

China, Japan set stage for n-talks

10-15 By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, AUG. 11. The six-party parleys on the nuclear-weapons 'programme' of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) will start at "an early date". The scope and timing of these highly sensitive political talks, which might be held in Beijing towards the end of this month, came into sharp focus as the Chinese Foreign Minister, Li Zhaoxing, held talks with the Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, and Foreign Minister, Yoriko Kawaguchi, in Tokyo today.

While Japan indicated that the two countries had now agreed to cooperate in resolving the nuclear issue by peaceful means, Mr. Li affirmed that China "wants to maintain a nuclear (weapons)-free Korean peninsula". He underlined that China, like other countries in the region, wanted "peace and stability" to prevail. Mr. Koizumi is quoted by the Japanese side as having told Mr. Li that their two countries shared a desire for the peaceful settlement. Mr. Li is understood to have told him that China would expect

Japan to play an active and constructive role. Besides China and Japan, those expected to participate are the two Koreas as also the United States and Russia. China's Vice-Foreign Minister and a key trouble-shooter as regards the nuclear issue, Dai Bingguo, expressed the hope that the talks would produce "positive results".

Aside from the ongoing Sino-Japanese discussions and Mr. Dai's recent talks in Russia as also the DPRK and the U.S. on the nuclear issue, a three-way dialogue among Washington, Tokyo and Seoul is planned for later this week as part of the preparations for the six-party discussions. Mr. Li's visit to Japan has another dimension. With China and Japan marking the 25th anniversary of their bilateral treaty of peace and friendship, the two sides are updating ties to a level of greater interactive exchanges.

On Tokyo's eagerness to utilise the six-party talks to raise the issue of the DPRK's abduction of some Japanese nationals in the past, China indicated that the matter should be seen as a bilateral dispute between Tokyo and Pyongyang.

China eager to help: Powell

BEIJING, FEB. 24. The United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, met top Chinese officials on Monday and said China was eager to play a positive role in helping to resolve the crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons programmes.

After meeting the Chinese Vice-President, Hu Jintao, and the Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, Gen. Powell told a news conference that China was undertaking initiatives with North Korea that he was unable to discuss publicly.

He also made his case for Chinese support for a second U.N. Security Council resolu-

tion on Iraq that would authorise military action.

He said the U.S. had seen "some setbacks" in China concerning the protection of human rights. Since December, he said, Washington has been "deeply concerned by the execution of a prominent Tibetan, the detention of more than a dozen pro-democracy activists and the continuation of a pattern of inconsistent and irregular legal and judicial procedures."

On North Korea, Powell said China "is anxious to play as helpful a role as they can." — AP

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Powell to pressure China on N. Korea

BEIJING, FEB. 23. In what could be a test for the U.S.-Chinese relations, the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, will ask officials here for a more robust effort to persuade North Korea to curb its suspected nuclear weapons programmes, a senior U.S. official said on Sunday.

Gen. Powell arrived here late on Sunday afternoon from Tokyo and has separate talks planned on Monday with the Chinese President, Jiang Zemin, the Communist Party Secretary-General, Hu Jintao, and the Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan.

Besides the discussions on North Korea, Gen. Powell is expected to urge China not to veto a joint U.S.-British bid for U.N. Security Council approval for a resolution authorising the use of force against Iraq. Until now, China has favoured a continuation of U.N. inspections in Iraq. The resolution will be tabled on Monday.

In Tokyo on Sunday, Gen. Powell said time was running out on U.N. demands for Iraq to disarm. He also has said the clock is ticking on the North Korea issue as well — an apparent reference to the prospect that Pyongyang could be months away from having as many as

six plutonium-based nuclear weapons.

Gen. Powell sees international pressure against North Korea, with China playing a leading role, as the best hope for inducing North Korea to drop its nuclear ambitions. But thus far, China has seemed reluctant to use its influence against its long-time ally, a major recipient of Chinese assistance.

In reference to North Korea, Gen. Powell said: "Time is passing, and we're trying to use that time to the maximum, but at the same time, we're not going to let time become a weapon to be used against us."

He told a Congressional hearing two weeks ago that China is key to a peaceful outcome of the conflict over North Korea. "China has a role to play, and I hope China will play that role".

As his meetings here approached, Gen. Powell and his aides have been less assertive in public about what they expect from China.

En route here from Tokyo, the State Department spokesman, Richard Boucher, said Gen. Powell "looks forward to considering, with the Chinese how to build on their existing efforts with North Korea." — AP

China wins Russian oil deal

BEIJING: Ending years of uncertainty and high-level political wrangling, China has secured a major oil deal with Russia under which Beijing would share a huge untapped oil reserve in Russia's far east with Japan and other Asian countries. China has been lobbying very hard for the massive crude oil deposits in Angarsk in the Irkutsk region in eastern Siberia which could be a 'perfect deal' for the fast-growing Communist giant, whose galloping economy needs diversified energy sources amid global uncertain ties. Japan, however, managed to influence Moscow's decision on the pipeline and much to the disappointment of Chinese leaders, the multi-billion dollar deal failed to come through during the visit of Russian President, Vladimir Putin, to Beijing last year. — PTI //

Astronauts prepare for homecoming

Washington: After making final observations on various experiments, astronauts on board space shuttle Columbia on Friday began preparations for Saturday's scheduled landing at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.



Kalpana Chawla

Mission specialist Kalpana Chawla and commander Rick Husband took turns to simulate the landing on the computer-based training programmes, while others continued with their sample collection for the advanced respiratory monitoring system.

The experiment sponsored by the European space agency attempts to study the change in metabolism, hormone levels and the reaction of the human body in microgravity with special emphasis on the body fluids, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) said.

This 16-day research mission gave scientists an opportunity to study how heart and lungs function in space, as well as how the nervous system controls them. Israeli video cameras captured an image over Brazil that scientists said proved a scientific theory about how a major fire on earth can alter global climate.

The picture shows a large plume of smoke rising from a fire in the rain forest on a cloudy day in the Amazon Basin. Israeli scientist Joachim Joseph said the picture demonstrated the scientific theory that smoke dissipates cloud cover in its vicinity, allowing more sunlight to enter.

"We just made one pass over the jungle and low and behold we get textbook confirmation of a hypothesis," Mr Joseph said.

"If this kind of thing happens, biomass burning all over the world — and it is happening all the time all over lower latitudes — if the clouds do that then this is a factor that has to be taken into account when you try to model climate and greenhouse effect on climate more accurately," Mr Joseph said. Agencies

Japan, China in race for Russian oil

By Vladimir Radyuhin

Give Russia

MOSCOW, JAN. 12. Japan and China are locked in a race for Russian oil, each lobbying rival pipeline projects from oil-rich Siberia. On a visit to Moscow on Friday the Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, tried to coax the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, into building a 4,000-km oil Pacific Pipeline Project from Angarsk, near Lake Baikal in Eastern Siberia, to Nakhodka on Russia's Far Eastern coast.

A month earlier the Chinese leaders sought Mr. Putin's support for an alternative 2,400-km pipeline from Eastern Siberia to Daqing in Manchuria during the Russian President's visit to Beijing. Moscow faces a difficult choice between the two projects, as there is just not enough oil to fill both pipelines — 50 million tons a year to Nakhodka and 20 million tonnes to Dag-

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ing. Last year Eastern Siberia produced a mere 460,000 tonnes, even though the region's oil reserves are estimated at 8 to 10 billion tonnes.

The Pacific route has two crucial advantages: it will not tie Siberian oil flows to any one market, with Japan, China, Korea and the United States all likely destinations. It will also bring Siberian oil to Russia's energy-starved Far East, giving a crucial push to the economic revival of the region. The Chinese alternative is cheaper at about \$2 billion against \$3.5 billion for the Pacific project. China is also Russia's strategic partner, while relations between Moscow and Tokyo have been marred by a long-standing dispute over four Kuril Islands.

Apart from the cost of pipeline construction both projects call for multi-billion investment into developing Siberian oil fields.

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China blasts U.S.

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BEIJING, JAN. 7. A prominent Chinese rocket scientist blasted as laughable the U.S. charges against two firms for illegally sharing space technology with China, saying only China was responsible for the success of its space programme.

The comments in a front-page article in the Yangcheng *Evening News* seen in Beijing today were the first from China since the U.S. State Department charged the Hughes Electronics Corp and Boeing Co's Satellite Systems unit with passing technology to China.

The announcement of the charges at the beginning of the month came just days after China successfully launched what it has hailed as its final unmanned rocket, the "Shenzhou IV", before it sends a person into space later this year.

Wang Decheng, a rocket specialist and chief designer of China's "Long March" LM-2E rocket, was quoted in the newspaper as saying that the charges merely showed how little the U. S. knew about China's space programme. —Reuters

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China faces new security concerns

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JAN. 5. Even as the Chinese authorities seek to speak their mind to Japan on the question of sovereignty over the tiny isles of Diaoyu, Beijing suddenly finds itself addressing a few security concerns of its own amid its intense preoccupation with the issue of defusing the current international alarm over North Korea's nuclear weapons programme. The concerns range from the Diaoyu islands and the possibility of a proactive U.S.-Taiwan military exercise, on one side, to the recent U.S. action of preventing Israel from executing a significant arms deal with China and Washington's moves against two high-profile American companies for their suspected export of sensitive know how to Beijing in the past.

The latest Sino-Japanese tensions over the tiny Diaoyu islands, which might prove to be of considerable economic value in the future, are traceable to the reports that Tokyo has taken three uninhabited isles in that chain on lease from their "private owner". While Beijing has made its position clear to the Japanese side through standard diplomatic procedures, the punch line was delivered by a spokeswoman of the Chinese

Foreign Ministry in the public domain itself. According to the spokeswoman, any "unilateral claim", which Japan might raise in respect of these islands, "is invalid".

She underlined that the Diaoyu islands had always belonged to China from ancient times. The geostrategic location of these islands, insofar as China and Japan are concerned, is enhanced by the possibility that the tiny territory might prove to be a site for oil and natural gas. In some contrast, China has so far kept its diplomatic cards close to its chest while formulating a strategy to face the other three challenges as well. With Taiwan indicating that its prospective military exercises, known as Han Kuang, might involve a degree of American participation, China has taken note of the possible implications for its own security.

However, Beijing has not yet spelt out a definitive strategy to address the Taiwan-U.S. game plan of this latest genre. Any form of participation by the U.S. in the proposed Taiwanese war games later this year will mark a new ground reality after a gap of nearly two decades. Ironically, from the Chinese standpoint, Taiwan is trying to advertise its updated strategic links with the U.S. precisely at a time when Beijing itself has officially expressed satisfaction over the

incremental intensity of the Sino-American military-related engagement.

The upturn in the Sino-American military ties is traceable to the Crawford summit last October between the U.S. President, George W. Bush, and his Chinese counterpart, Jiang Zemin. As for the latest U.S. pressure on Israel to halt the export of any sensitive military hardware to China at this juncture, Beijing's concerns go beyond the basics of the relevant objections from America. As Beijing tends to see, the name of the new American game is not exactly a policy of containment as first enunciated by George Kennan as a Cold War mantra.

Diplomatic observers in the Asia Pacific region draw attention to Beijing's concern that the U.S. may be eager to engage in a policy of strategic denial. This aspect is said to be manifest in the manner in which the U.S. administration has now sought to arraign two U.S. companies Hughes Electronics and Boeing Satellite Systems for having (as alleged) provided China with certain aspects of contraband space technology in the 1990s. While the two companies have denied any wrong-doing, the Chinese concerns relate to official Washington's laser-beam focus on Beijing at this juncture of its space adventures.

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China concern over
U.S.-Taiwan move

BEIJING, JAN 3. China has raised concerns with the United States over a report that the U.S. military officers are to participate in Taiwan's annual war games, the Foreign Ministry said today.

China objects to all types of defence interaction and cooperation between Taiwan and the United States, the Foreign Ministry said in a faxed response to a question from The Associated Press.

China has made "serious representations" to Washington over the report, demanding an end to "all military interaction between the United States and Taiwan," the statement said. Such interaction "brings harm to China-U.S. relations," it said.

A Taiwanese newspaper yesterday reported that officers from the U.S. Pacific Command would be in the Taiwanese military command center in Taipei during drills later this year. That would mark the first time U.S. military personnel have participated directly in Taiwanese exercises since Washington withdrew its military presence from the island when it switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 1979.

China and Taiwan split amid civil war in 1949. Beijing considers the island to be part of its territory and has threatened to attack it to assert control. Military ties between Taiwan and the U.S. have taken a major leap since the inauguration of the U.S. President, George Bush, who has said he would do whatever it took to help defend the island. — AP

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