

G8 to tacitly approve Indo-US nuclear deal: Diplomats

REUTERS, Berlin

G8 leaders meeting this week are likely to give tacit approval to a controversial deal giving India access to US nuclear technology, despite fears this could undermine non-proliferation efforts, diplomats say.

They say leaders from the Group of Eight industrialized nations are likely to come up with a form of wording which provides a lukewarm acknowledgment of the deal at their meeting in St. Petersburg on July 15-17.

This would boost US efforts to convince the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the world's top producers of atomic technology, to lift its ban on nuclear trade with India.

"In terms of what the US needs from the G8, this non-committal nod is good enough," said Mark Fitzpatrick of London's International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).

"The more important international forum is the NSG, whose 45 members must approve the exception to NSG rules by consensus for the US-India nuclear cooperation deal to be consummated."

India, which has refused to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), secretly tested a nuclear device in 1974 and then publicly announced a series of tests in 1998, following shortly afterwards by Pakistan.

The tests led to international sanctions on providing nuclear or dual-use technology to either country.

However last year Washington signed a deal -- yet to be approved by the US Congress -- granting India access to US nuclear fuel and reactors as part of a broader effort to develop US-Indian ties.

Washington had initially hoped the G8 would openly back the deal

when the leaders of the United States, Germany, Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Canada and Russia meet.

But concerns about the timing of the deal, which comes as the international community is trying to curtail Iran's nuclear ambitions, and fears it may be rewarding India for flouting the NPT, make a full endorsement impossible, several diplomats said.

"The India language has still not been finalized but will be very neutral," a western G8 diplomat told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

"There will be a lot of 'taking note of India's commitments' and being prepared to look at a new relationship with India that meets its energy needs while being consistent with international non-proliferation norms," he said.

Fitzpatrick, from the IISS, said the lack of opposition from the G8 would be enough to help Washington to try to convince the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) to lift its ban.

The NSG, which was established in response to India's 1974 nuclear test, forbids the sale of sensitive atomic technology to countries not in full compliance with the NPT. India would be the NSG's first exception.

"China's role in the NSG will be key, and it is not part of the G8, of course," he said.

China has traditionally had close ties with Pakistan and might try to block the India-US deal. Japan and many of the 25 EU members also have problems with the idea of rewarding India, diplomats say.

Tacit recognition from the G8 could also help the US administration win approval from the US Congress for the deal, which has run into strong criticism in the United States.

AL walks out

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the former for raising the issues in the parliament as points of order.

Taking floor on a point of order AL lawmaker Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim said the government has allotted the official residence to Justice Latifur Rahman as an award for his contribution to vote rigging in 2001 general election. He demanded judicial probe into the allotment.

Referring to the law minister's claim that Justice Latifur Rahman was not allotted the official residence, the AL lawmaker said, "Justice Latifur in an interview published in a daily today said he will leave the residence this month. The law minister will have to apologise for his misleading information in the parliament," Selim, also AL presidium member, demanded.

In response, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar however disallowed the point of order and maintained that there is no provision in the rules of procedure of the Jatiya Sangsad for seeking apology.

Immediately after the AL lawmaker, the speaker provided the floor to BNP lawmaker Mashiur Rahman, who blasted AL for using "indecent words" about President Iajuddin Ahmed and for the opposition leader's 'refusal' to meet the president.

Taking floor on a point of order, AL lawmaker Mohammad Nasim explained the reason for not meeting the president and started blasting the government for amending the constitution.

The speaker however switched off Nasim's microphone saying the time was over and invited BNP lawmaker Ali Newaz Mohammad Khaiaam to speak, prompting the AL lawmakers to protest and demand the floor.

Amid the AL lawmakers' protest, the BNP lawmaker blasted AL for labeling former president Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, and former chief election commissioner MA Syed as national traitors.

Soon after Ali Newaz, the AL lawmakers demanded the floor but the speaker refused and they walked out of the House.

After the Maghrib prayers the AL lawmakers again entered the House and asked for the floor but again they were refused, and they again walked out of the House.

Then the AL lawmakers held a

Mob lynch

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Police rescued Polish from mob beating while Siddique managed to flee. They recovered a sharp knife from the gang's possession.

Polish said Kalu led the gang in committing the crime. He is a hawker in Farmgate area, and also an informer of Tejgaon police.

Afsana was admitted to a local clinic and owner of the building filed a case with Motijheel Police station.

TIB refuses

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reason to withdraw the reports as we have all the facts and figures on what the reports are based.

"So, there is no question of rejecting the report," Prof Muzaffer said.

The TIB report titled "Corruption Database 2005" and launched on July 5 ranked the LGRD and co-operatives ministry and the environment and forest ministry as the two most corrupt institutions.

LRGD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Environment and Forest Minister Tariqul Islam held press conferences on Sunday and Monday rejecting the reports.

They raised questions over the sources of TIB's funds and motives of such reports. They also threatened to sue the TIB if it does not withdraw the reports.

On the issue of TIB funds, Prof Muzaffer said the government knows all the sources of our money and there are government departments that release the funds.

"We can get funds from any donor if their conditions are acceptable to us and our project is acceptable to them and if the government permits acquiring of the funds," he said in the interview.

Tata's proposal

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But in this subcontinent it is always tough to take decision on such a major economic issue at a time when the general election draws nearer, he observed.

Besides, Bangladesh's bureaucracy is not efficient enough to deal with this sort of cases quickly and that is why more time is needed, he explained.

Meanwhile, Tata's investment proposal is now at the final stage of scrutiny by a secretarial committee, which will review the report on July 16. According to sources, Tata officials are likely to attend the meeting.

The secretarial committee will submit the report to a cabinet committee headed by the industries minister by July 31. The cabinet committee will then decide whether to place the proposal before the cabinet.

Executive Director of Tata Sons Alan Rosling after a meeting with the Board of Investment (BoI) in Dhaka on July 10 said Tata has decided to suspend pursuing any further its investment proposal in Bangladesh as the government does not want to take a decision before the election.

Jamal Uddin

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Nizam, in the charge sheet.

Family members of Jamal Uddin have repeatedly been accusing Maruf Nizam as the mastermind of the whole episode ranging from Jamal's sensational abduction back in July 2003 to his killing later on.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) Sheikh Mohammad Mobarak Hossain fixed July 17 for hearing on the acceptability of the charge sheet.

Kanchannagar Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Kashem, Anwara Sadar Union Chairman Shahidul Alam alias Shahid, Kala Mahub, Lomba Mahub, Israq alias One Piece, Sobhan, driver of the microbus used in the abduction, and Boli Mansur are among the chargesheeted accused.

Of them, Kashem chairman is still at large while 15 others are now in jail.

Jamal Uddin, also a BNP leader, was kidnapped on July 24, 2003 while he was returning to his residence at Chandgan from a business firm at Chawak Bazar in the port city. He was later murdered.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) dug out his skeleton from a remote village in Fatikchhari on August 24 last year and a DNA test later confirmed that the skeleton was indeed of Jamal Uddin.

135 dead

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the meeting. "Security has been definitely put on high alert."

The Mumbai blasts came just hours after suspected Kashmiri militants killed eight people, six of them tourists, in a series of grenade attacks in Indian Kashmir's main city, Srinagar, police said, the most concerted targeting of civilians in months.

Kashmir has been split between India and Pakistan since shortly after the two countries gained independence from Britain in 1947, but both claim it in full.

Mumbai, a metropolis of about 17 million, which was formerly called Bombay, has been hit by a series of bomb blasts in the past decade.

More than 250 people died in a string of bomb explosions in the city in 1993 for which authorities blamed the city's underworld criminal gangs.

Police in the Indian capital New Delhi said they were on the lookout for more violence.

"We have mobilized our entire forces who are conducting checks in all areas such as buses, bus stops, train stations and religious institutions," Anil Shukla, deputy commissioner of police for South Delhi, told Reuters.

BB appoints

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monitoring nine private commercial banks under its early warning system. Of those, IFIC Bank and another one now have observers appointed by it.

Sources noted that the BB usually does not appoint observer for any bank under its early warning system if the bank does not have management crisis.

Four other commercial banks including Oriental Bank that are on the BB's problem bank list have such observers.

450MW Sirajganj power plant

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power project and Cadogan Manning assured of contract for the Meghnaghat-3 power project in gross violation of rules and regulations.

One of the pre-qualification criteria for Sirajganj power project required that the bidder must have experience of designing, constructing and developing at least 300 MW combined cycle power plants at two sites. The inexperienced bidder may qualify, if it has a partner with such experience but that partner should have a minimum of 10 percent equity in the project.

As neither Orion nor Cadogan Manning has ever built a power plant, they showed names of different experienced power companies, which are holding 10 percent or more equity in their bids for the Sirajganj power project.

Orion named Delta Energy BV of the Netherlands, showing it as holding 70 percent equity of its Sirajganj bid. Orion claimed that Delta has built an 800 MW combined cycle power plant in east Vlissingen in the Netherlands, which is in operation for five years.

But Delta's website says, "DELTA Energy BV plans to start constructing a new power plant in the port and industrial area to the east of Vlissingen in 2007."

This company has never built

any combined cycle power plant anywhere though it is experienced in building nuclear and coal-fired power plants.

A well placed source pointed out that Delta does not have any joint venture with Orion and it is not planning to work in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, Cadogan Manning, yet another novice company, used the experience of General Electric (GE) to pre-qualify in the bid. It showed GE's 510 MW combined cycle power plant in Baglan Bay, UK.

Interestingly, Cadogan Manning showed GE/GDSI as its 10 percent equity partner in the bid. As per the criteria, GE's equity alone should have been 10 percent. Sources mentioned that they are unaware of any power company named GDSI. If there is one, it is not involved with GE or Baglan Bay power project in any way.

Again, for more than a decade, GE does not get involved with independent power projects (IPPs) like the Sirajganj scheme. GE never participated in any IPP bids of Bangladesh. "It is highly unlikely that GE has opted for 10 percent equity participation with Cadogan Manning. That is why Cadogan resorted to showing GE/GDSI as its partner, which is visibly unacceptable," noted one source.

A top official of the Power Cell

however defended its screening. "About 18 companies showed interest and 12 participated in the pre-qualification process. If we had the power, we would have qualified all the 12 to get a low price for the power project," he said.

When pointed out that the claims of both Orion and Cadogan Manning could be easily proved false, he said, "We qualified them the way they were qualified in the Meghnaghat-2 and 3 projects."

In Meghnaghat-2, Orion and its partner Belhassa showed Japanese company Nissosoeiwi as the lead bidder to qualify in the bid but upon qualification, changed the lead bidder to German Steag. Though such a change is illegal, the government awarded contract for Meghnaghat-2 to Orion-Belhassa last year. A year has elapsed but Orion could not yet sign the deal as it neither has funds nor experience to accomplish such an enormous task.

The 'alternative centre of power' openly backs Cadogan Manning which pushed for the Meghnaghat-3 scheme on its own from 2003 on the basis of an unsolicited negotiation. Contract for the project would have been awarded by now but it is getting delayed as the Power Cell and other authorities concerned were pressurised to find legal loopholes to justify the unsolicited deal.

Workers' strike

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untoward incident. Besides, the factory was declared closed for yesterday.

Their other demands include better meal, regular payment of overtime bills and decent behaviour by the factory officials.

The factory authorities have not been paying their wages and overtime bills for the past several months, despite repeated demands, the workers alleged. In most cases they are not paid for overtime, while some of them are paid a fixed amount of Tk 500 for overtime in a month without calculating the actual hours of the overtime work, they said adding they usually get their wages irregularly on the 20th or 25th of the next month.

The factory officials also behave rudely with the workers and they often lose job if they remain absent even for a day due to illness, complained the angry workers adding that the authorities never grant any leave to anyone.

Later, General Manager of the factory Major (rtd) Md Hafiz calmed down the sewing section workers assuring them of meeting their demands.

The meeting with the workers of finishing section was continuing till the filing of the report in the evening.

JMB kingpins

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the Jhalakathi case.

The bench asked the attorney general's office to bring up the matter after two weeks.

A Barisal court on May 29 awarded death sentence to JMB chief Abdur Rahman, his deputy Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai and five other militants and acquitted one in sensational Jhalakathi judges' killing case.

The others to walk the gallows are JMB Jalilish-e-Shura members Ataur Rahman Sunny, Abdur Awal and Khaled Saifullah, suicide bomber Iftekhar Hasan Al Mamun and Asadur Rahman Arif. Of them, Arif is still at large.

Immediately after the lower court's verdict, the government took steps for quick disposal of the militants' death reference case as over 500 cases still await paper book preparation and death reference hearing in the HC.

Currently, paper books are being prepared for the cases of 2003. If the paper book for the Jhalakathi case were prepared in the usual manner, HC hearing on death sentences of the militants would not be held before 2009.

According to the government instructions, the attorney general's office in June petitioned the HC to give priority to preparation of the paper book for the death reference case. The HC granted the prayer on June 15.

Teachers

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The demonstrators yesterday held a rally at the Central Shaheed Minar and marched towards the Shikkha Bhaban to press home their demand. In Lalmonirhat, the agitating teachers and employees of non-government educational institutions burnt effigies of Finance Minister Saifur Rahman and State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon.

The pro-government teachers and employees' platform Shikkhak Karmachari Oikya Jote declared to form a human chain in front of the Vigarunnisa Noon School and College in the capital at 12noon today while the Awami League (AL)-backed Jatiya Shikkhak Karmachari Front will hold rallies at upazila and district levels across the country today.

In addition to full payment of salary from government, the striking teachers and employees also want an increase in house rent, medical allowance in full and implementation of the recommended privileges as by UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Violence kills 36

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neighbourhood of Dura, a defence ministry official said.

The passengers were heading to the Shia holy city of Najaf to bury the corpse when they were "ambushed by gunmen on the highway, taken out and shot dead," the official said.

The attack came less than two hours after a curfew imposed on Dura the day before ended.

The curfew was imposed after Dura residents reported hearing gunfire and said large numbers of armed men were out on the streets. The neighbourhood has been the scene of repeated fighting and attacks on security forces.

In Iraq's northern Salaheddin province a raging gunbattle between Iraqi troops and villagers left 10 soldiers dead, a security source said.

A group of soldiers raided Al-Salman village, 260km northwest of Baghdad early Tuesday, but met stiff resistance from armed villagers, the source said, adding that civilian casualties were not known.

In Baghdad, five people were killed and 10 wounded in a car bombing and a suicide bombing near the heavily fortified Green Zone, the seat of the Iraqi government and headquarters of the US military.

A car bomb went off near a restaurant about 100 metres (yards) from the Green Zone, which also houses the courtroom where trial of ousted leader Saddam Hussein is taking place.

Just minutes later a suicide bomber blew himself up near the site of the earlier blast, police said.

Another 11 people were killed in other attacks in Baghdad and other parts of the country Tuesday.

More than 80 people have been killed in the last two days in sectarian bloodshed in Baghdad -- one of the largest bouts of violence since the bombing of a revered Shia shrine in February, which triggered nationwide Shia-Sunni reprisals.

On Sunday at least 61 people were killed, including 42 Sunni Arabs massacred by rampaging mobs, believed to be Shia militias, in Baghdad's Sunni neighbourhood of Jihad.

In an apparent revenge attack on Monday, 10 people were killed and 51 wounded in a car bombing and mortar attack in the Shia-dominated slum district of Sadr City, police said.

"We have no choice but to defeat those who want to plunge us in the darkness. We can only achieve this through national unity," Maliki said in an address to the Kurdish parliament in Erbil on Monday.

"We still face a lot of challenges and Iraqi blood is being spilled on our streets every day, but no and a thousand nos, they will not defeat us."

Israel batters Gaza

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widespread international criticism that the assault has been disproportionate.

A Palestinian security officer was killed and six people were wounded in the latest Israeli air strikes hitting northern Gaza, medical sources said, as the punishing aerial campaign moved into a third week since the soldier's capture.

The raids -- which the Israeli military said targeted rockets and a "cell about to launch them" -- came just one day after nine Palestinians died from Israeli fire around the impoverished and radicalised Gaza Strip.

The dead man was named as Ahmed Shahid. Medics said he was struck by a missile fired towards a car. The army said the attack targeted a vehicle used to reach a rocket-launch site and loaded with rockets in the Beit Hanun area.

The local head of Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Abu Ghazal, was in the targeted vehicle but managed to escape unharmed, said a spokesman for the group, an offshoot of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah movement.

A 12-year-old boy who was wounded in an air strike on July 6 died of his wounds, bringing to 52 the number of Palestinians killed in the operation, on top of one Israeli soldier who was killed by friendly fire during clashes.

Despite the mounting death toll, defence sources said the government had given the military authority to continue, and if necessary, intensify the offensive, with infantry and armour poised to carry out "in-depth" incursions.

Approval was granted during consultations late on Monday between Olmert and Defence Minister Amir Peretz.

Troops are still massed on the eastern and northern borders of the densely-populated Gaza Strip, as well as stationed east of Gaza City and in the south near a defunct airport.

Olmert was on Tuesday to confer again with military commanders to discuss the offensive, the largest operation since Israel pulled out of Gaza last September.

The prime minister has refused to negotiate with Hamas or free Palestinian prisoners in exchange for 19-year-old Corporal Gilad

But in a separate incident Tuesday, Iraqi diplomat Wissam Jabr, on leave from his post in Iran, was kidnapped in Baghdad, a defence ministry official said.

Armed gangs and insurgent groups are increasingly using kidnapping as a means of raising funds.

Meanwhile, the US military condemned an Internet video posted by al-Qaeda's Iraq branch showing the mutilated bodies of two US soldiers it claims to have killed last month.

"It demonstrates the barbaric and brutal nature of the terrorists and their complete disregard for human life," the military said.

The two soldiers -- Kristian Menchaca and Thomas Tucker -- were taken captive on June 16 near Yusifiyah, south of Baghdad, and their bodies with throats slit were found three days later booby-trapped with explosives in the same vicinity.

al-Qaeda said it was to avenge an Iraqi female allegedly raped and murdered by US soldiers south of Baghdad in March. A former soldier and five other servicemen currently stationed in Iraq have been charged over incident.

Black money

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"The black money holders will not have the opportunity to whiten their money in future if their names come out," he added.

The finance minister said he believes the Tax Ombudsman's Office will not be ineffective like the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

Unlike the ACC, which is led by three people, the tax ombudsman administration is less likely to be affected by internal complexity as it has only one person at its helm, he noted.

Saifur ughed Khairuzzaman to be extra cautious about the taxpayers from small and middle income groups, as they are more vulnerable to harassment.

Talking to the reporters, Khairuzzaman said he has already sent a proposal to the finance ministry regarding recruitment of the officials and infrastructure of his office.

The Tax Ombudsman's Office, to be housed temporarily at Tax Inspection Directorate, will start functioning after the ministry approves the proposal.

When asked how to react if an allegation of irregularity in tax assessment is brought against him, Khairuzzaman, former chairman of National Board of Revenue (NBR), said there is no chance of his being accused as the tax assessment is usually handled by field level staff.

"If allegations of corruption are levelled at me, I will forward those to the ACC for resolution," he said.

Shalit, vowing the assault will continue "in places, in time, in measures" at Israel's convenience.

Khaled Meshaal, the exiled political chief of Hamas, which formed a Palestinian government last March, insists the captured soldier at the heart of the crisis will not be freed without a swap for prisoners jailed in Israel.

"I think that once the Qassam (rocket) shooting will be stopped and the terrorist actions against innocent civilians will be halted altogether, there will be no need for any Israeli action in Gaza," Olmert said.

Aid groups have expressed concern about the difficulties of providing assistance to 1.4 million people living in Gaza following months of financial crisis and the suspension of direct Western aid to the Hamas-led government.

The European Commission announced Tuesday it was sending emergency fuel supplies to Gaza through an international mechanism set up to meet basic Palestinian needs after the West cut direct aid to the Hamas-led government.

The fuel, the first aid to flow through the mechanism, was sent to public hospitals for use in generators after the Israeli airforce last week destroyed electricity transformers at the only power plant in the territory.

Israel has said its troops are likely to be in for the long haul, but denied that the offensive aimed to topple the Hamas-led government, boycotted by the West and whose offices have been directly targeted in the operation.

Hamas's armed wing claims to be holding the soldier, along with two other militant groups, the Popular Resistance Committees and the Army of Islam, since the conscript was abducted during an attack on an army post on June 25.

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi was due to arrive in the region on Tuesday for separate talks with Olmert and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas on a trip he hopes will help calm tensions.