

India tests surface to air missile

AFP, Bhubaneswar

India Wednesday successfully tested a surface-to-air missile as part of accelerated trials of its five separate airborne warfare systems, officials said.

The Trishul (Trident) missile was fired from a coastal range in the eastern state of Orissa two days after its multi-target missile Akash, or Sky, was tested from the same location, the officials said.

India is developing the Trishul, which was last tested on July 26, for use by the army, navy as well as the airforce, and touts the system as the local version of the anti-missile Patriot system built by US-based Raytheon.

Military researchers say the Trishul, which can deliver a 15-kilogramme warhead nine kilometres, has the best manoeuvrability of missiles of its class developed either by India or its largest military supplier, Russia.

The missile is one of five being developed by state-run Defence Research and Development Organisation, which launched a project in 1983 to build an array of weapons. It hopes to cap the project with an inter-continental ballistic missile that can fly 5,000 kilometres.

Briton held in Pakistan denies London bomb link

REUTERS, London

A British Muslim arrested in Pakistan denied on Wednesday having any involvement in suicide bombings on London's transport network on July 7 in which more than 50 people were killed.

In a letter to Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper, Zeeshan Siddiqui rejected reports he had met senior al Qaeda figures and one of the London bombers, Shehzad Tanweer.

Siddiqui had been arrested as a possible so-called "missing link" to the four bombers who killed 52 commuters on three London underground trains and a bus, the Telegraph reported.

British police have not charged anyone so far in connection with the July 7 attacks.

"I totally condemn these acts of violence," Siddiqui wrote. "I have never taken part in any terrorist activity nor do I support or ever intend to support any terrorist activities."

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, an ally in the U.S.-led war against terrorism, ordered a crackdown on militants after revelations that three of the four London bombers visited Pakistan before the attacks.

Iraq's about-turn on constitution vote rules

AFP, Baghdad

Under UN pressure, Iraq's parliament on Wednesday reversed changes to an electoral law that critics had charged made it harder to reject the new and deeply divisive constitution in next week's referendum.

The move came as thousands of US troops widened a sweep for Al-Qaeda fighters in a new offensive along the Euphrates Valley near the Syrian border in a bid to shore up security ahead of the October 15 vote.

The latest change in voting rules came only three days after MPs altered them in a way that drew sharp criticism from the United States and the United Nations as well as the increasingly alienated Sunni Arab minority.

The political flap revolved around the terms under which the charter would be approved, and what could block its adoption. Wednesday's measure, approved by 119 of the 147 MPs present, places all voters on an

equal footing.

The constitution will be approved if a simple majority of all those who turn out to vote say "yes" and if two-thirds of voters in at least three provinces do not say "no."

Sunday's change had referred to "voters" in terms of approval and "registered voters" for rejection.

The once all-powerful Sunnis, largely behind the ongoing insurgency, have enough registered voters in three provinces to torpedo the constitution, but have generally called for a boycott.

The vote on the constitution is a key stage in the country's political transition following the ouster of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein by US-led forces in April 2003.

And it is being held just four days before Saddam and seven of his former henchmen are due to go on trial over a massacre of Shiite villagers in 1982. They face the death penalty if con-

victed.

"You cannot have two different meanings in one article. It's using interpretation to your own benefit," a representative of the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq had said Tuesday of the changes to voting rules.

And US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said parliament should stick to the spirit and the letter of the original article.

"In doing so, we think that, whatever the result of their discussions may be, that they should aim to broaden the political consensus," he said.

The charter has caused deep divisions between the Sunnis and the rival majority Shiites and their Kurdish allies who now dominate parliament.

Many Sunni Arab leaders have urged rejection of the text on the grounds that it undermines national unity by opening the doors to federalism, and waters down Iraq's "Arab" identity.

Putin and Blair hail 'new level' of Russia-EU ties

AFP, London

Russia and the European Union should take their relations to a "new and more intense level", Prime Minister Tony Blair said following talks with visiting President Vladimir Putin.

Putin, in London for discussions with Blair -- whose country holds the six-monthly rotating EU presidency -- and other leaders of the bloc, was also effusive on Tuesday.

"The results of the London summit have reaffirmed that we are consistently

strengthening our partnership. We are adding new substance and new quality to it," the Russian leader said.

Putin held talks earlier Tuesday with Blair, along with EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

At a joint press conference afterwards with Putin and Barroso, Blair hailed the meeting as "good and constructive".

"We want to try to take the relationship between Europe and Russia to a new and more intense level..." Blair said.

The discussions covered "important realities" such as economy and trade, notably energy, as well as tackling crime and terrorism and the issue of human rights, Blair said.

In particular, Blair hailed growing trade ties with Russia, saying: "This is a relationship which can only grow and prosper and strengthen."

Blair added: "One thing for sure... whether it is in respect of Iran, or the Middle East peace process or any aspects of countries surrounding the Russian Federation, the need for us to have that close working relationship is very clear indeed".

"It was a good and constructive meeting that we held today and as I say, it has... become very obvious to me and I think my European colleagues just how important today, for our own economic future and our own security, this relationship between Russia and Europe is."



PHOTO: AFP Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair bids farewell Russia's President Vladimir Putin after their meeting at No. 10 Downing Street in London yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP A tourist walks past the bomb blast site in Jimbaran, on Bali island yesterday, four days after a series of suicide bomb attacks shocked the resort island killing at least 19 people last Saturday. Indonesia's police force has gone on top alert nationwide as part of efforts to track down the culprits behind the weekend bomb blasts on the resort island of Bali.

UNSC condemns suicide attacks in Bali

Australia to press Indonesia to ban JI

PTI, AFP, Sydney, United Nations

The United Nations Security Council has "strongly" condemned the deadly weekend bombing in Bali, calling for perpetrators behind the "heinous act of terrorism" to justice.

In a unanimous statement, the 15-member Council stressed the need to bring the perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of the blast to justice, and urged all States to provide support and assistance to the Indonesian Government.

The statement also said that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constituted one of the "most serious threats" to international peace and security and that "any act of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed."

It also restated the Council's determination to combat all forms of terrorism, in accordance with its responsibilities for peace and security under the United Nations Charter.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer will travel to Indonesia to lobby the government to ban the extremist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) following the latest Bali attacks, Canberra announced on Wednesday.

Prime Minister John Howard said in a series of radio interviews that by taking a stand against the organisation, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono would send a reassuring signal to moderate Indonesians.

It was blamed for the first Bali attack in 2002 which killed 202 people including 88 Australians, and the group's alleged religious leader Abu Bakar Bashir was jailed for conspiracy over the bombing, but no action was taken to outlaw the shadowy organisation.

It is also suspected of being responsible for Saturday's bombings in Bali, which left at least 19 dead, including as many as four Australians -- sparking fresh calls here for the group to be banned.

But Howard suggested that Australia would adopt a cautious

attitude.

"What will happen is that Mr Downer will be going to Indonesia soon," Howard said. "He will indicate when, and he and I are going to work out the most appropriate way to push it."

"But can I just make this point again: we are having a debate, a discussion, about the laws of another country."

Howard said Australia could not force Indonesia to change its laws, adding that in any case he did not believe outlawing JI would drastically change the situation.

"It is not the be all and end all of tackling terrorism in Indonesia and if it remains as it is or if it is banned in practical terms it's not going to make an enormous difference."

New Orleans lays off 3,000 staff

REUTERS, New Orleans

Mayor Ray Nagin said on Tuesday New Orleans will lay off 40 percent of its workers and warned of more belt-tightening ahead, a bleak reminder of the challenges the city faces as it recovers from two hurricanes.

The elimination of 3,000 jobs, which Nagin described as "pretty permanent," is expected to save the hard-hit city \$5 million to \$8 million a month. New Orleans now pays about \$20 million a month in salaries for city workers, Nagin said.

He said the city was not considering bankruptcy, at least for now. "We can limp along for another month or two," he told a news conference. "Beyond two months we'll be talking again." With virtually all businesses closed the city's tax revenues have dried up.

Eighty percent of the low-lying city was flooded after the storm surge from Hurricane Katrina broke through levees and flood walls at the end of August. Hurricane Rita, which struck the Louisiana-Texas border on September 24, caused new flooding that still persists in some areas.

Many smaller communities were also devastated as the storms struck Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. Katrina, which caused over \$34 billion in insured property damage alone, killed nearly 1,200 people and was the most expensive hurricane ever to hit the United States.

Priyanka Gandhi, Kiran Bedi warned!

PTI, New Delhi

Indian health officials have warned Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, daughter of Congress President Sonia Gandhi, after they found Aedes mosquito breeding in her house during an anti-dengue inspection in one of capital's VIP localities.

A New Delhi Municipal Council official said the mosquitoes were detected in the servant quarter of Priyanka's residence during a house-to-house inspection. Mosquitoes were also found inside a water cooler at senior IPS officer Kiran Bedi's house.

"Both Vadra and Bedi have been warned to take precautions and check the breeding of dengue mosquitoes at their homes," he said.



PHOTO: AFP Recently arrived African immigrants wait outside the Temporary shelter for Immigrants in the Spanish enclave of Melilla in Morocco yesterday. Around 500 people stormed the fence early this morning between the Spanish enclave of Melilla and Morocco with only 65 managing to make it across, only two days after another mass storming. The Spanish government announced that a third metal barrier would be set up to reinforce the border with Morocco.