

India coalition in shake-up over US nuclear deal

Left gives July 7 deadline to Manmohan govt

AFP, INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

India's coalition government was undergoing a major shake-up yesterday with the dominant Congress party pushing on with a controversial nuclear deal with the US and ditching left-wing allies.

A four-party bloc of Communist and leftist parties met Friday to discuss what politicians described as the "modalities" of a divorce from the Congress-led government because of the pact.

The Left parties on Friday asked the government to make it clear by July 7 if it was seeking the approval of the IAEA's board of governors for the India-specific safeguards agreement to take forward the India-US nuclear deal.

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and its three allies made the demand in a joint letter to External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, the convenor of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-Left nuclear panel.

The Congress party, however,

was working to avoid being forced into early elections and getting the atomic deal through by negotiating a new alliance with the socialist and regional Samajwadi Party (SP).

SP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi separately to finalise their agreement, officials said.

After talks with PM Singh, Yadav told reporters that "national interest is more important than politics" -- seen as a sign that a deal to reshape India's ruling alliance was close.

Later, senior Congress leader Veerappa Moily told NDTV news channel: "We have the numbers now. Their (Samajwadi Party's) help has been very timely."

The nuclear deal -- agreed in principle in 2005 -- would allow India to buy atomic power plants and technology despite not having signed international non-proliferation pacts.

Prime Minister Singh argues the pact is crucial for India's energy security.

Singh is lined up to meet US President George W. Bush on the sidelines of the G8 meeting in Japan next week, taken as another sign that Congress was blazing ahead with implementing the pact the two leaders agreed to in 2006.

Tensions between Singh and the communists have been running high for months, with the left-wing threatening to pull the plug on the coalition and force elections earlier than May 2009 as scheduled.

India's left say the deal undermines the country's traditional status as a beacon of the non-aligned movement, and that allowing UN inspections of the civil nuclear programme -- as demanded by the Americans -- would harm the strategic weapons programme.

After their meeting Friday, India's top Marxist leader Prakash Karat set Monday as a deadline for the government to clearly declare whether it was proceeding with the deal.

"We wish to know... whether the government is proceeding to seek

the approval for the safeguards agreement by the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency)," Karatsaid.

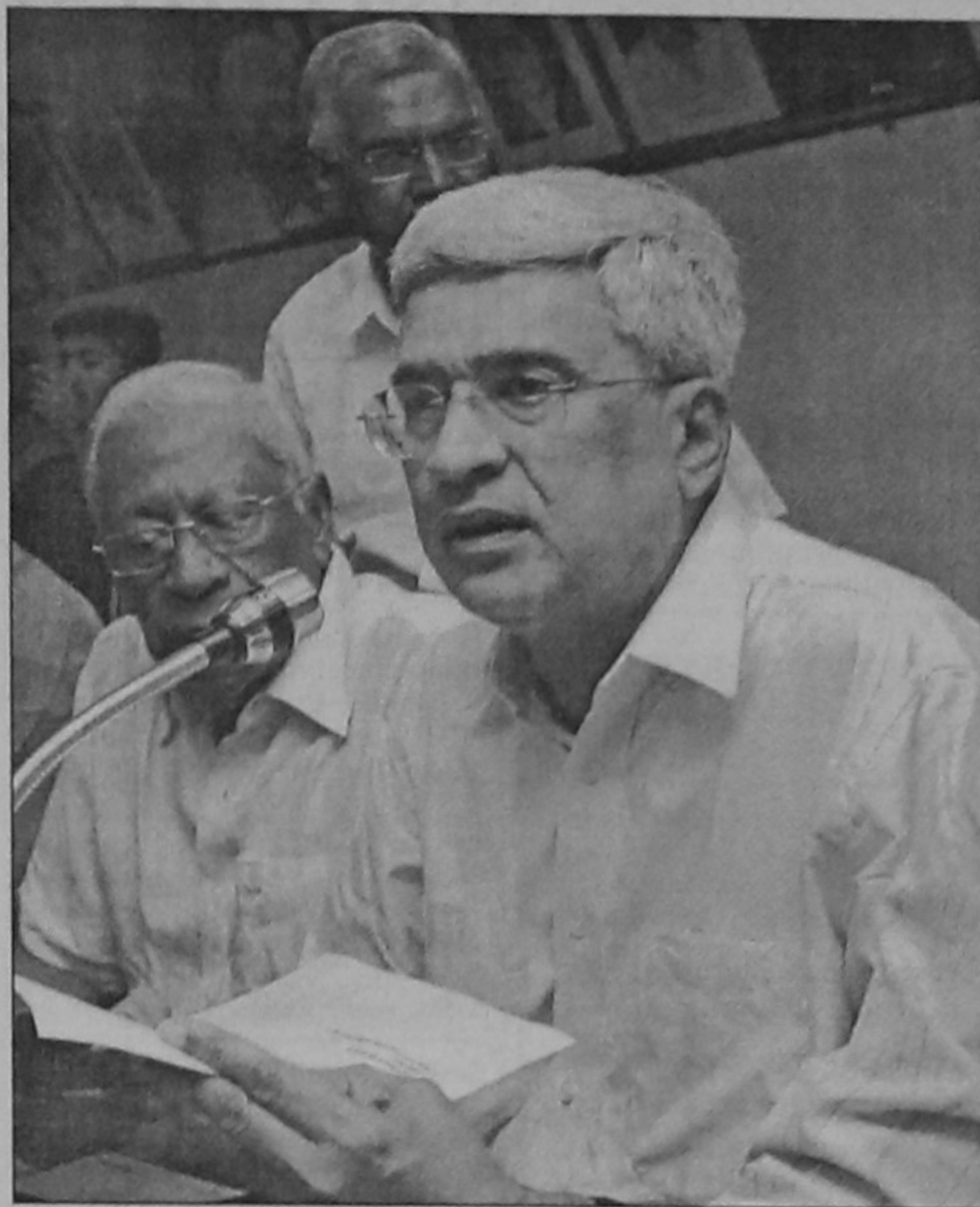
"Please let us know by July 7, 2008," Karat told reporters, adding that the Left parties would meet a day later for a final decision on withdrawing support.

The ultimatum was rejected by Congress, whose spokesman Abhishek Singhvi said "sovereign governments or political parties cannot be subjected to deadlines."

"We are happy that other parties in the national interest are slowly converging to our view point," he told reporters.

"We are working towards triple objectives -- to do a nuclear deal in national interest, to carry along our allies with us for that purpose and to go to elections as per schedule" in May 2009.

The United States has been pressing India to move on the deal before the end of President Bush's tenure, warning the pact may not survive in its current form under the next administration.



Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), General Secretary Prakash Karat talks to reporters after the Left parties meeting in New Delhi yesterday. A four-party bloc of Communist and leftist parties were meeting to discuss what politicians described as the "modalities" of a divorce from the Congress-led government.

Pakistan slams US military chief's statement

THE NATION/ ANN, Islamabad

Pakistan on Thursday denounced a statement by the US military chief on cross-border attacks against the militants and said that only Pakistani troops could take action against the terrorists on Pakistani side of the shared frontier with Afghanistan.

"Pakistan wants to clarify that on its side of the border along Afghanistan, it is the Pakistani troops who have the sole responsibility to take action against the terrorists," said foreign Office spokesman Muhammad Sadiq while addressing his weekly press briefing.

He was asked to comment on the statement by the US joint chiefs of staff chairman Admiral Mike Mullen in which he had claimed the other day (July 2) that the United States had the right to take military action in Pakistan or Afghanistan without prior information, if it got reliable and concrete intelligence about the presence of top leadership of Taliban and al-Qaeda, including Osama Bin Laden.

"The US army can take whatever action they want against terrorists on the Afghan side but on the Pakistani side, our troops have the sole responsibility to take action," he said. He also referred to the statement by assistant secretary of state Richard Boucher at a press conference here on July 2 in which he had made it clear that it was the responsibility of Pakistani troops to take action against terrorists inside Pakistan.

"Joint investigations are underway into Nato air-strike on a Pakistani post and we hope that the two sides will be able to work out a better mechanism to avoid recurrence of such incidents in future," he said. He said the Afghan government must share the information relating to its nationals beheaded in Bajaur Agency by militants.

"Pakistan has asked the Afghan government to provide names, passport numbers, visa particulars and the purpose for which the two Afghan were visiting Bajaur Agency," he said. He said the information would be very useful in the conduct of an inquiry.



Pakistani protesters belonging to the Hizb-ut-tahrir Wilayah Pakistan take part in a rally in Lahore on Thursday against the 'killing of Muslims for the sake of the US'. The protest was organised to mark the first anniversary of a raid on Islamabad Red Mosque.

Iraq trip could refine policy, says Obama

AP, Fargo

Democrat Barack Obama struggled Thursday to explain how his upcoming trip to Iraq might refine, but not basically alter, his promise to quickly remove US combat troops from the war.

A dustup over war policy one of the main issues separating the Illinois senator from his Republican opponent, John McCain overshadowed Obama's town-hall meeting here with veterans to talk about patriotism and his plans to care for them. Republicans pounced on the chance to characterize Obama as altering one of the core policies that drove his candidacy "for the sake of political expediency." He denied equally forcefully that he was shifting positions.

Arriving in Fargo, Obama hastily called a news conference to discuss news of a sixth straight month of nationwide job losses, but the questioning turned to Iraq policy and his impending trip there.

"I am going to do a thorough assessment when I'm there," he said. "I'm sure I'll have more information and continue to refine my policy."

He left the impression that his talks with military commanders there could refine his promise to remove US combat troops within 16 months of taking office.

Less than four hours later, after the town hall meeting, Obama appeared before reporters for another statement and round of

questions to "try this again."

"Apparently I was not clear enough this morning," he said. He blamed any confusion on the McCain campaign, which he said had "primed the pump with the press" to suggest "we were changing our policy when we haven't."

"I have said throughout this campaign that this war was ill-conceived, that it was a strategic blunder and that it needs to come to an end," he said. "I have also said I would be deliberate and careful about how we get out. That position has not changed. I am not searching for manoeuvring room with respect to that position."

He promised to summon the Joint Chiefs of Staff on his first day in office "and I will give them a new mission and that is to end this war, responsibly and deliberately, but decisively."

He said that when he talked earlier about refining his policy after talking with commanders in Iraq, he was referring not to his 16-month timeline, but to how many troops may need to remain in Iraq to train the local army and police and what troop presence might be needed "to be sure al-Qaeda doesn't re-establish a foothold there."

"I will bring our troops out at a pace of one two brigades a month" which would mean the United States would be totally out of Iraq in 16 months. "That is what I intend to do as president of the United States."

5 soldiers, rebel die in clash near Kashmir border

AFP, Srinagar

Five Indian soldiers and a Muslim militant were killed Friday in continuing fighting near the Line of Control dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan, the army said.

"In fresh fighting today (Friday) five soldiers, including two officers, and a militant were killed," an army spokesman said.

The clash took place in Pather Behak area in the mountainous district of Kupwara, about 140 kilometres (86 miles) north of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar.

"The fighting has been raging there since late Monday," the spokesman said, adding in all a dozen militants and six soldiers have died, making it the deadliest series of clashes so far this year in Kashmir.

Soldiers came under heavy fire when they resumed searches to root out more militants near the Line of Control early Friday.

"The operation in the area is still on," the spokesman said.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and funding militants engaged in an 18-year-old insurgency in the Indian part of the scenic Himalayan region.

Pakistan denies the charge and says it is doing its best to prevent armed rebels from crossing into Indian Kashmir.

Violence has dropped sharply since the two nuclear-armed neighbours started a peace process in 2004 to resolve all disputes, including Kashmir.

Attacks, bombs kill 11 cops in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Bomb blasts and attacks killed 11 policemen and three civilians in separate incidents in insurgency-hit Afghanistan, officials said yesterday.

In the deadliest incident, attackers tossed a grenade into a police post in Panjwayi district of troubled southern Kandahar province and then opened fire into the building, killing eight policemen, the provincial police chief told AFP.

Another two policemen were missing after the midnight attack and two were wounded, General Muthullah Khan said.

"A hand grenade was thrown into a police post in Panjwayi district near the district centre followed by a small-arms fire attack on the post. Eight police have been killed, two police are wounded and two are still missing," Khan said.

The area has been a hotbed of Taliban insurgents but it was not clear if the militants were responsible.

"At this stage we cannot say if the two missing police are taken by Taliban or if there was some problem among policemen in the post and they had fought and killed each other," he said.

Separately three policemen were killed and two were wounded Friday in the central province of Ghazni when their vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb, provincial government spokesman Ismail Jahangir told AFP.

A Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahed, said his group was responsible for the attack in the district of Rashidan.

Another roadside bomb hit a civilian vehicle in the neighbouring province of Wardak, killing three civilians and wounding two, said the provincial police chief, General Muzafarudin, who uses one name.

Neighbours urged to help stabilise Afghanistan

AP, Islamabad

A senior UN official called on Thursday for Afghanistan's neighbours to work towards mending tense regional relationships so that the conflict-torn country could be rebuilt.

Kai Eide, head of the UN mission in Afghanistan, is seeking to expand the world body's role in areas such as regional economic

cooperation and cross-border infrastructure.

Eide, on his first visit to Islamabad since his appointment in March, said his priority was to harness the momentum from an international conference in Paris last month when donors pledged more than \$20 billion in additional aid for Afghanistan.

Other areas where regional cooperation is needed include

combating Afghanistan's runaway illegal narcotics industry and its raging Taliban-led insurgency.

Eide said the UN was ready to facilitate "constructive" regional ties and that the reaction of Pakistani leaders in meetings on Thursday was "positive."

He wouldn't elaborate on exactly what role the UN could play in the regional cooperation or what it would like to see from Pakistan.

Nepal to seek extension of UN mission

AP, Katmandu

Nepal's government has decided to ask the United Nations to continue a peacekeeping mission in the country for another six months, an official said Friday.

All major political parties agreed to seek the UN extension but a formal request to the world body has yet to be made, Transport Minister Ramesh Lekhak said.

The UN's peace mission was established in January 2007 for one year and extended for six months earlier this year after communist rebels gave up their armed revolt and joined mainstream politics.

Lekhak said with the peace process going smoothly, the gov-

ernment would ask for a smaller UN mission to stay in the country for the next six months.

UN arms monitors still keep watch over thousands of former rebels who have been staying in camps with their weapons locked up in metal containers.

The UN team also monitored the April 2008 election of a Constituent Assembly that is charged with rewriting the constitution.

The ex-rebels emerged as the largest political party in the April election but failed to secure a majority. They are set to lead a new coalition government but so far have not been able to reach agreement with other political parties.



Cyclone-affected residents wait for food aid distribution by private donors in Mawlamyinchun, Myanmar's Ayeyawady Delta on Thursday. Myanmar was hit by a severe cyclone on May 2-3, which left some 138,000 people dead or missing and 2.4 million in need of humanitarian aid.

UN climate chief spurs talks on new global warming pact

AFP, Bonn

UN climate chief Yvo de Boer called on industrialised countries Friday to start showing some of their cards in a poker game whose prize will be a new pact to tackle global warming.

De Boer, executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), said talks unfolding among senior officials here marked "the first time that people are getting down to serious negotiations" for a historic deal in Copenhagen in December 2009.

But, he warned, many positions

had so far been "incredibly generic" and this problem of vagueness was especially worrying among industrialised countries.

The June 3-13 Bonn talks should issue "a very clear call on governments to start submitting their ideas on what should be the key elements of a Copenhagen outcome," said de Boer.

He warned: "Politically, if Copenhagen fails we would be in huge trouble. I think that people would then begin to question the utility of this process."

Last December, parties to the UNFCCC set down a "Bali Roadmap" of talks designed to

climax in the most ambitious and complex environmental treaty ever attempted.

The post-2012 pact would succeed the current pledges made under the UNFCCC's cornerstone accord, the Kyoto Protocol.

It would commit countries to deeper cuts on the heat-trapping gases that are driving climate change.

And it would beef up the transfer of clean technology to poorer economies and strengthen financial support for those countries most at risk from water stress, rising sea levels and other damage.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines advertisement. Includes logo, contact information for Zia International Airport, Kurmitola, Dhaka, and a 'Tender Notice' for road work. The tender notice details the scope of work, including bituminous road work and carpeting, and provides contact information for the project manager.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh advertisement for an 'INVITATION FOR TENDER'. It details the location of the tender (Segunbagicha, Dhaka), the tender number (225/2007-2008), and provides a list of specifications for three groups of tenders. It also includes contact information for the procuring entity and a list of special instructions for bidders.