

# 'Delhi must not miss nuclear energy bus'

## Manmohan dismisses fear of dependence on 'one country'

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Locked in a showdown with his Left allies on a landmark nuclear deal with the United States, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday said India's cooperation with the world in atomic energy field would not be dependent on any one country and strongly advocated the need to push ahead with the deal for energy security of the country.

Speaking after dedicating to the nation two units of an atomic power plant near Mumbai, Manmohan said India's proven reserves of oil, gas, coal and hydro power were insufficient to meet the country's growing energy requirement of a fast-growing economy and nuclear power is recognised as an "important and environmental benign constituent of the overall energy mix".

He said India "needs to benefit from nuclear commerce without restrictions as we need to enable our industries to gain access to cutting edge technology and create opportunities for our scientists and technologists to participate in international exchange of scientific and technological know-how".

Pointing out that India has set a modest target of 20,000 MW of nuclear power generation by the year 2020, the prime minister said this can be doubled with the opening up of international cooperation in nuclear field.

"This cooperation will not be dependent on any one country and we will source supplies (of nuclear material) from many of the countries in the Nuclear Suppliers Group including the United States, Russia, France and Japan," he said.

However, India's international cooperation with these and other countries cannot become effective until the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) adopts its guidelines to enable nuclear commerce with India, Manmohan said.

The NSG itself has made it clear that they will not do so till the India-specific Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA is finalised, he said adding once these and other "steps" are taken, "India" can commence civil nuclear cooperation with all the 45 members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

"This will signal the end of our

## Taliban

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from going there. But this was nothing new, raising questions as to whether there was another backroom deal.

A Japanese newspaper reported Friday that South Korea paid two million dollars to the hardliners after Afghan mediators had said a ransom was the only way out.

Taliban and Afghan officials have denied a ransom was involved.

In Seoul the end of the hostage drama that has gripped a nation for six weeks brought a flood of relief.

"Thank God. They are all freed now," said Je Mi-Sook after her brother Je Chang-Hee was released. "My mother is just sobbing, she can't say anything."

But the way the hostage crisis was resolved has also attracted criticism.

Afghan Foreign Minister Rangeen Dadfar Spanta said people might think South Korea had handled the hardline Islamic militia a propagandist victory.

He told Germany's RBB radio that Seoul had informed Afghan authorities months ago that it planned to withdraw its soldiers.

"But if the impression is created now that the international community and the Afghan government allow themselves to be blackmailed, then this sends a very dangerous message," he said.

German politicians also criticised South Korea's handling of the crisis, with Chancellor Angela Merkel indicating Berlin would stand firm in its refusal to negotiate with the militia over a German engineer captured more than six weeks ago.

"But if the impression is created now that the international community and the Afghan government allow themselves to be blackmailed, then this sends a very dangerous message," he said.

Canadian Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier said such negotiations "only lead to further acts of terrorism."

In Kabul, a spokesman for President Hamid Karzai said the government only directly with the Taliban because the lives of the 19 were at risk.

"If the question of people's life is concerned, we allow this to happen under strict conditions..." spokesman Homayun Hamidzada told AFP.

"There is no victory for the Taliban," he added.

## BNP plans

FROM PAGE 1

Khaleda Zia in a message yesterday greeted leaders, workers as well as people of all walks of life on the occasion.

She urged all leaders and workers to remain united in respect for Zia.

"We will carry out our duties for the well-being of the country and the people," said the former prime minister calling on the partymen to stand by the flood victims.

Meanwhile, leader of the pro-reform camp and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday paid homage to Ziaur Rahman and the party faithful who died since its formation in 1979.

Talking to reporters at his Gulshan residence, he asked the BNP units across the country to observe the anniversary in consultation with the local administration.

**KHALEDA'S TELECONFERENCE**

According to New York based agency News World, Khaleda Zia in a teleconference with leaders of the BNP US chapter Thursday said Tarique Rahman cannot indulge in corruption as a son of late president Zia.

"Nobody can prove the allegations against Tarique and he is in jail due to a political propaganda campaign against him," she claimed, saying that her elder son is the one who had initiated reforms in the country.

Terming him a "reflection of Ziaur Rahman", the former premier said those who love Zia should wage a movement to get Tarique free.

## Ex-Biman men

FROM PAGE 1

about the new airline."

"Most of the retired 1,877 staffs have given verbal consent to joining the initiative to run a new airline," a member of the organising committee said.

"The seven-member sub-committee has started its ground-work," said Zahirul Haque, member secretary of the 25-member organising committee and also a member of the sub-committee.

"After receiving consent letters from the retired staffs, we will get the idea about how much money we can collect from them for the new airline," Captain Nasimul Haque earlier told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, dozens of Islamic

minimills attacked a military checkpoint in northwestern Pakistan before dawn Friday, killing at least two soldiers and wounding six others, police said.

The attack happened in Gul Bagh, a village in the Swat valley, about 150 miles northeast of Peshawar, the capital of North West Frontier Province, said Mohammed Hafeez, the region's police chief.

Tribal elders have intervened at the request of Pakistani authorities to try to free the soldiers, the security officials said. "This misunderstanding has been removed," the official told The Associated Press. "The missing soldiers have been traced and they are safe, and would return to their bases soon."

A pro-Taliban militant leader whose men seized the soldiers claimed far more troops were involved than authorities had reported.

"About 300 soldiers were present in our areas. We captured them, snatched their weapons and later shifted them to different places," the militant said in a telephone call to the AP.

The militant, who refused to give his name and spoke from an undisclosed location by mobile phone, confirmed that elders had reached out. "We have taken no decision to free the soldiers," said the militant, whose voice was recognized by an AP reporter.

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