

Accept our nuke rights

Urges Iran

REUTERS, Dubai

An adviser to Iran's supreme leader has urged world powers to formally recognise its nuclear rights to bring about a "favorable result" in talks on its atomic program later this month, state media reported yesterday.

"I hope the P5+1 group recognises Iran's inalienable nuclear right within the framework of the NPT and refrains from sitting on the sidelines," IRNA quoted Ali Akbar Velayati, an aide to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as saying.

Deflecting Iranian pressure in talks last month, Western countries declined to accord any such recognition, saying Tehran had no automatic right to enrich uranium because of its previous violations of the nuclear Non-Proliferation

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, centre, waves from the balcony of Buckingham Palace next to (L-R) Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, Prince William, Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry at the end of a coach procession on the final ceremonial day of the Queens Diamond Jubilee in London yesterday. Inset, Part of a jubilant 1.5 million crowd who gathered around the palace to greet the Queen.

PHOTO: AFP



Pakistan fires fifth missile in weeks

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday tested a fifth nuclear-capable missile since India launched a new long-range weapon capable of hitting China just over six weeks ago.

The Hafiz VII cruise missile has a range of 700 kilometres, can carry conventional warheads and has stealth capabilities, the military said.

Yesterday's test was Pakistan's fifth of a nuclear-capable missile since April 25.

On April 20, India successfully test fired the Agni V capable of delivering a one-tonne nuclear warhead anywhere in rival China, marking a major advance in its military capabilities.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947. Each has carried out routine missile tests since both demonstrated nuclear weapons capability in 1998.

DRONE STRIKE IN PAKISTAN US claims Qaeda number 2 killed

AFP, Washington

The United States is highly confident that al-Qaeda Number two Abu Yahya al-Libi was killed in a CIA drone strike in Pakistan, in what an official described Tuesday as a "major blow" to the group's leadership.

The official told AFP that Washington had a "very high degree of confidence" that al-Libi was dead, and argued that his demise would severely hamper the capacity of core al-Qaeda leaders to liaise with affiliated groups.

"It is significant," the official said, terming the killing of al-Libi the most important blow against al-Qaeda since US special forces troops swooped into Pakistan last year and killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Al-Libi, killed in a pre-dawn US drone strike Monday in North Waziristan, a Taliban and al-Qaeda stronghold along the Afghan border, was a Libyan citizen with a \$1 million price on his head.

A trusted lieutenant of bin Laden, Libi has appeared in countless al-Qaeda videos and is considered the chief architect of its global propaganda machine.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that al-Libi had served as the group's "general manager" and had overseen day-to-day operations in Pakistani tribal areas.

The official said the killing of al-Libi would further pressure the group's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Panetta in India amid focus on Asia

Urges 'pivotal partner' India's more active role in Afghanistan

AFP, New Delhi

US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta yesterday arrived in India for talks focusing on Washington's strategic shift towards Asia, as the United States eyes New Delhi as a potentially pivotal partner.

In a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Panetta encouraged India to play a "more active role" in Afghanistan during talks Tuesday in New Delhi, US officials said.

Washington has previously worried about India antagonising its arch-foe Pakistan and preferred New Delhi retain a modest profile in the Afghan conflict, restricted to troop training and infrastructure development.

But officials briefing reporters before Panetta arrived on a two-day visit to New Delhi said US policy has evolved as the NATO-led force prepares to withdraw combat troops by the end of 2014.

"Over the last 10 years, for a variety of reasons, India has not played a particularly active role in Afghanistan," a senior defence official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told reporters aboard Panetta's plane.

"We welcome India playing a more active



PHOTO: AFP

US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta speaks with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during a meeting at the Prime Minister's office in New Delhi yesterday.

role in Afghanistan, a more active political and economic role," the official said, adding that the US hoped India would expand its training of Afghan security forces.

Panetta discussed the issue, as well as a new US strategic tilt towards Asia and

expanding military ties, when he met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and National Security Adviser Shiv Shankar Menon yesterday, officials said.

"In both meetings, Secretary Panetta discussed the US rebalance to the Asia-

Pacific region and the importance the United States places on India," his spokesman George Little said in a statement.

In October, India and Afghanistan signed a "strategic partnership" deal aiming at deepening their security and economic links, with Afghan President Hamid Karzai also keen to elevate India's involvement.

New Delhi, fearful of the return of an Islamist regime in Kabul, has ploughed about \$2.0 billion of aid into the country to gain influence, but is extremely wary of over-stepping.

The US official acknowledged the hostility and distrust between India and Pakistan, but said both countries had a common interest in seeing peace take root in Afghanistan.

The suggestion India bolster its presence in Afghanistan might be an attempt by Washington to press Pakistan to open its border to Nato supply convoys, which Islamabad has blocked since a US air strike in November killed 24 Pakistani soldiers.

The United States has had to rely since then on a more costly, cumbersome route to the north through Central Asia.

Libya regains control of airport

AFP, Tripoli

Libyan authorities wrested back control of Tripoli International Airport from ex-rebels who seized the runway on Monday, surrounding planes and grounding all flights after their leader's apparent arrest, officials said.

It took until evening for the authorities to regain control of the airport when loyalist forces stormed it after negotiations with the militia-men broke down, deputy interior minister Omar al-Khadrawi told journalists.

Flights were not expected to resume for at least 24 hours because of the damage caused to the airport's infrastructure.

The raid was carried out by gunmen who fired into the air, causing panic among travellers, according to the official LANA news agency.

Assad may go as part of Syria settlement

Says Russia; US urges Moscow, Beijing's help

AFP, Damascus

Russia yesterday said that President Bashar al-Assad could leave power as part of a settlement to end bloodshed in Syria, as Saudi Arabia called on Moscow to end its support for his embattled regime.

"We have never said or insisted that Assad necessarily had to remain in power at the end of the political process," said Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov.

"This issue has to be settled by the Syrians themselves," ITAR-TASS news agency quoted him as saying.

The statement was one of Russia's most explicit about Assad's position since Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov refused to clearly back his rule during a visit to Damascus in February.

It came as Moscow and Beijing, which have stalled Western-led moves against Damascus,



Bashar al-Assad

began talks on ending nearly 15 months of violence that has killed more than 13,500 Syrians, and cost the lives of at least another 26 yesterday.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged both Russia and China to be "part of the solution" to the crisis after they agreed to work together more closely

in the United Nations.

"We believe there is a way forward and we are ready to pursue that. And we invite the Russians and the Chinese to be part of the solution," she told a news conference in the Georgian Black Sea city of Batumi.

Saudi Arabia, which has led Arab calls for Assad to step aside, said meanwhile it is time for Moscow to change its tune on Syria and work to ensure the peaceful transfer of power in the unrest-swept country.

'Vampire' skeletons unearthed

AFP, Sofia

Archaeologists in Bulgaria have unearthed two skeletons from the Middle Ages pierced through the chest with iron rods to keep them from turning into vampires, the head of the history museum said.

"These two skeletons stabbed with rods illustrate a practice which was common in some Bulgarian villages up until the first decade of the 20th century," said national history museum chief Bozhidar Dimitrov after the recent find in the Black Sea town of Sozopol.

According to pagan beliefs, people who were considered bad during their lifetimes might turn into vampires after death unless stabbed in the chest with an iron or wooden rod before

We can fight, win without Congress help

Says Trinamool after winning civic polls

STAR REPORT

In a strong message to ally Congress after winning elections to four of six civic bodies, West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress yesterday said the victory was a strong indicator of its might in the state.

"The result is a strong indicator of the might of the party and proves that the Trinamool Congress can stand firm on its own feet in West Bengal. It has now been established that the Trinamool Congress can fight and win elections on its own," party general secretary and Railways Minister Mukul Roy told media.

The Trinamool snatched Dhupguri municipality in Jalpaiguri district and Burdwan district's Durgapur Municipal Corporation from the Left Front, triumphed in the Nalhati municipality in Birbhum district and retained the Panskura municipality in East Midnapore district. The elections were held on Sunday, our New Delhi Correspondent reported.

While the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M)-led Left Front continued to hold sway over East Midnapore district's Haldia municipality, for the Congress the sole consolation was its success in retaining Cooper's Camp municipality in Nadia district.

The Trinamool and the Congress, allies in the central and state governments, fought separately in the civic polls for the first time after the assembly elections last year.

"The fight in the polls was not only against the Left (Front) but also against the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Maoists. The victory has vindicated our stand to go it alone," Roy said.

Describing the CPI-M as an "endangered species", Roy said the alliance was hurtling towards "extinction".

The civic poll results came ahead of panchayat election to be held next year, which is expected to be a major trial of strength in the state before the 2014 parliamentary polls.

Nat'l interests to define ties with US

Says Pak PM Gilani

AGENCIES

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said Pakistan-US relations are multi-dimensional and important but the country's national interests will determine the ties between the two.

Stating that the country had improved its relations with its neighbours like India, Iran and Afghanistan, Gilani added Pakistan was paying special attention in making its neighbourhood peaceful, stable, and prosperous, Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

Gilani was speaking at the Command and Staff College in Balochistan's Quetta city Monday where he also said that a thriving, prosperous, transparent, and peaceful Afghanistan was in the interest of Pakistan.

"We are trying to have an open, transparent, and mutually beneficial relationship with the US based on our national interests," he said.

Meanwhile, Nato signed deals with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to use their territory for evacuating vehicles and military equipment from Afghanistan.

The agreement will allow the military alliance to bypass Pakistan, which has blocked Nato from using its territory in a disagreement over drone strikes.

Russia, China vow unity

Putin kicks off three-day China visit

AFP, Beijing

Russian President Vladimir Putin met his Chinese counterpart yesterday on a visit aimed at bolstering a crucial alliance, with the two neighbours set on blocking international action against Syria.

Putin told Hu Jintao ties between the two nations had reached "new heights" as he kicked off the three-day China visit, his first to Asia since starting an historic third term last month.

Both the countries pledged to increase their cooperation in the United Nations and other important organisations.

China's President Hu Jintao said closer cooperation would allow the two countries, whose stance has angered Western powers, to "set the global political and economic order in a more fair and rational direction".

"We plan to increase cooperation in the framework of leading international organisations -- the United Nations, G20, BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation



Organisation," Putin told reporters after the talks.

Beijing and Moscow have walked in lockstep on Syria to the anger of Arab and Western nations, with EU president Herman Van Rompuy telling Putin in Russia on Monday that world powers needed to "find common messages on which we agree".

Putin has been keen to play up the importance of Russia's at-times uneasy ties with China, which have grown stronger in the past year as both used their veto power on the UN Security

Council to block action against Damascus.

"Through the sustained efforts of both sides, the Russia-China overall strategic cooperative partnership relationship has attained new heights," he told Hu.

China's foreign ministry spokesman Liu Weimin told reporters Tuesday that both Beijing and Moscow were united on Syria, opposing foreign intervention and forced regime change in the conflict-ridden country.

The two nations had periodic border conflicts and viewed each other with suspicion in Soviet times, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared this weekend that Russia had an exemplary partnership with China on foreign policy.

Kremlin foreign policy aide Yury Ushakov said last week the two countries planned to sign 17 diplomatic and business agreements that should help support booming trade, which reached \$80 billion (64 billion euros)

EUROZONE CRISIS G7 ministers vow speedy response

AFP, Tokyo

Finance chiefs from the Group of Seven industrialised economies yesterday vowed after emergency talks to respond "speedily" to the eurozone's fiscal crisis, Japan's finance ministers said.

Finance ministers and central bank chiefs from the world's seven most industrialised nations held the call just days after US President Barack Obama blamed Europe for sluggishness in the US economy.

The US Treasury confirmed in a statement that Europe was a key topic of the call, saying the ministers and governors reviewed developments in the global economy and financial markets "and the policy response under consideration, including the progress towards financial and fiscal union in Europe."

The talks came as Spain warned it could soon no longer afford to borrow on the markets in the clearest sign yet that it will require a rescue that Madrid's European partners may not be able to afford.

Concern has grown that two years of problems in the eurozone are pulling the world economy out of a fragile recovery with Obama on Friday saying the crisis in Europe