

International

Senior UAE military official says

GCC countries likely to spend \$80b on defence in five yrs

ABU DHABI, Feb 13: Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Arab neighbours are planning to spend nearly 80 billion dollars on defence over the next five years, a senior United Arab Emirates (UAE) military official said today, reports AFP.

Brigadier General Sultan Obaid Bakhit said the Middle East and other Asian countries were among the biggest arms buyers in the world, accounting for nearly 10 per cent of the total global defence spending.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are committed to spending around 80 billion dollars on defence projects in the next five years, Bakhit told the daily Al-Khaleej.

He did not elaborate on the projects.

But in the biggest air contract expected to be sealed by

2000, the UAE wants to buy almost 80 warplanes, at an estimated cost of between six and eight billion dollars.

France's Dassault which produces the Rafale is in competition with the F-16s of the US company Lockheed Martin.

The Emirates also plans to buy fast gunboats and replace six patrol vessels.

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, is looking for between 150 and 225 battle tanks, in a deal contested by Giat industries of France, General Dynamics of the United States and the British firm Vickers.

The Saudi Kingdom has tilted toward buying F-16 fighter jets to replace aging warplanes.

"After we were offered several planes, our air force experts decided the F-16 is a good

replacement for the F-5," Defence Minister Prince Sultan Ibn Abdel Aziz was quoted as saying in Saudi newspapers today.

The United States said last month it has not received an "official request from Saudi Arabia to buy 100 F-16 fighter planes and missiles.

The six Gulf Arab states have sought to bolster their armies since Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

Official Arab figures showed Saudi Arabia had allocated more than 30 per cent of its annual expenditure to defence since 1990.

The Sultanate of Oman spent more than 40 per cent, while the level ranged between 25 and 35 per cent in the remaining members — Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE.

High defence spending in the

volatile Middle East region has attracted hundreds of international arms producers to a key ground and naval arms exhibition in Abu Dhabi and an air show in Dubai over the past few years.

More than 700 companies from 40 countries will exhibit weapons at the third arms show in Abu Dhabi next month, said Bakhit, who heads an armed forces committee organising the march 16:20 fair.

"The figure includes the top 10 arms manufacturers in the world. The show will also feature the biggest naval presence since the (1991) Gulf war," the General said.

Aircraft carriers and other warships from France, Britain, the United States, Germany, Italy and The Netherlands will dock at Port Zayed for the show, he added.

BRIEFLY



The Princess of Wales, Diana, attends the premiere performance of Lord Attenborough's latest film "In Love and War" at London's Empire in Leicester Square on Wednesday. The screening was a charity of the British Red Cross.

Gunmen kill cop in Albania: An Albanian policeman was shot dead Wednesday by unknown gunmen in the southern town of Vlore, scene of violent anti-government riots earlier this week, the Interior Ministry announced, AFP reports from Tirana.

The incident came after the Albanian government decided not to foist a state of emergency on the southern port, despite a week of riots which have left three people dead and 150 injured. The rioting was touched off after a shady investment firm collapsed, taking with it the savings of thousands of already poor citizens.

84 merchants held in Iraq: The Iraqi opposition said Wednesday that the Iraqi authorities have arrested 84 merchants for allegedly extorting state funds, AFP reports from Dubai.

"Eighty-four merchants in Baghdad, including Saad Tabra, were arrested last week," the Iraqi National Congress (INC) opposition coalition said in a statement received here. The London-based INC said the Iraqi presidency has prepared lists of names of other merchants and wealthy Iraqi businessmen... and the dictatorial regime is ready to carry out additional arrests.

50 kg heroin seized in India: Fifty kilograms of smuggled heroin worth about 50 crore rupees in international market was seized from a house in village Malkapur, close to the Indo-Pakistan border, last night, customs and police officials said Wednesday, PTI reports from Amritsar.

Speaking at a press conference here, the additional collector of customs, MS Negi, the I G Police (border range), Bakshi Ram, and the DIG (border range), PS Sandhu, said the contraband was found from the house of one Ajab Singh, who was absconding. His wife Manjit Kaur, allegedly in possession of this heroin, was arrested, they said.

Rock singer Brian Connolly dies: Brian Connolly, the once-hard-living singer of 1970s rock band Sweet, died on Monday, a friend disclosed. He was 52, AFP reports from London.

Connolly, whose hits included "blockbuster," "ballroom blitz" and "Wing Wam Bam," died of renal failure in hospital in Slough, west of London, with his friends and family around him. Sweet, were one of the leading lights of the "glam rock" movement of the 1970s, with hits in Britain and the United States and sales of 50 million records worldwide.

Pentagon will budget \$42b to develop new weapons

WASHINGTON, Feb 13: The Pentagon will budget 42 billion dollars to develop new weapons, which it considers a top priority, defence secretary William Cohen said Wednesday, reports AFP.

"The substantial reduction in force structure following the end of the cold war allowed us to terminate or defer many programmes within acceptable risks. But this trend must now be reversed," Cohen told the Committee on National Security of the House of Representatives.

"The holiday is over, we have to start getting back into business," he said after a meeting on President Bill Clinton's proposed defence budget.

According to Cohen, the United States must be "much more selective and much more restrained" today in its choice of military operations abroad.

"We should not be the world's policeman," he emphasized.

Joint chiefs Chairman General John Shalikashvili, who will leave his post in Septem-

ber, told the committee that there are now 42,000 American soldiers deployed abroad in 14 different military missions such as Bosnia.

Since 1989, the armed force have cut back the number of active servicemen by 700,000, or by about one-third, and they now stand at their lowest level since the Korean war.

India to acquire defence equipment from Israel

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: India will acquire defence equipment from Israel through Russia, local newspaper The Hindustan Times quoted defence ministry sources as saying here today, reports Xinhua.

India wants the transfer of technology in communication, command and control systems and intelligence gathering systems. Israel has agreed to cooperate with Russia to supply the systems to India, the newspaper reported.

2000 Karens cross into Thailand

BANGKOK, Feb 13: Two thousand ethnic Karens have crossed into Thailand to seek refuge from fighting between Karen rebels and Myanmar government forces, a senior Thai military officer said today, reports AFP.

The exodus across the border began Tuesday after clashes just inside Myanmar, as strongholds of the Karen National Union (KNU) came under pressure from troops of the ruling junta.

"About 2,000 Karen women, children and old people have crossed to Thailand in the last two days since the clashes occurred," said Colonel Suwit Maenmuen, Commander of Thailand's Fourth Regiment Task Force in the province of Tak 402 kilometres (250 miles) northwest of here.

Will China live up to its promise to keep HK capitalist?

HONG KONG, Feb 13: When a float sponsored by a pro-China organisation ran out of control during a Chinese New Year parade and killed a British spectator, some saw more in it than just an accident, reports AP.

A citizen of the departing colonial power run down by a symbol of the incoming regime on the most auspicious day in the calendar — the tragedy sent a tremor through superstitious Hong Kong, and a Chinese official was quick to deny it was a bad omen for the British colony's return to China on July 1.

With so many uncertainties looming over the momentous change of sovereignty, it's not surprising to find Hong Kong people reading hidden meanings into anything.

The big uncertainty remains, as ever, whether Communist China will live up to its promise to keep Hong Kong cap-

italist and free.

Another is whether Tung Chee-hwa, leader-in-waiting of semi-autonomous, post-colonial Hong Kong, will stand up to China in defence of the promised freedoms.

Although he is still more than four months away from taking office, the 59-year-old shipping tycoon already is feeling the heat.

Hong Kong's pro-democracy camp, deeply skeptical that the future chief could be anything but Beijing's yes man, has leaped on Tung for endorsing China's moves to disband the elected legislature and roll back some of Hong Kong's civil liberties.

Tung has argued strenuously that these are largely technical changes whose overall effect will be negligible. He says the proposed controls on the right to demonstrate and to establish links between Hong Kong and

foreign organisations are little different from those imposed in many western societies.

But Michael DeGolyer, an American analyst who is tracking the public mood through the change of sovereignty, says his surveys find many people believing that Tung has bent over far too much in favour of Beijing's views.

Tung seems to think the curbs are a small price to pay for winning Beijing's trust and dissuading it from imposing its own restrictions, which would probably be much harsher.

But Professor Joseph Cheng of City University of Hong Kong asks whether freedoms can ever be negotiable.

"We believe that they are part and parcel of the Hong Kong way of life," he says. But China sees them as preconditions to be preserved as long as they are useful, and "sacrificed when more important considerations

come into the foreground."

Nihal Jayawickrama, a law professor, notes that many of the freedoms now under threat were legislated when Tung was a member of Gov. Chris Patten's cabinet. Therefore, he must have supported them.

"Mr Tung is now marching to the beat of a different drummer when he should be beating his own drum," Jayawickrama wrote in the Hong Kong Standard.

Tung's advocacy of "Chinese values" and his exhortations to Hong Kong to focus on its economy rather than on politics, strike some critics as coded support for China's view that politics cause instability and that economic prosperity outweighs individual rights.

Tung's problems don't end with the democrats. Anson Chan, Patten's popular deputy, has given Tung a valuable credibility boost by agreeing to stay

in his government. But her continuing criticism of the moves against civil liberties put any long-term partnership with Tung into question.

Even some members of the pro-Beijing camp, taken aback by the outcry, say they are having second thoughts about changing the laws.

Tung has also risked alienating powerful rural conservatives by refusing to back the abolition of a law granting women equal inheritance rights.

Tung doesn't shy away from controversy. He faces the media almost every day. When a dozen chanting, banner-waving democracy campaigners occupied the lobby of his office building, he did what no Chinese official has done in recent memory: he came down and talked to them.

Tung, who lived in the United States for 10 years, also

Off the Record



Rock music superstar David Bowie (R) and his wife, supermodel Iman smile as they pose for photos after Bowie received a star on the world famous Walk of Fame Wednesday in Hollywood, CA. Bowie, whose changing persona has marked him as one of rock music's most dynamic performers over the last three decades, recently released his latest album "Earthlings."

Brigitte Bardot sexier than Pamela Anderson!

WARSAW: Most Polish men still consider France's Brigitte Bardot to be the sexiest woman on earth, a good two decades since her name was synonymous with sexiness, a survey for the Polish edition of Elle magazine revealed Wednesday, reports AFP.

The poll, conducted for Valentine's Day on Friday, placed Bardot, 62, ahead of Pamela Anderson, star of the American Baywatch television series.

Next came Marilyn Monroe and two retired Polish newscasters.

They survey favoured older stars since it asked respondents to name an object of their desire with whom they had no hope of ever fulfilling their amorous dreams.

The women questioned picked Polish actor Stanislaw Mikulski as their ideal man, followed by US film stars Tom Cruise and Robert Redford.

More than a year after his death

TOKYO: The body of a reclusive Japanese man who had died alone in his apartment more than a year ago was found last month by his sister — who lived next door, reports AP.

The sister, who assumed that her brother had gone on an unannounced trip, found the badly emaciated body January 18 after a relative asked her to go into the apartment to check the Buddhist altar inside, police said Thursday.

The man, single and living alone in a tiny apartment outside Tokyo, was believed to have died of some kind of illness, which was not identified in the autopsy, police said.

The 39-year-old man, whose name was withheld, had no record of serious chronic illness, but police said they did not suspect wrongdoing in the death, which they estimate happened around November 1995.

The man was a loner and had in the past disappeared suddenly for a few months without telling anyone, police quoted the sister as saying.

He lost his job at a janitorial company several months before his death. He and his sister were living next to each other after inheriting the apartment complex from their parents in 1992.

Taliban impose decree Foreigners can no longer hire taxis or private cars

ISLAMABAD, Feb 13: Afghanistan's Islamic Taliban militia has decreed that foreign journalists and other foreigners can no longer hire taxis or private cars and must use only tourism department vehicles, reports Reuters.

Taliban-controlled radio Afghanistan said on Wednesday night that the tourism department had announced that its vehicles would be at the disposal of foreigners and journalists.

"All owners of taxi and private vehicles are hereby informed that henceforth they have no right to transport guests or foreign journalists anywhere from point A to B."

The department of tourism, which possesses transport vehicles official licences and able interpreters, is at the service of journalists and foreign guests.

"Being a government institution, the department has the duty to provide vehicles carrying white (Taliban) flags and symbols of tourism and to transport journalists and foreign tourists inside the city and around the country," it said.

The radio, monitored in Islamabad did not say if the handful of foreign journalists permanently based in Kabul would be allowed to drive their own vehicles.

The Taliban, who captured the Afghan capital on September 27, have already ruled that visiting journalists must stay at the rocket-scarred state-run continental hotel.

The radio gave no reason for the latest restriction, which appeared designed to keep a tighter rein on journalists' movements and to generate revenue for the tourism department.

The purist Taliban, who have taken over about three quarters of Afghanistan, want to impose their strict interpretation of Islamic sharia law throughout the war-ravaged country.

NATO troops moving ahead to control Brcko

SARAJEVO, Feb 13: NATO troops are bracing ahead of a potentially explosive ruling Friday on control of the strategically vital town of Brcko, with both Muslims and Serbs marking ominous predictions of what will happen if they are not awarded the town, reports AFP.

The NATO-led Stabilisation Force (SFOR), nervous at the belligerent warnings, have announced a complete ban on troop movements and training after both Muslims and Serbs called up reservists.

On Wednesday, SFOR seized a Serb tank that was roaming the countryside south of the town. SFOR forces throughout Bosnia will be on alert over the weekend.

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