

US won't rework nuke deal with India

Indian communists warn against N-accord

AFP, New Delhi

A top US official has said a controversial nuclear pact with New Delhi cannot be renegotiated amid demands from Indian critics for a radical reworking of the deal.

"We cannot renegotiate it because the agreement is done. Neither government wishes it to be renegotiated because it is now complete," US under secretary of State Nicholas Burns told Outlook magazine in an interview published on the weekend.

The agreement will allow New Delhi to buy atomic fuel, technology and plants even though it is not party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but critics say it will limit India's strategic options.

The agreement -- reached last month after nearly two years of negotiations -- has drawn heavy and widespread criticism from opposition parties and the government's communist allies.

The Indian government's communist allies warned on Saturday of "serious consequences" if the country went ahead with a historic nuclear deal with the United States. "Don't take the next step in the deal," Communist Party of India-

Marxist (CPM) General Secretary Prakash Karat told reporters in the Indian capital.

"The government should not proceed further till all doubts and apprehensions are evaluated," he said.

The stance widens a political chasm between the four leftist groups, which prop up the multi-party government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in parliament from the outside.

Burns declined to comment on criticism by the communists, whose support is crucial to the survival of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Congress-led coalition government in parliament.

"So I don't have any particular message for them except to say that in the 21st century we have seen the global balance of forces is shifting," said Burns, the chief US negotiator of the deal.

"That it is in the common interest of India and the US to be partners, certainly on the effort to bring peace and stability in South and East Asia," said Burns.

The Indian government came under mounting criticism after a US State Department spokesman said this week that the accord had provisions allowing Washington to termi-

nate the agreement if India tested atomic weapons.

Singh and Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee have said that the negotiation will not hinder the country's nuclear testing options.

The communists -- who are attending a two-day meeting in the national capital to work out their strategy in parliament on the issue -- say the agreement would also lead to US interference in India's foreign policy.

But Burns dismissed the suggestion.

"No one is trying to challenge India's sovereignty as a country to make its own decisions," Burns said.

Tensions between the government and its allies mounted last week after Singh told the Communists the deal would not be renegotiated and dared them to withdraw support for the ruling Congress coalition.

In an interview published over the weekend, Singh also hit out at the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over its opposition on the issue.

Flooding traps 181 Chinese miners

AP, Beijing

Floodwaters from heavy rains poured into two coalmines in a town in eastern China, leaving 181 miners trapped and feared dead, government officials and state media said yesterday.

There was no word on whether there was any sign of life in the mines or when rescuers might enter them. Two high-speed pumps reportedly were being rushed in to drain the flooded shafts.

A dike on the Wen river in Shandong province broke Friday afternoon, sending water gushing into a mine run by the Huayuan Mining Co. in the city of Xintai and trapping 172 miners, the Xinhua News Agency reported.

Work areas were submerged and the miners "had only slim chances of survival," Xinhua said, citing Wang Ziqi, director of Shandong's coalmine safety agency. There was no indication whether rescuers had any sign the miners were alive.

Friday night, nine more miners were trapped when floodwaters poured into Xintai's Minggong Coal Mine, Xinhua and China National Radio reported.

A mine employee reached by phone said the water came from a small river nearby, not the Wen dike break. He would give only his surname, Pan, and said he had no details on the status of rescue efforts.



A local resident and his son wait for help to salvage at least some of their belongings from their home, toppled by a strong earthquake two days ago in the Tambo de Mora harbour sector of Chincha, 250km south from Lima. Powerful aftershocks rattled rescuers as they clawed through rubble Friday in a desperate search for survivors after a massive earthquake claimed some 500 lives in Peru.

PHOTO: AFP



Unidentified men stand by the hijacked Turkish airplane Atlas Jet during the surrender of its two hijackers at Antalya's airport yesterday. The two men who hijacked a Turkish airplane and forced it to land in southern Turkey on Saturday have surrendered, a Turkish official said.

PHOTO: AFP

Talks to free S Korean hostages have failed

Say Taliban

AFP, Ghazni

Taliban militants yesterday were deciding the fate of 19 South Korean hostages in Afghanistan after talks for their release failed, a spokesman for the militia said.

"The negotiations have failed. The Taliban leading council is making its decision now on the fate of the hostages," Yousuf Ahmadi told AFP.

Face-to-face talks between Taliban negotiators and a South Korean delegation in Ghazni, the capital of Ghazni province where the 23 Christian aid workers were abducted nearly a month ago, ended Thursday with no result, he said.

More talks did not seem "probable," he said, as Taliban demands for the release of some of their men from prison in exchange for the hostages' liberty had not been met by the Afghan government.

"Further talks will not achieve anything, the Koreans told us that the Americans and the Afghan government are not ready to release our prisoners," he said.

The Taliban freed two women hostages on Monday in what they said was a "gesture of good will". The two were the first to be released since the South Koreans were seized on July 19 on the main highway south of the capital Kabul.

Two of the men in the group have been murdered, and the Taliban have threatened to shoot more if their demands are not met.

Ahmadi said his group would resume talks only if the South Korean delegation and the Afghan government were ready to discuss a prisoner swap.

"We will still negotiate with them if they are ready to discuss the release of prisoners," said Ahmadi.

The US-backed government of President Hamid Karzai was heavily criticised, notably by Washington, after it freed five Taliban in March in exchange for an Italian journalist.

The Taliban had beheaded the journalist's Afghan driver and a translator, giving rise to accusations that Kabul placed higher value on the lives of foreign nationals than Afghans.

It prompted Karzai to say no more deals would be done, and officials have said agreeing to the extremists' demands would encourage abductions by the Taliban and criminal groups alike.

The two freed female hostages arrived home in South Korea Friday after learning upon their release of the murders of their fellow captives.

Peru quake survivors loot market

AP, Pisco

Hungry earthquake survivors ransacked a public market Friday, while other mobs looted a refrigerated trailer and blocked aid trucks, prompting Peru's president to appeal for calm. Aid finally arrived to the disaster zone after about 36 hours without much help.

Few buildings still stood in the fishing city of Pisco Friday in the wake of a magnitude-8 earthquake that killed 510 people. Many of the structures not reduced to rubble were rickety deathtraps waiting to fall.

President Alan Garcia, on the scene for the second straight day, vowed that no one would die of hunger or thirst.

"I understand your desperation, your anxiety," he said. "There is no reason to fall into exaggerated desperation."

Garcia predicted "a situation approaching normality" in 10 days, but acknowledged that reconstruction would take far longer.

Two sunrises after the earth-

quake all but levelled this city of 90,000 people on Peru's desert southern coast, workers continued to pull bodies from rubble, the region lacked water and electricity, and officials began to worry about the outbreak of disease.

The death count stood at 510, according to Peru's fire department, and hopes of finding more survivors diminished. At least 1,500 people suffered injuries and Garcia said 80,000 people had lost loved ones, homes or both.

Brig Maj Jorge Vera, chief of the rescue operation, said 85 percent of Pisco's downtown was rubble.

The relief effort was finally getting organised. Police identified bodies and civil defence teams ferried in food. Housing officials assessed the need for new homes, and in several towns long lines formed under an intense sun to collect water from soldiers.

In the capital of Lima, Peruvians donated tons of supplies as food, water, tents and blankets began arriving in the quake zone.

Musharraf promises fair Pak election

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf yesterday pledged that presidential and general elections would be "free and fair" and held in accordance with the country's laws, state media reported.

Presidential elections will be held between September 15 to October 15, while general elections are due late this year or in early 2008.

"The presidential election will be held in accordance with the law and the constitution," the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan quoted Musharraf as telling MPs and mayors in the town of Bahawalpur in Punjab province.

"Both general and presidential elections will be held in a free and fair manner," said the country's military ruler, who seized power in a bloodless coup in 1999.

Opposition parties say that

under Pakistan's constitution, a military general cannot stand in presidential or general elections.

Critics say his decision to suspend the country's chief justice in March -- later overturned by the Supreme Court -- was a naked bid to remove any constitutional obstacles to remaining "president in uniform".

The embattled president is facing the deepest crisis of his rule, with a wave of Islamist violence sweeping the country amid US accusations that Pakistan's border areas have become a safe haven for Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Musharraf last week flirted with declaring emergency rule to cope with a wave of popular anger over his eight-year rule.

Indian PM says opposition prayed for his death

AFP, New Delhi

India's embattled Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, under fire over a civilian nuclear deal with Washington, says the opposition performed religious rituals for his demise.

Singh told India Today weekly news magazine in comments published on the weekend that he was disappointed with the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over its reaction to the deal.

"They didn't even believe that I would last the prime minister and some leaders even did havans (Hindu rituals) that I should die on a certain day," Singh told the magazine.

"It (the agreement) requires a big leap in approach and the attitude of BJP is disappointing." Singh gave the interview in June with the understanding that it would be published only after the Indo-US agreement was reached.

16 soldiers, dozens of extremists killed in Philippine clashes

AFP, Zamboanga

Sixteen troops and dozens of Muslim extremists were killed Saturday in clashes between government forces and al-Qaeda-linked rebels on the southern island of Basilan, the military said.

Nine soldiers were also wounded in the fighting that broke out in the jungle when Marines launched an attack on a rebel camp, said military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Bartolome Bacarro.

Bacarro said that the Muslim extremist Abu Sayyaf suffered about 30 wounded or dead but a military official in Basilan said as many as 42 members of the extremist group had been killed.

An airforce MG-520 helicopter gunship, which was sent to back up the troops, crashed in the waters off Basilan, killing the pilot but the co-pilot was rescued by a navy boat, air force chief Lieutenant General Horacio Tolentino said.

Tolentino said the helicopter crashed after suffering from unexplained vibrations but asserted that "it was not fired upon."

"It was not hit," by enemy fire, he said. Earlier, a military source said the helicopter went down after the pilot was shot by the Abu Sayyaf.

Details of Saturday's clashes remained sketchy because of a media blackout imposed by the military on Basilan, but sources said the gunbattle on the outskirts of the town of Unkaya Pukan turned into close-quarters combat.

"The enemy suffered a lot of casualties. We are still trying to get the exact number but their casualties are heavy," regional military spokesman Major Eugene Batara said.

"The offensive is continuing," he told reporters in Zamboanga City.



Afghan bystanders look at the wreckage of a damaged car near the site of a suicide bomb attack in Kandahar yesterday. A suicide attack on a US convoy in southern Afghanistan has killed 15 people, including 11 civilians, and wounded another 26.

PHOTO: AFP

N Korea postpones summit over floods

Now summit to be held in Oct

AP, Seoul

North and South Korea agreed yesterday to postpone the second-ever summit between leaders on the divided peninsula to early October due to recent floods that devastated the impoverished communist North.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Il had been set to host South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun in Pyongyang for the first summit between the countries in seven years from Aug. 28-30. The event has now been rescheduled for Oct 2-4, both Koreas said.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said Pyongyang "unavoidably" made the delay request because the country has to focus on coping with the aftermath of the recent flooding.

"Torrential rain hit most of its areas every day, causing great

damage, and this made it top priority to recover from the flood damage and make the living of the people in the afflicted areas return to normal," KCNA said.

The South's presidential office said the North reaffirmed in a message that it remained committed to holding a summit. Spokesman Chun Ho-seon told reporters that he does not believe there are any other motivations behind Pyongyang's decision to postpone the summit.

The North has said a week of storms destroyed 11 percent of its staple rice and corn fields. The U.N. warned the severe floods will worsen North Korea's food situation, and an aid group said the numbers of dead and missing from floods has risen to more than 300.

On Friday, South Korea offered the North a \$7.5 million emergency aid package.

Census won't deter US immigration raids

AP, Washington

Immigration officials sharpened their message a day after being coy about whether they would agree to halt enforcement raids during the 2010 census.

"We won't entertain any request to scale back our efforts," Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokesman Kelly Nantel said Friday.

Census officials had planned to speak with immigration agents about curbing enforcement during the population count, the Census Bureau's second-ranking official said in an interview earlier this week.

Raids during the population count would make an already distrustful group even less likely to cooperate with government workers who are supposed to include

them in the headcount, Deputy Director Preston Jay Waite had said.

When asked Thursday if the immigration enforcement agency would consider suspending raids during the census, spokeswoman Pat Reilly said, "If we were, we wouldn't talk about it."

"We're an investigative agency," she added. "We don't talk about how we target our enforcement activities."

The Constitution requires the Census Bureau to count everyone, including illegal immigrants, in the census.

Immigration agents informally agreed to cooperate with the Census Bureau during the 2000 census by not conducting any large-scale raids, said Waite and Kenneth Prewitt, who directed the

Census Bureau during the 2000 count.

Public discussion about possibly repeating the policy in 2010 knocked the Bush administration off message a week after two members of the president's Cabinet announced stepped-up efforts to enforce the nation's immigration laws.

Nantel said she wanted to clarify the enforcement agency's position.

"I don't want there to be any question in the American people's mind as to whether or not ICE would suspend enforcement efforts," Nantel said. "The answer to that is emphatically no."

PHOTO: AFP

PHOTO: AFP