

Indian parliament okays nuclear bill

No change in nuke policy: Delhi

AFP, PTI, New Delhi

India's upper house of parliament Friday passed legislation banning the proliferation of nuclear technology, seven years after the South Asian giant shocked the world with a series of nuclear tests.

Foreign Minister Natwar Singh assured lawmakers that the proposed legislation "would not hinder" India's development of its defence capabilities and atomic power industry.

"India is committed to safeguarding its security as a nuclear weapon state and to deepen its autonomous scientific and technical capability for meeting our security imperatives as well as our developmental goals," Singh said before lawmakers passed the bill.

development of missile technology but prevent leakage of this technology. As a responsible nation, India has never passed on its proven technological capabilities to any one," he added.

The bill was passed by the lower house of parliament on Thursday and will become law as soon as it is signed by Indian President Abdul Kalam.

The Weapons of Mass Destruction and Their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Bill, outlaws the transfer of biological and chemical weapons and their delivery systems.

It lays down that a person caught engaging in nuclear commerce or passing on atomic technology could face five years to a life in prison as well as a fine. The legislation covers Indians in India and abroad and

foreigners residing in India.

India has refused to sign two landmark agreements on proliferation, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and Non-Proliferation Treaty, saying they are discriminatory because they allow the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to keep their nuclear weapons.

PTI adds: Government on Friday said the new legislation to prohibit unlawful activities in relation to weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and their means of delivery in no way indicated any change in India's nuclear policy.

"It does not indicate any change in our nuclear policy. It does not in any manner constrain our nuclear programme, civilian or strategic," External Affairs Ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told reporters here.

Taiwan's ruling party wins assembly polls

AP, AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's ruling party won elections yesterday for a special assembly charged with amending the island's constitution, giving a big boost to President Chen Shui-bian's policy of resisting unification with rival China.

With 99 percent of the ballots counted, the Central Election Commission said the Democratic Progressive Party had won 42.5 percent of the vote, against 38.9 percent for the opposition Nationalist Party.

The DPP garnered 1.64 million votes, followed closely by the opposition Kuomintang's (KMT) 1.5 million votes, according to the Central Election Commission, which reported a record low turnout.

The hardline pro-independence Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) collected 273,147 votes. KMT's ally the People First Party took 236,716.

A total of 12 political parties and alliances were vying for 300 seats in

the National Assembly based on their share of the vote. This was the first time Taiwanese voters chose parties rather than candidates.

The elections are seen by political analysts as a litmus test of support for the island's independence-minded leaders, headed by President Chen Shui-bian, and for the opposition following recent visits to China by KMT and People First Party leaders.

The vote for the ad hoc National Assembly had developed into a test of strength for Chen's policies, following the visits to China of Nationalist chief Lien Chan, and James Soong, head of the People First Party.

That party garnered only 6.1 percent of the vote, coming in fourth behind the Taiwan Solidarity Union, a pro-independence party, whose spiritual godfather is former President Lee Teng-hui. The TSU won 7 percent of the vote.



Local residents look at the bodies of the victims from the clashes between the government forces and local protesters on display at the central square in the Uzbek town of Andijan Saturday. Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov blamed Islamic extremists for the violence in the eastern city of Andijan and said about 30 people had been killed, but denied having ordered security forces to open fire on demonstrators.

PHOTO: AFP

Saddam to write his memoirs from jail

AFP, London

Ousted Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein has decided to write his memoirs from an Iraqi jail where he is awaiting trial for more than 20 years of abuses, a British newspaper reported, quoting one of his lawyers.

Giovanni di Stefano, a member of Hussein's legal team, said Saddam decided recently to start writing about his childhood in Iraq, his early exile to Egypt and his military adventures in Iran and Kuwait, the Financial Times reported.

He will try to embarrass the great powers that once saw him as a useful buffer against the expansionist ambitions of Iran after the 1979 Islamic revolution, di Stefano was quoted as saying.

He will tell how France and Britain betrayed him by also helping Iran's Islamic republic during the 1980-1988 war with Iraq.

"There will be quite considerable detail," di Stefano was quoted as saying. "The Americans (holding him) are relaxed about it and we've seen some of the translation."



PHOTO: AFP

Chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government and Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi waves to her party supporters as Haryana state Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda (R) looks on, during a rally in Jind, Haryana Saturday. India's ruling UPA government is completing one year in office after the Congress Party swept the Hindu nationalists from power on May 13, 2004.

Karimov a Soviet-era strongman

AFP, Tashkent

Uzbek President Islam Karimov, whose rule is being challenged by protesters in the eastern city of Andijan, is a Communist-era strongman who has run a repressive regime in this impoverished former Soviet republic for more than a decade.

Dour and round-faced, the 67-year-old Karimov is considered to be one of the most autocratic leaders in the former Soviet Central Asian region.

In a country of 24 million people, which gained independence after the Soviet Union's 1991 collapse, Karimov banned opposition parties from taking part in parliamentary election in December.

The 67-year-old leader, an ally of Washington in the US-led war on terror who also enjoys unequivocal backing from Moscow, has succeeded in shutting down most independent media in a country where "making offensive statements" about him leads to a prison term.



Being found in possession of a simple tract of the outlawed Islamic Hizb ut-Tahrir, which seeks to create an Islamic state out of the Central Asian former Soviet republics, is also punishable with prison.

The crackdown on Islamic radicals sparked the riots in Andijan, where around 50 people were killed after gunmen took over government buildings and the prison in protest of the trial of 23 alleged Islamic extremists.

Karimov is regularly accused of cautioning torture and police brutality, which the New York-based Human Rights Watch says is widespread

EU voices concern at Uzbekistan unrest

Putin worried about 'destabilisation' in Central Asia

AFP, Brussels/ Moscow

The European Commission voiced concern yesterday at the escalation of violence in the Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan, but said the government's disregard for human rights was partly to blame.

"The commission is closely following the situation in Uzbekistan. We are concerned by the outbreak of violence," a spokesman for the EU executive told AFP in response to the clashes that have left at least 50 people dead.

"The situation is also the result of the government's lack of regard for human rights and the rule of law," the spokesman added, calling for the crisis to be "resolved through dialogue and reconciliation, not by force."

Two days of clashes between rebels and security forces in the eastern Uzbek city of Andijan have left 30 people dead according to authorities, more than 50 according to other sources.

The violence erupted late Thursday when a group of armed protesters overran government buildings and a prison in Andijan in protest at the trial of 23 businessmen accused of belonging to an outlawed Islamic group.

Protestors claim the charges were fabricated by the government of President Islam Karimov, which has been accused of using torture and arbitrary arrests of practising Muslims to crush opposition.

Meanwhile, President Vladimir Putin spoke by phone Saturday with his counterpart in Uzbekistan and

expressed Russia's "serious concern" about the danger of instability in former Soviet Central Asia, the Kremlin said.

Uzbekistan President "Islam Karimov informed the president of Russia on the developing situation in Andijan," the Kremlin said in a statement, referring to the city in eastern Uzbekistan where troops have cracked down on anti-government protests.

"Both sides expressed serious concern on the danger of the destabilisation of the situation in the Central Asian region," the Kremlin statement said.

The two leaders agreed to remain in close contact, it added.

Nepali Maoists gun down former mayor

AFP, Kathmandu

Suspected Maoist rebels shot dead a former mayor in Nepal's Itahari district southeast of the capital, police said yesterday.

"Unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle shot dead Gitanidhi Rayamajhi in the Itahari market in front of his residence at around 6:45 pm Friday evening," police said.

Rayamajhi, 32, was rushed to a local hospital in the district 540km southeast of Kathmandu but later died of his injuries.

Rayamajhi, a pro-Royal National Democratic Party supporter, was appointed as mayor of the Itahari municipality by the former Surya Bahadur Thapa-led government. He served as mayor for about six months until around a year ago.

Hizbollah, Israeli forces clash in border area UN, US express concern

REUTERS, Kfar Shouba, Lebanon

Israeli artillery and aircraft pounded the outskirts of Lebanese border villages on Friday in a fierce clash with Hizbollah guerrillas that ratcheted up tensions on the volatile frontier.

The fighting in the disputed Shebaa Farms strip comes as Lebanon prepares to hold its first general election without a Syrian military presence for 33 years.

There were no reports of casualties on either side in the fighting, which abated less than two hours after it had begun.

Israeli aircraft and artillery struck the outskirts of Lebanese border villages near the Shebaa Farms, and further west near the towns of Khiam and Rmeish, some distance

from the disputed strip, Lebanese security sources said.

The United States said it was "deeply concerned" and urged both sides to immediately end the fighting.

"This opportunity for reaffirming democracy in Lebanon must not be undermined by militias pursuing their own agendas," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters, referring to Syrian-backed Hizbollah, which also has a bloc in parliament.

In New York, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called the exchange of fire, the third border violation in recent days, "a worrisome escalation" and reminded both sides "one violation cannot justify another," chief spokesman Fred Eckhard said.

Iran preparing for nuke talks with EU FMs

AFP, Tehran

Iran is preparing for direct talks with the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany after backing away from a move to immediately resume sensitive nuclear activities, a senior official was quoted as saying yesterday.

Top nuclear official Hossein Mousavian, speaking to Iran's Mehr news agency, said such a meeting could take place in Europe within the next 10 days.

"Both sides are preparing the ground for such a meeting. If all the arrangements are worked out, probably it is going to be held in Europe in the middle of the next week," he was quoted as saying.

"The aim is to find a successful solution that is satisfactory for both parties," he added.



Iraqi soldiers herd arrested men to a waiting truck Saturday in the town of Maqadadiya, 45km northeast of the town of Baquba following a raid. Fifty-eight men were arrested and taken away by the army. Over 450 people were killed in suicide attacks and car bombs across the country this month.

PHOTO: AFP

Karzai plans admn shake-up after anti-US protests

AFP, Kabul

President Hamid Karzai is planning an administrative shake-up after violent Afghan protests over the alleged desecration of the Koran at Guantanamo Bay left 14 dead and 120 injured, officials said yesterday.

They said Karzai, who returned home from Brussels early Saturday, was likely to replace the governor and police chief of eastern Nangarhar province where the bloody rioting started on Wednesday.

Officials told AFP Karzai held immediate consultations with officials on the security situation, which has seen the worst anti-US violence since the fall of the Taliban more than three years ago.

Police opened fire to control a mob that torched the buildings of several aid agencies, the Pakistani consulate and the governor's house in Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province.