



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee looks up after signing the nomination papers for Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) President Venkaiah Naidu (R) as Deputy Prime Minister L. K. Advani (L) smiles at BJP headquarters in New Delhi Friday. Naidu filed his nomination seeking a second term for heading the party. Naidu is likely to be elected unopposed as the party has decided at the National Executive meeting at Hyderabad to contest the coming Lok Sabha elections under his presidency.

Scientists may have sold nuke secrets: Musharraf

REUTERS, Davos

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said on Friday it appeared Pakistani scientists had sold nuclear secrets abroad, but reiterated Islamabad's position that there had been no official involvement.

Pakistan says it began questioning its nuclear scientists, including the father of its atomic bomb, Abdul Qadeer Khan, after the UN nuclear agency began investigating possible links between the Pakistani and Iranian nuclear programs.

Musharraf told CNN while attending the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, that the investigation, launched in November, would be finished in "a few weeks."

Asked the likely outcome, he replied: "Well, I would not like to predict, but it appears that some individuals, as I said, were involved for personal financial gain."

Musharraf went further than past statements from his government that individual scientists "may" have transferred nuclear

technology to neighboring Iran.

He said similar allegations had been made against European individuals and countries, "So it is not Pakistan alone."

And he stressed: "There is no such evidence that any government personality or military personality was involved in this at all."

Asked about reports that Pakistani scientists had also transferred technology to Libya and North Korea, he replied:

"I am not denying anything because we are investigating; we have sent teams to Libya, we have sent teams to Iran and we are in contact with the IAEA (the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency). We are collecting all the data..."

He vowed "stern action" against violators: "There is nothing that we want to hide, we want to be very up and clear about it that we will move against anybody who proliferated," he said.

Pakistan would move against any violator "because they are enemies of the state," he said.

The United States suspects Iran

of seeking to build a nuclear bomb under cover of an atomic energy program Tehran insists is purely peaceful.

Nuclear programmes in Iran, North Korea and Libya have all intensified Western concern that one or more of the countries could join the "nuclear club," although Libya announced late last year it would cooperate with the United States and Britain in dismantling its weapons programs.

IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei was asked in Davos on Thursday about reports that nuclear know-how and technology may have reached Iran or Libya from Pakistan and replied:

"I think what we know is that there have been individuals involved. I do not want to jump to conclusions and say a government is involved."

Two Dutch ministers said on Monday there were "indications" North Korea and Libya may have acquired potentially arms-related nuclear technology developed by British-Dutch-German consortium Urenco that Pakistan and Iran are known to possess.

Israel forces kill two more Palestinians

REUTERS, Gaza

Israeli soldiers shot and killed two Palestinians yesterday near Israel's security fence with the Gaza Strip, the army and Palestinian medics said.

An army spokesman said the Palestinians were shot as they approached the soldiers who suspected the men intended to set off an explosive charge.

The soldiers found binoculars and mobile phones on the bodies of the Palestinians, the spokesman said.

The medics said the bodies of two men, shot in the head and legs, were brought to a hospital. They said the men were wearing the combat fatigues of Palestinian militants, but no group claimed the two as members.

The bloodshed was the latest in three years of Israeli-Palestinian violence that has plagued a US-backed peace "road map."

Thursday, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said the United States was having a "great deal of difficulty" in getting Israel and the Palestinians to implement the plan.

UN security team begins Iraq mission

US captures al-Qaeda suspects

AFP, Baghdad

A two-man UN security mission got underway in Iraq yesterday as US officials disclosed that troops had captured a top al-Qaeda operative organising terror operations in the insurgency-racked country.

Efforts to lure the United Nations into a renewed role in the planned transfer of power from the US-led coalition to Iraqis have been boosted by a call from the country's top Shiite cleric to halt protests against the plans.

But the US casualty list continued to mount after two pilots were killed Friday when their military reconnaissance helicopter went down in northern Iraq. The cause of the crash was not immediately clear.

The arrival of the UN liaison team in Baghdad has ended a three-month absence by UN international staff since a spate of deadly attacks last year.

The team was charged only with opening up channels of communication with the coalition, a spokesman said.

A separate security assessment would be needed if UN chief Kofi Annan announces the dispatch of a mission to assess the viability of immediate elections, as he is widely speculated to do next week.

But top Shiite leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, ordered his followers to give the world body space to set up such a mission, a week after threatening a campaign of civil disobedience unless the coalition agrees to organise elections for the first post-occupation government, due to take power by the end of June.

It is vital "to wait until the United States and the UN clarify their positions on the election procedure to choose the nature of the next Iraqi government," Sistani's spokesman Sheikh Abdul Mahdi al-Karbalai said in his sermon at the main weekly prayers in the Shiite pilgrimage city of Karbala.

Tens of thousands of Shiites

have taken to the streets over the past week to back Sistani's demands, prompting Washington to seek UN support as it tries to shore up its plans for a swift hand-over of sovereignty without prior polls.

While a UN evaluation mission would address the demands of Sistani and the mainstream Shiite hierarchy, it stirred the wrath of Shiite radical leader Moqtada Sadr, who branded the world body "dishonest" and subservient to America.

Nevertheless, Ahmed Chalabi, a Pentagon-backed member of the Governing Council said it would be "possible" to hold Iraqi elections before the scheduled power transfer, in comments made Friday to US think-tank, the American Enterprise Institute.

Meanwhile, US officials in Washington revealed that two senior al-Qaeda suspects had been captured in Iraq.

"These are significant developments," said a US official, who

asked not to be identified.

Hasan Guhl, a Pakistani was captured Thursday where he was believed to be scoping out the turf for organizing Al-Qaeda operations in Iraq and working with like minded Islamic extremists.

"He is a very significant player," the official said. "He's a longtime facilitator of al-Qaeda operations in terms of moving both people and money. He has an extensive network of contacts all over the world."

In another major break, US forces captured Husan al-Yemeni, the leader of an Ansar al-Islam cell in the flashpoint town of Fallujah, on January 15, said another US official, who also asked not to be identified.

"He is the most senior Ansar al-Islam person that's been caught to date," said the official.

But there has been no let-up in the nine-month insurgency against the US occupation in mainly Sunni areas north and west of Baghdad.

Nations must join in terror fight: Cheney

AP, Davos

Democratic nations must join together to fight terrorism and the spread of the world's most dangerous weapons, but if diplomacy fails, they must be prepared to use force, Vice President Dick Cheney said yesterday.

In remarks at the World Economic Forum, Cheney defended the US-led invasion of Iraq, yet struck a conciliatory tone to ease trans-Atlantic relations strained by the war.

"We must act with all urgency this danger demands," Cheney said.

Ideologies of violence must be confronted at the source by nurturing democracy throughout the Middle East and beyond, Cheney said at the forum held in this Swiss alpine resort. Cooperation among governments and international institutions is even more important today than in the past, he said.

The vice president insisted, however, that if diplomatic efforts aren't enough to defeat terrorism and stop the proliferation of weapons, America and other nations must be prepared to use force.

"Direct threats require decisive action," Cheney told the more than 1,500 world political, corporate

and opinion leaders who gathered here in eastern Switzerland to discuss security, economic and other global issues.

Last year at the forum, when anti-Americanism sentiment ran high, Secretary of State Colin Powell took the podium for the United States and called on all nations to back US efforts to force Iraq to disarm.

The Bush administration used Saddam Hussein's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction to justify the invasion, but no weapons have been found.

Still, with the Iraqi regime ousted and Saddam in US custody, Cheney faced a less hostile audience.

He said the attacks on America on Sept. 11, 2001, gave all nations "the merest glimpse of the threat that international terrorism poses to us all." Nurturing democracy, especially in the Middle East, is essential to halting terrorism, Cheney said.

"Democracies do not breed the anger and the radicalism that drag down whole societies or export violence," he said. "Terrorists do not find fertile recruiting grounds in societies where young people have the right to guide their own destinies and to choose their own leaders."



Hindu priest Khem Raj (L) waves ceremonial lamps in front of King Gyanendra of Nepal (2-R) while Queen Komal sits on the throne beside him during a Dharmik Avinandan (a religious felicitation) in Kathmandu Friday. The World Hindu Federation felicitated the globe's only Hindu King Gyanendra amidst a special function.



Two Thai workers collect chickens from a farm for destroying in Suphanburi province, northwest of Bangkok yesterday. Thailand's government was accused of endangering the health of farmers and the public with its slow response to the bird flu crisis after two human cases were confirmed in the kingdom.

Thai govt under fire

Bird flu claims 6th life in Vietnam

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's government was accused yesterday of covering-up the bird flu outbreak here and responding too slowly to the crisis, as a sixth death from the virus occurred in Vietnam.

The death of a 13-year-old boy from the H5N1 virus in Ho Chi Minh City was confirmed Saturday, director of the Ho Chi Minh City health department Nguyen The Dung told AFP.

The unnamed teenager's death on Thursday marked the first from avian influenza in southern Vietnam, the five previous victims all from northern provinces. An eight-year-old girl from Ho Chi Minh City has also tested positive for H5N1 and is in a critical condition.

Two sisters died Thursday from

severe respiratory illnesses in Hanoi that were suspected bird flu cases, while 17 other suspected cases were being monitored at hospitals in the capital.

The Thai government, meanwhile, came under fire for its handling of the outbreak, which after weeks of denials it confirmed Friday had spread here with two confirmed human cases and the detection of the virus in chickens.

Thai medical authorities also announced Friday the first death of a person suspected to have contracted the disease.

"The livelihood and health safety of hundreds of thousands of farmers and workers in the poultry industry stands in jeopardy, due to the failure of timely and prompt identification and action against the outbreak," the Bangkok Post said in an editorial.

Homoeopaths' cancer cure attracts US

PTI, Kolkata

A cancer cure protocol developed by Indian homoeopaths has attracted the attention of the US National Institute of Health (NIH).

The pioneering protocol developed by the Kolkata-based father-son duo of Dr Prasanta Banerji and Pratip Banerji, of the PB Homoeopathic Research Foundation, caught the eye of NIH's Cancer Advisory Panel for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAPCAM). CAPCAM on Friday said it has appointed teh medical research firm Contractual Research Organisation (CRO) to study the protocol under a two-and-a-half year project.

Pakistan Tells American Delegation

Converting LoC into border not an option

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan has categorically told a visiting American delegation that converting the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir into an international border is not an option that will be considered by Islamabad.

Pakistan Defence Secretary Hamid Nawaz Khan told the American team that Islamabad just could not accept this conversion as being justifiable in the short or the long-term as it involved the "aspirations of the people of Kashmir".

Converting the LoC into an international border "would not be a just solution", Khan was quoted by The News, as saying.

Meanwhile, Information and

Broadcasting Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed has again reiterated that Pakistan will not budge an inch from its position on Kashmir.

"People should not have too high expectations from the Indo-Pak dialogue," he told the paper.

"Pakistan has gone two steps ahead for peace in the region, while New Delhi has taken just one step. It is India's moral responsibility to stop murder of innocent Kashmiris forthwith," he stressed.

"The issue is not to run factories for enhanced trade, but the real question is to take the Kashmiris along. The success of SAARC hinges on the resolution of the Kashmir issue," he added.

Another Mars rover set for landing

AP, Pasadena

As Nasa scientists struggled to revive their ailing Mars rover, they also began to prepare for the landing of its twin, which was scheduled to touch down on the other side of the Red Planet late Saturday night.

Spirit, the first of the \$820 million twin rovers sent to Mars to determine if it was once a wetter world capable of sustaining life, began to malfunction on Wednesday, nearly three weeks after landing on the planet's Gusev Crater.

For two days it transmitted only gibberish or sporadic beeps to acknowledge commands from Earth. On Friday controllers said they had begun to hear from it again, but it still wasn't working properly. Its prognosis was uncertain.

"The chances that it will be perfect again are not good and the chances that it will not work again are also low,"

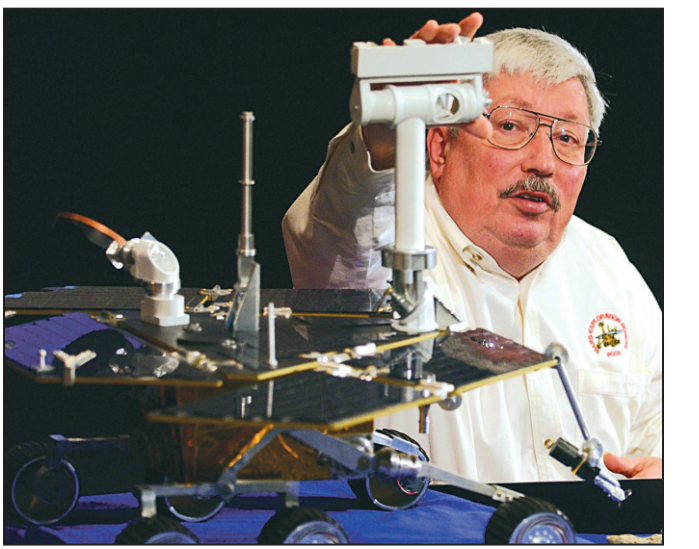
project manager Pete Theisinger said at Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Even under the best of circumstances, the rover will not be back to normal for many days or even a couple of weeks, he added.

Engineers believe some sort of underlying hardware problem triggered the crisis that has wreaked havoc with Spirit's software and forced the rover to reboot its computer more than 60 times.

At the same time engineers dealt with the crisis, Spirit's twin, Opportunity, neared Mars for its own landing Saturday night.

Three hundred scientists and engineers, divided into two teams, are working on the double mission, and Theisinger has encouraged engineers to stay focused on Opportunity and not dwell exclusively on Spirit and its problems.



Mars Exploration Rover project manager Pete Theisinger uses a model of the Rover to illustrate a point during a press conference at Jet Propulsion Laboratory Friday in Pasadena, California, after Nasa received a transmission from the troubled Mars rover Spirit, the first in two days. "The chances it will be perfect again are not good," Theisinger told reporters at Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. "We have got a long way to go with the patient in intensive care."