

Left refuses to budge on nuke deal with US

UPA's fall imminent, says Sharad Yadav

PTI, New Delhi/Bangalore

The CPI(M) yesterday struck to its stand that the government should keep the Indo-US nuclear cooperation agreement on hold till its objections are "properly evaluated".

After a meeting with External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury made it clear that there was no change in the stand of the Left parties and the situation was as it is.

"The situation is where it is. We have not heard anything about the Committee (to go into the Hyde Act and its implications on the 123 agreement)", Yechury said after meeting Mukherjee, who is playing the role of a trouble shooter.

The CPI(M) leader said that the Left parties told the government to keep the whole thing on hold till their objections were "properly evaluated".

Yechury's meeting with Mukherjee assumes significance as the Left parties are meeting this evening to study the response of the

government on their ultimatum regarding the nuclear deal.

The CPI(M) leader's statement appears to show that there was no immediate end in sight to the stand-off between the Left parties and the government despite the UPA's declaration that it would address their "legitimate concerns".

Trying to fish in troubled waters, the Third Front on Monday supported the Left parties on their opposition to the nuclear deal with the US and sought Parliamentary approval for it.

"We are in touch with the Left parties. They have said that sense of the House should be taken on the deal. This is the best way for that," Samajwadi Party General Secretary Amar Singh told reporters here. He was flanked by TDP's Yerran Naidu and AIADMK's V Maitrayan.

Branding the Indo-US nuclear deal as a "slave treaty" and a "unilateral" decision taken by the Government, the UNPA demanded the setting up of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to

look into the matter.

"The Government has said that the treaty has been ratified by the Cabinet, which is a handful of people picked up by the Prime Minister, but since in a democracy like India, Parliament is supreme, the deal should be ratified by both the houses," Singh said.

Meanwhile, JDU President Sharad Yadav said on Monday the fall of the UPA government was imminent unless Prime Minister Manmohan Singh decides to withdraw the controversial Indo-US nuclear deal.

Speaking to reporters here, Yadav said his party was not in favour of the deal and would continue to oppose it along with other parties at the centre.

"The deal is against India's interests," as it was in violation of the non-alignment policy followed by India for the past 60 years, Yadav said.

21 Iranian hostages freed in Pakistan

AFP, Tehran

Pakistani troops yesterday in a pre-dawn raid freed 21 people who were kidnapped by militants in southeastern Iran and then whisked over the border, security officials said.

Troops freed the 21 hostages, all Iranians, who were captured on Sunday in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province in a town close to the border, and arrested their captors.

They had earlier been confused over the number of hostages kidnapped, but police officials on both sides of the border confirmed that 21 people had been abducted.

German rescued, talks for Koreans stalled

AFP, Kabul

Afghan police rescued a female German aid worker in a dramatic pre-dawn swoop yesterday but efforts to free 19 South Koreans and another German held captive for over a month remain deadlocked, officials said.

The interior ministry, which handles police matters said a criminal gang motivated by money was behind the weekend kidnapping of Christina Meier in the Afghan capital Kabul.

"The motive behind the kidnapping was mainly ransom. They had demanded a big sum – about a million dollars," ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashayr told reporters.

"Initial investigations indicate that this group is a criminal gang and

their main aim on this issue was to get money."

The rescue overseen by senior security officials including Interior Minister Zarar Ahmad Muqbel was made after police surrounded the house in southwest Kabul where Meier was being held, officials said.

Police colonel Ghulam Rasoul, who took part in the operation, told AFP that six kidnappers were arrested, but Bashayr said only four including the gang leader were in custody and being questioned.

"We located the house where she was kept. We surrounded the house and called on the kidnappers to surrender to police. They came out one by one and surrendered and then we freed the hostage. She's fine," Rasoul said.

Last month, the Tigers carried out a similar attack in the same area that killed four people.

Five killed in Lanka rebel attack

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels opened fire on a police bunker in northern Sri Lanka yesterday, killing five people including three female paratroopers, a military official said.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked a bunker in the district of Vavuniya, where one soldier was killed on Sunday in a rebel mortar bomb attack, the official said.

"Four guards were killed and three of them were women," he said. "A civilian bus driver was also killed in the Tiger firing."

Last month, the Tigers carried out a similar attack in the same area that killed four people.



PHOTO: AFP

This TV grab from Japan's NHK shows an aircraft from Taiwan's China Airlines after it burst into flames at Naha airport, on the southern island of Okinawa yesterday. Giant flames and plumes of black smoke engulfed the Boeing 737 after it landed at the airport from Taipei but all passengers and crew made a dramatic escape.

Taiwan jet explodes into fireball in Japan

AP, Tokyo

The hardline Taliban are active in Sangin, a poppy-cultivating region reclaimed by the government early this year.

Almost six years after being overthrown from power in a US-led military offensive, the Taliban are waging an insurgency of attacks, suicide bombings and Iraqi-style kidnappings.

The insurgency which is being resisted by Afghan security forces and a 50,000-strong international force has intensified in the past two years.

Thousands of people, mainly rebels, have died.

The focus of the al-Qaeda-linked Taliban unrest is on mountainous regions across southern and eastern Afghanistan near the long border with Pakistan.

Tamura said.

Accounts of injuries were unclear. Tamura said one crew member had been hurt, but local fire official Hiroki Shimabukuro said two passengers a 7-year-old girl and a man in his 50s had been hospitalised because they didn't feel well, not because of specific injuries.

National broadcaster NHK showed footage of a squad of firefighters dousing the empty plane with extinguishers as flames and clouds of black smoke billowed from the fuselage. The fire was put out about an hour later, leaving the aircraft charred and mangled.

Several passengers interviewed by NHK said they were suddenly told to use the emergency slides to evacuate as they were preparing to get off the plane after what seemed like an ordinary landing. Some said they saw smoke and flames entering the cabin.

Artificial life likely in 3 to 10 years!

AP, Washington

Around the world, a handful of scientists are trying to create life from scratch and they're getting closer.

Experts expect an announcement within three to 10 years from someone in the now little-known field of "wet artificial life."

"It's going to be a big deal and everybody's going to know about it," said Mark Bedau, chief operating officer of ProtoLife of Venice, Italy, one of those in the race. "We're talking about a technology that could change our world in pretty fundamental ways in fact, in ways that are impossible to predict."

That first cell of synthetic life made from the basic chemicals in DNA may not seem like much to non-scientists. For one thing, you'll have to look in a microscope to see it.

"Creating protocells has the potential to shed new light on our place in the universe," Bedau said. "This will remove one of the few fundamental mysteries about creation in the universe and our

role."

And several scientists believe man-made life forms will one day offer the potential for solving a variety of problems, from fighting diseases to locking up greenhouse gases to eating toxic waste.

Bedau figures there are three major hurdles to creating synthetic life.

A container, or membrane, for the cell to keep bad molecules out, allow good ones, and the ability to multiply.

A genetic system that controls the functions of the cell, enabling it to reproduce and mutate in response to environmental changes.

A metabolism that extracts raw materials from the environment as food and then changes it into energy.

One of the leaders in the field, Jack Szostak at Harvard Medical School, predicts that within the next six months, scientists will report evidence that the first step creating a cell membrane is "not a big problem." Scientists are using fatty acids in that effort.

PHOTO: AP

This undated photo provided by ProtoLife Srl of Venice, Italy, shows vesicles, artificial membranes for cells, made from scratch. Teams around the world, including ProtoLife, are trying to create synthetic life from scratch, and the first step many of them are working on is making a container for the life form such as these vesicles. The large cell container (with little ones inside of it), shown in computer-created colouring, is about the thickness of a human hair.

Hurricane Dean batters Jamaica, surges towards Mexico

AFP, AP, Kingston

Hurricane Dean rampaged towards the tourist beaches of Mexico on Monday, after battering Jamaica into a state of emergency by downing power lines, ripping off roofs and blocking roads with felled trees.

The category four hurricane, packing winds of 150 miles (240km) per hour which have so far killed at least eight people across the Caribbean basin, whipped up giant surf as it headed south of the Cayman Islands for Belize and Mexico's Yucatan peninsula.

Roads were blocked by fallen trees and flooded in the eastern parts of Jamaica, with power cuts affecting thousands of homes.

Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller announced late Sunday that security forces would be granted wider powers after police reported looting across the island.

The state of emergency will be reviewed at a meeting of the Jamaican cabinet later on Monday, but was envisaged for a period of 30 days, and Miller even indicated that national elections on August 27 may be delayed due to Dean.

"The sea has dumped debris onto the roads," Portia said.



PHOTO: AFP

Congress Party President and Chairperson of United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Sonia Gandhi (R), her son Rahul Gandhi (L) and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (C) attend a memorial ceremony for former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, on the 63rd anniversary of his birth in New Delhi yesterday.