

## White House sends Indian nuclear deal to Congress

AFP, Washington

The White House said late Wednesday it sent the text of a landmark US-India civilian nuclear agreement to Congress for final approval but it remains unclear if lawmakers will give the accord the green light.

The proposed deal, signed by President George W Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in July 2005, offers India access to Western technology and cheap atomic energy as long as it allows UN nuclear inspections of some of its nuclear facilities.

If Congress endorses the agreement it would lift a three-decade-old ban on nuclear trade with

India.

The White House said in a statement that it was transmitting the text of the agreement and other relevant documents to lawmakers, who returned to work Monday after their August recess and are expected to leave Washington again in late September to campaign ahead of the November 4 elections -- leaving little time for action on the accord.

"The proposed Agreement provides a comprehensive framework for US peaceful nuclear cooperation with India," the statement read. "It permits the transfer of information, non-nuclear material, nuclear material, equipment (including reactors) and components for nuclear research and

nuclear power production. It does not permit transfers of any restricted data.

"Sensitive nuclear technology, heavy-water production technology and production facilities, sensitive nuclear facilities, and major critical components of such facilities may not be transferred under the Agreement unless the Agreement is amended," the statement said.

The agreement "will remain in force for a period of 40 years and will continue in force thereafter for additional periods of 10 years each unless either party gives notice to terminate it 6 months before the end of a period," it said, adding that either party can end the agreement before that "on one year's written notice to the other party."

## India nears nuclear pacts with France, Russia

AFP, New Delhi

India is finalising bilateral pacts with countries including France and Russia for the import of civilian atomic power plants and technology, a foreign ministry spokesman said yesterday.

The announcement comes days after the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which controls the export and sale of nuclear technology worldwide, amended its rules to allow India to buy equipment and expertise to fuel its booming economy.

New Delhi is also in talks with US companies, foreign ministry

spokesman Navtej Sarna said.

"Following the NSG statement which enables civil nuclear cooperation by NSG members with India, the government is taking steps to realise commercial cooperation with foreign partners," Sarna said.

New Delhi is moving towards bilateral agreements with "friendly partner countries such as France and Russia," he said.

The agreements with both Russia and France are ready for signing, officials have said.

The NSG approval followed the United States leaning on several countries opposed to the India-

specific amendment in Vienna last weekend.

It was a pact agreed with the United States in 2006 that opened the possibility of India buying nuclear plants and related technology.

The pact with the US offers India an end to its three-decade-old nuclear pariah status, as long as New Delhi allows UN nuclear inspections of some of its nuclear facilities.

Despite the NSG go-ahead, New Delhi and Washington are awaiting approval of their bilateral pact that the White House sent to the Congress on Thursday.

## Japan ending air mission in Iraq

AP, Tokyo

Japan said yesterday it may withdraw its military airlift mission in Iraq by the end of the year in light of security improvements there and a growing focus on Afghanistan. The move would end Japan's military involvement in Iraq, a non-combat mission that has tested the limits of its pacifist constitution and divided a war-wary public.

Japanese officials said the withdrawal plan was still being negotiated in conjunction with Iraq, the United States and the United Nations.

"We're considering ending the mission by the end of the year," Defence Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters Thursday. Officials cited the improved security situation in Iraq and the expira-

tion at the end of the year of the U.N. Security Council resolution that sets the legal basis for the US troop presence in Iraq.

Hayashi also suggested it was time to pay more attention to Afghanistan, where violence fuelled by the Taliban insurgency has spiked over the past year.

"In a way, the importance of operations in Afghanistan has increased," Hayashi said.

Japan's air force has airlifted materials and armed troops since 2006 from Kuwait to locations in Iraq, including Baghdad, in support of US-led forces. The mission has involved about 210 personnel. Prior to the airlift mission, Japan deployed about 600 army troops to the southern city of Samawah on a humanitarian mission from 2004 until 2006.

## Georgia accuses Russia of breaking truce

AFP, Tbilisi

Georgia said one of its policemen was shot dead from a Russian position Wednesday in violation of a fragile truce, as a major crack appeared in the EU-brokered ceasefire over the remit of EU observers.

The Georgians said it was the first fatal shooting since the August 12 ceasefire that brought an end to the five-day war between Georgia

and Russia over Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia.

"This is the first time that Georgia police or military personnel have been shot at since the ceasefire began," Georgian interior ministry spokesman Shota Utiashvili told AFP.

An unnamed spokesman for the Russian forces in South Ossetia quoted by Interfax denied the incident and said he would not believe it until the Georgians showed him the body.



The tattered flag saved from the World Trade Centre attacks yesterday is displayed during a memorial ceremony on September 11 where the names of those that died in the attack read by family members.

## US marks 9/11 terror attacks

AP, New York

As the nation pauses to mark the seventh anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the spotlight from a presidential campaign and a new memorial at the Pentagon are joining the familiar rituals of remembrance on this solemn day.

In New York, four moments of silence were planned Thursday morning to commemorate the precise times that two hijacked jetliners crashed into the World

Trade Centre, along with the times that each tower collapsed. Services also were to be held in a field in western Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon outside Washington, where terrorists crashed two other hijacked planes.

Presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama were to pay silent respects at ground zero Thursday afternoon and later attend a city forum on public service. McCain also was scheduled to attend a memorial service in Shanksville,

Pa., for the 40 people killed aboard United Airlines Flight 93.

Family members and students representing more than 90 countries that lost citizens on Sept. 11, 2001, were to read the names of the more than 2,700 people killed in New York.

Some mourners wondered if the remembrance would, or should, continue as it has indefinitely. About 3,500 people attended last year's ceremony, a roughly 25 percent decrease from 2006.



US Democratic presidential candidate Illinois Senator Barack Obama greets guests after speaking during the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Annual Awards Gala at the Washington Convention Centre in Washington, DC, on Wednesday.

## Obama keeps cool as Democratic fears heat up

AFP, New York

White House hopeful Barack Obama professes no anxiety about polls that show his longstanding lead evaporating, but senior Democrats are rattled at the Republicans' Sarah Palin-inspired charge.

Since his shock decision a fortnight ago to select the little-known Alaska governor as his running mate, John McCain has risen steadily in opinion surveys on the back of a re-energized conservative base.

Obama, however, appears confident that the Palin surge will fade as her novelty value wears off, as the media digs deeper into her record, and as voters reappraise which ticket would best bring change to a fretful nation.

## Bomb kills pro-Syria Lebanese politician

AP, Beirut

A Druze politician in Lebanon who recently helped reconcile rival factions within his minority community was killed when a bomb tore through his car, police said.

One of Sheik Saleh Aridi's colleagues said that Wednesday's attack in the hills east of Lebanon's capital was an attempt to rekindle violence between rivals in the Druze-inhabited mountains.

The bomb that killed Aridi, a senior member of the Lebanese Democratic Party, was planted under his car in the village of Baissour, police said. It was the first political assassination in about a year in Lebanon and came less than a week before planned reconciliation talks among rival Lebanese factions.

## Iran, Syria pose 'no problem' for Iraq

Says Talabani

AFP, Washington

Iraq President Jalal Talabani told US President George W Bush on Wednesday that Iran and Syria, long targets of US blame over deadly unrest in Iraq, now pose "no problem."

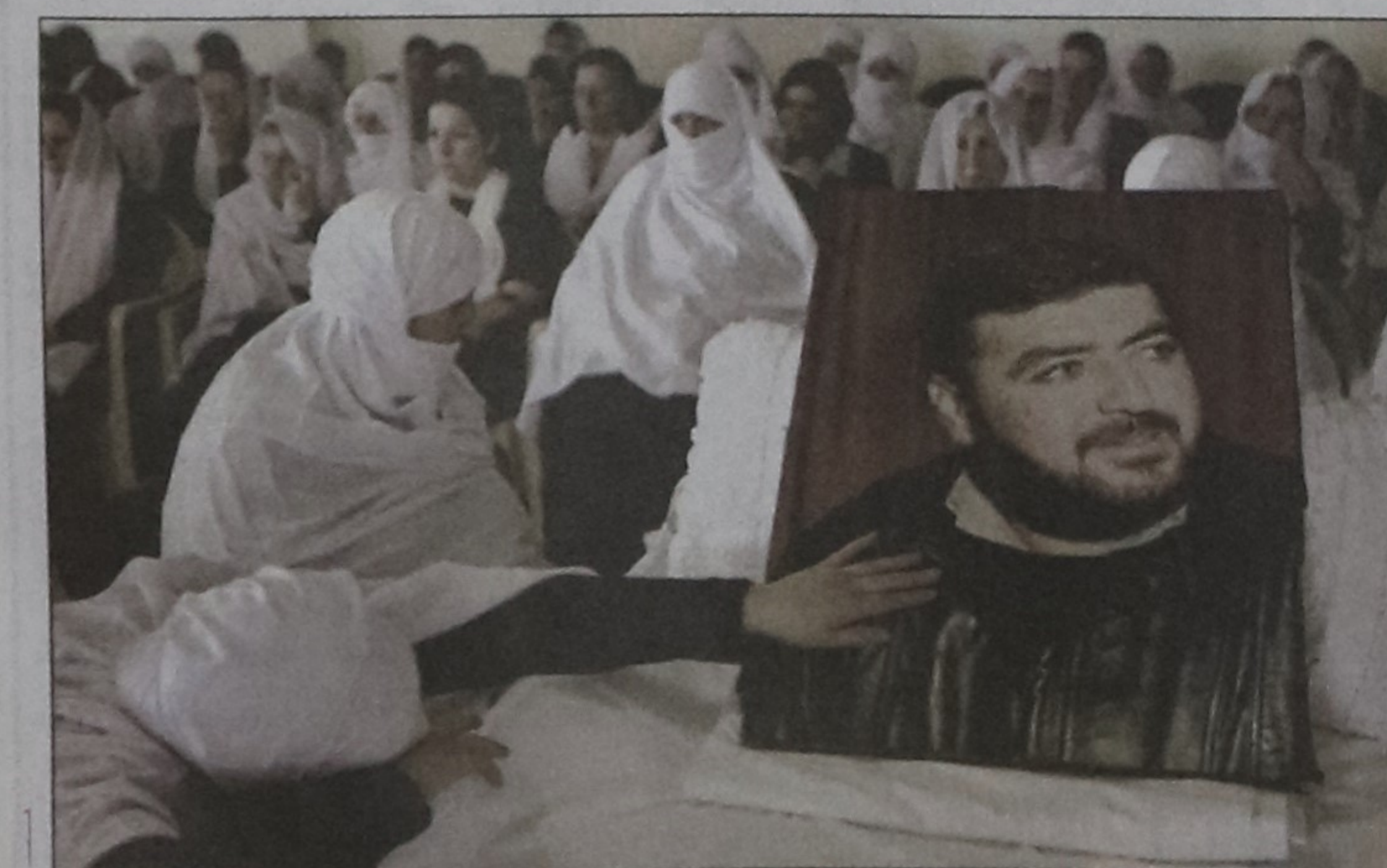
"I'm glad to tell you Mr President that our relations with our neighbours is improved very well with Turkey, with Syria, with Iran with the Arab countries," Talabani said as he met with Bush at the White House.

"The relation is normal now and we have no problem with any of those countries. In contrary, many

many new ambassadors are coming to our country from Arab countries," Talabani said.

Washington has for years accused Syria of at the very least turning a blind eye to foreign fighters crossing into Iraq to battle US-led forces, and has alleged Iranian support for elements that target coalition troops.

But a senior US official told reporters on Tuesday, after Bush announced a modest drawdown of US forces in Iraq over the coming months, that Iran may have changed tack on its strife-ravaged neighbour.



Female family members and friends mourn next to the body of Lebanese Druze opposition politician Saleh Aridi yesterday in the village of Baissour, in the vicinity of the Druze mountain town of Aley, southeast of Beirut. The killing of the opposition politician Wednesday night in the first such attack against a pro-Syrian figure jeopardises national reconciliation efforts already undermined by deep rifts between rival factions.

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