

## 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.

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, followed 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 Mashur 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 Khaiama to speak, prompting the AL lawmakers to protest and demand the president.

Amid the AL lawmakers' protest, the BNP lawmaker blasted AL for labelling 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

news briefing where Suranjit Sen Gupta, Mohammed Nasim and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim said the amendment to the constitution, that the government drafted and passed in the cabinet, does not conform to the ongoing democratic practice.

They will continue to protest the amendment as it is against the fundamentals of the constitution, they said.

The cabinet in its weekly meeting with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair on Monday approved a draft bill to amend the constitution incorporating a provision for extending the time limit for holding by-elections for vacant parliamentary seats to 180 days from 90 days.

Section 4 of article 123 of the constitution provides for holding a by-election in a constituency within 90 days of its becoming vacant due to any reason. However, if it is not possible due to 'any act of God', 90 more days are allowed.

The draft amendment to the constitution (15th amendment), if passed, will be the second amendment to it during the current regime of the BNP-led alliance government.

Referring to the proposed amendment incorporating a provision for not holding by-elections in vacant seats during the last 180 days of parliament, Hasina said a i d such amendment is not required at all as the constitution clearly states that the by-election will have to be held within 90 days if any seat falls vacant.

On termination of army officials, she said no army officials were sacked on political grounds when the AL was in power. "I do not suffer from any political meanness," Hasina added.

She urged people to resist all kinds of conspiracy of the BNP-Jamaat alliance government. She asked the grassroots level AL leaders to work together to ensure victory in the upcoming election.

The leaders urged the AL president to initiate formation of a grand electoral alliance with the Jatiya Party (Ershad) to ensure victory in the northern part of the country.

"We asked the party chief to take initiatives for a grand alliance with the Jatiya Party so that we can win in all constituencies in the northern districts," Mofazzel Hossain, general secretary of Lalmonirhat municipality unit AL, told The Daily Star after the meeting.

He said they also urged Hasina to nominate those who contested in the 2001 election with AL tickets in the three constituencies of Lalmonirhat district.

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## 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 cooperatives ministry and the environment and forest ministry as the two most corrupt institutions.

LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Environment and Forest Minister Tarique 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.

Some passengers who were on the roof and bumper of the bus managed to jump on the ground before the bus was hit.

The police arrested bus-driver Kibakobad at Shantahar, a few kilometres from the spot.

An assistant sub-inspector of police who was passing through the area informed the nearby police station of the accident.

The police and villagers rushed to the spot to rescue the victims but they had to battle hard to pull out the survivors and the dead bodies from the badly damaged bus.

Locals said many indulged in looting valuables of the accident victims.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Railway (BR) in a press release said yesterday the Naogaon-Joypurhat road crossed the railway tracks on the spot of the accident without any permission from the railway authorities and so no gatekeeper is posted at such an unapproved level crossing.

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

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

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