

AFTERNOON EDITION

US hopes N-deal with India can go forward

WASHINGTON — The United States remains hopeful that a nuclear deal can go forward despite political opposition in India that has brought the agreement to the brink of collapse.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told US President George W Bush in a telephone call on Monday that “certain difficulties” have arisen in trying to implement the agreement.

Mr Singh is facing considerable opposition within his governing coalition from leftist parties who argue the agreement compromises India’s sovereignty.

The US signed the deal with India to share civilian nuclear knowhow and technology in July 2005.

“We do continue to believe that this is a very important agreement and it’s in the interests of both countries and also in the in-

terests of further cementing and strengthening international non-proliferation regimes,” said US State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey.

The deal requires India to separate its civilian and military programmes and to reach an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency to monitor its civilian nuclear activities — which would subject India’s nuclear energy programme to inspections for the first time.

Four communist parties in Mr Singh’s United Progressive Alliance have threatened to leave the coalition. They traditionally oppose strong ties with the US but believe the deal will weaken India’s sovereignty. — DPA

SINGH’S COSTLY NUCLEAR U-TURN
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BUSH DEFIES CHINA, MEETS DALAI LAMA

The Dalai Lama outside his hotel after meeting US President George W Bush at the White House yesterday.

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NO, YES, NO ... TERRY STILL CANNOT PLAY

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More than just a mini-Olympics

Games line-up will be planned to better appeal to youth

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WITH 3-on-3 basketball and even beach wrestling potentially on the programme, the inaugural Youth Olympic Games in 2010, for athletes aged 14 to 18, is shaping up to be more than just a mini-version of the Summer Olympics.

The menu of 26 sports will be part of an attempt to better “interest and appeal” to youth, said Singapore’s International Olympic Committee (IOC) executive board member Ng Ser Miang. The Republic is hoping to host the historic event.

Take wrestling, for instance. In addition to conventional indoor events, the plan is to have an outdoor beach-wrestling version, too. As for basketball, different formats may be tried — such as having teams of three, as opposed to five, battle it out and playing on

a half-court only. And sailing will likely see a new youth class of boats used that will suit the abilities of the young athletes.

Mr Ng revealed the IOC’s plans to TODAY on the sidelines of a press conference held at the Singapore Sports School yesterday to rally support for the Singapore bid, which was submitted to the IOC in August.

“The international federations (of the respective sports) can be creative about the kinds of events they want to include. They can experiment and present the sports to create interest and appeal to the youth, to bring them into the sports,” he said.

Nine other cities — Algiers (Algeria), Athens (Greece), Moscow (Russia), Turin (Italy), Bangkok (Thailand), Debrecen (Hungary), Guatemala City, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) and Poznan (Poland) — are also in the running and have until Oct 26 to submit detailed plans for their bids.

Even before it announces its final decision next February, the IOC is already making a concerted effort to ensure the Games will take

on its own unique identity in the long term.

IOC president Jacques Rogge — who recently met Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the IOC headquarters in Switzerland to discuss the Games — said in May that national anthems and flags would be excluded.

When the winners of each event step up to the podium to receive their medals, only the Olympic flag and official anthem will be used, to sidestep nationalist fervour.

On why he felt the time was right for the IOC to have an event for the young, Mr Ng said it was important to start educating them early on core Olympic values such as respect, excellence and friendship.

“Different countries around the world have similar issues facing their youth — inactivity due to spending so much time on their computers, which results in obesity.

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Triathlete brings to court his demand for place in SEA Games

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HE WAS passed over in the selections for Singapore’s SEA Games squad. Now, triathlete Gino Ng (picture) is taking the legal route to demand his place in the competition this December.

Last Wednesday, his lawyers at Allen and Gledhill filed an application with the High Court to quash the Triathlon Association of Singapore’s (TAS) decision not to nominate him for a place in the national team.

The application also seeks to set aside the TAS appeals committee’s subsequent dismissal of his appeal and to order the TAS to put his name up for the SEA Games

squad. The team of lawyers, led by Senior Counsel K Shanmugam, have applied to have the case heard next Friday.

The saga began in August after Ng, a sport physiotherapist with the Singapore Sports Council, placed fifth in the first-time trial held on June 23 for the national triathlon team.

Under TAS selection policy, only the top four finishers who met the qualifying mark of 2 hours 8 minutes would go through to the second trial.

But 17-year-old Thaddeus Cheong, who was in second

place, died shortly after that first race.

Ng then competed in the second-time trial, held on July 29 during the Osim Singapore International Triathlon, where only the two fastest athletes would make it to Korat, Thailand.

Ng, 35, finished second with a time of 2:06:37 — but 18-year-old Shaun Phoon, who came in 44 seconds later for third place, was picked for the SEA Games squad along with front-finisher Mok Ying Ren.

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TAN YO-HINN

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MiWorld

More than just a mini-Olympics

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"And when it comes to competition, to also explain things like over-training and doping," said Mr Ng.

At yesterday's press conference, Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) Teo Ser Luck called on Singaporeans to band together and support the Republic's bid to bag the honour of hosting the Games.

He unveiled a dedicated website (www.singapore2010.sg) that one can visit to read the latest updates, post feedback and suggestions, and view a new video promoting Singapore's strengths that will be used as part of the bid.

Mr Teo also shared findings from his ministry that showed the number of Singaporeans taking part in sports is on the increase — 48 per cent in 2005, up from 38 per cent in 2001. In the key 15-to-19 age bracket, this figure was 83 per cent, higher than the 68 per cent in 2001.

MCYS Permanent Secretary Niam Chiang Meng, chairman of the Singapore 2010 bid committee, said Singapore's "good track record" in organising events quickly could work in its favour.

There are just two-and-a-half years between the time the Youth Games host city is revealed and the opening ceremony, compared to nearly seven years for the Summer Olympics, he noted.

"Ours is a single-tier Government, and we can make things happen quickly. We feel we can deliver a good event in quick time. I do believe we have a reasonably good chance of succeeding," he said.

A hurdle for Asean Charter?

Thailand's new Constitution could prevent it from signing landmark Asean document

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IF MYANMAR's recent turmoil has cast a shadow over the Asean Summit in Singapore next month, Thailand's recent constitutional changes may also have an impact on the gathering.

The new Thai Constitution was drafted by the military-backed government and passed in a referendum in August.

It contains a clause that disallows the Prime Minister or government from signing anything without approval from the country's Parliament, the National Legislative Assembly (NLA).

This means that Thailand may not be able to sign the Asean Charter, the centrepiece of the summit, if its lawmakers disapprove of the document.

"Thailand will be here but ... if you read their new Constitution, there is a restriction on what the government can sign," said Asean Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong yesterday on the sidelines of the final day of the Asean-US symposium.

"Whether it will impact the actual signing, no one has said anything so I hope there is good news there," he added.

But Mr Ong made it clear that the possibility of Thailand not signing the Asean Charter was a "worst-case scenario".

"The realistic situation is — as far as



NAZRY BAHRAWI

The realistic situation — as far as Singapore is concerned — is that the Charter signing is on schedule. I don't think anybody would want to defer or delay that.

— Asean Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong (picture)

Singapore is concerned — is that the Charter signing is on schedule. I don't think anybody would want to defer or delay that."

But the Thai government must inform Asean of its next course of action as the Summit — which will be held from Nov 18 to Nov 22 — nears, said Mr Ong.

According to Thai lawmaker Gothom Arya, the issue of the Asean Charter had come up during a small group discussion among the Legislative Assembly members, with most agreeing that a draft copy should be tabled to Parliament soon.

"My opinion is that it is very likely that the draft Charter will be approved by the NLA," said Dr Gothom, who was speaking in his personal capacity.

But he also did not rule out the possibility that Thai legislators might reject the Charter if it was seen to be "infringing on Thailand's sovereignty".

Former Asean Secretary-General Rodolfo Severino said it would be "tragic" if Thailand was unable to sign the new Charter,

especially since it was one of Asean's founding members.

But Mr Severino — currently a visiting research fellow at the Institute of South-East Asian Studies (Iseas) — told TODAY: "I hope, I believe, that Thailand will find a way to do so."

When asked what will happen if Thailand or Myanmar decides not to sign the Charter, Dr Denis Hew, also from Iseas, said he believes the signing ceremony would have to be delayed.

"After all, it is a long-term document so it is not something you need to sign this year," said Dr Hew.

But Mr Ong said: "We must sign it this round because if we delay this round, I am afraid that the momentum will be lost and the Charter might not be done."

Despite the hiccups, he is optimistic that the Asean Charter will be signed.

"We expect everyone to turn up for the summit. We expect the signature of the Charter to take place," he said.

Summit can help US-Asean FTA

But FTA accord could hinge on resolution of crisis in Myanmar

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THERE'S still a long way to go before Asean and the United States can ink a free trade agreement (FTA), but trade representatives from both sides are hoping that next month's Asean Summit will enable them to move the process forward.

Asean trade ministers will hold talks on the proposed FTA with US Trade Representative Susan Schwab at the sidelines of the summit, which will be held from Nov 18 to Nov 22 in Singapore.

The ministers will also discuss how they can produce tangible results from the existing Asean-US Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (Tifa), which was signed in Kuala Lumpur last year.

This will "inject life into the Tifa", according to Professor

Tommy Koh, chairman of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), yesterday while closing the Asean-US symposium.

One possibility, said Prof Koh, is the creation of a single-window system, where regulatory documents such as customs declarations and certificates of origin are standardised and submitted to a single entity or location.

Another is the establishment of a ministerial council on trade matters.

These were among the ideas that had been floated by Indonesian Trade Minister Mari Pangestu during a luncheon talk at the symposium on Monday.

Given that Tifa is a "loose non-binding document", Dr Dennis Hew of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Iseas) hailed the moves as a step in the right direction.

But on an Asean-US FTA, Dr Hew was more cautious. "Without a clear resolution to the crisis in Myanmar, I don't see a possible Asean-US FTA being realised in the near future," he said.



TODAY FILE PHOTO.

Prof Koh added that Asean could help serve US strategic interests in the region because it could socialise with regional superpowers, India, China and Japan.

Beyond tangible economic cooperation with the US,

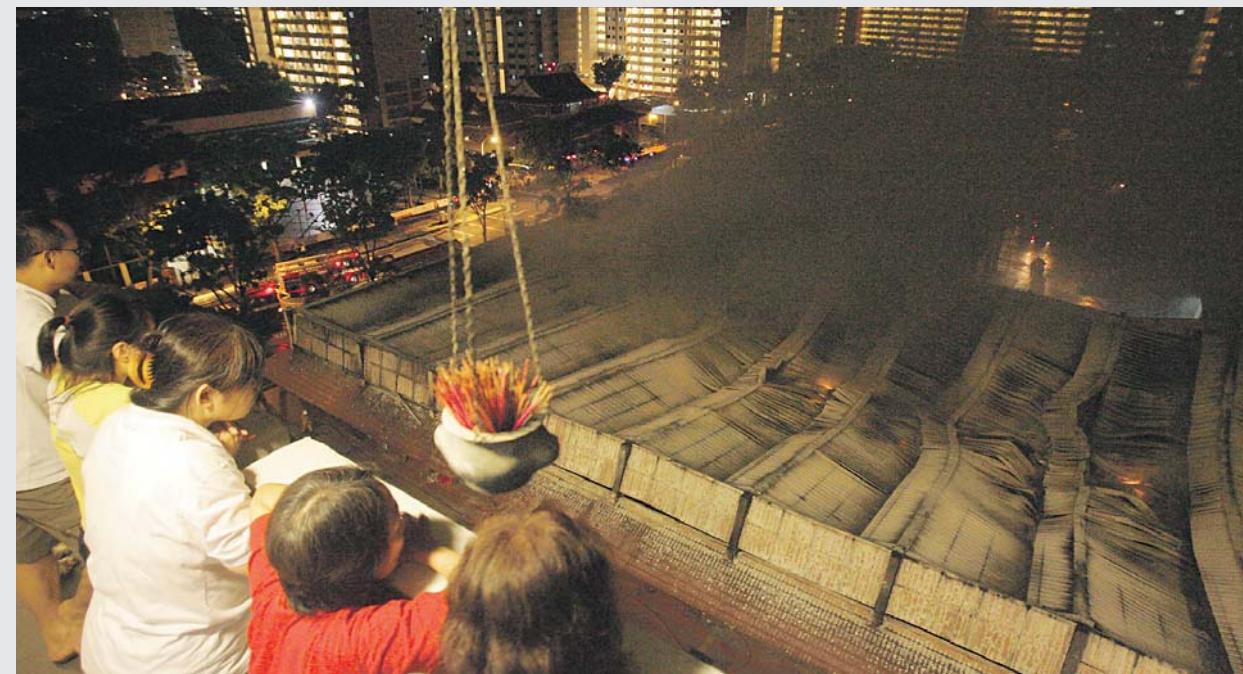
Prof Koh said he had also offered the American delegates — who he described as "third-generation US strategic thinkers" — some suggestions on strengthening future Asean-US relations.

Prof Koh added that given Asean's neutral standing, the grouping could help serve US strategic interests in the region because it could "socialise" with regional superpowers, India, China and Japan.

It is also important for the US to continue engaging the 10-member body — over half of whose population are Muslims — in the wider context of "the struggle for the soul of Islam".

Prof Koh went on to describe the Muslims in the region as among the most cosmopolitan in the world today.

He said: "If you want to win this struggle and help encourage the so-called moderates win this struggle ... you can help Asean's secular leaders to succeed."



DON WONG

Massive fire guts Ang Mo Kio wet market, hawker centre

WHEN patrons heard the shouting, they thought that a fight had erupted at the other end of the hawker centre in Ang Mo Kio. It turned out that a big fire had broken out — one that would raze the entire wet market and food centre at Block 628A, Ang Mo Kio St 61.

Witnesses told TODAY that the fire started at about 9pm. The area was still crowded then, with some 100 people.

One hawker, Mr Alvin Teo, said he saw his cooked food stall, which he had operated for the past 26 years, destroyed by the fire within minutes. The owner was

having a drink with his friends at the hawker centre when the fire broke out.

A crestfallen Mr Teo, 47, said: "When I saw the fire, I wanted to run in to put it out but the fire spread too fast. I feel very heartbroken. The stall was like my second home."

The cause of the fire remained unknown and no casualties were reported at press time. A police officer was heard telling some residents living on the lower floors next to the hawker centre that it was safe for them to return to their homes. — JASMINE YIN

Triathlete brings to court his demand for place in SEA Games

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In his submission, Ng is, among other things, arguing that the TAS selection and appeals committees "acted unfairly and/or unreasonably and/or irrationally", and that he was not given a fair shot at presenting his case before the appeals committee.

According to an email from honorary president Alex Kuok on Aug 22, the selection panel — which comprised TAS president Mark Tay and national coach Guo Weidong — had considered the triathletes' "performances, potential, tactics, training attendances and general discipline", and concluded that Ng had not shown "much

improvement in the swim which is critical to the overall performance of the triathlete".

In another email on Sept 9, on the appeal committee's "unanimous decision", TAS honorary secretary David Hoong said the selection policy did not state that a second-placed athlete in the time trial should be nominated for the SEA Games squad. He also added that it was in the "best interests of all to nominate a younger athlete".

Subsequently, Hoong noted — in an email on Oct 5 — that in the first time trial, Ng did not finish in the top four and thus was "eliminated". Ng had been allowed to race in the Osim event as were other

athletes who did not qualify in the first time trial, but it did not amount to a second trial for them, Hoong said.

But Ng is alleging that his request to register for the second time trial was granted.

Last month, the Athlete's Commission — a Singapore National Olympic Committee (SNOC) body chaired by former sailor Benedict Tan — had found in Ng's favour and criticised the lack of transparency in TAS' selection policies.

Ng had finished fourth in the 2005 SEA Games triathlon with a time of 2:05.

On why individual appeals could not be submitted directly to it, SNOC general

secretary Chris Chan said the integrity of the national sport associations (NSA) must be upheld.

He told TODAY: "The constitution allows nominations only from the NSA. NSAs are our affiliates; they have a selection criteria that is reported to us and that understanding is prescribed to the competing athletes. We have to leave it to the NSAs to manage their qualifying processes."

This is the second time in three years that the TAS has had to deal with grievances from disgruntled athletes. In 2005, Elizabeth Kim was upset after being left out of the contingent for the Manila SEA Games, even though, like Ng, she had finished second in the time trials.

PHUKET

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