

AIRSHIPS COULD BE USED TO PATROL TORRES STRAIT

Eye in sky protection

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FLOATING airships and submarines may yet be deployed to the Torres Strait in the fight against illegal fishing and to protect the nation's northern borders.

An Australian consortium has been lobbying the Federal Government to trial one of the unmanned aircraft on Moa Island off the tip of Cape York.

A Collins Class submarine is already in northern Australian waters as part of a top-secret operation, defence sources say.

V-TOL Aerospace managing director Mark Xavier yesterday said tethered airships had been proven to work on the US borders with both Mexico and Alaska.

"Anything on the surface or flying below 10,000 feet - whether it is people walking around, or on a boat or in an aircraft - can be detected up to a 200km radius," Mr Xavier said.

It would be a serious deterrent to fish pirates as well as drug and people smugglers, he said.

The Aerostat airship would carry high-tech radars to detect small wooden boats and infrared technology, he said.

The 71m platform would offer around-the-clock surveillance and



Surveillance: Airships are an option.

search-and-rescue capabilities as well as crime detection and weather-reporting facilities.

But the biggest hurdle has been rebuilding the reputation of airships in the wake of the 1937 Hindenburg disaster.

"The Hindenburg was filled with hydrogen and had people on it; these are filled with helium and are unmanned with people on the base station.

"In cyclonic conditions we would pull down the airship and winch it back up after the eye of the storm has passed."

Both the defence and communications department have been approached for funding support.

But Mr Xavier, who worked in an army surveillance unit in the Torres Strait in 1990, said there was potential for fisheries to also be involved.



Military might: The Collins Class submarine is on operations in Australia's northern waters.

IN BRIEF...

Three guilty

A CAIRNS Supreme Court jury last night found Romanians Nicolae Bivolaru, 55, Dorin Robu, 38, and Stefano Marinel Evan, 43, guilty of trafficking heroin. They were charged with trafficking the drug from mid-1999 to February 2001. They will be sentenced today.

Court date

A MAN, 62, who allegedly sexually assaulted a deckhand on Thursday Island on April 17 will appear in court in July for committal proceedings. Police also charged the man with possession of protected wildlife after allegedly finding a crocodile skin on his boat.

Police spat at

A MAN allegedly spat all over two Innisfail policemen and bit one deeply on the arm about 6pm yesterday as they tried to arrest him for allegedly threatening to burn down the Silkwood police station and residence. The man, 23, also allegedly kicked in a police vehicle's windows.

Charity golf

MORE than 140 players will tee off tomorrow for the annual Mayor's Charity Golf Day in aid of Cystic Fibrosis Queensland. A barbecue at 11am will start the event at the Half Moon Bay Golf Club, Yorkeys Knob.

Billionaire ore baron breaks into rich list Hedley inducted

① NATION'S RICHEST

1. James Packer	\$7.1b
2. Frank Lowy	\$5.4b
3. Richard Pratt	\$5.2b
4. Zhengrong Shi	\$3.0b
5. Harry Triguboff	\$2.5b
6. David Hains	\$2.3b
7. Len Ainsworth	\$1.9b
8. Gina Rinehart	\$1.8b
9. John Gandel	\$1.8b
10. Kerry Stokes	\$1.8b

AUSTRALIA has its first female billionaire - iron ore queen Gina Rinehart.

The personal fortune of Ms Rinehart, 52, has doubled in the past year to \$1.8 billion, driven by the global commodities boom and the demand for resources from developing giants like China and India.

She was already Australia's richest woman, but she now joins 21 men in the billionaire's club and moves into the top 10 of the nation's richest citizens, according to *BRW*

magazine's annual wealth list. Like table topping James Packer, whose worth is put at \$7.1 billion, Ms Rinehart not only inherited a fortune but is doing something with it.

Working from the same Perth desk used by her father Lang Hancock, who died 14 years ago, she has overcome a debt burden that almost put her out of business.

"This is a landmark," *BRW's* *Rich 200* editor James Thomson said.

"It shows that women can mix it

at the top end of Australian business, and that there should be no hurdles or impediments to them doing so.

"Her business acumen got Hancock Prospecting to this point.

"If not for her hard work clearing up the problems she inherited, this (fortune) might have all disappeared.

"The company was carrying a lot of debt, and she struggled with a cash flow problem that almost sent her broke in the 1990s."

TOM Hedley has entered *Business Review Weekly* top 200 rich list with a bullet after storming up the charts straight to number 56.

Mr Hedley whose personal worth was rated at \$515 million made his debut alongside 22 other new tycoons.

Only renewable energy mogul Zhengrong Shi whose personal worth was rated at \$3 billion entered higher than Mr Hedley.

Mr Shi's entry is the largest ever debut onto the list.

Mr Hedley's entry to the list comes on the back of the \$300 million sale of his liquor business to retailer Coles Myer.

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