

## US military developing non-lethal weapon

REUTERS, Washington

The US military on Thursday said it was developing a new non-lethal weapon which uses electromagnetic energy to cause a burning sensation on the skin and turn back enemy troops from long range.

Officials said the "millimeter-wave" pulses, which might one day be fired from a dish-shaped device similar to a radar, could be mounted on military jeeps and possibly be used in peacekeeping and cases where innocent civilians are mixed with enemy troops.

"In conflicts, targeted adversaries are expected to simply flee," the Marine Corps said of the new weapon.

After 10 years and \$40 million in research by the corps and the Air Force, the Marines said at a briefing for reporters that pulses from the weapons travel at the speed of light to penetrate less than 1/64 of an inch into the skin, causing immediate discomfort like touching a hot light bulb.

## India tests Akash missile

AFP, New Delhi

India on Friday successfully tested for a second time in a week its multi-target surface-to-air missile "Akash", the Press Trust of India reported.

The missile weighing 650 kilograms (1,430 pounds) was fired from a mobile launcher shortly after 1:00 pm (1230 BST) from a test range in the eastern state of Orissa. Akash has a range of 25 kilometres, can deliver 55 kilograms (121 pounds) of explosives and has the capacity to strike several targets simultaneously.

The last test launch of the missile was conducted on Tuesday.

Akash is one of the missiles being developed by the Indian defence establishment under its indigenous Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP), launched in 1983.

India has already inducted the short range surface-to-surface Prithvi missile with a range of 150 km to 250 km into service.

The Prithvi is capable of carrying a one-tonne nuclear or conventional warhead.

# Destruction of Afghan statues sparks world outrage

AFP, Kabul

International outrage escalated Friday as Afghanistan's Taliban militia pressed on with their "Islamic" mission to smash ancient statues across the country.

The European Union described as "deeply tragic" the destruction of statues, including the world's tallest standing Buddha built almost 2,000 years ago.

"It is with dismay and shock that the EU has received information about the edict of the Taliban leader Mulla Omar, in which the destruction of all statues and shrines in Afghanistan is ordered," the EU presidency in Stockholm said.

France warned the ruling militia late Thursday that it was stoking "hostility" to its regime in the world's capitals by destroying its pre-Islamic heritage with flagrant disregard for international opinion.

UN special envoy to Afghanistan Francesco Vendrell told AFP he discussed the edict with the Taliban foreign minister in Kabul Thursday but was told "the Islamic Emirate (Taliban) is not in the habit of rescinding their edicts."

"I told him that the international community is baffled at the moment and it would create international outrage if the edict is carried out," Vendrell said. "It's going to have negative implications for the Taliban's image around the world."

Appeals to spare the Afghan relics have come from the United States, France, Germany, Thailand, Japan, Sri Lanka, Iran, Pakistan, Germany, Russia, India, the European Union, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and many museums and Buddhist organisations.

Taliban Minister of Information and Culture Qudratullah Jamal told AFP Thursday that the destruction of scores of pre-Islamic figures, designed to stop the worshipping of "false idols," had begun throughout Afghanistan.

Refusing to say how the "work" would be carried out, he said militiamen started wrecking the huge Buddhist figures in the central province of Bamiyan, including the world's tallest standing Buddha measuring 50 metres.

The Taliban have in the past fired mortars at the Bamiyan Buddhas and set off explosives around them.

He said Taliban soldiers were also busy in the Kabul museum and elsewhere in the provinces of Ghazni, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar.

# US punishes Afghanistan, Myanmar for drugs record

AFP, Washington

The United States announced that Afghanistan and Myanmar, the world's top opium and heroin producers, would face continued US sanctions under the annual US review of nations engaged in the illicit drug trade.

Twenty out of 24 nations which the United States considers major producers or conduits of illicit drugs were certified in the review Thursday as fully cooperating with the United States.

Four nations were decertified, but sanctions against Cambodia and Haiti, which included an end to most US aid and a block on borrowing from multilateral organisations, were waived.

For the second year in a row, Afghanistan and Myanmar were the sole countries decertified and under sanctions following the release of the list issued by the White House following recommendations from the State Department.

In its annual report on drug producing countries, issued along with the certification list, the State Department said Afghanistan and Myanmar were number one and two respectively in opium and heroin production.

"Afghanistan continues to be the world's largest opium producer after another year of major increases. Afghanistan now accounts for 72 percent of the world's illicit opium supply," said the report.

"The Taliban issued in late July a new ban on poppy cultivation.

However, it is not clear how serious the Taliban's efforts are to enforce the ban."

As for Myanmar, despite efforts by the ruling junta at crop eradication and bad weather that reduced harvest, the country "remains the world's second largest producer of illicit opium and heroin."

Production of coca -- the raw ingredient of cocaine -- increased in Colombia to 583,000 tonnes compared with 521,400, while the world increase in coca production rose six percent.

The other two top coca producers, South American nations Peru and Bolivia, both reduced production, however.

Sanctions were not imposed on the three Andean nations because

of their anti-drug policy, deemed satisfactory by Washington which has pledged 1.3 billion dollars to the region, most to be used for Colombia's anti-drug initiative Plan Colombia.

The list of countries up for US certification has dropped to 24 from 26 last year. Hong Kong and Taiwan are no longer considered conduits for illegal drugs.

Nigeria and Paraguay, both decertified with waivers last year, were certified along with Mexico, China, Colombia and Pakistan.

Rand Beers, assistant secretary of state for narcotics, told a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing Cambodia and Haiti were granted waivers out of national interest.

## The Buddhas of Bamiyan

AFP, Kabul

For centuries, the two giant stone Buddhas of Bamiyan province have watched over the restive plains of Afghanistan, the silent guardians of the country's pre-Islamic history.

Painstakingly hewn out of a cliff face by Buddhist monks between the second and fifth centuries AD, their faces have long since disappeared, destroyed by iconoclasts and the elements.

On Friday, what remained of the towering stone figures was also apparently being reduced to rubble by tank shells and rockets fired by militiamen of Afghanistan's Islamic fundamentalist Taliban.

The massive Buddha carved into sandstone near the provincial capital Bamiyan stand 50 metres (165 feet) and 34.5 metres (114 feet) tall. The larger of the pair is considered the world's tallest standing Buddha.

Before their faces were lost, they wore the same serene smiles of the much later Buddhas in the far East, but their classical features and Hellenistic Greek robes represented their unique place not just in the history of Afghanistan, but of the world in general.

When they were built, Afghanistan was one of the most cosmopolitan regions in the world, a stop along the fabled Silk Route and a melting pot of merchants, travellers and artists from China and India, central Asia and the Roman Empire.

Buddhism was introduced in Afghanistan around the third century BC and the area around Bamiyan, in the center of the coun-

try, remained Buddhist until the arrival of Islam in the mid-800s.

Islam was not fully established there until the 11th century AD.

Once protected by pilgrims and monks who lived in nearby caves, the Buddhas of Bamiyan were one of Afghanistan's leading tourist

attractions until the 1979 Soviet invasion and subsequent civil war.

They now appear to be doomed, victims of a Taliban decree ordering the destruction of all statues in the country to prevent the worshipping of "false idols."

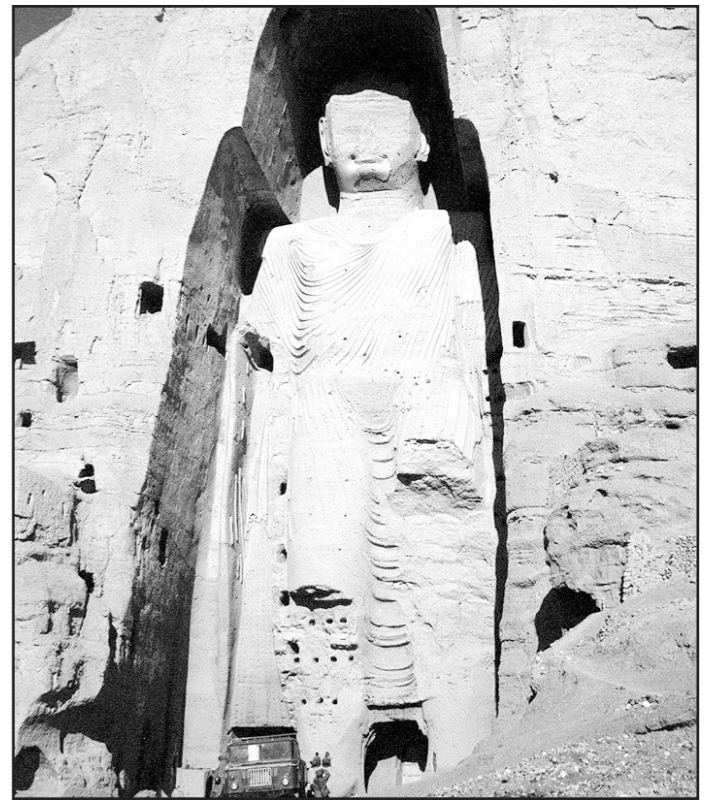


PHOTO: AFP

An undated file photo shows a huge Buddha statue in the central province of Bamiyan in Afghanistan.



PHOTO: AFP

Russian President Vladimir Putin (L), accompanied by Vietnamese National Assembly Chairman Nong Duc Manh (C), is welcomed at the Vietnam-Soviet Friendship Palace in Hanoi yesterday. Putin, the first Kremlin chief ever to visit Moscow's old Cold War ally Vietnam, was given a rousing welcome by thousands of Vietnamese who once studied in the former Soviet Union.

## Bush declares Washington state a disaster area after quake

AFP, Seattle, Washington

One day after Washington's worst earthquake in 52 years, President George W. Bush declared the state a major disaster area, triggering the release of federal funds to help recovery.

Thursday's declaration came amid drenching rains as the Pacific Northwest took stock of the powerful quake that destroyed buildings and injured hundreds from Oregon north to the Canadian border.

"The President is committed to ensuring the safety and welfare of people in the earthquake area," said Joe Allbaugh, Bush's new director of

the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

"Thankfully because of the work put in over the last 20 to 25 years, Washingtonians were prepared to handle what happened yesterday," Allbaugh added.

"What happened" was a 6.8-magnitude earthquake that left 250 people injured, showered streets with glass, and made the city's famed Space Needle wobble like jelly.

Allbaugh's announcement came after he toured devastated areas and meeting with Governor Gary Locke, who said he spoke with Bush and received assurances of federal

support.

The president "said if there were any problems with FEMA, to contact him directly," added the governor, who said losses could reach two billion dollars.

Meanwhile the gray, wet weather couldn't dampen the spirits of Washingtonians, who had just passed through the bonding ritual of surviving a dangerous ordeal together.

"We're so lucky," said Ali Ghambari, 42, as he carried his tool kit to repair a shelf knocked over in his cafe in Seattle's historic Pioneer Square district, scene of the worst damage.

## Troops remain alert in Borneo

AFP, Palangkaraya, Indonesia

Security forces in Indonesian Borneo remained on alert Friday for more trouble from indigenous Dayak tribesmen angered by suggestions that Madurese refugees will return to the province.

In a move that appeared certain to anger the Dayaks, Home Affairs Minister Suryadi Sudirja insisted that the tens of thousands of refugees had the right to return to their homes.

Similar comments on Thursday by parliamentary speaker Akbar Tanjung created fears of fresh attacks by the Dayaks.

"There was a scare because of Tanjung's statement," an official, who asked not to be named, told AFP by phone from Sampit, the river port city south of here which has seen the worst violence.

"The Dayaks threatened to go round the town looking for Madurese, but it was quiet last

night," he said.

Sudirja, speaking after a meeting with Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri and military chief Widodo Adisucipto, said: "Every Indonesian citizen has the right to live anywhere in the republic's territory."

"If the situation allows they can come back."

But Sudirja acknowledged that any return would have to wait until the situation improved, and added without explaining that "conditioning" would be needed.

Allowing native ethnic groups to expel migrant settlers from other parts of the huge multi-ethnic Indonesian archipelago would threaten the country's unity, he added.

Some 22,000 terrified Madurese have fled Central Kalimantan aboard refugee ships since the Dayaks ran amok killing and beheading the settlers and torching their houses in a campaign of ethnic

cleansing.

An estimated 25,000 more are awaiting evacuation.

Sampit administration chief Wahyudi Anwar told AFP the official death toll in the carnage had risen to 469. But scores of bodies in outlying areas remain uncounted.

The violence erupted in Sampit on February 18, with clashes between Dayaks and Madurese, but the Dayaks quickly gained the upper hand and the violence spread to outlying areas and the provincial capital of Palangkaraya.

Sampit administration official Zul Rachman said three more naval ships were expected in Sampit Friday, following the evacuation of 9,000 people to the port of Surabaya on the island of Java on Thursday.

"We don't expect any problems, because the last time I spoke with the port people in Surabaya, all three ships had left, but a bit later than scheduled," he said.