



A damaged building and vehicles in a residential neighbourhood after it was hit by a Russian drone and missile strike on the outskirts of Kyiv yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Return of UN sanctions 'unjustifiable': Iran

Vows 'firm and appropriate' response to 'illegal' measures

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday condemned as "unjustifiable" the reinstatement of United Nations sanctions over its nuclear programme, after the collapse of talks with Western powers and Israeli and US strikes on its nuclear sites.

The measures, which bar dealings linked to the Islamic republic's nuclear and ballistic missile activities, took effect overnight after Western powers triggered the so-called "snapback" mechanism under the 2015 nuclear accord.

"The reactivation of annulled resolutions is legally baseless and unjustifiable... all countries must refrain from recognising this illegal situation," the Iranian foreign ministry said in a statement.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will firmly defend its national rights and interests, and any action aimed at undermining the rights and interests of its people will face a firm and appropriate response," it added.

The return of the sanctions ends months of tense diplomacy aimed at reviving nuclear talks derailed since June, when Israeli and US forces bombed Iranian nuclear facilities.

Despite the reimposition, Western leaders stressed channels for dialogue remained open.

Kaja Kallas, the European Union's top diplomat, on Sunday said the reimposition of sanctions



Western leaders say channel for dialogue remains open

Rubio calls on Iran to engage in direct talks with US

Russia says sanctions invalid; Israel hails move

"must not be the end of diplomacy", adding that "a sustainable solution to the Iranian nuclear issue can only be achieved through negotiations".

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged Iran to "accept direct talks, held in good faith".

He also called on UN member states to "immediately" implement sanctions to "pressure Iran's leaders to do what is right for their nation, and best for the safety of the world".

The British, French and German foreign ministers said in a joint statement they would continue to seek "a new diplomatic solution to ensure Iran never gets a nuclear weapon".

They also called on Tehran "to

refrain from any escalatory action".

Iran had allowed UN inspectors to return to its nuclear sites, but President Masoud Pezeshkian said the United States had offered only a short reprieve in return for handing over its whole stockpile of enriched uranium, a proposal he described as unacceptable.

An 11th-hour effort by Iran allies Russia and China to postpone the sanctions until April failed to win enough votes in the Security Council on Friday, leading to the measures taking effect at 3:30am in Tehran (0000 GMT) on Sunday.

Russia made clear it would not enforce the sanctions, considering them invalid.

The sanctions "finally exposed the West's policy of sabotaging the pursuit of constructive solutions in the UN Security Council, as well as its desire to extract unilateral concessions from Tehran through blackmail and pressure," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

Iran has long contended that it is not seeking nuclear weapons.

Newspapers in the Islamic republic gave contrasting reactions to the reimposition of the sanctions. The ultraconservative newspaper Kayhan, which opposes any dialogue with the United States, suggested the sanctions would likely have been imposed even if Iran had engaged in negotiations.

The reformist daily Ham Mihan wrote: "The big question is whether Russia and China will maintain their position".

China former minister gets death for graft

AFP, Beijing

China's former agricultural minister was sentenced to death yesterday on corruption charges, with a two-year reprieve, a court statement said.

Tang Renjian accepted cash and property bribes totalling more than 268 million yuan (\$38 million) between 2007 and 2024, the People's Court of Changchun in northeast Jilin province said in a statement.

The court ruled that the bribes "caused particularly severe losses to the interests of the state and the people, and therefore warranted the death penalty", adding that Tang had confessed to his crimes and expressed remorse.

Tang's sentencing is the latest in President Xi Jinping's sweeping anti-graft campaign that has brought down several high-level figures.

Supporters of Xi's anti-corruption drive say the campaign promotes clean governance, but critics argue it provides the president with the power to purge political rivals.

Tang previously served as governor of the northwestern province of Gansu, as well as the vice chairman of southern autonomous region Guangxi.

Deep roots of rage as Ladakh seeks self-rule

AFP, Leh

India's remote high-altitude desert region of Ladakh has been in turmoil since four people were killed in violent protests demanding greater political autonomy for the Himalayan territory.

Growing resentment with New Delhi's direct rule over the territory, and fears of losing livelihoods boiled over on Wednesday as crowds took to the streets in the main city Leh, torching a police vehicle and the offices of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Initially police said five people had died but later revised the toll to four.

The sparsely populated region, home to some 300,000 people, borders both China and Pakistan and is a strategic enclave for India. Around half of Ladakh's residents are Muslim and about 40 percent are Buddhist.

Why are people protesting?

Modi's government split Ladakh off from Indian-administered Kashmir in 2019, imposing direct rule on both after cancelling the region's partial autonomy.

Since then, resentment has been growing in Ladakh, with concerns about losing traditional livelihoods, land rights, and cultural identity. Residents say the end of semi-autonomy stripped them of protections over land, jobs, and resources.

Who is leading the demonstrations?

The Apex Body Leh, led by veteran leader Chering Dorjay, has become the main voice of the protesters.

"We have been used like slaves," Dorjay, 77, said, vowing to continue the struggle in the days to come.

Wednesday's demonstrations were also organised in solidarity with prominent activist Sonam Wangchuk, who had been on hunger strike for two weeks. New Delhi blamed the unrest on "provocative speeches" by Wangchuk who was detained by police on Friday.

What are the core demands?

The protesters are demanding protection of land rights and to stop outsiders from buying property in Ladakh. They also want constitutional autonomy under the "Sixth Schedule" of India's constitution, which would allow a local legislature to make laws on land use and jobs.

Why is land a sensitive issue?

The government has announced large-scale solar projects and industrial plans in Ladakh that require thousands of acres of land.

Locals fear this will endanger grazing grounds critical for pashmina goat herding, already under pressure from climate change and military buffer zones established with China.

"The danger to this centuries-old



livelihood undermining lives of thousands of pashmina goat herders is another issue now," Dorjay said.

How do Ladakhis view relationship with India?

Unlike in Kashmir where opposition to Indian rule runs deep, Ladakhis have historically aligned with India, backing its troops in past conflicts with Pakistan and China.

But many now say they feel betrayed.

"For 70 years we have helped protect India's borders," Haji told AFP. "Now we want ourselves to be protected."



World's highest bridge opens in China

AFP, Beijing

The world's highest bridge opened to traffic in China yesterday, state media said, capping an engineering feat three years in the making.

The Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge towers 625 metres above a river and vast gorge in the country's rugged southern province of Guizhou, also home to the 565-metre Beipanjiang Bridge that is now the world's second highest.

Live drone footage broadcast by state media showed vehicles traversing the immense structure, its support towers partially engulfed in clouds.

State news agency Xinhua said Wednesday that nearly half of the world's 100 highest bridges are located in Guizhou.

The Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge took more than three years to complete, Xinhua reported. Its 1,420-metre main span makes it the "world's largest-span bridge built in a mountainous area", it added.



Relatives mourn after receiving the body of a victim who was killed in a stampede at a campaign rally last evening in the Karur district, in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

INDIA STAMPEDE Case filed against actor Vijay's party

REUTERS, Chennai

Police in India registered a criminal case against leaders of Tamil actor Vijay's political party after a stampede at his rally killed 39 people, a senior police official said yesterday.

The dead included children and more than 50 people were injured in Saturday's stampede in Tamil Nadu, where Vijay was campaigning for his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam party ahead of state elections early next year.

Tamil Nadu police filed the case, the first step toward potential charges, "against TVK party senior leaders Bussy Anand, Nirmal Kumar and VP Mathiyalagan, and the investigation is under way," senior police official V Selvaraj told Reuters.

"TVK originally sought permission for a gathering of 10,000 people, but the actual crowd was more than double," he said.