

'India to Buy US radar'

AP, New Delhi

America's top general said Monday that India intends to buy U.S. surveillance radar, the first major military purchase by India from the United States.

An Indian Defence Ministry source told The Associated Press on Monday that the radar would be used in the fight against Islamic militants in the disputed province of Kashmir.

Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in a statement that a U.S. Army team would visit India later this week to "seek consensus" on an agreement to purchase the American-made weapons-locating radar.

After decades of estrangement, India is now developing close diplomatic and military ties with the United States.

Myers did not indicate that the radar, known as "firefinders," would be used in Kashmir, where tens of thousands of people have been killed in the insurgency. And Washington has often said that it would not interfere in the Kashmir dispute.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes (L) looks at a model of a sea harrier FA2 fighter from the British Royal Navy during a five day-long international exhibition of military hardware "Defexpo 2002" in New Delhi on Tuesday. Fernandes laid out his government's vision of India as a manufacturing base for top-of-the-range defence products for export as well as domestic use.

US yet to decide how to handle Saddam

AFP, Washington

The United States has yet to decide how to handle Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, whose government is part of the "axis of evil" denounced last month by President George W. Bush. The Washington Post reported Tuesday.

"There's a lot of work being done on this. This is getting a lot of focused attention," an unnamed senior administration official told the daily.

"This is clearly an issue that is being seen differently than it was before September 11. But to the best of my knowledge, no decision has been made and no timetable has

JKLF warns of violence if India remains adamant

AFP, Srinagar

One of Kashmir's top separatist leaders has condemned the world's "criminal negligence" of the disputed region's Muslim community and warned of an escalation in violence if India fails to promote a political solution.

"The silence of the international community is an encouragement to the Indian government" to continue its "suppression" of Kashmir's Muslim-majority population, Yasin Mali, 'the head of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), told AFP in an interview.

Japan reopens embassy in Kabul

AFP, Tokyo

Japan reopened its embassy in Afghanistan Tuesday after it was closed in 1989 when Kabul began a descent into bloody chaos with the withdrawal of Soviet troop.

Tokyo appointed Kinichi Komano as the charge d'affaires and officially notified the embassy opening to Afghan's interim government, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Last month Tokyo hosted an international conference to support the reconstruction of war-torn Afghanistan in which, world leaders promised to give 4.5 billion dollars over the next five years.

"Under the leadership of Komano, the Japanese embassy in Afghanistan will follow up assistance measures pledged at the Afghan conference," the foreign ministry statement.

Fighting erupts in Philippine, troops rescue farmers

AFP, Zamboanga

Two soldiers were wounded Tuesday as troops fought the Muslim Abu Sayyaf kidnap gang off the southern Philippine island of Basilan, military officials said.

The clashes came within hours after soldiers rescued two farmers seized by the gunmen in Basilan two days earlier, officials said.

Troops were sent after fishermen had alerted the military to the Abu Sayyaf presence on Tinggulan island, about seven km off the coast of Maluso town, where US Special Forces troops are encamped with local troops.

India rules out troop recall from Pakistan border

Delhi hopes to establish itself as top producer of military hardware

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes ruled out on Tuesday any immediate reduction in the number of troops massed in a tense military face-off on the border with Pakistan.

"Forces were moved there in a certain situation. That situation still remains," Fernandes told reporters.

"We laid down certain conditions. These conditions have not been met, so the forces will remain there until a final decision is taken."

India and Pakistan have massed an estimated 800,000 troops on their common border since military tensions escalated in the wake of a December attack on the Indian parliament, which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based militant groups.

Despite a landmark speech by

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf last month in which he banned five militant groups and instigated a crackdown that led to the arrest of around 2,000 alleged religious extremists, India has insisted that Pakistan has not done enough to warrant a de-escalation at the border.

Fernandes acknowledged that moving troops back and forth in such large numbers was an "expensive proposition," but added the federal budget included contingency funds for such operations.

Fernandes, who has made several visits to the border areas, said troop morale remained very high.

"The only question was how long you want us to wait until we handle the enemy," he said.

Moreover, Defence Minister

George Fernandes Tuesday laid out his government's vision of India as a manufacturing base for top-of-the-range defence products for export as well as domestic use.

"Our vision is to create a defence industrial base capable of producing world-class products at highly competitive prices," Fernandes said at the inauguration of "Defexpo 2002" -- a five-day international exhibition of military hardware.

Fernandes said the vision was in line with the government's liberalised economic policies, "which are rooted in an ever-expanding global economy."

Some 26 countries are participating in the exhibition.

In January, India opened its defence production market to private participation -- both domestic and foreign. Foreign investment

however had been capped at 26 percent equity and is subject to stringent guidelines.

"With Indian infrastructure and production in defence having grown over the years, our attention is now switching from being recipients of technology to being partners in developing new products," Fernandes said.

Later, addressing a news conference, Fernandes said India wanted to increase defence equipment exports from three billion rupees (6.3 million dollars) to 10 billion rupees in the fiscal year beginning April 1.

Fernandes said New Delhi was also hopeful of getting high-technology equipment from the United States after both sides recently renewed military-to-military cooperation.

EU slaps ban on Zimbabwe

AP, Brussels

The European Union imposed sanctions against Zimbabwe on Monday after President Robert Mugabe refused to let its observers freely monitor next month's presidential election in the African country. The observers were ordered to come home.

At a meeting, the EU foreign ministers issued a statement saying Mugabe's government had "prevented the deployment of an EU election observation mission."

"The EU remains seriously concerned at political violence, serious violations of human rights

and restrictions on the media.... which call into question the prospects for a free and fair election," the foreign ministers' statement said.

As a result "targeted sanctions" were to be imposed, officials said.

Meanwhile, the government on Tuesday condemned European Union economic and diplomatic sanctions, accusing Europe of orchestrating "hostile action" to influence March elections.

"There is no price that is going to be high in defending our independence," said Information Minister Jonathan Moyo.

"They said they were going to do it and they have done it. We said as

Africans who fought for our liberation against some of these European countries, we would defend our independence and sovereignty and that's what we are going to do," Moyo told the state Herald newspaper.

The European Union, angered by Zimbabwe's refusal to let its observers freely monitor March 9-10 presidential elections, imposed sanctions Monday against President Robert Mugabe's government and ordered its observer team home.

History needs rewriting!

AFP, Madras

The discovery of an ancient city on the seabed off India's eastern coast has scientists salivating at the prospect of a fundamental rewrite in the chronology of ancient human society.

Preliminary tests have suggested the site in the Gulf of Cambay off Gujarat state could date as far back as 7,500 BC, several thousand years older than what were previously known to be the first significant urban settlements.

The discovery was made purely by chance last year as oceanographers from the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) were measuring water pollution in the area.

The team picked up strange signals and sent down two highly sensitive pieces of sonar equipment, which produced astounding images of what appeared to be a

large settlement, stretching for nine kilometers (six miles) along both sides of an old river bed.

A dredge was used to bring several tonnes of sludge up from the site, which contained a number of artefacts such as stone tools, ornaments and even a human jawbone and tooth.

"We are very excited, naturally," said S. Kathirolu, who headed the NIOT team that did the dredging.

The main source of the excitement was a fossilised wooden log, which carbon dating techniques dated back to 7500 BC.

Until now, the world's first urban settlements were believed to have thrived in the river valleys of ancient Mesopotamia around 4000-3500 BC. These were followed by the colourful Pharaonic culture seen in Egypt's Nile Valley civilisation.



PHOTO: AFP

The smoking ruins of the district administrative offices are seen following an attack on February 17 by Maoist rebels in Mangelsen, Accham district, some 350 km west of the capital Kathmandu.

Nepali PM seeks support for emergency extension

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba made last minute efforts Tuesday to gain the support of opposition parties for the extension of a state of emergency after weekend guerrilla attacks which left more than 150 people dead.

Deuba tabled a motion on the emergency in parliament late Monday and the lower house is due to debate the issue on Wednesday before taking a vote later in the week.

The weekend offensive in western and southern areas of the Himalayan kingdom -- the bloodiest since

the launch of the Maoist insurgency in February 1996 -- left 141 police, soldiers and civilians dead as well as at least 13 rebels and prompted tight security as the country marked its annual National Democracy Day.

Army patrols stopped vehicles and questioned residents as Deuba and King Gyanendra attended an event hosted by the Royal Nepal Army on the 52nd National Democracy Day which marked the end of the reign of the autocratic Rana rulers in 1950.

In his speech Gyanendra made no mention of the attacks, but he said a commitment to multi-party democracy must be shared by all.

Mosque could be built at a distance near Ram Temple : RSS

PTI, Nagpur

The RSS on Tuesday said a mosque could be built at a distance near the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and expressed its readiness to hold talks with Muslims on the issue.

A mosque can be constructed at some distance from the temple on the banks of Sharayu river, RSS spokesman M G Vaidya told newspersons here.

Without specifying the distance, he said "may be at a nearby area and called upon Muslims to think over the RSS advice."

RSS will extend 'Kar Sewa' to Muslims in building mosque in Ayodhya, he asserted.

To a query, he ruled out any threat to BJP-led NDA government at the centre over proposed construction of the Ram Temple.

VHP has clarified its stand on construction any time after March 15, but the RSS will come out with its stand only after its Akhil Bhartiya Pratinidhi Sabha (general council) meeting at Bangalore from March 15 to 17, preceded by its national executive committee meeting on March 14.

He denied that RSS was pressurising the BJP government on the temple issue and said BJP was free to follow its own policies and those of NDA.

Milosevic cross-examines first witness

AFP, The Hague

A prosecution witness clashed with Slobodan Milosevic on Tuesday, accusing the former Yugoslav president of killing women, children and elderly people in the name of fighting terrorism.

The confrontation came during the cross-examination of Mahmut Bakalli, a former Kosovo communist party official and the first witness to testify at Milosevic's war crimes trial here.

Bakalli opened testimony on Monday, speaking of the apartheid-like discrimination suffered by Albanian Kosovars and a "scorched earth" plan he was told about to wipe out 700 Albanian villages.

Milosevic has refused to recognise the UN tribunal trying him here but he intently questioned Bakalli on issues ranging from Serb police crackdowns on Albanians to details of the local education system.

sure from the right to dismantle Yasser Arafat's administration.

The latest spasm of violence was triggered by two deadly attacks by the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed offshoot of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement which has nudged Islamic groups aside as the spearhead of strikes against Israel, while adopting their grisly methods.

In two separate attacks within two hours, Al Aqsa kamikazes killed a policeman on the edge of Jerusalem and two soldiers and a settler in an ambush on a convoy in the southern Gaza Strip.

At the same time on Monday evening, a Palestinian gunman was also shot dead by Israeli troops as he tried to enter the Jewish settlement of Morag in the southern Gaza Strip.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, under increasing pressure for failing to come up with a clear plan to tackle almost 17 months of escalating violence that has left 1,231 people dead -- including 940 Palestinians and 269 Israelis -- unleashed warplanes and tanks in retribution.



PHOTO: AFP

US President George W. Bush (R) walks past an honor guard with South Korean Chief-of-Protocol Song Young-oh upon Bush's arrival at a military base in Seoul on Tuesday. Bush arrived in South Korea from Tokyo for a three-day visit during which he was expected to thrust the spotlight on North Korea's missile sales and feared weapons of mass destruction.

ways to increase military cooperation to pursue possible members of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network or other terrorists throughout Asia.

In the most visible example of a rapidly expanding focus on Asia, about 600 U.S. troops have begun advising Filipino soldiers fighting Muslim extremists on a southern island.

"Your response to the terrorist threat has demonstrated the strength of our alliance, and the indispensable role of Japan a role that is global, and begins in Asia," Bush said. Japan, one of Bush's staunchest allies in the war on terrorism, has provided logistical support to U.S. forces.

The last stop on his trip will be in China.