

## Medvedev warns of new arms race

REUTERS, Moscow

President Dmitry Medvedev warned yesterday that a new arms race would erupt within the next decade unless Russia and the West forged an agreement to cooperate on building a missile defense system.

In his annual state of the nation address, Medvedev called for closer cooperation with the United States and the European Union, holding out the prospect of closer ties two decades after the Soviet Union's collapse ended the Cold War.

He said tension would ratchet up fast, forcing Russia to bolster its military arsenal, if Western offers of cooperation on a system to defend against missile threats failed to produce a concrete agreement.

The warning appeared to reflect wariness in the Kremlin over uncertainty about Senate ratification of New START, the nuclear arms limitation pact Medvedev signed with President Barack Obama in April, centrepiece of the push for better ties.

"In the coming decade we face the following alternatives: Either we reach agreement on missile defense and create a full-fledged joint mechanism of cooperation, or ... a new round of the arms race will begin," Medvedev said.

"And we will have to take a decision about the deployment of new offensive weapons. It is clear that this scenario would be very grave."

## N Korea boasts advances in nuke programme

REUTERS, Seoul

Secretive North Korea boasted advances in its nuclear programme yesterday, making sure it held the world's attention, saying it had thousands of working centrifuges, as pressure built on China to rein in its ally.

Nuclear-armed Pyongyang's revelations about its uranium enrichment, which gives it a second route to make a nuclear bomb, came a week after it fired an artillery barrage at a South Korean island, killing four people, including two civilians.

Experts have voiced surprise at the sophistication of a uranium enrichment plant and light-water reactor at the North's main nuclear complex, which were shown to a U.S. scientist earlier this month. There has been no way to verify the North's claims.

The North is also seen as a proliferation risk, accused by the West of supplying Syria, and possibly Iran, with nuclear know-how.

"Currently, construction of a light-water reactor is in progress actively and a modern uranium enrichment plant equipped with several thousands of centrifuges, to secure the supply of fuels, is operating," the Rodong Sinmun newspaper reported.

"Nuclear energy development projects will become more active for peaceful purpose in the future," added the paper, according to the state news agency KCNA.

New revelations by whistle-blower Wikileaks, meanwhile, suggested that some Chinese officials did not view North Korea as a useful ally and would take no action if it collapsed.

By staging provocations and flexing its nuclear muscle, analysts say the isolated North is seeking to increase its leverage as it pushes for a resumption of talks with regional powers, which it walked out of two years ago, in return for aid.

Andrei Lankov, a North Korea expert at Seoul's Kookmin University, said Pyongyang was simply following a typical pattern.

"For the last two years, both Washington and Seoul have tried to ignore them, so now they use

both artillery and centrifuges to say: 'we are here, we are dangerous, and we cannot be ignored. We can make a lot of trouble, but also we behave reasonably if rewarded generously enough'," Lankov wrote on the East Asia Forum website.

North Korea has conducted two nuclear tests to date and is believed to have enough fissile material from its plutonium-based program to make between six and 12 bombs.

It is impossible to verify the North's uranium enrichment program, which it first announced last year. International inspectors were expelled from the country last year, but Washington has said since 2002 that it suspected Pyongyang had such a program.

Analysts say its actions are also linked to family politics, as ailing leader Kim Jong-il seeks to burnish a military image for his inexperienced son and chosen successor Kim Jong-un.

**THREE-WAY MEETING**  
South Korea's Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday the North's nuclear program, last week's attack on Yeonpyeong island and a Chinese proposal for emergency talks would be raised at meeting of foreign ministers in Washington in early December.

South Korea, Japan and the United States, three of the six countries involved in the on-off disarmament talks, will attend.

Talks host China has proposed a summit meeting of the six parties that have been trying to rein in North Korea's nuclear program. Russia and North Korea are also part of that group.

"Returning to consultation and talks is in the interests of all sides," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said at a regular news briefing.

"Ensuring the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula is the shared responsibility of all sides. We call on all sides to do more to stabilize the situation."

The new Wikileaks revelations, purporting to be from U.S. State Department cables and published by several Western papers, raised questions about the future of the relationship between China and North Korea described in the past as being as close as "lips and teeth."



A man protests against US involvement and escalation of the military crisis between North Korea and South Korea, in Los Angeles on November 29, 2010. PHOTO: AFP

## China scraps Norway talks as Nobel tensions rise

REUTERS, Oslo

Norway said yesterday that China had indefinitely postponed bilateral trade talks in what experts said was an escalation of tension ahead of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony honouring Chinese rights activist Liu Xiaobo.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee angered Beijing last month by awarding the Nobel to Liu, who is serving an 11-year jail term on subversion charges for his role in advocating democratic reform and an end to the Communist party's power monopoly.

The Asian superpower has snubbed Norwegian ministers and pressured diplomats to boycott the December 10 award ceremony, set to focus the world's media spotlight on human rights in China.

Norway, the world's fifth-largest oil exporter, and China have been negotiating for the past two years a bilateral trade deal that could serve as a blueprint for the European Union's potential trade agreement with China.

"There has been a delay and at this point we have not set a new date," Oeyvind Arum, a spokesman for Norway's Industry and Trade Ministry, told Reuters. "The next round of negotiations was due ... during Christmas and New Year."

Neither the Chinese embassy in Oslo nor China's Foreign Ministry were immediately available for comment.

## Forest collapse boosted reptiles

BBC ONLINE

The fragmentation of tropical rainforests 300 million years ago helped pave the way for the rise of the dinosaurs, a new study suggests.

In the Carboniferous period, North America and Europe lay at the equator and were covered by steamy rainforests.

Global warming is thought to have brought about the collapse of these tropical habitats, triggering an evolutionary burst among reptiles.

The work, by a British team, is published in the journal *Geology*.

The forests that covered the ancient supercontinent of Euramerica are colloquially referred to as the Coal Forests.

They are so called because they accumulated a large amount of peat, which later turned into the coal that is mined today.

Towards the end of the Carboniferous, the Earth's climate is thought to have grown hotter and drier.

"Climate change caused rainforests to fragment into small 'islands of forest,'" said co-author Howard Falcon-Lang, from Royal Holloway, University of London.

Dr Falcon-Lang continued: "This isolated populations of reptiles, and each community evolved in separate directions, leading to an increase in

diversity."

To reach their conclusions, the scientists studied the fossil record of

"You see the same process happening today whenever a group of animals becomes isolated from its parent



reptiles before and after the collapse of the rainforests.

They showed that reptiles became more diverse and even changed their diets as they struggled to adapt to a rapidly changing climate and environment. Professor Mike Benton, from the University of Bristol, said: "This is a classic ecological response to habitat fragmentation."

population.

"It's been studied on traffic islands between major road systems or, as Charles Darwin famously observed in the Galapagos, on oceanic islands."

His Bristol colleague Sarda Sahney commented: "It is fascinating that even in the face of devastating ecosystem-collapse, animals may continue to diversify."

## 'Rockets' running out of steam

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made, they say they won't be able to cope with the losses. But a sale to the tourism industry might give them a new lease of life.

"The vintage rocket steamers have huge potential in the tourism industry," says M Rafiqul Islam, director of Bengal Tours. "Very few paddle-wheel steamers now remain in the world. Most of them are involved in the tourism industry."

"While travelling in Bangladesh, almost every foreign tourist includes a paddle steamer trip in their itinerary. We are struggling to meet the demand," he adds.

Huge losses on the steamers discourage the state-run Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) from continuing their operation. "The service is dragging on only because it holds a sentimental value," says Md Mosharrar Hossain Howlader, General Manager (commerce) of BIWTC.

With white wooden cabins, beds in crispy white sheets and a range of western and local dishes served on fine china, the tranquil rocket voyage through spectacular rivers leaves a gentle memory in the minds of millions. But a long-term lack of investment is the cause of the heritage steamers' downfall, BIWTC officials believe.

During the last fiscal year the steamer service carried about 4.5 lakh passengers, yet it incurred a loss of Tk 13 crore. BIWTC officials blame rising maintenance and fuel costs. The agency trimmed down routes and departure days to stem the losses.

Paddle steamers have run the nation's rivers since the days of the British Raj, when they used to travel all the way to Kolkata. After independence from Pakistan, BIWTC inherited seven steamers.

Today, four -- the PS Ostrich, PS Mahsud, PS Lepcha and PS Tern -- operate on the Khulna, Barisal and Morelganj routes. Two were built in 1929 while the

others in 1938 and 1950. The other three -- the Gazi, Teal and Kiwi -- met their demise in the late '90s, when fire raced through them while docked for repair work, Howlader says.

Renovations of the four in operation included conversion of the steam engine to diesel and a changing of the hull plates in 1985. Aside from a lick of paint, the paddle rockets last saw a minor refurbishment back in 1992, the BIWTC official adds.

"The bright paintwork of the exterior might make the steamers look younger, but in reality the aged paddle steamers simply cannot perform any longer," the official adds. "Trips to dockyard for repair work is becoming more frequent," Howlader says.

Also spare parts and experts able to diagnose the boat's ailments are now scarce. Almost all the veteran engineers are retired.

Still, the rocket steamers manage two trips a week to

Khulna and four trips to Morelganj. The Ostrich and Lepcha can carry up to 850 passengers; the other two up to 600.

"The Khulna route hardly attracts any passengers these days," says Humayan Kabir, a ticket checker on the Ostrich, in the 345-km journey. "Sometimes there are no passengers on the deck. Tour companies are keeping the service alive in Khulna."

Many top travel guides, including Lonely Planet, recommend a paddle steamer trip while in Bangladesh, and they have been featured on the BBC, CNN and other news services.

"It is probably the last remnant of the colonial legacy, even though it had lost the old glory. It should be revived, if not for commercial purpose, but for the huge romantic appeal it still holds," says Zaker.

"A little investment can still resuscitate the classic vessel."

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## Pakistan suicide attack kills six

AFP, Peshawar

A suicide bomber blew himself up near a Pakistani police station in the northwest of the country yesterday, killing six people, including two children, officials said.

The attack occurred in the town of Bannu, which lies close to Pakistan's lawless tribal belt on the Afghan border, an area which Washington has branded al-Qaeda's global headquarters and the most dangerous region on Earth.

"It was a suicide attack. The bomber came on foot and detonated himself near a police van close to a police station," said Bannu police chief Ifkhar Khan.

"The death toll is now six. They include two boys aged seven and nine, one police official and three pedestrians. Nineteen people were injured," Khan told AFP.

## Aftabuddin

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The court asked seven of the accused, who had been granted bail earlier, to appear before it today. It also issued arrest warrants against the other 11 accused, including Shahadat and Khorshed Alam, all of whom have been on the run since the filing of the case.

The PP told The Daily Star on Monday that he had earlier requested the court to clear only Goni of the charge. But the home ministry decided to drop the case altogether, and made recommendation accordingly, he added.

The Awami League-led government after assuming office took steps to throw away politically motivated cases filed mostly during the last BNP-Jamaat coalition government, and the subsequent caretaker government.

The chairman of the national committee that reviews politically motivated cases, State Minister for Law Qamrul Islam, and its member Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder ruled out that the committee's recommendation to drop the murder case had been intentional.

Both claimed that the recommendation was issued mistakenly. Aftabuddin was sprayed with bullets by a gang of armed men on motorbikes near his Mirpur-2 residence in the capital on December 25, 2005. He died of the wounds three days later.

His brother Afrozuddin filed the case with Mirpur Police Station the same month accusing Shahadat, Khorshed and 17 of their associates.

In the case statement, Afroz said his brother was killed because he had not paid the extortion money the gang had been demanding from him.

Shahadat is widely known as the leader of one of the most notorious extortion rackets in the capital. He allegedly runs the racket from abroad. There are 14 murder cases against him.

Khorshed is also a gangster of the same area, who has 10 murder cases against him.

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