

ME countries making modern arms

CAIRO, Feb 25: Middle Eastern countries are busy building up arsenals of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and it may already be too late to stop them, defence analysts said on Monday, reports Reuter.

"The best that can be hoped for is to slow the spread of these technologies", Professor Trevor Taylor of Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA) told a symposium.

"Some would argue that trying to control the spread of non-conventional arms in the Middle East is like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted," he added.

Cheap arms sales from East European countries trying to sell off military stockpiles, the breakup of the former Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal and the slow progress of Arab-Israeli peace talks were among reasons the analysts cited.

Also, the technologies of mass destruction had matured to the point where they were no longer out of the range of developing countries.

"Many of these capabilities have been around for 30 or 40 years, they're far from new," Taylor told about 100 analysts at the symposium, organised by the Japanese think-tank Jime.

The spread of nuclear capability and long-range ballistic missiles are key areas of concern to western countries.

"Regional disarmament is far from being achieved," said George Joffe, a researcher in geopolitics. "If anything, the reverse could be said to be true."

President's rule goes from Punjab

CHANDIGARH, Feb 25: The 57 month old president's rule in Punjab was revoked today following the installation of the 26 member Congress -1 ministry headed by Beant Singh, reports PTI.

The proclamation of the President, R. Venkataraman, revoking the president's rule was read out by the Punjab Chief Secretary, Tejendra Khanna before the swearing-in of Beant Singh and his ministers.

The President's rule was claimed on May 11, 1987 following the dismissal of the Akali Dal ministry headed by Surjit Singh Barnala.

Israel trying to dig grave of peace process : Ashrawi

WASHINGTON, Feb 25: Israel and Palestinians in Middle East peace talks have again clashed over settlements in the occupied territories after Secretary of State James Baker intervened powerfully on the issue, reports Reuter.

Baker told a US congressional committee that the United States would only grant Israel 10 billion dollars in loan guarantees if it froze settlements, including homes already under construction.

Palestinians in the talks then handed Israel a paper denouncing settlements as illegal, inhuman and liable to sabotage peace.

Palestinian Spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi said Baker should now take the next step and declare settlements illegal.

"While the settlements are still going on, while the bulldozers are levelling our land, it is clear that Israel is trying to dig the grave of the peace process," she said.

Chief Palestinian delegate Haider Abdel-Shafi said Israel had rejected Palestinian demands to halt the settlements in a way that could threaten the talks.

"The Israeli response was not reassuring and does not help on the continuation of these talks," he said. "If they sustain this negative attitude the prospects of the peace process are in danger."

Israel says it will only discuss the settlements after three years when the final status of the territory will be determined. The current talks aim to establish interim Palestinian self-rule.

Israeli representative Eli Rubinstein insisted Jews had a right to live in the territories and Israel was not about to give this up.

Israeli spokesman Yossi Ben Aharon said his country had not given up hope of securing the loan guarantees, which

Israel desperately needs to prevent its floundering economy, being swamped by hundreds of thousands of immi-



Hanan Ashrawi grants from the former Soviet Union.

He said he believed a compromise could still be found.

Baker told the house appropriations sub-committee Israel could either freeze settlements and get the 10 billion dollar spread over five years or complete the estimated 6,000 homes already under construction and accept less money.

He did not spell out how much less but diplomatic sources said Israel could end up with only about 500 million dollar that why and would still eventually have to accept a settlement freeze.

Around 100,000 settlers live among the 1.75 million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Palestinians fear that if the settlements continue Israel will control so much of the land that there will be nothing left to negotiate about.

The peace talks in Washington resumed against a background of increased vio-

lence and tension in the Middle East. They marked the fourth round of negotiations since the sides first met at last October's historic Middle East peace conference.

The negotiations so far have achieved little and all sides have expressed disappointment with the lack of progress.

Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians have still not agreed on agenda for their talks.

The loan guarantee question overshadowed Monday's negotiations. All sides had been waiting for months for Washington to lay its cards on the table.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was defiant.

"We cannot under any circumstances go along with the principle that Jews have no right to live in this or that part of the land of Israel," said Shamir.

Saudis to buy F-15 from US

WASHINGTON, Feb 25: Saudi Arabia has formally asked to buy 72 F-15 fighter planes from the United States in a deal worth five billion dollars, NBC television reported on Monday, says Reuter.

NBC news said the administration of President George Bush told Congress in a secret report that it wanted to sell more weapons to the Gulf Arab states in deals worth more than 12 billion dollars.

The deals include the five billion-dollar sale of the F-15s, which has been in the works for months, and one billion dollars worth of two missiles and other hardware, also to the Saudis.

Kuwait also wants six Patriot missile batteries along with 450 missiles, worth five billion dollars, it added.

There have been reports in recent months that Saudi Arabia wanted the F-15s. The F-15s ground attack version of the plane is regarded as a highly sophisticated attack weapon.

Israel has objected to offensive weapons sales in the past and Congress has bowed to pressure to halt the sales.

China withdraws embassy from Latvia

BELING, Feb 25: China said Tuesday it was withdrawing its newly opened embassy from Latvia because the Baltic nation set up consular ties with Taiwan, reports AP.

The Chinese side had made solemn representations to the Latvian side on this matter," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement issued by the state-run Xinhua News Agency. It said the Latvian-Taiwan agreement violated the Latvian-Chinese communique that established diplomatic relations last September.

China routinely includes a clause in such agreements specifying that Taiwan is part of China and the only legitimate government is in Beijing.

The Chinese action fell short of breaking relations with Latvia.

Ruling party wins Malta polls

Ta Qali, Malta, Feb 25: Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami proclaimed victory today in Malta's hotly-contested General Election and said joining the European Community would be his government's prime aim, reports Reuter.

It will be our top priority, he told Reuters during a victory tour of the counting hall in this central Maltese town.

Fenech Adami's Nationalist party declared on Monday night it had won 51 per cent of the vote against 47 per cent for its main rival, the Labour party.

Former Soviet N-arms in safe hands

MOSCOW, Feb 25: NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner has struck up a new friendly relationship with Russian leaders and gained assurances from them that the former Soviet Union's vast nuclear arsenal is in safe hands, reports Reuter.

"We have met for the first time not as enemies," Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev told reporters after talks in Moscow with the NATO chief.

Woerner also met the army Commander-in-Chief of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi and first Deputy Prime Minister Gennady Burbulis on Monday.

It was due to hold talks with President Boris Yeltsin on Tuesday.

"We have come a long way and I think partnership, which is the motto of my stay here, is becoming a reality," Woerner said.

Delegation sources said the two sides discussed broadening contracts and exchanged views on nuclear non-proliferation, an area of great concern to the west as the new Commonwealth restructures former Soviet armed forces.

"Both sides were very much interested in sharing ideas as

much as possible. The Secretary-General stressed the importance of stability and of having as many contacts as possible in the military sphere," one source said.

"Woerner stated his interest in seeing unified control over strategic nuclear forces and he received very clear and posi-



MOSCOW: Russian Defence Minister Yevgeny greets NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner (R) in the Defence Ministry.

itive answers from the other side."

Commonwealth leaders reaffirmed at a meeting in the Belarusian capital Minsk this month that nuclear forces would come under unified command.

But they were divided on what to do with conventional forces, with three former Soviet republics opting to create their own national armies and the rest preferring unified command at least for a transitional period.

Woerner also discussed disarmament initiatives with the Russian officials and outlined plans for future cooperation.

Kozyrev said Russia's long-term goal of integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was not on the agenda. "We discussed how to transform rapprochement into concrete project," he said.

Shaposhnikov said: "We have many common approaches to the situation in the Commonwealth and the world as a whole."

The Commonwealth army chief said NATO could help in the process of reforming the old Soviet armed forces, but he did not elaborate.

On Sunday, Woerner visited Ukraine, the second most powerful Commonwealth state after Russia.

7 pro-democracy activists sentenced in China

BEIJING, Feb 25: Seven Chinese activists linked to the 1989 pro-democracy movement were sentenced in court here Tuesday, in the largest judgement of dissidents in more than one year, reports AFP.

The seven were all charged with "counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement," according to separate public notices put up outside the Beijing Intermediate People's Court in the capital's western suburb.

The announcement of the sentences came on the same day that the US Senate was scheduled to vote on a bill linking renewal of China's Most Favored-Nation (MFN) trading status to progress in human rights.

Former People's Daily Editor Wu Xuecan, 40, was given a four-year jail sentence for issuing a special unauthorized edition of the communist party newspaper that defended disgraced party leader Zhao Ziyang, relatives said.

Beijing university student leader Peng Rong, 24, was sentenced to two years for illegally conducting a survey of student sentiment, his mother said.

She said she would appeal the sentence.

The sentences of the other

five were not immediately known, but the notices identified them as Zhai Weimin, Li Ming, Dong Huaiming, Wang Zhongkang and Wang Guoqing.

Zhai, 23, was sixth on a list of 21 student leaders most wanted by police after the June 4, 1989 crackdown on the democracy movement. He eluded capture for nearly a year and organized an underground anti-communist party.

Li, 22, led a demonstration at Beijing university on the first anniversary of the crackdown in which students

marched, sang songs and threw bottles from dormitory windows. He attacked China's leaders as "wild and savage autocrats."

The backgrounds of the other three defendants were not known, but many workers arrested for their part in the 1989 protests are still in jail.

Court staff deliberately covered up the public notices announcing the sentencing soon after they were posted up and harassed relatives and friends who spoke with foreign reporters present.

Kim won't transfer power to his son

SEOUL, Feb 25: North Korean President Kim Il-Sung will hold on to power will not transfer his post to his son as expected, a senior Seoul official who recently met with the "Great Leader" said here today, reports AFP.

"Kim is simply too healthy to abdicate," Lee Dong-Box, spokesman of South Korea's delegation to last week's inter-Korean Prime Ministers' meeting, said.

"It is one of very important

discoveries we think we have found, that there is not going to be the kind of power transfer which has been rumoured," Lee told foreign correspondents.

"North Korea is not ready to go through that type of transfer of power," he said.

The post of Supreme Commander of the People's Army was specially created to honour his son and did not usurp the elder Kim's authority as supreme commander.

The only thing Iraqis have won from war is 'sanctions'

BAGHDAD, Feb 25: Arms flapping, the Iraqi policeman flagged down a car in central Baghdad this week on seeing a foreign face in the passenger's seat, reports Reuter.

"Please sir," the policeman asked the visitor through a half-open car window. "Can you buy me a new whistle? My old one is broken, and I can't get another because of the embargo."

To illustrate his dilemma, he blew air through the Chinese-made silver instrument hung round his neck. No sound emerged. "You cannot get a good whistle now, because of the blockade," he said.

One year after Iraq was routed in the Gulf War over Kuwait, the effect of living un-

der sanctions is beginning to tell on the lives of ordinary Iraqis, not just Iraqi policemen.

Last February 28, when the US-led coalition ceased its offensive, ushered in one of the longest periods of peace Iraqis have known since before the start of the 1980-88 war with Iran.

But the taste of peace is bitter-sweet. Daily life costs Iraqis more than they have ever known, shortages abound and life without war means a struggle to survive under the siege of sanctions.

"Get married? What kind of a life is that? It's not a life, it's death sentence," said one highly marriageable young

Iraqi woman who now works to supplement her parents' income.

No official data has been published, but foreign studies say Iraq is slowly slipping down the world economic league table, from the group of middle income oil states to rank among the Third World poor.

US President George Bush says sanctions imposed after Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait will remain in force as long as Saddam Hussein rules this nation of 18 million people.

But most foreign diplomats say the sanctions actually help Saddam by imposing a state of siege which legitimises his use

of the army, intelligence services and police to exercise power.

Routed on the battlefield and then shaken by rebellions by the Kurds and Shi'ites, Saddam Hussein promised his nation he would liberalise the politics, economics and the media.

But the Baath Party still rules unchallenged, the economy is a free-for-all black market and the only non-government newspaper is Babel, a pro-government daily owned by Saddam's son Uday.

"We went to war over Kuwait and we lost. We rebelled against Saddam like Bush said and we lost. Saddam crushed us. The only thing we

Mongolia in economic crisis after abandoning socialism

BEIJING, Feb 25: Mongolian Prime Minister Dashyn Byambasuren, his vast country lurching into economic crisis after its decision to abandon socialism, on Monday began a trip to seek help from France and Germany, Beijing's new China news agency said, reports Reuter.

Byambasuren, who last month threatened to quit his position to atone for the economic ills ravaging Mongolia, will also visit the headquarters of the European Community in Brussels, the agency said in a report from Ulan Bator.

"The visit would also open the door to further cooperation between Mongolia and the EC," the agency said.

It did not give a schedule for Byambasuren's trip.

Vice President Radnaasumberelyn Gonchigdorj left Mongolia on a one-month tour of Asian and Pacific countries earlier in February, the Chinese agency said.

"It is believed that they are seeking more loans for national construction," it said.

Mongolia, a sparsely-populated nation of wind-blown steppes and forbidding mountain ranges stretched across north-central Asia, has endured a bitter winter of shortage and hardship following its decision to drop communism in 1990.

Deprived of traditional economic support from its one-time mentor, the former Soviet Union, Mongolia has embarked on a crash programme to develop a market economy and democratic politics.

But the halt to Soviet aid has brought critical shortages of everything from matches and vodka to medicines and antibiotics.

Mongolia's communist leaders followed Moscow's lead in March 1990 and abandoned their sole monopoly on power, allowing free elections later that year.

Off the Record

Condom to fight AIDS

SAO PAULO, Brazil: Sao Paulo health workers hit the streets on Monday to distribute 2.6 million condoms as the Brazilian city gears up for carnival celebrations this weekend, a health official said, reports Reuter.

The condom handouts are part of an AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) awareness programme the city launched in an effort to curb the most serious AIDS epidemic in the country.

Officials said 14,800 people have been tested positive for the AIDS virus in the state of Sao Paulo and they estimate the number of carriers may reach 300,000. Up to 700,000 people could be infected in all Brazil, they said.

"There is far more sexual activity during carnival," Elizabeth Ingless, head of the Sao Paulo AIDS campaign, said. "People are more pleasure-driven."

Ingless said her office was working with the dancers and musicians of the Samba schools, who march in the traditional carnival parades, to educate the population about the AIDS threat.

His hand on her lap turns him into a trap

BANGKOK: Thai army chief Suchinda Kraprayoon is facing his toughest battle how to make peace with his jealous wife and defuse a controversy over his too-friendly encounter with a beauty queen, reports Reuter.

The nation newspaper said an enraged Wannee Kraprayoon made a big scene at a party for military top brass in southern Thailand over the weekend after her husband playfully put his hand in the lap of beauty queen singer Saengraee Assavarak.

Wannee shocked hundreds of guests by taking the microphone to demand the beauty queen leave the party, it said. She also threatened to smash the sound system of the band.

The embarrassed Suchinda, Thailand's most powerful general and a leader of last year's coup d'etat, could not be reached for comment on Monday.

Elvis Presley returns

LAS VEGAS: Is Elvis Presley best remembered as the sneering, hip-swiveling rock 'n' roller or the middle-aged legend in a white sequined suit? reports AP.

The Postal Service is leaving it up to the American people. The service unveiled two stamp designs Monday, one showing the king in his "Hound Dog" and "Heartbreak Hotel" years. The other shows Elvis during his later Las Vegas years. Presley died in 1977 at age 42.

Five million ballots will be available to the public in post offices April 4 to 26. The winning stamp, expected to be issued in 1993, will be announced in May, probably at the Presley's Graceland estate in Memphis, Tenn.

"This lets the American public become involved in a very unique way," Postmaster Anthony Frank said. "He broke new ground. The American people have deep feelings for him."



LAS VEGAS: US Postmaster General Anthony M. Frank stands between two stamp designs of the king of the Rock 'n' Roll, Elvis Presley at the Las Vegas Hilton. The stamps, which were unveiled at the site where Presley had 839 sold-out performances, will compete in a nationwide poll 6-24 April. The winner will be declared in early May.

BRIEFLY

Pro-communist group uncovered:

Police said Tuesday they have uncovered a 22-member student group that allegedly were trying to set up a socialist government after overthrowing South Korea's capitalist system, reports AP from Seoul.

A police announcement said 10 members of the group called International Socialists were arrested pending trial. The rest were booked but were released because of their minor roles in the group, it said.

The announcement did not say when and where the arrests were made.

If convicted under national security laws, they could face up to life imprisonment.

Police seized more than 2,000 books and leaflets supporting communism, it said.

Nine arrested in Brazil:

More than 100 police arrested nine men as death squad members in a raid early Monday in a poor community near Rio, AP reports from Brazil.

Police Chief Paulo Souto said a supermarket owner and a tavern keeper also were arrested on suspicion of financing the death squads. Souto promised more raids and said he expected 300 hired gunmen to be seized.

Brazil's death squads began forming during the military dictatorship here from 1964 to 1985, targeting people regarded as enemies of the regime.

Now, local merchants hire gunmen—most thought to be retired or off-duty police—to "clean up" high-crime areas. Many victims are street kids, who may be involved in petty crime and the drug trade.

Amnesty blames Filipino army:

Amnesty International said Tuesday that the Philippines army and other government-backed forces have killed hundreds of unarmed people in the past three years, AP reports from Sydney.

The most serious incident cited by the human rights organisation involved the shooting deaths by soldiers of 19 members of one family, including a pregnant woman and six children. Amnesty said the soldiers went to the home to arrest the father, a suspected Muslim rebel.

Amnesty International said in a report released here that while the military claimed the father killed two soldiers while resisting arrest, he was actually gunned down trying to escape and the others were then summarily shot.

The London-based organization also said it had evidence of executions of those not connected with any particular opposition group. Amnesty said they included children and elderly.

Salvadoran rebels go on alert:

Salvadoran guerrillas went on alert nationwide Monday after government aircraft flew over zones where insurgents have grouped to be disarmed under a UN-brokered peace accord, the rebels said, reports AFP from San Salvador.

Rebel forces have been ordered to open fire on any government aircraft buzzing the disarmament zones created under the accord signed January 16, rebel Radio Venceremos said.

Journalists plan strike: Journalists vowed to strike on Tuesday over government censorship of their post-coup coverage and the government sought to discourage the planned 24-hour work stoppage, AP reports from Caracas.

Labor Minister Ruben Rodriguez said any strike would be illegal since the unions had not allowed a mandatory 120-hour period to pass since ratifying their strike plan Friday.

A strike "will not contribute to the public order," Rodriguez declared in a televised address. "It would harm everyone—workers, companies and the community."