

Australia to sell uranium to India

AFP, Sydney

Australia has agreed to sell uranium to India for use in nuclear power plants even though New Delhi has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty on atomic weapons, local media reported yesterday.

A condition of the deal would be that inspectors would be allowed to check the chain of supply of the nuclear fuel to ensure none was siphoned off into weapons programmes, The Australian newspaper said.

The national security committee of the federal cabinet reportedly made the decision late Tuesday but it would not be announced until Prime Minister John Howard had advised his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh.

Australia has the world's largest known reserves of uranium and the move would mark a major change in its policy of refusing to sell the nuclear fuel to countries that have not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Howard's government, a strong supporter of US President George

W Bush's administration, had signalled a break with the policy after New Delhi finalised a landmark civilian nuclear deal with the US last month.

The deal would allow India to buy civilian nuclear technology while possessing nuclear weapons, making it an exception under the NPT.

Bush and Singh discussed the agreement by telephone on Tuesday, the White House said, as officials looked for ways to overcome stiff opposition in the US Congress to the pact, which Bush sees as a key foreign policy victory.

Australia, meanwhile, has been under pressure to sell uranium to India since agreeing last year to supply rival Asian giant China.

India and China already have nuclear weapons but Beijing has signed the NPT while New Delhi has not.

Both countries say they want Australia's uranium simply to fuel nuclear power stations to meet the soaring demand for electricity from their booming economies.

But the main Australian opposition party, which is tipped by opin-

ion polls to oust Howard's government in elections this year, has condemned any deal with India.

The decision to bypass the NPT would send the wrong message to the international community, Labor Party leader Kevin Rudd told reporters.

"It is a very bad development indeed when we have the possibility of the government of Australia stepping outside the non-proliferation treaty, saying it's okay to sell uranium to a country which isn't a signatory to the NPT."

The leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Bob Brown, said the decision would contribute to nuclear tensions between India and Pakistan and the spread of nuclear weapons around the world.

"It will also promote the building of nuclear weapons and rockets by Pakistan and across the border we're giving uranium to China and to Russia," he said.

Pakistan, already a nuclear weapons power, has already indicated that it could also press for Australian uranium if the deal with India goes ahead.

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Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said the fact that India already had nuclear weapons meant there was no risk uranium exports would contribute to nuclear proliferation.

"I think the reverse in fact is the case -- that the more you can get the India civil nuclear programme under UN inspections and under the UN protocols of the International Atomic Energy Agency the better," he told ABC television.

Tk 36cr Japanese grant for portable steel bridges

Under an agreement signed in Dhaka yesterday, Japan will provide Bangladesh with a grant aid worth 611 million yen (approximately Tk 36 crore) for portable steel bridges in rural areas, says a press release.

Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh Masayuki Inoue and Secretary of Economic Relations Division Md Aminul Islam Bhuiyan signed the Exchange of Notes on behalf of their respective governments.

Under the exchange of notes, the Government of Japan will provide the Government of Bangladesh with the grant assistance for a project to provide portable steel bridges which will be installed by the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED).

Under the project, 20 dilapidated bridges will be renovated improving greatly the transportation networks in rural areas of 11 districts.

The LGED will also install portable steel bridges in crucial locations on major rural roads where existing water channels are critically impeding the road traffic of goods and people.

It is expected that this project will greatly improve the rural economies in the country.

At the signing ceremony, Masayuki Inoue said this grant would greatly contribute to improving transportation network in rural areas which is one of the high priorities in reducing poverty in Bangladesh.

Since 1994, the Government of Japan has supplied 296 portable steel bridges to Bangladesh.

Visitors at an exhibition of photographs depicting the life of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Liberation War Museum organised the exhibition that began at its auditorium in the city yesterday.

Strike, celebrations mark India's Independence Day in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

A separatist-led strike yesterday paralysed life in revolt-hit Kashmir on India's Independence Day, police said, as troops deployed against rebel attacks.

The strike, sponsored by the state's separatist political alliance, cleared the streets of the summer capital Srinagar and shut all shops and businesses.

The picture was the same in other Muslim-dominated towns of Kashmir, but life was normal in Jammu, the Hindu-majority winter capital, residents told AFP.

Kashmiri militants and separatists observe India's national celebration as a "black day."

Britain's August 1947 withdrawal from the subcontinent led to the partition of India, the birth of Pakistan and the division of Kashmir between them.

Separatists favour Kashmir's

merger with Pakistan or its independence.

"The strike is to convey to the world that Kashmiris want the right to self-determination," separatist leader Syed Ali Geelani told AFP.

Indian troops patrolled the empty streets of Srinagar, frisking occasional passersby.

"We are on a high state of alert," senior police officer Farooq Ahmed said as thousands of school children, residents and troops took part in celebrations at a tightly guarded football stadium in Srinagar.

Islamic militants opposing New Delhi's rule in Indian Kashmir routinely step up attacks on important Indian holidays.

Kashmir Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad took the parade salute and watched the celebrations that included Bollywood-style song-and-dance routines by nearly 2,500 students from across Kashmir.

In his speech from behind a

Pak tribal chiefs threatened over Kabul talks

AFP, Khar

Pakistani tribal elders have been threatened with reprisals for attending last week's talks in Kabul aimed at ending support for Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants, officials said yesterday.

The landmark tribal council or jirga, involving tribes from both sides of the volatile Afghanistan-Pakistan border, pledged to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries in their respective tribal regions.

But an anonymous letter sent to elders in the Bajaur tribal area threatened unspecified "action" against them for taking part.

"Your participation at the jirga was not a good decision," officials quoted the letter as saying. "Action will be taken against you," it warned.

Local security official Adalat Khan said at least four tribal elders in a remote town in the region had received the warnings.

Road accidents kill 7

STAR REPORT

At least seven people were killed and 30 others injured in separate road accidents in Brahmanbaria and Narayanganj yesterday.

UNB from Brahmanbaria reports: Three people were killed and 30 others injured when a bus plunged into a roadside ditch in Ashuganj upazila on Dhaka-Sylhet highway yesterday.

Quoting witnesses, police said

The Dhaka-bound bus from Sylhet veered off the road at Kamaura bus station after hitting a stationary truck at about 11.45pm, leaving

one dead on the spot.

Two others succumbed to their injuries on the way to Sadar Hospital. The deceased could not be identified immediately.

Eight of the injured were admitted to the hospital.

Narayanganj:

Our correspondent from Narayanganj adds: Four people were killed in two separate road

accidents at Fatullah and Rupganj.

They were identified as Abdur Rab, 45, his wife Selina Akter, 30, Abdur Kuddus, 32, a rickshawpuller, and Mosammam Banu, 45.

Abdur Rab and his wife were run over by a passenger bus at Aliganj bus stoppage while they were returning from their relative's house at Postogola in a rickshaw at around 10.00pm on Tuesday.

They died on the spot while Kuddus died on the way to hospital.

Relatives of the deceased and local people ransacked several passenger buses before police brought the situation under control.

Mosammam Banu was knocked down by a passenger bus near Akhabur Harvest factory on Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Rupganj at around 8.00am yesterday.

The bodies of the four were sent to Narayanganj General Hospital Morgue.



Cultural personality Ramendu Majumder distributes relief on behalf of Sammilita Sangskritik Jote among the flood-affected people in Daser Kandi area in Demra yesterday.



Members of Dhanmondi Ladies Club distributes relief among the flood-affected people at Khalapara in Demra on August 13.

Relief distribution continues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More organisations yesterday donated to government's relief fund and distributed relief materials to flood-hit people across the country.

Dhaka Club Limited donated Tk 10 lakh to the relief fund of the chief adviser, while MetroNet Bangladesh Limited donated one-day salary of its employees to Sirajganj District Commissioner for flood victims.

The CPD also distributed relief materials at Sirajganj sadar upazila, Manikganj upazila and Alengon in Tangail.

As it did in 2004, the CPD is also observing the flood situation in the country and has already organised a meeting of the experts and sent the recommendations to the government.

Meanwhile, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Students Union, Sangskritik Union, Sammilita Sangskritik Jote, Bangladesher Samajtantrik

Dal, Charon Sangskritik Kendra, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Bangladesh Scouts Dhaka Metropolitan, Bangladesh Chhatra League, Bangladesh Juba Mahila League, Ganasanghati Andolon and Dhanmondi Ladies Club also continued their relief operations at different places across the country.

Besides, Bonya Tran Nagorik Samanay Committee, Consumers' Association of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Bangladesh Private Medical Practitioners Association and Sylhet Division Development Action Council and Aligarh Old Boys' Association of Bangladesh also distributed dry food, saline, water purification tablets and other relief materials.

LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal distributed cooked food among the 1600 flood-hit people who have taken shelters at different schools in the city.



Commuters holding umbrellas wait in a queue for buses at South Basabo as the city experienced intermittent rain yesterday.