

India deploys Russian-made air defence system

NEW DELHI, Jan 10: Indian has deployed a one-billion-dollar air defence artillery system procured from Russia, a report said today, says AFP.

The Business Standard daily quoting the Director of Defence Artillery, A. Mukherjee, said the Russian-made air defence system called 'Tungushka' was 'fully inducted into the forces'.

An unspecified number of these anti-missile weapons have been deployed in the troubled region of Kashmir and the northern desert state of Rajasthan to 'provide battlefield support to tank regiments', the daily said.

It said the system had twin high velocity machine guns, eight radar-guided missile batteries and weighed slightly more than a tank.

The deal to buy the system,

said to be the most advanced of its kind in the world, was clinched during (former prime minister) Narasima Rao's (1991-96) regime, the daily reported.

The system is to be put on show for the first time during India's Republic Day celebrations on January 26.

Mukherjee said Tungushka's primary role was the 'provide air cover to attacking artillery formations', and can track and attack several targets at the same time, including helicopters, fighter aircraft and Cruise missiles.

India conducted five nuclear tests in May last year and has developed an array of guided missiles, including two long-range systems, which can transport nuclear warheads to a distance of 1500 km. Almost 70 per cent of India's military hardware is of Russian origin.

Koirala may win ensuing vote of confidence

KATHMANDU, Jan 10: Nepali parliament begins voting later this week to test the strength of Prime Minister Raja Prasad Koirala's new coalition, officials said today, reports Reuters.

Koirala would seek a mandatory confidence vote in the 205-seat lower house of representatives. He is expected to easily win the vote, as members of his alliance would take up more than two-thirds of the vote, much more than the 103 required to keep him in office.

The government has already registered the confidence motion which will mature for debate on Wednesday, parliament spokesman Bishnu Dutt Upreti said.

He said parliament Speaker Ram Chandra Poudel would fix dates for a debate on the motion, and voting would be completed before the next weekend.

A political crisis gripped the Himalayan kingdom in December when a communist partner walked out of Koirala's coalition, temporarily reducing his power to minority.

Koirala resigned but quickly struck a power-sharing deal with another communist party in parliament and was reappointed as prime minister.

This week's parliamentary vote is crucial for Koirala's plans to hold early national elections in April, which is part of the condition of the new power sharing pact with the Communist United Marxist-Leninist (UML) party.

Koirala's centrist Nepali Congress party and the UML are expected to be the main contenders for power during the upcoming elections.

The Nepali Congress and the communists jointly launched a pro-democracy movement in 1990.

Stride toward democracy Nigeria holds state polls

LAGOS, Nigeria, Jan 10: After decades of military rule, Nigeria continued its tentative stride toward democracy with long lines of voters turning out to elect governors and state assemblies across the country, reports AP.

Turnout appeared to be particularly high in the north and in Lagos, before voting ended in mid-afternoon. Results were expected later Sunday.

In a novel anti-fraud move, voters were allowed to stay at polling centres after they cast their ballots and watch votes being counted.

Military meddling and armed forces coups have long been part of Nigerian politics — the army has held power for all but 10 years since independence in 1960. But change has come to

Africa's most populous nation since Gen Sani Abacha's sudden death in June ended his brutal dictatorship.

Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, the career soldier who succeeded Abacha, has freed political prisoners, opened up the political process and repeatedly vowed to hand over power to civilians later this year. Nigeria, which became an international pariah under Abacha for its miserable human rights record, is again welcoming foreign envoys and wooing investors.

"We basically have one reason for voting, that is to get the military out of power," said Rahimi Sodunke, a Lagos businessman. "We deserve a change in this country and we must shift power".

BRIEFLY

Menem to meet Clinton: Argentine President Carlos Menem will meet with US President Bill Clinton in Washington next week and discuss the status of the disputed Falkland Islands diplomatic sources told AFP on Saturday in Buenos Aires.

Menem's visit to the US capital on Monday and Tuesday was set to occur at a high point in relations between Buenos Aires and London.

American extradited to Australia: An American accused in Australia's largest ever cannabis resin seizure has been extradited to Australia from the Netherlands, the federal government said yesterday. AP reports from Canberra.

Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone said American George Paul Brock, 49, is alleged to be the principal and financier of an attempt to import 10 metric tons of cannabis resin into Port Stephens on the mid-north coast of New South Wales state in January, 1997.

Landslides claim 42 in Indonesia: At least 42 have been killed in four landslides on two Indonesian islands in recent days, news reports said yesterday, AP reports from Jakarta.

Seven people were killed when torrential rain triggered three landslides on the main Indonesian island of Java on Friday, the newspaper Kompas said. Meanwhile the death toll from a landslide on Thursday on the tourist island of Bali rose to 35 when three more bodies were found on Sunday, the official Antara news agency said.

Azeri jail revolt victims buried: Eleven prisoners and two guards who were killed in a prison revolt in the Caucasus nation of Azerbaijan were buried on Saturday in separate funerals, AP reports from Baku.

The 13 men were killed Friday after prisoners led by dissident former military officers staged a rebellion in the Gubstan hard-labour camp, about 60-km south of Azerbaijan's capital Baku. Twenty-one guards were wounded in the operation to put down the rebellion.

Chandigarh — an urban mess today

CHANDIGARH, India, Jan 10: Fifty years ago acclaimed French architect Le Corbusier conceived of transforming India's northern barren plains of Chandigarh into a bustling urban centre rivaling this century's emerging capital cities of Brasilia, Islamabad and Abuja, reports AFP.

But Chandigarh, planned as a capital for the new state of Punjab, is today an urban mess. It is a far cry from Le Corbusier's sylvan have dotted with boulevards, avant-garde buildings, a modern city centre ringing a spacious plaza and numerous parks and nature trails.

India's first Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru had hoped the city, work on which began in 1956, would herald stunning changes.

An ongoing international conference here to debate the future of the city has suggested stern measures to save Chandigarh, built by Le Corbusier on a plain that gently slopes up to the sub-Himalaya foothills.

Le Corbusier, whose real name was Charles Edoard Jeanneret, had in his master-

plan divided the city into about 30 self-sufficient districts, each measuring 800 metres (2,640 feet) by 1,200 metres (3,960 feet).

The number of quarters has swelled to 47, while two satellite townships and several sprawling and filthy slums ring the city on a 16-kilometre radius that Le Corbusier had specified should remain unbuilt to protect the environment.

Le Corbusier's stamp, however, remains largely untarnished in the sequestered Capitol area, modelled on the Acropolis of Athens, and built to house a sprawling 10-storey secretariat for about 4,500 government employees, the Punjab legislature and the High Court.

A huge monument — an open hand — dominates the Capitol. It signifies, to use Le Corbusier's words, that the city would offer "All amenities of life to the poorest of the poor citizens to lead a dignified life."

Indian writer Nayantara Sahgal, Nehru's niece, said Chandigarh had been an investment in the future of India.

"Punjab had been through a kind of hell and people were left insecure, Chandigarh was an

attempt at resurrecting one's self-world — a brand new capital unlike anything India had seen before."

Sahgal said Nehru had hoped to change Indian perspectives on living by creating a city that was clean, well-planned and orderly.

But the glory of Chandigarh is a thing of the past although city restaurateur Puneet Sethi said living conditions were still better than any other Indian city.

"There is regular water and electricity. The air is cleaner and traffic is better."

However population has increased several-fold to some three million Le Corbusier's buildings and specially created tapestries for them are in a state of utter disrepair.

The city now serves as the capital of three states following the 1966 partition of Punjab into two provinces and the elevation of Chandigarh to quasi-statehood.

Charles Correa, India's best-known architect said the idea behind Chandigarh was flawed since it catered only to the needs of the well-heeled.

Blair warns Saddam not to attack neighbours

Iraqi lawmakers may back govt's defiance of no-fly zones



Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, centre, during a meeting with Muzahem Mus'ib al-Hassan, Commander of the Iraqi Air Force and his assistants in Baghdad on Saturday. Iraqi News Agency (INA) gave no details of the meeting.

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