

Russia ready to scrap old subs

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PRESIDENT Boris Yeltsin said yesterday Moscow would dismantle all its old nuclear submarines in northern Russia's Barents Sea region if Norway provided credits to help it.

"We do not need the submarines now, especially nuclear submarines," Mr Yeltsin said after he met Norway's King Harald V and the two sides had signed an agreement on environmental protection dealing with nuclear submarines. Mr Yeltsin said Russia's north was "saturated with nuclear objects" and acknowledged Norway's concerns.

"We must solve the financial question. If the financial side is solved in the form of credits from the Norwegian side, we will immediately start dismantling the submarines," he said in televised comments. He also said the Barents region could be declared a security zone.

It was not clear how the king reacted to the proposal, nor did Mr Yeltsin say how much help Russia would need to dismantle the submarines.

Yevgeny Primakov, the foreign minister, later made clear that Russia was only offering to scrap old submarines

destined to be decommissioned.

"We are not talking about those submarines that are patrolling the region," he told NTV commercial television.

Russia keeps a huge military and civil fleet, complete with nuclear submarines and ice-breakers, in the Arctic north near Norway, with which it shares a 120-mile frontier.

Moscow has about 90 old nuclear submarines in the north and about 150 across the country, the respected Russian current affairs magazine *Itogi* said recently. - Reuters