

Saudis bargained with Chinese for nuclear reactors

SAUDI ARABIA tried to buy experimental nuclear reactors from China as part of a secret 20-year programme to become a nuclear power, according to documents obtained by The Sunday Times.

Prince Abdel Rahman bin Mohammed, the nephew of King Fahd, travelled to China, toured nuclear facilities and opened negotiations on the purchase of a miniature neutron source reactor in 1989, according to the documents. Mohammed Khilewi, a Saudi diplomat seeking asylum in the United States, claims the kingdom bought at least two mini-reactors.

The kingdom hoped, according to an American middle man, to "start small" and eventually to persuade the Chinese to sell the kingdom larger nuclear reactors for a weapons programme.

Khilewi, the former second in command at the Saudi United Nations mission in New York, has already detailed the extent of Saudi-Iraqi co-operation in obtaining nuclear weapons.

In 1985 Saudi Arabia began

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funding Iraq's nuclear weapons programme in a \$5 billion deal under which Baghdad would give the kingdom nuclear weapons once it had developed them.

According to the new documents, however, the Saudis appeared by 1989 to have broadened their efforts to include opening their own research facilities. On January 10, 1989, a letter from the Chinese Nuclear Energy Industry Corporation in Peking says: "We can do business in nuclear fields."

Saudi Arabia signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty in 1988 and under that agreement must declare any nuclear capability and allow inspection by international experts.

On his return from Peking the prince described his trip to China to the dean of research at the King Khaled University in Riyadh and sent him documents on the reactor he aimed to buy: "It is my pleasure to

offer you documents about this very important project which is very important to us (the kingdom) . . . I am certain you share with me my opinion that the kingdom needs such a programme."

A source in Washington last week revealed further evidence of the extent of Saudi-Iraqi co-operation in the nuclear field. He said Nabil Sayeed, the Iraqi defence attaché in Washington, and Brigadier-General Abdel Rahman Banyan, the Saudi defence attaché, often travelled together to Westinghouse, Pittsburgh, for discussions with the American executives on the company's nuclear reactor programme.

Michael Wildes, Khilewi's lawyer in his application for political asylum, said Khilewi had now separated himself from the 13,000 documents he took into exile with him because of a Saudi kidnap threat against him. Wildes said last week that Khilewi had made arrangements to have the documents published should anything happen to him or his family.