

## CHINA, IRAN SEE CLOSER TIES AFTER NUCLEAR DEAL

**BEIJING:** The foreign ministers of Iran and China—a major buyer of Iranian oil—signalled yesterday that their countries will forge closer economic ties following a landmark international nuclear deal with Tehran.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi hosted Iran's top diplomat Mohammad Javad Zarif for talks in what Wang described as their seventh round this year. China took part as a member of the P5+1 — the five per-

manent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany—in the talks with Iran that yielded the nuclear agreement in July.

In exchange for lifting painful economic sanctions, the hard-fought deal limits Tehran's nuclear programme, which was seen by the United States, Israel and others as ultimately intended to develop atomic weapons. In an attempt to choke off Iran's oil exports the United States from 2012 threat-

ened to penalise foreign financial institutions over transactions with Iran's central bank, which handles sales of the country's key export. China significantly cut back on purchases of Iranian crude, earning an exemption from the sanctions as did several other countries. Wang said energy was a "traditional area" of cooperation between Beijing and Tehran, and their overall relationship "will have new prospects after the

comprehensive Iran nuclear deal is implemented". At that point, Zarif said, "illegal sanctions imposed upon Iran by Western countries will be lifted, a lot of Chinese companies will have more chances to cooperate with Iran".

"China and Iran are reliable partners in energy, trade and economy," he added. On broader issues, both sides stressed the need to work together to solve hotspot security problems through political means.

"We would like to cooperate with China on issues in Yemen, Syria and the Middle East, seeking a political solution," Zarif said. Iran is a major backer of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, which is battling Islamic State and other groups trying to overthrow his regime.

China and Russia have cooperated at the Security Council to block some attempts by the US and other Western countries to punish Syria. — AFP

## THAI POLICE CHIEF LINKS UIGHURS TO BANGKOK BOMB

### POLICE BLAME PEOPLE SMUGGLERS FOR ATTACK

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's police chief yesterday linked the Bangkok bomb to China's Uighurs for the first time, as the lawyer for one of two detained foreign suspects confirmed his client is from the Muslim minority. For weeks Thai police have skirted around mentioning the word Uighur or suggesting their possible involvement in the attack, despite arrests and warrants that increasingly pointed in that direction. The August 17 bombing killed 20 people, the majority of them ethnic Chinese tourists, raising the possibility of a link to militants or supporters of the Uighurs, an ethnic group who say they face heavy persecution in China. A month earlier Thailand had forcibly deported more than 100 Uighur refugees to China, sparking international condemnation as well as violent protests in Turkey, where nationalist hardliners see the minority as part of a global Turkic-speaking family.

Police blame a gang of people smugglers for

attack, motivated by revenge for a crackdown on their lucrative trade through Thailand, a motive which has been widely dismissed by security experts. "The cause was the human trafficking networks—networks transferring Uighurs from one country to another. Thai authorities destroyed or obstructed their human trafficking businesses," Somyot Poompanmoung told reporters on Tuesday, explaining the apparent motive for the attack. It was the first time Thai police have formally referenced the Uighurs in relation to the case, after issuing a retraction of a mention of the group over the weekend. Thailand's junta chief Prayut Chan-O-cha later questioned why Uighurs would carry out an attack yet not claim it.

"But I don't rule out this motive yet," he told reporters. Mostly Muslim Uighurs have long accused Beijing of religious and cultural repression in China's far western Xinjiang region, with hundreds of refugees believed to have fled in

recent years, often heading to Turkey via Southeast Asia.

#### Wary of upsetting China

Analysts say Thailand is keen to avoid naming Uighurs for economic and diplomatic reasons. Chinese visitors are a lynchpin of the tourist industry, and Beijing remains one of the increasingly isolated Thai junta's few international allies. But arrest warrants, passports and travel itineraries of the main suspects all point towards the involvement of militants from the ethnic group or their supporters. Nearly a month on, Thailand has two foreigners in custody and a dozen arrest warrants issued.

One of the two men in custody, Yusuf Mieraili, was seized with a Chinese passport that gave a Xinjiang birthplace. Police say they believe his passport is real. The other suspect, named by Thai police as Adem Karadag, was allegedly discovered in a flat on the outskirts of Bangkok in possession of bomb making equipment and dozens of fake Turkish passports. Speaking to the media yesterday, his lawyer said his client—whose real name is Bilal Mohammed—admits entering Thailand illegally but denies any knowledge of the bomb plot. "He has denied that any of the bomb making materials belong to him," lawyer Chuchart Kanphai told AFP. "Most of stuff in that room was there before he arrived." Chuchart said Mohammed was born in Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi, but moved to Turkey in 2004 where he received Turkish nationality and found work as a truck driver with his brother.

He entered Thailand on August 21, four days after the bomb blast, with the aim of finding work in Malaysia, the lawyer said. A broker helped him get into Thailand with a fake passport via Vietnam and Laos, and arranged for him to stay at the flat that police later raided and allegedly discovered explosives. The broker "promised him work in Malaysia, such as being a driver or a painter or a cleaner", Chuchart said. Almost all the other suspects identified by police have Turkish sounding names or links.

On Monday police said another suspect, Chinese national Abudusataer Abudurehemam—whom investigators say was in contact with cell members before the blast—flew out of Thailand on August 30 to Bangladesh before heading on to Delhi, Abu Dhabi and eventually Turkey. Yesterday the Turkish embassy in Bangkok said it had yet to be contacted by Thai police on that development. — AFP



**BANGKOK:** In this Aug. 29, 2015 file photo, Thai police chief Somyot Poompanmoung talks to reporters outside of an apartment on the outskirts of Bangkok. Somyot said yesterday that authorities are now certain that last month's deadly bombing at a Bangkok shrine was related to the trafficking of Uighur Muslims from China to Turkey. — AP

## SUU KYI PARTY MANIFESTO PLEDGES 'DIGNIFIED' MYANMAR MILITARY ROLE

**NAYPYITAW:** Myanmar's main opposition party has launched an election manifesto that pledges to retain a "dignified" role for the military as a defender of democracy and consolidate government ministries to save costs. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) published the 28-page document late on Monday ahead of a Nov. 8 election in which it is expected to perform well after decades on the political sidelines.

The election marks a major shift in Myanmar's political landscape, giving a platform to democratic activists crushed during a half-century of military rule that ended in 2011. Though direct military rule has ended, it retains a powerful political role and a veto over changes to a constitution drafted under its direction, which bars Suu Kyi from becoming president. Despite that, the NLD indicated a softer line towards

the armed forces, or "Tatmadaw", under which it suffered years of persecution. It said the Tatmadaw was an "essential" institution that "shall be dignified forces that shall defend the democratic practices". The manifesto is short on specifics but pledges to make the military "strategically efficient", equip it with advanced technology and include it in the executive system. It suggests a return to a more conciliatory position by Suu Kyi, who took aim a few months ago at Myanmar's top general after armed forces lawmakers rebuffed NLD attempts to change the constitution to remove their parliamentary veto. The NLD ended its boycott of the military dominated political system in 2012 when it won dozens of seats in by-elections.

The NLD won an election in 1990 with a landslide but the junta did not recognise the result. Though it may win most seats in the upcoming election, there

are no guarantees the NLD would lead the executive. The president, who is chosen in a parliamentary vote that includes the military, chooses his or her own cabinet, not necessarily from among political parties. In a video message to open the campaign last week, Suu Kyi said a smooth transition was "almost as important" as the election being free and fair.

Despite the popularity of a party built around Suu Kyi's image as a hero of democracy, it has been criticised for a lack of inclusivity and for being vague about how it would govern. It pledged to create farmers' unions, scrutinise investment to manage environmental impacts and follow a foreign policy that sides with "genuine democratic bases". It says ministries would be reduced in number to ease pressure on the budget to make a "fully efficient" government. — Reuters



**NEW DELHI:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) addresses a joint press conference with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe following their meeting in New Delhi yesterday. The Sri Lankan prime minister is on a three-day official visit to India. — AFP

## SRI LANKAN TAMILS REJECT WARTIME TRUTH COMMISSION

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka's minority Tamils yesterday rejected government plans for a truth commission to promote reconciliation after decades of ethnic war, insisting on an international inquiry. Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera unveiled a range of reconciliation measures on Monday at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, two days before the release of a long-awaited report on Sri Lanka's alleged war crimes. But Tamil leaders said the new unity government's plans for a truth commission and an office for war reparations were not enough, amid concerns abuses would not be properly investigated.

"The minister tells us to have confidence and trust them. But ... he himself acknowledges that their track record is not good," said Suresh Premachandran from the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front. "That is why we say: have an internationally independent inquiry." Tamil legislator Dharmalingam Sithadthan also rejected the commission in favour of an international inquiry, adding that the ethnic minority was also seeking a greater share of political power.

Tamils have demanded greater autonomy in areas of the war-ravaged north and east of the country where they are concentrated. The war ended in 2009 when troops crushed Tamil rebels fighting for a separate homeland on the Sinhalese-majority island.

"You can't just pay compensation and forget about it. We need a credible political solution," said Sithadthan, leader of the Democratic People's Liberation Front. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said yesterday the plans aimed to resolve reconciliation issues so that "all Sri Lankans are treated equally" and "together we look at the future".

Wickremesinghe briefed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the developments during an official visit to New Delhi. A former Norwegian peace envoy to Sri Lanka, Eric Solheim, also welcomed the plans, saying on Twitter that they would be a "sea change for Sri Lanka" if implemented.

President Maithripala Sirisena came to power in January promising reconciliation and accountability for alleged atrocities committed by troops under the command of then-president Mahinda Rajapakse. Rajapakse resisted Western pressure to investigate allegations that up to 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed by his troops in the final months of the conflict.

The Human Rights Council will on Wednesday release the report on Sri Lanka's alleged crimes during the war. The report had initially been scheduled to be published in March, but UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein had recommended it be delayed for six months to give the country's new government a chance to cooperate with investigators. — AFP

## MALDIVES CRITICIZES UN'S CALL TO FREE JAILED EX-PRESIDENT

**COLOMBO:** The Maldives criticized the UN human rights chief's call to release the country's imprisoned former president, calling it an effort to circumvent rule of law. The foreign ministry said in a statement Monday that it rejects High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein's allegation that the law in the Maldives is being manipulated for political ends.

"To seek the release of an individual purely on the basis of his political standing is inappropriate, and clearly seeks to circumvent the rule of law," the statement said. Hussein made his comments in his opening speech at the human rights council.

"I was initially encouraged by the government's decision, in July, to move former President Nasheed to house arrest, for health reasons and to appeal his conviction after a flawed trial. But the decision to return him to prison last month, and pursuit of a further criminal investigation against his family, are serious setbacks," Hussein said.

"Given the deeply tainted nature of this case, I urge the government to release him, and to review several hundred pending criminal cases against opposition supporters in relation to protests in recent months."

Former President Mohamed Nasheed is serving a 13-year sentence after being

found guilty of ordering the military to arrest a top judge three years ago. The verdict alleged that the judge's arrest was akin to abducting, an offense under the terrorism law.

His trial was criticized internationally for an apparent lack of due process. Nasheed's lawyers said that they were not given enough time to prepare their defense and not allowed to call witnesses. After his conviction the case documents were not given to them in time to lodge an appeal, they said.

Hopes for Nasheed's release increased after his party and the government started negotiations in June and Nasheed's lawyers said that his sentence had been commuted to house arrest. However he was sent back to prison after eight weeks and the government said that the house arrest was only a temporary measure considering Nasheed's health.

Nasheed in 2008 became the country's first democratically elected president, ending a 30-year autocratic rule. He resigned in 2012 amid weeks of public protests against the arrest of the judge and after losing support from the military and police.

Nasheed lost the 2013 presidential election to President Yameen Abdul Gaiyyoom, a half-brother to the country's former strongman ruler. — AP

## Participation for Democracy

### 15-9-2015



**NAYPYIDAW:** Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi bows to greet during a function to mark the International Day of Democracy in Naypyidaw, Myanmar, yesterday. More than 90 political parties will take part in the parliamentary elections on November 8, which are being closely watched as the next step toward democracy in a country that was run by a repressive military junta for nearly half a century. — AP