had taken themselves to hospital or been ferried there by others.

Horrifying amateur video footage showed crowds of young revelers dancing in front of a stage and cheering as clouds of green and yellow powder covered them at the "colour party".

But their joy turned to terror when the powder suddenly erupted into flames engulfing them in an inferno as they ran screaming for their lives.

Some were dressed only in swimwear and images from the scene show many with severe burns being tended by those who escaped.

One male student who sustained minor injuries described the scene as "hell".

"There was blood everywhere, including in the pool where lots of the injured were soaking themselves for relief from the pain," he told reporters.

His visibly shaken girlfriend added: "I saw lots of people whose skin was gone."

Ambulances had struggled to reach the scene, and victims were carried away on rubber rings and inflatable dinghies as friends desperately tried to get them out.

Around 1,000 spectators had been at the Color Play Asia event at the Formosa Fun Coast water park, just outside the capital Taipei, according to officials.

Greek parliament okays bailout referendum

AGENCIES

Greek lawmakers yesterday authorized Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' proposed July 5th bailout referendum, setting Greece on course for a plebiscite that has enraged international creditors and increased Greece's chances of exiting the euro zone.

The government easily passed the 151-vote threshold needed to authorize the referendum, with deputies from the far right Golden Dawn voting with the government and pro-European opposition parties New Democracy, Pasok and To Potami and the KKE Communist Party voting against.

Greeks are due to vote on whether to accept or reject the latest terms offered by creditors to Athens in order to unlock billions of euros in bailout funds.

European partners have reacted negatively to the announcement of the referendum. On Saturday, they rejected a request by Tsipras to extend the current bailout in order to cover the period leading up to the referendum. The rejection means Athens is likely to default on a key payment to the International Monetary Fund yesterday.

Meanwhile, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls yesterday said there is a "real risk" of Greece leaving the eurozone if the Greek people vote against the EU's bailout proposals in a referendum.

However, Valls urged the Greek authorities to "come back to the negotiating table" after Athens broke off deadlocked talks on trying to rescue Greece's debt-stricken economy.

Valls refused to attack the decision of the Greek government to call a referendum, saying: "When you ask the people to decide, to exercise their democratic right, this should not be criticised."

"It is obvious that if there is a negative response, there is a real risk... of leaving the eurozone," Valls told rolling news channel iTELE.

"I continue to believe... that a deal is still possible and I invite the Greek government to return to the negotiating table," the prime minister added.

Valls urged the European Central Bank to continue supplying Greece with cash as governors held emergency talks before Greek banks open on Monday.

ROW OVER GAY MARRIAGE, OBAMACARE

Republicans 'party of the past': Clinton

AFP, Fairfax

Hours after the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states, Hillary Clinton told hundreds of Virginia Democrats on Friday that "Across the board, (Republicans) are the party of the past, not the future."

The Democratic frontrunner was speaking at a Jefferson Jackson fundraiser for the Virginia Democratic Party at George Mason University on a night in which she was repeatedly referred to by fellow Democrats as the next President of the United States.

"This morning, they all decried the Supreme Court's ruling," Clinton said, noting that "we even heard them call for a constitutional amendment" against same-sex marriage.

A fired-up Clinton then seemingly spoke directly at the 13 declared Republican presidential hopefuls.

"I am asking them, please, don't make the rights, the hopes, of any American into a political football for this 2016 campaign," she said. "LGBT Americans should be free not just to marry, but to live, learn and work, just like everybody else."

Republican response to the Supreme Court's decision was universally opposed,

but politically mixed. Former Florida Gov Jeb Bush called for respect for the court's decision, despite opposing it. On the other side of the spectrum, Louisiana Gov Bobby Jindal said he wants to amend the Constitution to leave the decision over who can marry up to each state.

"This morning, love triumphed in the highest court in our land," Clinton said. "Equality triumphed, America triumphed."

But the former secretary of state's attacks on Republican hopefuls were not limited to same-sex marriage.

Reacting to the other landmark decision by the Supreme Court this week, Clinton said, "All the Republican candidates were furious that earlier this week the Supreme Court once again confirmed what we have all known and believed for years: (Obamacare) is settled law and it is here to stay."

"Even after two Supreme Court verdicts and a presidential election, they are still fighting to take us backwards," Clinton said, referring to the 2012 Supreme Court decision on the issue and that year's presidential election. "I think we can sum up the message from the Court and the American people: 'Move on.'"



Singer Joni Mitchell loses speech after aneurysm

AFP, New York

Folk legend Joni Mitchell lost her ability to speak after suffering a brain aneurysm, fellow artist and former boyfriend David Crosby said.

The account offered rare detail on the condition of the 71-year-old Canadian singer and guitarist, who was rushed to a Los Angeles hospital on March 31.

Crosby said that Mitchell was recovering at home but that "to my knowledge, she is not speaking yet."

"She took a terrible hit, she had an aneurysm, and nobody found her for a while," he said Friday in response to a fan's question on a Huffington Post webcast.

"She's going to have to struggle back from it, the way you struggle back from a traumatic brain injury."

Crosby, who dated Mitchell briefly in 1967 and has remained friends with her, described her as "probably the greatest living singer/songwriter" with the possible exception of Bob Dylan. Mitchell was a major figure in the generation of folk rockers who grew prominent in the 1960s, with hits including "Big Yellow Taxi," "Woodstock" and "Both Sides, Now."

NEWS IN brief

Pak heatwave toll nears 1,300

PTI, Karachi

Twenty six people died yesterday of high temperatures in Pakistan's Karachi, taking the death toll to around 1,300 as residents grappled with the week-long heatwave that has crippled life and overwhelmed the healthcare system. Weather experts forecast the temperatures, which have been as high as 45 degrees Celsius in the past week, are again likely to soar in the next few days in Karachi, the country's biggest city and the financial capital.

Rajapaksa to contest as Lanka PM

IANS, Colombo

Former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa would contest as a prime ministerial candidate in the August 17 parliamentary elections, a source said yesterday. Kumara Welgama, a former minister in Rajapaksa's government, said the former president would look to contest under the betel leaf symbol of the opposition United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA). Xinhua news agency reported.

Pak air strikes kill 23 militants

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani air strikes yesterday killed 23 militants including foreigners in the country's restive tribal regions near the Afghan border, the military said, part of a massive ongoing operation against the Taliban. The strikes took place in areas close to the border with Afghanistan in Khyber and North Waziristan tribal districts. The military says it has killed more than 2,700 militants since the launch of the offensive a year ago.