

Nuke deal with India at risk, says US

AFP, Hong Kong

A landmark nuclear energy deal between the United States and India is in jeopardy because New Delhi wants key clauses rewritten, a senior US official told the Financial Times daily yesterday.

US State Department officials say India's tough stance is threatening to unravel the agreement, which gives the South Asian state unprecedented access to nuclear fuel without having to sign a non-proliferation treaty.

The business daily, citing the officials, said New Delhi is insisting President George W Bush's administration rewrite key elements of the law approved by Congress last year.

"We are disappointed with the pace and seriousness of the civil nuclear negotiations with India,"

Nicholas Burns, the US under secretary of state, told the newspaper.

"It is time to accelerate our efforts to achieve a final deal."

According to people close to the talks, Indian negotiators are contesting a clause which states that the United States would withdraw civil nuclear fuel supplies and equipment if India breached its unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing, the FT said.

The India-US civilian nuclear energy deal is the centrepiece of India's new relationship with Washington after decades of Cold War tensions and is part of the energy import-dependent nation's bid to increase its fuel sources to sustain its booming economy.

But, according to the report, India is insisting it be given the explicit right to reprocess nuclear

fuel, in contradiction of the US law.

Officials from India's Department of Atomic Energy insist that the country, which is termed "a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology" under the July 2006 deal, must retain the right to test nuclear weapons.

The report said officials in Washington are surprised at India's stance.

"That the US government would go to such lengths to help India out and that India is now in the position of aggrieved party in the talks is extraordinary," Michael Krepon, a public policy expert in Washington, told the newspaper.

"If, as a result, this deal stalls, the next US administration and the one after that will be very reluctant to extend such help to India."

Gunman's video assaults US campus again

AP, Blacksburg

Two days after the worst killing spree in modern US history, the shooter again assaulted Virginia Tech though this time it was in videos and photographs.

In the images, mailed to NBC midway through his rampage, 23-year-old Cho Seung-Hui delivered a snarling, profanity-laced tirade about rich "brats" and their "hedonistic needs."

"You had a hundred billion chances and ways to have avoided today," the 23-year-old says in a harsh monotone. "But you decided to spill my blood. You forced me into a corner and gave me only one option. The decision was yours. Now you have blood on your hands that will never wash off."

NBC said the package contained a rambling and often incoherent 23-page written statement, 28 video clips and 43 photos. Several of the photos showed him

aiming handguns at the camera.

The package arrived at NBC headquarters in New York on Tuesday and was opened Wednesday, two days after Cho killed 32 people and committed suicide. It bore a Postal Service time stamp showing that it had been mailed at a Blacksburg post office at 9:01 a.m. Monday, about an hour and 45 minutes after Cho first opened fire.

"I saw his picture on TV and when I did I just got chills," said Kristy Venning, a junior from Franklin County, Virginia. "There's really no words. It shows he put so much thought into this and I think it's sick."

The package helped explain one of the biggest mysteries about the massacre: where the gunman was and what he did during that two-hour window between the first burst of gunfire, at a high-rise dorm, and the second attack, at a classroom building.

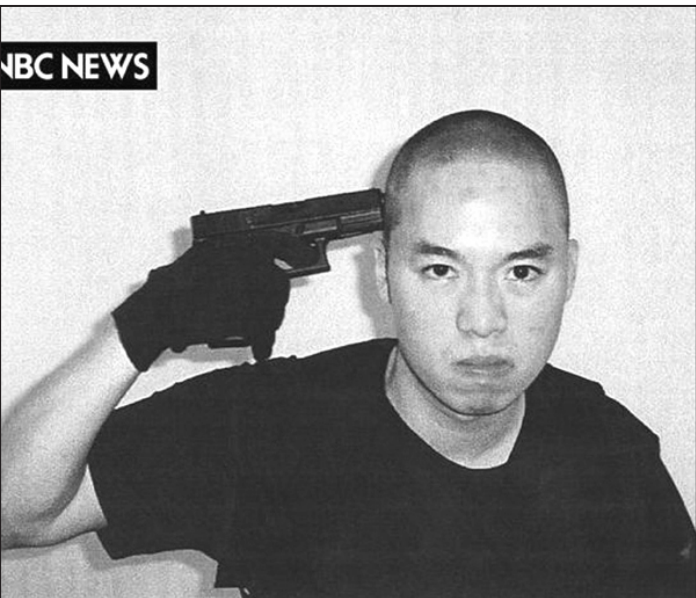


PHOTO: AFP

NBC News image shows a photo of Cho Seung-hui, the alleged shooter in the April 16 massacre at Virginia Tech University. The image was part of a package mailed to the NBC television headquarters in New York by Cho. NBC reported that the postmark on the package indicates that Cho mailed the package in the two hours between the first shootings at a university dormitory and the massacre at Norris Hall. Thirty-two people were killed in the shooting.

Lankan war planes bomb Tiger posts

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan war planes bombed suspected Tamil Tiger gun positions in the island's north for a third straight day yesterday, the defence ministry said.

Two attacks were carried out against the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Jaffna peninsula and at Puthukkudiruppu, the ministry said, adding that they hit Tiger gun positions.

"The air force claims both locations were completely destroyed in the attacks, resulting in heavy damage to the LTTE," the ministry said.

It did not detail what damage was caused. There was no immediate word from the Tigers about the aerial strikes.

More than 4,000 people were killed between December 2005 and the first week of March 2007 across the island, including 675 civilians and 1,040 security personnel, according to defence ministry figures.



PHOTO: AFP

Japanese groom Kosuke Sugiura (L), 29, and his bride Nami, 28, are all smiles during their wedding at a five-metre depth and 25-metre length tubular shaped Aqua Stadium aquarium at Tokyo's Shinagawa Prince Hotel yesterday. Some 30 attendants as well as fish and sharks celebrated the couple of wedding.

Nepali Maoist ministers walk out of cabinet meeting

THE KATHMANDU POST/ ANN, Kathmandu

The cabinet meeting slated for Wednesday morning could not take place as the Maoist ministers in the government left the meeting venue soon after their arrival.

It was learned that the Maoist ministers left the venue due to "differences" between them and other ministers.

All the Maoist ministers had arrived at Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's Baluwatar residence for the meeting, which was scheduled for 9am, but left soon after their arrival.

According to sources, the meeting was disrupted after Minister for Forest Matrika Yadav, who represents CPN-Maoist in the coalition government, walked out of the meeting following a debate on ministerial jurisdiction between him and PM Koirala, who also holds the defence portfolio, regarding the case of Nepal Army men stationed at Shivapuri who were reportedly felling trees and killing animals.

Bhutan to hold practice run of democracy

AFP, Guwahati

The tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is to stage mock polls this weekend as a practice run for its planned transformation from absolute monarchy to democracy, officials said Thursday.

Saturday's exercise is designed to familiarise people in the "Land of the Thunder Dragon" -- which has never had an election -- with how parliamentary democracy actually works.

"Everything is in place for the dummy elections, from electronic voting machines to poll personnel," Bhutan's chief election commissioner, Dasho Kunzang Wangdi, told AFP by telephone from the capital Thimphu.



PHOTO: AFP

Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala gestures (L) after receiving the credential letter from newly appointed Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Zhen Xianglin (R) at Belaiti Baithak in Singhadurbar - central secretariat - in Kathmandu yesterday. This is for the first time in Nepalese history that the premier received credentials from a foreign diplomat. Previously, the king used to receive credentials from foreign diplomats.

Pak, Afghan troops clash over new border fence

AFP, Kabul

Afghan troops tore down a new anti-Taliban fence erected by Pakistani soldiers on the border between the two countries yesterday, sparking a gunbattle, which caused no casualties, officials said.

The clash was the first since Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, a key US ally, announced plans earlier this year to fence 35 kilometres (22 miles) of his country's northwestern frontier

to stop the movement of militants.

The Afghan defence ministry said in a statement that the fighting happened between the Afghan border town of Shkin and Angoor Adda in Pakistan's troubled tribal belt.

The Pakistani military was not immediately available for comment.

"Today at 9:30 am (0500 GMT) the Afghan army moved to the area and removed the fence. Pakistani troops fired on our forces. The

Afghan army returned fire," the defence ministry statement said.

It said that Afghan forces first reached the area on Tuesday, after which Pakistani troops immediately stopped work on the barbed wire fence and pulled back.

"But unfortunately, taking advantage of the darkness of the night, the Pakistani forces again erected fences overnight Wednesday," the statement said.

The ministry said there were no casualties reported.

Civilians increasingly targeted by Taliban Says Amnesty

AFP, London

The Taliban are stepping up their attacks on Afghan civilians as part of their spring offensive against government and Nato-led forces, Amnesty International said yesterday.

According to the London-based human rights group, the Taliban are increasingly targeting women's rights activists, clerics, government and health workers as well as teachers.

"Afghan civilians are bearing the brunt of this conflict," said Claudio Cordone, Amnesty's senior director for research.

"They are caught in the fighting between the Taliban, Afghan government forces, US forces and forces from other Nato countries.

"But it is the Taliban who have a deliberate policy of targeting civilians -- they are killing teachers, abducting aid workers and burning school buildings."

The Taliban regime was ousted by US-led forces in 2001 but the former rulers and their followers have since hit back with a bloody insurgency that has already left around 1,000 people dead this year, most of them rebels.

Amnesty said that the Taliban had burned down at least 183

schools between 2005 and 2006, and noted that its military rulebook "explicitly sanctions targeting and killing civilians."

The group also said that a Taliban Fatwa, or religious edict, called for the death of any person who supported the foreign forces in Afghanistan.

It condemned the militia's use of improvised explosive devices in roadside bombs and suicide attacks, with Cordone saying that by conducting such "indiscriminate attacks," the Taliban were "committing war crimes."

A Taliban spokesperson, interviewed by Amnesty, said that attacks on "unharmd" civilians not considered a threat were "forbidden," but went on to say that "there is no difference between the armed people who are fighting against us and civilians who are co-operating with foreigners."

"All parties to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan must ensure that civilians are protected and all prisoners treated humanely, as required by international law," Cordone said.

"A first step for the Taliban is to stop deliberately targeting civilians and end all indiscriminate attacks."



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani human rights activists march under a banner depicting Burqa clad Islamic seminary students during a protest rally in Islamabad yesterday. Several hundred Pakistani human rights activists and citizens rallied to urge the government to act against extremist forces for promoting violence in the country.

US makes 4-point offer to Russia on missile cooperation

AFP, Brussels

The United States has made a four-plank offer to Russia to help ease its fears about US plans for a missile shield in Europe, a Nato official said yesterday.

The US offered to share early warning data about missile threats, proposed interoperability between US and Russian missile systems, committed to holding joint exercises and suggested ideas for a new partnership, the official said.



PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi mourns over the coffin of a relative outside the morgue of a hospital in Baghdad's impoverished district of Sadr City, early yesterday. The victim was killed Wednesday in a car bomb explosion at Baghdad's al-Sadrriyah neighbourhood.

Dozen more killed in Baghdad

Gates in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates flew into Iraq for talks with US commanders on Thursday after bombers killed more than 200 people in a savage blow to a US-backed security plan.

Embarking on his third visit to Iraq since taking office late last year, Gates arrived in the former rebel stronghold of Fallujah by helicopter on a previously unannounced leg of his latest Middle East tour.

He swept straight into talks with US commanders in the town in the deeply troubled western Sunni Arab province of Al-Anbar, where US forces battle al-Qaeda-linked militants daily.

In Baghdad, one day after the deadliest single car bomb attack on civilians of the four-year-old war, mourners and Iraqi politicians

slammed the US-backed security plan for failing to halt the carnage.

"We have anticipated from the very beginning... that the insurgency and others would increase the violence to make the people of Iraq believe the plan is a failure," Gates said in Israel before flying into Iraq.

"We intend to persist to show that it is not."

Gates's plan hinges on a controversial troop "surge" ordered by US President George W. Bush in a bid to turn around the Iraq war.

But the deployment of 80,000 Iraqi and US troops has failed to stop a torrent of bombings from terrorising the capital's population of five million.

The latest attack saw a suicide car bomber kill 12 people outside a Baghdad take-away shop in the central Jadriyah district -- majority Shia -- and set ablaze a nearby truck loaded with gas cylinders.