



(L-R, saluting) Indian Defence Minister AK Antony, Chief of Army JJ Singh, Chief of the Naval Staff Arun Prakash and Indian Air Force Chief SP Tyagi salute as they pay homage to Indian soldiers who fought in the 1971 war against Pakistan at the Amar Jawan Jyoti at India Gate in New Delhi yesterday. The Indian army celebrates the Vijay Divas (Victory Day) every year on Dec 16 to mark the victory over Pakistan in the Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971.

India's top scientists oppose US N-deal

AFP, New Delhi

India's top nuclear scientists have repeated their fears that a landmark nuclear deal with the United States will place limitations on the country's weapons programme, the media reported Saturday.

The deal allows the export of nuclear fuel and technology to energy-hungry India for the first time since it first tested a nuclear device in 1974. US President George W. Bush is expected to sign the accord on Monday.

But the scientists said the final version of the bill, which reconciled versions of the legislation approved by the US House of Representatives and Senate, contained clauses that India had previously objected to.

"The act makes it explicit that if

India conducts such tests, the nuclear cooperation will be terminated," the scientists said in a statement published by the Asian Age newspaper.

Three former chairmen of the country's Atomic Energy Commission were among those who signed the statement.

Under the deal announced by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Bush in July 2005, India, a non-signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), agreed to place its civilian-use reactors under global scrutiny.

The agreement includes a set of international safeguards to be approved by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the global nuclear watchdog, and to which India must adhere.

The scientists also raised

objections to other clauses, which require India's participation in US efforts to "dissuade, isolate, and, if necessary, sanction and contain Iran" in its alleged efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

"These stipulations... constitute intrusion into India's independent decision-making and policy matters," the statement said.

The scientists have appealed to the government to convey their concerns to the US administration.

Prime Minister Singh is expected to make a statement on the agreement in parliament on Monday, after which lawmakers will discuss the deal.

The deal still requires the endorsement of the influential 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Chief judge on Saddam panel steps down

AP, Baghdad

The chief investigator on the 10-judge panel that sentenced Saddam Hussein to death said Saturday that he has relinquished that role, allowing another judge to take over the post for the Iraqi High Tribunal.

Raid Juhi said he will remain as a judge and spokesman on the tribunal, which handles the proceedings against the ousted dictator and other former regime members.

Juhi has been a high-profile figure in the trials against Saddam, who was sentenced to death for the killing of 148 Shias in Dujail, north of Baghdad, after a 1982 assassination attempt there against the ousted leader. Two other senior members of Saddam's regime were also sentenced to death in the Nov. 5 ruling by the tribunal.

Juhi said he was replaced during annual elections held by tribunal members because he did not run for re-election to his post as main investigator.

Iraqi PM asks Saddam-era soldiers to join new army

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's embattled prime minister offered an olive branch to former supporters of Saddam Hussein yesterday, calling for them to join the country's new leaders in a national peace process.

At the opening of peace talks, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki urged former soldiers from the ousted dictator's defeated army to join Iraq's new security forces in fighting the armed factions, which are tearing the country apart.

He also urged delegates -- including for the first time representatives of some of Iraq's illegal armed groups -- to review the law, which banned tens of thousands of Saddam's Baath Party activists from working in the civil service.

"The Iraqi army opens its doors to officers and soldiers from the former army who wish to serve the

country," Maliki told hundreds of delegates who braved the chaos on Baghdad's streets to attend the peace conference.

"The national unity government will pay pensions for those who are not reintegrated," added the prime minister, who has presented the broad-based talks as a fresh opportunity to end Iraq's vicious sectarian bloodletting.

Before the conference began, delegates said that, for the first time, the talks would include former members of Saddam's Baath party and representatives of some of the armed groups fighting the US forces in Iraq.

"We draw a distinction between Baathists whose hands are not stained with blood and those who committed the most heinous crimes against Iraqis and still continue to kill innocent people," Maliki said.

"We draw a distinction between

the two, so as not to harm the first group and so that the second does not escape justice," he declared.

"I call upon parliament to review the constitutional items regarding such committees as de-Baathification and the anti-corruption committee to embody the principle of forgiveness," Maliki said.

After the US-led invasion of March 2003, which toppled Saddam's Sunni-led regime, the occupying force dissolved the Iraqi army and oversaw the sacking of tens of thousands of Baathists from government jobs.

The creation of a huge pool of embittered and armed Sunnis fuelled the subsequent rebellion against the new Shia-led government, and filled the ranks of the nationalist and Islamist insurgent groups fighting US forces.

Since February, when Sunnis extremists demolished a revered

Shia shrine in the northern city of Samarra, Iraq has been engulfed in a vicious sectarian war between Sunnis and Shia factions that claims more than 100 lives per day.

Maliki and his US allies hope the national reconciliation conference will encourage some hardline elements to join the political process and isolate those determined to continue campaigns of bombing and mass murder.

Naser al-Ani, spokesman of the conference, admitted not many Baathists had turned up and that some other invitees had also stayed away, a disappointment which he attributed to the dangerous security situation.

"If they boycotted this time, the next time they will see some changes and they will come," he predicted. "We have to talk to those who boycotted and the 1,000-mile road starts with the first mile."

Iran hails elections as message to West

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran hailed nationwide elections to local councils and a powerful clerical body as a success on Saturday and said healthy voter turnout would help the Islamic Republic confront its Western foes.

Friday's vote was the first popularity test for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose anti-Israel rhetoric alarms many in the West, since he took office 16 months ago.

Official results for the twin polls for local councils and the so-called Assembly of Experts are not expected until late on Saturday at the earliest, officials said.

Unofficial opinion polls and partial results cited by some local media suggested voters backed a range of candidates, giving all political groups something to cheer but allowing none to claim outright victory.

Ali Alavi, an official involved in electoral supervision, told the ISNA students news agency that about 26 million people had voted. That would mean a turnout of around 56 percent, well up on previous votes.

British prostitute killer hunt focused on 5 suspects

AFP, Ipswich

Police in Britain hunting a killer dubbed the "Suffolk Strangler" after the deaths of five prostitutes are focusing on five key suspects, media reports said yesterday.

Detectives want to talk to a taxi driver, a businessman and a man with a liking for outdoor sex, all of whom were clients of Tania Nicol, one of the dead working girls, the Sun newspaper reported.

They are increasingly confident that they are closing in on the killer terrorising the sleepy town of Ipswich, in eastern England, after the discovery of five bodies in ten days, according to the Times.

One man, described as "very interesting" by an unnamed senior police source, has come to the fore of the probe, the Times said, adding that sex offenders and people associated with the drugs trade are also being investigated.

The victims have been confirmed as Nicol, 19; Gemma Adams, 25; Anneli Alderton, 24; Paula Cinnell, also 24; and Annette Nicholls, 29.

US must not quit despite 'ugly' combat: Rumsfeld

REUTERS, Washington

"Ours is a world of unstable dictators, weapon proliferators and rogue regimes, and each of these enemies seek out our vulnerability," he said.

"Ours is also a world of many friends and allies, but sadly, realistically, friends and allies with declining defence investment and declining capabilities," he added.

He said that those allies are increasingly vulnerable, requiring the United States to invest more in defence.

Rumsfeld was a star of the Bush administration in the months following the September 11 attacks on the United States. He won praise for a swift campaign to oust Afghanistan's Taliban rulers and his confident televised briefings were popular.

"This man knows how to lead and he did -- and the country is better off for it," Bush declared at Friday's ceremony.

"In every decision Don Rumsfeld made over the past six years, he always put the troops first. And the troops in the field were quoted as saying.

Cheney, a longtime friend and associate of Rumsfeld, went even further. "I believe the record speaks for itself -- Don Rumsfeld is the finest secretary of defence this nation has ever had," he said.

Russia hopes for UN consensus on Iran by year's end

AFP, Moscow/ Vienna

China's opposition to harsh sanctions favoured by Western states.

Lavrov expressed "cautious optimism" about the course of the talks, saying: "We are succeeding in bringing our positions closer, the process continues, though artificial problems are appearing along the way."

Western negotiators are pushing for sanctions after Iran ignored a previous Security Council resolution calling for it to stop enriching uranium, which the West fears may be used for weapons development but which Iran insists is destined for its civilian energy programme.

Meanwhile, Iran is ready to hide its uranium enrichment and continue with the sensitive nuclear work if threatened with military attack, a senior Iranian official said Friday.

"We have a large country, 1 million 600 thousand square kilo-

'Karzai's outbursts strengthen Taliban'

AFP, Islamabad

Afghan phenomenon.

"To hurl blame at each other is really counterproductive and strengthens the hand of the Taliban," Pakistani analyst and retired general Talat Masood told AFP.

"Pakistan and Afghanistan must jointly resolve the threat of Talibanisation."

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have long been bedevilled by mutual mistrust.

Pakistan's shadowy Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency helped the Taliban -- mainly comprising ethnic Pashtuns from either side of their shared frontier -- to rise to power in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001.

Hundreds of militants fled across the mountainous border into Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal zone in late 2001 after US-led forces ousted the Taliban for supporting al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

Windstorm leaves 1m Americans in the dark

AP, Seattle

The worst windstorm in more than a decade tore through the Pacific Northwest, leaving more than a million people without power Friday and killing at least six.

Winds gusted to a record 69 mph about 1 a.m. at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, breaking the old mark of 65 mph set in 1993. Winds were clocked at 90 mph near Westport on the coast.

Power was knocked out at one of the airport's concourses until late Friday morning. Dozens of flights were cancelled, including all American Airlines service through the morning hours. Flights were also cancelled at Portland International Airport in Oregon, and Amtrak cancelled service between Seattle and Portland after downed trees and mudslides blocked the tracks.



An unidentified teenager climbs over a downed tree on Friday in Kirkland, Washington. At least four people died in the windstorm that left nearly one million residents without power.

US legislators in Cuba to jump start dialogue

REUTERS, Havana

The largest delegation from the US Congress to visit Cuba since 1959 arrived in Havana on Friday seeking to open a dialogue with the communist government of acting President Raul Castro despite White House opposition to such contacts.

The stepping aside of ailing Cuban leader Fidel Castro, who has not appeared in public for four months, has set the stage for ending political hostility dating from the start of the Cold War, they said.

"We sense this is an important time and we hope to meet with officials and hopefully launch a new era in US-Cuba relations," said Rep Jeff Flake, an Arizona Republican.

The six Democrats and four Republicans hope to meet with Raul Castro, who took over July 31 after his brother underwent emergency surgery for an undisclosed

illness.

Raul Castro two weeks ago said he was open to negotiations with Washington to settle the longstanding dispute that emerged after the Castros seized power in a 1959 revolution and turned Cuba into a Soviet ally.

The Bush administration, which opposes a "dynastic succession" from one Castro brother to the other, has rejected talks in the absence of democratic reform to Cuba's one-party state.

The State Department opposed the trip, delegation members said. "The bottom line is, we think it is the right thing to do," said Massachusetts Democrat Jim McGovern. "We've long thought our policy toward Cuba has been arrogant and dumb."

The visiting legislators said momentum was gathering in Washington for a new chapter in ties with Cuba and changes in US policy are likely next year under a Democrat-controlled Congress.