

## INDO-US NUKE DEAL

## Bush admn slammed in Senate

AFP, Washington

Senate lawmakers criticised the US administration for not being transparent with lawmakers on a controversial civilian nuclear deal with India.

Legislators were particularly interested in an agreement being negotiated with New Delhi detailing the landmark deal clinched on March 2 by President George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The deal would allow India, which is not a signatory of the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), access to long-denied civilian nuclear technology in return for placing a majority of its atomic reactors under international safeguards.

Speaking at a hearing on the deal, Democratic Senator Joseph Biden charged that the administration had "renege" on a promise to share drafts of the bilateral nuclear agreement.

## War fear haunts Lanka

Air raids leave thousands homeless

REUTERS, AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka stopped bombing Tamil Tiger targets and reopened borders with rebel territory yesterday, but with the island teetering on the brink of war the police said a fragmentation mine blast killed two sailors.

Both sides have vowed to retaliate if attacked again after heavy firing Tuesday night and Wednesday caused thousands to flee their homes and raised fears a 2002 ceasefire could collapse.

If violence stops, diplomats say peace talks might still be possible. But if it intensifies, they fear a return to war.

Police in the northern army-held Jaffna enclave said a suspected Tiger claymore mine blast killed two sailors, while two policemen were wounded in a claymore attack near the northwest coast.

Military spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe said claymore blasts would not provoke air attacks.

"It was suspected LTTE. But for a

claymore mine blast we don't respond with air strikes," Samarasinghe said after the first blast.

The strikes on Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) territory in the northeast followed a suspected Tiger suicide bomb attack on army headquarters in Colombo killed 10 and wounded the army commander.

The pro-rebel Web site Tamilnet (www.tamilnet.com) quoted Tiger northeastern political chief S. Elilan as saying the rebels awaited instructions from their leadership, but any retaliation would be "catastrophically disabling and devastating."

Thousands of frightened people have been left homeless in northeastern Sri Lanka after air strikes on suspected Tamil Tiger rebel positions, the guerrillas and a UN official said Thursday.

"More than 40,000 people have been displaced and are languishing as refugees," the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said in a statement.

The LTTE accused the international community of ignoring the plight of the homeless who are mostly Tamils. "They are terrorised. Normalcy in civilian life has been utterly destroyed."

Tamil Tiger rebels have pleaded with the international community to pressure Sri Lanka's government to prevent further air strikes against them and to save a ceasefire from complete collapse.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they were "distressed" over the lack of foreign concern at the strikes carried out by government forces after a suicide bombing targeted the island's army chief on Tuesday.

Aid workers say that figure is probably high, but the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said it believed thousands had been displaced.

Lyndon Jeffels, spokesman for the United Nations refugee agency, said staff could not confirm the figure of 40,000 but it was clear that thousands of people were on the

move. "Certainly it seems that there is a very significant displacement as a consequence of the aerial bombardment," Jeffels told BBC radio.

About 130 people had sought refuge at the Sacred Heart church in Muttur, Trincomalee district, after the bombing began, a priest said.

Military experts said the air force lacked the capability for precision strikes and civilians were likely to have been hit.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it was moving to assess the number of displaced.

In the army-held Tamil-majority Jaffna enclave, a Reuters reporter said residents were hoarding food.

Meanwhile, five headless corpses were found in central Sri Lanka but police said Thursday the incident was not linked to the island's conflict with Tamil Tiger rebels.

The bodies were found in two places about 80 kilometres (50 miles) east of the capital, police said.



Sri Lankan Army personnel check the passengers of a bus at an emergency checkpoint in Colombo yesterday. Thousands of frightened people have been left homeless in northeastern Sri Lanka after government air strikes on suspected Tamil Tiger rebel positions.



Indian Joint Secretary at the Ministry of External Affairs Dilip Sinha (L) hold talks with Pakistani Additional Secretary of United Nation and Economic Coordination Tariq Usman during a meeting at the Foreign Ministry in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistan and India held talks on nuclear and conventional Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) as part of the ongoing composite dialogue process between the two South Asian countries.

## Pakistan, India to halt building army posts in Kashmir

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan and India agreed at peace talks here yesterday they would not set up any new military posts along the heavily defended frontier in Kashmir.

But the Indian side rejected a Pakistani proposal to move heavy artillery outside the boundaries of the disputed Himalayan territory, a Pakistani official said.

The announcements came after a third round of talks on conventional confidence-building measures, held as part of a slow-moving peace process launched by the nuclear rivals in January 2004.

In a joint statement after the talks, India and Pakistan said they had reached agreement on "no development of new posts and defence works" along the Line of Control (LoC), which has divided the region for decades.

The two sides also said they would hold quarterly meetings between commanders along the LoC.

They further agreed to quickly repatriate civilians who inadvertently cross the 760-kilometer (471-mile) frontier. In the past many Kashmiris from both sides who crossed the LoC by accident have spent years in jail.

The statement said the talks were held in a "cordial and constructive atmosphere."

Pakistani delegation chief Tariq Osman Hyder later told reporters that his side had made a "very major proposal" to move large guns, rockets and mortars out of the region, saying they were only needed for offensive operations.

"The Indian side was not ready to accept this and their point of view was that it is their sovereign right to keep their formation," he said.

## Confusion hangs over Nepal's future

King awaits next move

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's humbled King Gyanendra could block moves to rein his authority despite being pressured to recall parliament after weeks of street protests as a struggle for power among factions takes shape, analysts said.

Nepal's legislators head back to work Friday after a four-year break promising to take back power for the people, but their ability to carry out radical reform remains in doubt.

The Himalayan nation is then set for months of legal and political battles for power between implacable foes ranging from Maoists and republicans to royalists set to fight over the future of the country's political system.

"Clearly some things are very hazy," said professor S.M. Habibullah, head of

political science at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan University. "This is very, very much a new thing. Real democracy hasn't started yet."

Politicians have vowed to call elections for an assembly to reframe the nation's 1990 constitution to take away power from the king but there is no legal basis for them to do so.

The preamble to the 1990 document enshrines the king as the dominant figure in the country -- along with the country's borders, human rights and multi-party democracy -- and that cannot be changed legally, say constitutional experts.

Nothing has yet changed under the law to stop the king from using his powers to snatch back power as he did in February 2005 when he sacked the government and asserted total rule.

But any such move is likely to spark even worse protests than was seen on the streets over 19 days in April when protesters repeatedly clashed with security forces.

Legislators are faced with the prospect of facing challenges to their moves by pro-royalist politicians in the Supreme Court -- where the chief justice is approved by the monarch -- or the potential for a nervous king to assert his role as commander-in-chief and take back power.

The final option, say experts, is to ignore the constitution altogether and for politicians to rule in the name of the people who took to the streets in their tens of thousands leaving at least 15 dead behind as they voiced their demands for a watered-down monarchy or even a republic.

## Voting on in West Bengal

REUTERS, Kolkata

Thousands voted yesterday in West Bengal where the ruling communists are expected to return to power with the unusual support of a new, well-heeled middle class.

West Bengal has the world's longest-serving elected communist government which is looking forward to a seventh straight term, this time with the help of groups who have

shunned it in the past.

The state's ruling left has actively wooed foreign and domestic investment after years of focusing on land reform and empowering poor peasants.

The five-stage election in the state of 80 million people is one of five in different states and is seen as the biggest test for the Congress party-led federal coalition, which came to power in 2004.