



People take part in a demonstration over the rising cost of living, in Brussels, Belgium yesterday. Belgian inflation hit 9 percent in June, mirroring sharp rises elsewhere driven primarily by the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on supply chains and energy and commodity prices.

PHOTO: REUTERS

REVIVAL OF 2015 NUKE DEAL Iran blames US for stalled talks

AGENCIES

Iran said yesterday that Tehran is ready to reach a "good deal" with world powers, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh told a televised news conference, blaming the US for stalling talks to revive their 2015 nuclear pact.

"Even today, we are ready to return to Vienna to reach a good deal if Washington fulfills its commitments," Khatibzadeh said.

The nuclear pact seemed near revival in March but talks were thrown into disarray partly over whether the United States might remove the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which controls elite armed and intelligence forces that Washington accuses of a global terrorist campaign, from its Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list, reports Reuters.

The 2015 agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA, gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme to guarantee that Tehran could not develop a nuclear weapon – something it has always denied wanting to do.

But in 2018, the US withdrew from the accord under then-president Donald Trump and re-imposed heavy economic sanctions that prompted Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

"We can certainly and quickly... finalise the agreement," Khatibzadeh said, if the US agrees to "put aside all the sanctions".

He also called on Washington to put an end to the so-called campaign of "maximum pressure" introduced by the Trump administration, reports AFP.

On June 8, the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors adopted a resolution censuring Iran for failing to adequately explain the previous discovery of traces of enriched uranium at three sites which Tehran had not declared as having hosted nuclear activities.

On the same day, Tehran said it disconnected a number of IAEA cameras that had been monitoring its nuclear sites.

"The US decided again to prolong and delay the agreement and went to the (IAEA) board of governors meeting with the delusion of using leverage," Khatibzadeh said Monday.

"Of course, the response by Iran was a proportionate and decisive one," he added.

As tensions have mounted over Tehran's nuclear programme, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and parts of Iraq have come under UAV or missile strikes that were claimed by or blamed on Iranian-backed militias.

Crisis-hit Sri Lanka begins shutdown

Schools closed, all non-essential govt services halted; IMF opens talks with Colombo on possible bailout



AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka closed schools and halted all non-essential government services yesterday, beginning a two week shutdown to conserve fast-depleting fuel reserves as the International Monetary Fund opened talks with Colombo on a possible bailout.

The country of 22 million people is in the grip of its worst economic crisis after running out of dollars to finance even the most essential imports, including fuel.

Yesterday, schools were shut and state offices worked with skeleton staff as part of government plans to reduce commuting and save precious petrol and diesel. Hospitals and the main seaport in Colombo were still operating.

Hundreds of thousands of

motorists remained in miles-long queues for petrol and diesel even though the energy ministry announced they will not have fresh stocks of fuel for at least three more days.

The country defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt in April and went cap in hand to the IMF.

The first in-person talks with the IMF on Sri Lanka's bailout request commenced in Colombo yesterday and will continue for 10 days, the lender and the government said in brief statements.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was also due to meet visiting Australian Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil to "deepen cooperation and assist Sri Lanka as the country faces very difficult economic times," Canberra said in a statement.

It said O'Neil will also discuss

strengthening engagement on transnational crime, including people-smuggling following a surge in would be illegal immigrants by boat in the past month.

Sri Lanka is facing record-high inflation and lengthy power blackouts, all of which have contributed to months of protests – sometimes violent – calling on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down.

Police arrested 21 student activists who blocked all gates to the presidential secretariat building after declaring yesterday, Rajapaksa's 73rd birthday, a "day of mourning".

The shutdown order came last week as the United Nations launched its emergency response to feed thousands of pregnant women who were facing food shortages.

Boy killed, 3 hurt in US shooting

AFP, Washington

A 15-year-old boy was killed and three other people, including a police officer, were wounded in a shooting after a concert in Washington Sunday night, the local police chief said.

The shooting was preceded by two other incidents which caused panic at the unpermitted "Moechella" concert celebrating Juneteenth, with several people injured while running away, DC police chief Robert Contee told reporters.

Police then shut down the sidewalk concert on safety grounds but shortly afterwards, despite a heavy police presence, the shooting occurred nearby in which the boy was killed, Contee said.

"Unfortunately things like this can happen when you have the wrong mix of people, or people who introduce firearms into a situation," he said.

The officer and two other wounded people were recovering in hospital, he added.

There was no exchange of fire and the gun used had not been recovered, Contee said.

It was not clear if the teenager was targeted but before the incident police had seized two illegal firearms nearby and were chasing another individual with an illegal firearm, the police chief said.

The United States is in the midst of a particularly gruesome chapter in its epidemic of gun violence.



Smoke rises over the city following recent shelling in the course of Ukraine-Russia conflict in Donetsk, Ukraine yesterday.

China tests missile interception system

REUTERS, Shanghai

China has carried out a land-based missile interception test that "achieved its expected purpose", the Defence Ministry said, describing it as defensive and not aimed at any country.

China has been ramping up research into all sorts of missiles, from those that can destroy satellites in space to advanced nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles, as part of an ambitious modernisation scheme overseen by President Xi Jinping.

Beijing has tested missile interceptors before; the most recent previous public announcement of a test was in February 2021, and before that in 2018. State media has said China has conducted anti-missile system tests since at least 2010.

The ministry said in a brief statement late on Sunday that the "ground-based midcourse anti-missile intercept technology" test had been carried out that night.

"The test reached its expected goals," the ministry said. "This test was defensive and not aimed at any country."

It provided no other details.

China, along with its ally Russia, have repeatedly expressed opposition to the US deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system in South Korea.

China argued the equipment's powerful radar could penetrate into its territory. China and Russia have also held simulated anti-missile drills.

FRANCE VOTE UPSET Macron seeks to salvage power

AFP, Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron and his allies were scrambling yesterday for a way out of political deadlock after losing their parliamentary majority in a stunning blow for the president and his reform plans.

Macron's Ensemble (Together) coalition emerged as the largest party in Sunday's National Assembly vote, but was dozens of seats short of keeping the parliamentary majority it had enjoyed for the last five years.

Surges on the left and the far-right destroyed the dominant position of Macron's deputies who, for the past five years, had backed the president's policies without fail.

Turnout was low, with the abstention rate recorded at 53.77 percent.

The left-leaning Liberation daily called the result a "slap in the face" for Macron, while the conservative Le Figaro said he was now "faced with an ungovernable France".

Macron's Together alliance won 244 seats, far short of the 289 needed for an overall majority.

The election saw the new left-wing alliance NUPES make gains to become the main opposition force along with its allies on 137 seats, according to the Interior Ministry.

But it is unclear if the coalition of Socialists, Communists, Greens and the hard-left France Unbowed will remain a united bloc in the National Assembly.

Meanwhile the far-right under Marine Le Pen posted the best legislative performance in its history, becoming the strongest single opposition party with 89 seats, up from eight in the outgoing chamber.

A confident Le Pen said her party would demand to chair the National Assembly's powerful finance commission, as is tradition for the biggest opposition party.

"The country is not ungovernable, but it's not going to be governed the way Emmanuel Macron wanted," Le Pen told reporters yesterday.

Ex-rebel wins Colombian presidency

AFP, Bogota

Ex-guerrilla Gustavo Petro was elected the first ever left-wing president of Colombia on Sunday, after beating millionaire businessman Rodolfo Hernandez in a tense and unpredictable runoff election.

With all votes counted, Petro – the 62-year-old former mayor of Bogota – won with 50.4 percent to Hernandez's 47.3 percent.

"As of today, Colombia is changing, a real change that guides us to one of our aims: the politics of love... of understanding and dialogue," said Petro.

Hernandez, 77, accepted the result, in which he came up short by 700,000 votes. Speaking to supporters at party headquarters, Petro held out an olive branch to his opponents.

Now everything is a dead zone. We don't have any relations with the United States now. They are at zero on the Kelvin scale. There is no need to negotiate with them (on nuclear disarmament) yet. This is bad for Russia.

Dmitry Medvedev
Former Russian president