

Israel in rush to strengthen India's war machine

AFP, New Delhi

India and Israel began talks Wednesday to open a new chapter in their defence partnership with an emphasis on India importing lethal hardware from the Jewish state to counter domestic insurgency, officials said.

Israel's defence ministry director-general Amos Yaron kicked off the talks with a string of meetings with his Indian counterpart Ajay Prasad, naval chief Madhavendra Singh and army chief N.C. Vij on the sidelines of a curtailed visit to New Delhi by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Indian defence ministry sources told AFP that the ongoing talks focussed on the purchase of surveillance equipment and assault rifles India needs to raise "lethal platoons" in each of its infantry battalions.

India a week ago set aside 65

million dollars for the formation of modern platoons to counter militancy, especially in the insurgency wracked zone of Kashmir.

At the same time it has stepped up efforts to buy hardware to monitor cross-border infiltration from adjoining Pakistan.

The officials said the ongoing talks touched on India's growing concerns about the inflow of Islamic militants from Pakistan-administered Kashmir which have sparked growing blood-letting in the disputed Himalayan territory.

"India is also looking at joint production of unmanned aerial vehicles, night vision devices for its battle tanks and nonobtrusive surveillance technology from Israel for border management," a highly-placed source said.

"We are also keen to acquire 10 Barak missiles for the navy and a

number of Arrow missiles from Israel which will form the cornerstone of India's air defence and give a lethal edge to our capabilities," he said, citing from the agenda of the talks.

Israeli officials overnight told AFP that it could be years before New Delhi acquires the Israeli-designed Arrow missile because of US concerns about its emerging ties with Pakistan, which has fought three wars with India.

"India and Israel have already discussed the anti-ballistic missile's price tag although both are awaiting a nod from Washington," the Indian source said, adding the missile system figured in Wednesday's talks.

"We have already bought Israeli Green Pine radar which tracks incoming ballistic missiles and locks the Arrow onto the target and hence we see no reason why the US should hold back its export to India," the

source said.

India and Israel, however, have made a fair amount of progress in clinching a billion-dollar deal for the supply in the near future by Tel Aviv to New Delhi of three Phalcon AWACS radar systems, officials said.

The Indian military, with an annual defence budget of around 14 billion dollars, is also seeking electronic warfare (EW) systems to arm seven of its frontline ships.

"Israel is already upgrading our MiG-21 aircraft and artillery systems and the talks on the EW and the electronic sensors for our borders have progressed well," the source said.

Russia's MiG manufacturers have sub-contracted to an Israeli firm the project to revamp India's vintage warjets, which have earned the sobriquet "flying coffins" because of their dismal safety records.



Palestinians search for survivors at the scene of an Israeli air strike in Gaza City yesterday. Senior Hamas figure Mahmud al-Zahar was wounded and at least three other people killed in the raid. The attack follows two suicide attacks in Jerusalem and near Tel Aviv yesterday that left 15 people and the two bombers dead.

Ex PM with thousands detained in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Former prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala was among some 3,000 political activists detained Wednesday when Nepal's five main parties held a demonstration against King Gyanendra in defiance of a ban on public meetings, witnesses said.

Around 700 riot police clashed with more than 9,000 political party activists of the Nepali Congress (NC), Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist Leninist (NCP-UML), People's Front Nepal and other parties gathered in central Kathmandu, shouting slogans like "Gyanendra quit Nepal" and "We want democracy."

Around 23 people were injured as they fell from a truck being used to take away detained protesters, witnesses said.



Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala (R) argues with police during his arrest for defying the government's ban against demonstrations and mass meetings in Kathmandu, yesterday.

India beyond Pakistan's reach

AGENCIES, Islamabad

Pakistani officials say Islamabad cannot hope to match the conventional military capability that the combination of India and Israel meets. A highly-placed government source said New Delhi's military purchases from Tel Aviv indicated a larger vision. "They are thinking big. India wants to be a world power. Their vision is beyond Pakistan," he said.

Islamabad placed its faith in the strategic balance provided in the subcontinent by Pakistan's nuclear deterrence, said an official. However, this meant Pakistan had reason to fear the Arrow missile -- an anti-missile system that would neutralise part of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. "The real worry is the proposed sale of the Arrow to India by Israel which will seriously affect Pakistani missile capability," affirmed retired General Kamal Matanuddin.

Officially, Islamabad said it was

"deeply concerned" about India's defence purchases from Israel. Unofficially, Pakistani officials said the resulting quantum leap in military capabilities meant that the purchases were no longer Pakistan-specific.

Pakistan's Foreign Office on Monday reflected this point of view by asking who India was arming itself against. "They can't all use all of these against Pakistan alone," said the Foreign Office spokesman.

Pakistani military experts said they were unconcerned about the purchase of the Israeli Phalcon early warning aircraft. And even if the Arrow missile system deal was struck today, said General Matanuddin, it would take at least a decade for it to put into place.

But though Islamabad insisted it was no longer in the business of matching India's conventional weapons capability, government officials admitted Pakistan was in desperate need to modernise its air force and navy.

4 aid workers killed by Taliban

AP, Kandahar

Suspected Taliban rebels ambushed and killed four Afghans working for Danish aid organisation in south of country, local governor said.

Taliban insurgents have stepped up attacks in recent months, targeting government troops, officials and aid workers. The south and east of the country have become particularly dangerous.

Last month, two Afghans working for the Afghan Red Crescent were killed and three wounded when gunmen attacked their convoy in Ghanzi. Those killings followed a rocket attack on the offices of the UN refugee agency in the eastern Afghan city of Asadabad.

One killed, scores hurt by latest Iraq car bomb

REUTERS, Baghdad

A fifth car bomb attack in Iraq in five weeks killed one person and wounded 53, including six Defence Department personnel, in the northern city of Arbil, the US military said yesterday.

The bomb exploded Tuesday evening 350km north of Baghdad in Kurdish-dominated territory, which has been spared much of the violence US-led forces have been battling to stamp out since they ousted Saddam Hussein on April 9.

A US soldier became the 68th to be killed in action in Iraq since the official end of major combat on May 1 when his vehicle was hit by an explosives attack northeast of Baghdad on Tuesday afternoon, a military spokeswoman said.

The two incidents hammered home the cost of the US-led occupation hours after Iraq's American-appointed Governing Council took a step toward international legitimacy by securing a seat at an Arab League meeting in Cairo.

For months, US troops have faced guerrilla attacks in Iraq. But the car bombs targeting foreign involvement in Iraq and locals working with occupying powers have taken violence to a higher level, killing more than 120 people since August 7.

One Iraqi was killed and 47 were wounded in the attack in Arbil, a US military spokeswoman in Baghdad said. Six US Department of Defence personnel were also wounded, she said. She had no details whether they were civilians or soldiers.

The spokeswoman said the attack took place at a "safe house" in the city but had no more information. A spokesman for the US 101st Airborne Division which patrols Arbil said none of its soldiers had been killed or injured in the blast.

Vehicle bombers have hit the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad, United Nations offices and the capital's police headquarters. A top Shi'ite cleric was among more than 80 people killed by a car bomb in the city of Najaf last month.

US officials have mostly blamed diehard Saddam supporters for postwar violence but are also increasingly pointing the finger of suspicion at foreign Islamic militants. Some are talking of a possible alliance between the two groups.

With the occupation imposing a mounting cost in American lives and money, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has launched a diplomatic drive to bridge differences between the United States and its critics over the future of Iraq.

Arms protesters arrested under anti-terror laws

REUTERS, London

A British civil rights group launched court action against police Wednesday after officers used anti-terror laws to arrest peace protesters at Europe's biggest arms fair.

Police in London made 16 arrests Tuesday around the Defense Systems and Equipment International (DSEI) show, a major display of high-tech weaponry from world arms manufacturers that attracts thousands of possible buyers.

Three people were arrested for criminal damage after they threw red paint at a walkway and others were held for obstructing a highway,

police said.

"When appropriate some officers used sections 44-1 and 44-2 of the Terrorism Act 2000 to make some arrests," a Scotland Yard police spokesman said.

A total of 67 people have been arrested in the run-up to the DSEI, which anti-arms trade protesters have targeted with marches and blockades.

Civil rights group Liberty said it would head to court to challenge the police decision to arrest demonstrators under anti-terror laws.

"Liberty is seeking a judicial review of the decision by police to use anti-terrorist legislation against protesters currently picketing the

arms fair," the group said in a statement.

"(They) are legitimate demonstrators and it is quite shocking they are being treated as potential terrorists," it added.

The DSEI is a showcase of all aspects of land, sea and air equipment and runs in London's Docklands area until September 12.

Arms trade protesters were particularly incensed that countries condemned by Amnesty International for human rights abuses, including Syria, Saudi Arabia and several African countries, were invited to the show.

Arab League 'worried' over Sharon's visit to India

AP, Cairo

Arabs hope that India will not abandon its traditional support for Palestinian self-rule during the visit of the Israeli prime minister, the head of the Arab League said on Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters after a meeting of Arab foreign ministers, Secretary-General Amr Moussa said he hoped India wouldn't back Israel in a way that "helps Israel escalate its killing and destruction to the Palestinian territories".

Israeli Prime minister Ariel Sharon arrived in India late on Monday amid nationwide protests. India has been a longtime supporter of the Palestinian struggle for self-

rule.

"Of course we can't tie any country's hands, (whether) to receive a certain official or not," Moussa said. "But we hope India will remain sincere to its relations with Arabs and not give support to an aggressive country, an occupier, who rejected peace."

"We are expecting more than that from India," Moussa said.

At the same news conference, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher said Indian officials assured him that they would abide by their "traditional stance ... and would support the Arab rights, including support for a just and comprehensive settlement."

Rocca visits India with Iraq in mind

PTI, New Delhi

US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca, arrived past midnight on a week-long trip for talks on a host of bilateral, regional and international issues, including the Iraq situation and West Asia crisis.

Other subjects of mutual concern would also come up for discussion, an American Embassy Spokesman said on Wednesday.

Rocca begins her engagements with a meeting with Joint Secretary in External Affairs Ministry (Incharge of Pakistan Affairs) Arun Singh, which would be followed by interactions with Jayant Prasad (territorial head of America and other countries in the region). She will also call Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal.

Rocca's visit takes place at a time, when the fate of the US draft resolution on Iraq at the UN is still uncertain amid indications that New Delhi is not inclined to send its troops to the war-ravaged country, under the present circumstances.

"This is the latest of the series of meetings between officials of the two countries growing out of the 2001 agreement between President Bush and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to hold regular senior level consultations," the Spokesman said.

Observing that Rocca was in India for such a dialogue in September last year, he said on this trip, she had no plans of visiting any other country in South Asia.

Asked whether Rocca would press India to send troops to Iraq to participate in the stabilisation force, the Spokesman said "that is not the objective of the visit". He, however, added that the Iraq situation is expected to figure in the parleys.

France and Germany have sought significant changes in the US draft resolution seeking establishment of a multinational force under American control in Iraq as the UN Security Council began discussions on it.

Apart from the two countries, India and Syria, besides Turkey -- the only Arab member of the 15-member Council -- demand much greater role for the UN than envisaged in the American proposal even as Britain, Spain and Mexico support the resolution.

India's official stand has been that it could consider sending troops to Iraq if there was an explicit UN mandate.

A variety of factors have contributed to government's unwillingness to make such a move at this juncture. One is casualties of Indian soldiers having political repercussions on the upcoming assembly elections.

Another aspect weighing in the minds of the Vajpayee government is the political mileage that the Opposition, which has been accusing it of bowing to the US pressure, would seek to derive from such a step.



Pedestrians walk at dusk past Ground Zero Tuesday evening in New York City. In a ruling two days ahead of the second anniversary of the devastating attacks in New York and Washington, a US court ruled that families of the victims of the 11 September attacks can sue for damages from the airlines, airport security officials, a plane manufacturer and the owner of the World Trade Center.

Remains still being found near Ground Zero

THE NEW YORK TIMES

The authorities said yesterday that nine pieces of bone and muscle were found on Monday by construction workers at a building near the site of the World Trade Center, and that these may be the remains of a victim of the Sept. 11 terrorist attack.

Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the city medical examiner, said DNA tests would be used to try to identify the remains. The process, she said, will take at least several days, and it may prove futile because heat, humidity and other factors affecting human tissue decrease the effectiveness of the tests.

The remains were found on a scaffolding that had been put up before the attack, on the north side of a 25-story building at 90 West Street. The location is a block south of where the trade center's south tower stood.

Lt. John Ryan of the Port Authority police told The Associated Press that the building had been searched for remains after the attacks, but that he was not surprised that more body parts had been found because burned-out floors and other obstacles had left parts of the building inaccessible.

City officials say 2,792 people were lost in the

attacks. Of those, 1,521 have been identified, Ms. Borakove said, with 785 of the identifications made entirely through DNA testing.

For many families, finding remains even two years after the attack have been more distressing than the attack itself. The other day Al and Ginger Petrocelli learned that some remains of their son, Mark, had been identified. Again. Which meant that it was time to visit the funeral home. Again. Time to cremate. Again.

This was the fifth time in the last two years that parts of Mark Petrocelli had been identified. Mark Petrocelli, 28; husband of Nicole, son of Al and Ginger, younger brother of Al Jr., uncle of Emily, friend of many. The fifth time.

His father, Al, sat at the dining room table in the family home, a home where the cappuccino maker is no longer used because so many cups had been shared with Mark and Nicole. He looked at his handwritten notes on a yellow pad; this is one of the ways he tries to make sense of things.

"This time," the father said, "from his left knee down to the top of his foot. Right femur with right lower leg and kneecap. Some skin. A piece of skull bone. Soft tissue. Muscle."

