

Iran's first nuclear plant begins operating

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday its first atomic power plant built by Russia in Bushehr has begun operations...

"Without any propaganda and fuss we sealed the cover of the reactor and all the fuel rods are in the core of the reactor," atomic chief Ali Akbar Salehi was quoted as saying by Fars news agency...

But Salehi said the authorities in the Islamic republic "hope that electricity produced at the Bushehr plant will be connected to the national grid in a month or two."

Iran says it needs the plant, which had been under construction since the 1970s in the southern port city of Bushehr before it was completed by Russia, to meet growing demand for electricity.

But Western governments suspect Iran's nuclear programme masks a drive for an atomic weapons capability, an ambition Tehran has steadfastly denied.

Salehi's announcement came ahead of the likely resumption of stalled negotiations between world powers and Iran on Tehran's controversial nuclear programme in Geneva on December 5.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said this week she had received "informal confirmations" from Iran about the date and location for the talks, "but I want a formal confirmation."

Iran and six world powers - the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany -- have agreed to return to the negotiating table for the first time since October 2009, but two sides diverge on what issues should be on the table.

CANCUN SUMMIT

India seeks to resolve disputes

AP, New Delhi

India is making two proposals for the UN climate summit in Cancun in hopes of redefining its global image as a constructive negotiator by helping to resolve disputes that have stymied agreement on curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

The two proposals, obtained by The Associated Press, address the monitoring of national emissions cuts and sharing of environmentally friendly technologies with poor and developing nations.

They offer rich and poor countries a middle ground, while leaving the most contentious issues for future debate.

Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh said Saturday, the eve of the Cancun summit, that India has worked hard to shed its old obstructionist image and is anxious to be part of a solution on global warming.



South Korea vows 'thousand-fold' revenge

PHOTO: AFP

Retired and former South Korean marines wave national flags during a rally denouncing North Korea's attack on Yeonpyeong island, in downtown Seoul yesterday. South laid to rest two marines killed in North Korea's artillery strikes, on the eve of massive naval war games with the United States that have angered Pyongyang and its ally Beijing.

REUTERS, AFP, AP, Seoul

South Korea's Marine commander yesterday vowed "thousand-fold" revenge for a North Korean attack that killed two servicemen as protesters demanded tougher action by the government against its reclusive neighbour.

"All Marines, including Marines on service and reserve Marines, will avenge the two at any cost, keeping today's anger and hostility in mind," said Lieutenant General Yoo Nak Joon, commander of the South Korean Marine Corps.

The funeral was followed by anti-North Korea protests in the capital as a US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier headed for the maneuvers with South Korea, infuriating North Korea and prompting a warning from its only major ally, China.

"It's time for action. Time for retaliation. Let's hit the presidential palace in Pyongyang," shouted close to 1,000 Marine veterans in downtown Seoul who burned

photographs of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il and his anointed successor, son Kim Jong-un.

The two Marines were honoured with a gun salute as families wailed and grim-faced officials saluted the funeral cortege, four days after North Korea rained shells on a tiny island in the heaviest attack on South Korea since the 1950-53 civil war.

Meanwhile, North Korea's state media warned that "no-one can predict the ensuing consequences" if a US carrier group goes ahead with a planned drill with South Korea in the Yellow Sea.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) statement came days after the headline communist regime sharply heightened regional tensions with an artillery attack that killed two marines and two civilians on a South Korean border island.

North is accusing South Korea of using civilians as a "human shield" at an island the North attacked this week.

North accuses Seoul of using civilians as shield

North Korea's state news agency says the South should be held responsible because "it took such inhuman action as creating 'a human shield' by deploying civilians around artillery positions."

The North says it "is very regrettable" that the South is using the civilian deaths "as part of its propaganda campaign."

North Korea said that if there were civilian deaths, they were "very regrettable," but that South Korea should be blamed for forming a human shield.

The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier the USS George Washington and its battle group

plans four days of exercises from Sunday with a flotilla of South Korean warships in a show of force meant to deter Pyongyang.

President Lee Myung-bak told ministers and aides to be ready for further "provocation" by North Korea during joint military maneuvers with the United States that start on Sunday.

"There is the possibility that North Korea may do some unexpected action, so please perfectly prepare against it through cooperation with the Korea-US joint force," Lee was quoted by a spokesman as saying.

South Korea's new defense minister called for tougher action, local media reported. A Seoul newspaper also reported the government plans to sharply increase defense spending next year.

Regional giant China has said it is determined to prevent an escalation of the violence but warned against military acts near its coast as US and South Korea forces prepare for exercises in the Yellow Sea.

A North Korean website (www.uriminzokkiri) operated by the government propaganda agency said the war drills were "another unforgivable military provocation."

"(The North) will make the stronghold of the enemy a sheet of flames if they violate its territory even by 0.01 mm."

The US military said the exercises, planned long before Tuesday's attack, were designed to deter North Korea and were not aimed at China.

"We've routinely operated in waters off the Korean peninsula for years," said Captain Darryn James, a Pentagon spokesman. "These latest provocations have been by the North and they need to take ownership of those, not us."

US Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said North Korea's nuclear ambitions and leader Kim Jong-il's unpredictability increased the threat of regional instability.

US teenager held over Christmas 'bomb plot'

BBC ONLINE



Osman Mohamud

A teenager has been arrested in the US state of Oregon after allegedly plotting to carry out a car bomb attack at a Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

Somali-born Mohamed Osman Mohamud, 19, was arrested after reportedly making a telephone call he thought would set off the bomb in the centre of Portland.

However, the bomb was a fake supplied by agents in a sting operation. Mohamud is a naturalised US citizen who had allegedly been in contact with an associate in north-west Pakistan.

He has been charged with attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction. 'LOT OF CHILDREN' Mohamud, who lives in the town of Corvallis, had driven a van to the ceremony and was arrested at around 1740 local time on Friday (0040 GMT Saturday), about 20 minutes before the tree light-

ing was to occur.

Prosecutors said Mohamud had shouted "Allahu Akbar!" (God is great!) and tried to kick agents as they closed in.

Court documents said the case began in August 2009 with e-mail exchanges between Mohamud and his alleged associate in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province.

Special FBI agent Russell said: "The threat was very real. Our investigation shows that Mohamud was absolutely committed to carrying out an attack on a very grand scale. I want to reassure the people of this community that, at every turn, we denied him the ability to actually carry out the attack."

The Oregonian newspaper quoted Oregon US Attorney Dwight Holton as saying: "This defendant's chilling determination is a stark reminder that there are people - even here in Oregon - who are determined to kill Americans."

Israeli fire wounds Gaza child: Officials

AFP, Gaza City

A 12-year-old boy gathering gravel near the Gaza-Israel border was wounded by Israeli army fire, officials and witnesses said.

The boy was shot in the leg as he foraged for building materials near the northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Lahya, the officials said.

An Israeli military spokesman told AFP troops opened fire after a "group of suspects" approached to within about 50 metres (yards) of the border fence and ignored orders to turn back.

"The soldiers fired warning shots in the air a number of times in an attempt to drive them away," she said.

Families say goodbye at site of NZ mine disaster

AFP, Greymouth

About 500 friends and family of the 29 men killed in a New Zealand mine explosion were taken to "say goodbye" at the remote colliery where they lie entombed.

Many carried flowers and photos of their loved ones as they were taken in a fleet of white buses to the Pike River mine, eight days after the disaster.

The visit, organised by the mining company, would help grieving families deal with the loss, said Laurie Drew, whose 21-year-old son Zen was killed.

"I went up there the other day and now my boys are going up, which is really good because

it allows them to feel closer to their brother," Drew said.

"We just want closure... then everyone can move on."

Zen's mother said she found the visit "very healing" and it helped her to say goodbye.

"I felt close to my boy. I felt like I was able to say goodbye to him -- just directly from me," Leeza Verhoeven told NZPA.

"It just felt like we were able to relax with the spirits of the loved ones."

The families were kept away from the mine portal but were able to see the wall where the miners' name tags remain, according to industry tradition, to show they have started their shift and are still underground.

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