INTERNÄTIONAL

The Daily Star

"such a vision would encourage our NATO allies and friends to bolster their defence budgets, perhaps," a reference to US worries that

European allies have allowed their

national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, made the same

point: "We are concerned about

. what has been a decline in military

capabilities on much of the (Euro-

European Union members

agreed more than a year ago to set

up a rapid reaction military force of

60,000 troops which they aim to

have up and running by early 2003. It would have the capability of jump-ing into Kosovo-like hotspots within

60 days and remaining in place for

humanitarian and peacekeeping

body. Bush said he supported it only

after receiving a number of assur-

ances from Blair on how it would

defence forces moving on their

own," the US leader said.

might be worthy of discussion.

Chinese foreign ministry spokes-

man Zhu Bangzao, in cautiously

assessing the Russian proposal,

said in Beijing on Thursday that it

might be worthy of discussion and

study if it would comply with the

landmark 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile

Sergeyev submitted the proposal in

Moscow on Tuesday to visiting

threatened by missile attack.

Russian Defence Minister Igor

(ABM) Treatv

"He also assured me that there

The force was conceived as a

In an interview with the independent Channel 4 News, Bush's

militaries to atrophy.

pean) continent.

at least a year.

Israel, Palestinians will go back to peace table: Powell

US secy of state kicks off ME trip

DHAKA SUNDAY FEBRUARY 25, 2001

AFP, Cairo

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said Saturday he was certain that Israel and the Palestinians would return to the peace table but declined to predict when talks might resume or what form they might take.

"There will be a negotiation again; there is no choice," Powell told reporters accompanying him on his whirlwind Middle East tour that includes five Arab nations, the Palestinian territories and Israel.

From Cairo, Powell is to travel to Israel on Saturday evening where he will meet outgoing Prime Minisrter Ehud Barak. The next day, he visits Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat

Washington has made clear that Powell will not be secret plans to help revive peace efforts but the secretary said he would be nonetheless pushing for progress on that front.

Violence needs to be curbed, lapsed security coopertation needs to be restarted and the economic blockade on Palestinians, including the withholding of taxes by Israel must be addressed before true peace talks can resume

"When we get these three moving again and we stabilise the situation then we begin to see where we are," Powell said, referring to peace talks and the need to wait until Sharon has formed a full government

'Then we'll begin to see where the negotiations begin again and on what basis and on what level are they ready to negotiate," he said. "It's not clear where we will start that."

Meanwhile, unrepentant despite heavy Arab criticism of air strikes on Iraq, US Secretary of State Colin Powell kicked off a lightning tour of the Middle East on Saturday aimed at boosting punitive measures on Baghdad.

Powell arrived in the Egyptian capital saying he was determined to build a regional consensus on re-energising UN sanctions against Baghdad and

finding a "better way" to contain Irag.

Powell said he intended to listen to Arab concerns about US and UN policy toward Iraq, particularly as it relates to improving the sanctions regime, but would not be distracted by any protest of last week's attacks on Baghdad.

Speaking to reporters accompanying him on the whirlwind tour, Powell said the United States would continue to hold open the option of military force against Saddam Hussein even while discussing an easing of sanctions.

"In some places (there was) quite a bit of criticism over the fact that we did that," he said referring to the February 16 strikes. "To the extent that that makes my job and my work a little more difficult, well, so be it.

"It makes the point that we will not allow the (sanctions) negotiating track overcome what we're prepared to do militarily and, if it means my trip is a little more difficult, I'm prepared to take on that added burden."

Powell will be cutting a broad swath through the region -- cramming into three days brief stops in five Arab capitals, Israel and the Palestinian territories -- to shore up support for the containment of Iraq and assess prospects

for the sickly Israeli-Palestinian peace track. US officials have said they envision "smoothing" the UN sanctions on Iraq, easing and clarifying commercial restrictions while boosting ones dealing with military goods and technology.

Key to this strategy, Powell said, would be convincing the Arab world and the United Nations that the energised sanctions were aimed not at the Iraqi people but at preventing Baghdad from acquiring weapons of mass destruction

"If there are aspects of the UN sanctions policy that are not directed toward that end and are frustrating our ability to hold the whole regime in place, then I want to know about it," he said



US President George W. Bush (2nd-L) and his wife Laura (L) welcome British Prime Minister Tony Blair(R) and his wife Cherie(2nd-R) on Friday to the presidential retreat Camp David in Maryland. Blair and his wife were scheduled to remain overnight at the compound with the Bushes

Bush backs European rapid reaction force

AFP, Camp David

US President George W. Bush, speaking at a joint press conference with British Prime Minister Tony Blair here Friday, expressed support for a European rapid reaction force as long as it did not undermine NATO

Bush said that the two leaders spent "a lot of time" on the subject of European force to deal with regional trouble spots at lengthy talks here during their first meeting. "And I support his point of view.

Bush said of Blair's advocacy of the pan-European force he said would respond to humanitarian crises.

"He also assured me that the force will in no way undermine NATO," said Bush. "I think it makes a lot of sense.

Blair said that the force, criticised in Washington as potentially compromising the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), would do no more than complement the Western alliance.

"It is not a standing army," he operate said. "We would never do anything to undermine NATO. But it is imporwould be a joint command, that the planning would take place within tant that we have the capability to be able to act should we chose to do NATO, and that should all NATO not wish to go on a mission, that would then serve as a catalyst for the

He described the force as "an additional string to our bow in circumstances where NATO does not want to be involved.

Bush also expressed hope that

More than snail's pace AP, London

A postcard that took more than a century to travel from Australia to Scotland will be returned to the sender's relatives, Royal Mail offi-

cials said Friday. The postcard was sent 112 years ago from Colin Wardrop to his sister in Aberdeen, northern Scotland, It left Australia this month and arrived in Aberdeen last week, the Royal

Mail said. The message reads: "Just a few lines to say that I am still in Brisbane

and have enjoyed my six weeks' leave. I reported myself today at the bank, but have not yet heard my destination. Thanks awfully for letters from you and Gerty. Trusting you are all well and wishing you all a happy new year. Will write in a day or two. This is the first time postcards have been issued in Queensland."

Kuwait renews defence pact with US AFP, Kuwait City

A defence pact between the United

Chaotic evacuation of refugees from Borneo fighting begins

AFP, Sampit

A chaotic evacuation began Saturday of some 24,000 refugees from this Borneo river town fleeing nearly a week of bloody clashes between Dayak tribesmen and Madurese settlers Crowds of desperate people

fought for places on trucks taking them to the single navy landing ship Teluk Sampit, which has a capacity of only 1.800 passengers, the staterun Antara news agency said. The Teluk Sampit arrived at the

town's river port overnight. An AFP photographer said some 2,000 people, most of them ethnic Madurese settlers, managed to squeeze aboard the ship, filling every inch of deck space before it left the port at around 9:30 (0230

He said the chaos subsided once the refugees had boarded the trucks and were escorted by army soldiers, rifles at the ready in case of attacks by Dayak tribesmen, for the one-km drive to Sampit port.

"They are hungry, they have money but no food, all the shops are closed," he said.

Antara described the condition of the refugees as desperate, and said four of them including two infants had died. Some had been without food for days, it said. A second navy ship, the Teluk

Ende, was expected to arrive in Sampit later in the day, it said. Another ship, the Tilung Kabilah, owned by the state shipping company, Pelni, was expected on

The refugees had sheltered in government offices with the help of Indonesian troops after indiginous Dayak tribesmen, armed with swords, arrows and blowguns, marauded through Sampit, burning Madurese houses and attacking the settlers

Clashes between the Dayaks and the Madurese erupted last Sunday, but by Thursday the Dayaks had control of the town, hunting down Madurese and burning their houses.

East Waringin district medical officials said that by late Friday more than 200 deaths in the clashes had been registered in hospitals in the area, but doctors at Sampit general hospital declined comment

Taliban execute

Russia and China have already agreed to build anti-missile defence networks to cope with the controversial national missile defence system (NMD) of the United States, according to a Pyongyang daily.

AFP, Seoul

The official newspaper of North Korea's ruling Korean Workers Party, Rodong Sinmun, made the claim in Thursday's edition, whose contents were received in Seoul Saturday.

> The paper denounced the new US administration for promoting the NMD as its key defence task despite strong opposition and protests from other countries, saying the NMD is bringing about a new arms race and the revival of Cold War

"Russia has declared that it would not sit by should the United States push ahead with its plans for the NMD," the paper said in an editorial titled "grave activities destroying peace.

Russia, China agree to build

anti-missile defence system

"Russia and China have already agreed to build anti-missile defence systems near (their) eastern borders." it said.

he paper said.

there has been such an agreement between Russia and China or the paper overplayed the fact that China has said a Russian proposal for a European missile defence system

Iraq, UN to resume talks after two-year hiatus

AFP, Baghdad

After a two-year hiatus, Iraq will resume talks Monday with the days in New York, has expressed no United Nations on how to lift the optimism about the talks, predicting only that they "will be long" crippling sanctions placed on the US-British air strikes on military country in 1990, but Baghdad has a targets around Baghdad on very different view from the UN on February 16 have aggravated what the solution should be. tensions between Iraq and the UN. In short, Iraq wants the sanctions regime lifted. "It's up to the United According to Annan, it is up to the UN Security Council to address the Nations to respect its resolutions, starting with the lifting of the embargo," Saad Qassem

the ruling Baath party, told AFP.

that Baghdad allows weapons

inspectors back into Iraq.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said al-Sahhaf, who will meet Annan Monday for two



nous act of adultery corrupting the

The radio did not say how the women were executed but the Taliban have in the past punished people convicted of adultery by stoning them to death.

2 women for adultery, flog 12 others AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's ultra-orthodox Taliban regime publicly executed two women and flogged a dozen others convicted of adultery in the southern city of Kandahar, the official Radio Shariat said Saturday. It said the women. Wasila and

Shoqufa, were executed on Friday at a sports ground in Kandahar, the headquarters of the ruling militia, charged with committing the "hei-

society.

Chandrika talks SAARC, civil

war with Indian leaders

Tigers kill 2 cops despite truce

Kathmandu in November 1999. "At present there is no consen

Russia has also said India and other Asian countries might take part in "joint actions like this one," However, it was unclear whether

NATO Secretary General George Robertson, who also discussed the issue with Russian President Vladimir Putin The Russian proposal calls for a defensive system with mobile elements placed at points most

s and Kuwait signed after the 1991 Gulf War has been renewed for another 10 years, the Kuwaiti defence minister said in a report published on Saturday.

The agreement "has been automatically renewed for a similar (10year) period, starting from the expiry date of the current pact," Defence Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak al-Sabah told Al-Rai Al-Aam newspa-

The pact was signed after the war in which a US-led coalition liberated Kuwait from seven months of Iraqi occupation. The pact was due to expire in the third quarter of this year.

A Dayaknese, while holding a spear, passes a Maduranese's burning house in Patai sub-district, Kotawaringin Timur, some 160 km from Central Kalimantan's main city, Palangkara on Friday. The death toll from seventh days of brutal ethnic clashes in Indonesian Borneo Island in Sampit rose to at least 143 as the clashes spread as Dayak tribesmen took control of the city.

> Teodoro Obiang Nguema accepted the resignation of the government of Prime Minister Angel Serafin Seriche Dougan late Friday amid a "constitutional crisis", the presi-

Dougan was prime minister of the former Spanish colony three times since 1996

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga Friday held talks with Indian leaders here on the twodecade-old civil war in her country and efforts to revive the SAARC regional forum.

AFP, New Delhi

In talks with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, it was decided the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) standing committee of senior officials would meet in May, an Indian foreign office spokesman said.

Reports from Colombo said Kumaratunga, whose country holds the rotating chairmanship of the seven-member forum, would try to persuade India to agree to an early meeting during her two-day visit. India has opposed a meeting in

protest at Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf's seizure of power in October 1999 in a coup. The last summit was to have

been held in the Nepalese capital

sus on holding a summit," spokesman Raminder Singh Jassal said. SAARC, which groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, requires that all decisions be taken unanimously. Convening a summit requires complete consensus among member nations.

However, in an interview with Star News, Kumaratunga expressed confidence India was "slowly but surely coming back to the SAARC process.'

"Today the Indian prime minister told us that he had no objections (to a standing committee meeting) first the foreign secretaries have to meet, then we will see. Things have to go very slowly and gradually," she said

Talks also focused on efforts by Kumaratunga to end the civil war between Tamil separatists and government forces.

wfulness of the raids. "We expect an escalation on the ground. They (the US) will not stop Hammudi, a high-ranking official in he bombardments, particularly when their Iraqi game is useful at UN Secretary General Koffi home in America," Iraq's Deputy Annan, on the other hand, wants Foreign Minister Nizar Hamdoon Baghdad to implement Security Council resolutions which offer an warned Friday while in Paris following US-British air strikes Thursday easing of sanctions on condition

on military targets in northern Iraq.

12 Muslim rebels.1 soldier killed in Southern Philippines AFP, Zamboanga About 12 Muslim extremist kidnappers and one infantry man were killed in clashes on the southern Philippine island of Jolo, where the guerrillas are still holding an American and a Filipino hostage, the military said Saturday. At least 15 army soldiers were also wounded in the clash following a military offensive targetting the Abu Sayyaf group's mountain lair in Jolo's Patikul town on Friday, the military said. Soldiers, backed by police, swooped on the rebel lair but were met by heavy gunfire from some 300 extremists led by Abu Sayyaf commanders Galib Andang and Mujib Susukan, the military said. Equatorial Guinea's govt resigns AFP, Malabo Equatorial Guinea's President dent's office said