

## Thousands rally against Iraq war in Australia

AFP, Melbourne

Tens of thousands of protesters marched through central Melbourne Friday to oppose a US-led war in Iraq, in what organisers said was Australia's largest peace rally since the Vietnam War.

The march was the first of a series of planned protests across the country over the weekend, with rallies expected in Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide, coinciding with anti-war rallies around the world.

The rally began with mock air raid sirens to symbolise air attacks on Baghdad.

Protesters chanted anti-war slogans and waved placards reading "No War for Oil" and "Will the Pollies' Kids Go to War?"

They said US President George W. Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Australian Prime Minister John Howard had no popular support or mandate for war.

Australia has committed 2,000 troops to war preparations in the Gulf and Howard has been one of Bush's staunchest supporters during the Iraq crisis.

However, opinion polls show only six percent of Australians support war against Iraq without United Nations backing and one in three oppose war under any circumstances.

Yesterday's rally was organised by churches, peace and student groups and unions.

## Laden tape urges holy war against US

AFP, Doha

A recording believed to be the voice of terror mastermind Osama bin-Laden called on Muslims to launch suicide attacks and defend Iraq against a possible US attack on Tuesday.

The audiotape, broadcast by the Al-Jazeera Arab satellite television network, also warned Muslims against cooperating with the United States against Iraq, saying any who did would be considered as having abandoned their faith.

The television channel said the voice was bin Laden's. US officials agreed, saying the tape was proof of his al-Qaeda group's links with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

"All those who cooperate with the Americans against Iraq are hostile to Islam," the speaker said.

He called on Muslims, "especially in Iraq, to launch a jihad (holy war) against such an unjust campaign."

"We stress the importance of martyrdom operations against the enemy, these attacks that have scared Americans and Israelis like never before," he said, employing the term often used by militants to mean suicide attacks.

Muslims "should have arms; it is a duty," he said, adding that enemy forces should be met with "long and exhausting combat ... because the enemy fears war in the streets."

He said "the United States is seeking, by occupying Iraq, to achieve the Zionist dream of establishing a Greater Israel" in the Middle East.

"All those among the leaders of the Arab countries ... or those who provide military bases to kill Muslims in Iraq are apostates," he said, calling on "Iraqis to resist the American war" against their country.

# Arafat agrees to appoint PM

## Israel takes steps ahead of possible Iraq war

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat agreed to appoint a Palestinian Prime Minister, in the most tangible sign yet of the reforms the United States and Israel have demanded of his administration.

The announcement came amid a climate of war, as two Palestinians were killed when the Israeli army blew up a smuggling tunnel between the southern Gaza Strip and Egypt, and Israel was finetuning its preparations for any spillover from the imminent conflict in Iraq.

"I have decided to appoint a Palestinian prime minister, and I will ask the Palestinian Legislative Council to take the necessary measures to that effect," Arafat told reporters after a meeting with officials from the so-called quartet of Middle East diplomatic players.

Arafat has been under intense pressure over recent months to reform his Palestinian Authority, accused by Israel and the United States of widespread corruption and links to militant groups.

Meanwhile Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz convened some 200 Israeli mayors for an urgent meeting aimed at finalising the measures which should be taken to face a possible Iraqi retaliation on the Jewish state to the imminent US military offensive against Baghdad, a defence spokesman said.

Although Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz said Thursday that his country did not have the means to hit Israel as it did during the 1991 Gulf war, the military establishment in Tel Aviv was taking no chances.

The daily Maariv reported Friday that the home front command is planning to evacuate up to 45,000 people from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem if missiles are fired.

Though closer to Iraq, Jerusalem is not expected to be a target of any Iraqi missile because of the large Palestinian population and the location of the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam.

Since 1991, when 39 Scuds hit Israel, killing two and wounding hundreds, Israel has developed a sophisticated anti-ballistic system which should protect the country from any type of Iraqi attack, even chemical or biological.

The latest sign that diplomatic channels to solve the Iraqi crisis were being dropped came when Israel, Washington's chief ally in the region, issued an emergency call-up for reservists to man Patriot anti-missile batteries recently deployed in the country.

Israel's civilian population continued its preparations for the possibility of the conflict spilling over, but there were no signs of panic and recent polls show that a majority of Israelis are more concerned about Palestinian attacks.

Although the latest successful Palestinian bombing inside Israel took place more than a month ago, Israeli security services say they have foiled many attempts in recent weeks and the army continued its crackdown on militants in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israeli troops killed two Palestinians when they blew up a smuggling tunnel under the flashpoint border between the southern Gaza Strip and Egypt, Palestinian security sources said.

The army confirmed the demolition but said it had no knowledge of any Palestinian casualties as a result of the controlled explosion, which it described as "regular procedure".

The army says Palestinian militants use tunnels under the border to smuggle arms from Egypt.

## North Korea blasts UN over nuclear crisis

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday denounced the United Nations atomic watchdog's "irresponsible" decision to refer Pyongyang to the full Security Council for violating non-proliferation accords.

In the first official response to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) move, official media said the UN body no longer has any jurisdiction over the nuclear issue after Pyongyang's withdrawal from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty last month.

"The IAEA interfered in the 'nuclear issue' of the DPRK (North Korea), ignorant of its status in which it withdrew from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, only to provoke derision of the public," the official Korean Central News

Agency (KCNA) said. "It is an interference in the affair of the DPRK for the IAEA to discuss its 'nuclear issue' as it is unreasonable from a legal point of view and in the light of usage of international relations."

The IAEA on Wednesday declared North Korea to be in breach of UN safeguards and referred the crisis to the UN Security Council, which could impose sanctions.

But IAEA head Mohammed ElBaradei, who announced the decision, said that "all members made it clear it is not the time to jump" to impose such punitive measures - a move Pyongyang has said would amount to a declaration of war.

## US military steps up anti-Taliban offensive

AFP, Bagram Air Base

US-led forces in central Afghanistan yesterday appeared to be stepping up their bombardment of extremists in a remote mountain valley after a fresh pre-dawn offensive in the area.

Colonel Roger King, a spokesman for the US military, said coalition warplanes continued to pummel cave hideouts in the Baghran valley area of Helmand province, where a US Special Forces patrol was ambushed Monday.

He said troops taking part in the operation, code-named Eagle Fury, claimed to have routed rebel fighters, who are believed to be loyal to the hardline former Taliban regime, from one village in the Lejay area of Baghran.

Meanwhile, residents in Kandahar reported a heavy deployment of US vehicles, troops and helicopters heading towards Helmand from a US airbase on the outskirts of the main southern city.

"US Special Forces continued

Operation Eagle Fury in Helmand province south of Lejay yesterday, with troops clearing dozens of caves," King told reporters Friday at Bagram air base near Kabul, the US military's headquarters in Afghanistan.

He said fighters had fled from one village, Robatak, where large amounts of empty ammunition cases, rocket tubes and rocket propelled grenade launchers were discovered.

"It is estimated enemy personnel may have taken refuge in the caves along the ridgeline to the east and west of Lejay."

King said coalition warplanes dropped four 500 pound bombs and fired several hundred rounds of ammunitions at the caves at around 3:30 am (2300 GMT Thursday), destroying at least three.

Despite reports that the fighting had claimed the lives of civilians living in the area, King said there had been no reports of non-combatant fatalities or casualties among coalition troops.

## Proof linking Pak doctor to al-Qaeda given to ISI

AFP, Lahore

Pakistani authorities have handed evidence linking a doctor and his immediate relatives to al-Qaeda terrorists over to the military intelligence agency ISI, a government lawyer told a court yesterday.

Syaed Shabbar, advocate general for the Punjab provincial government, told the Lahore High Court that 15 computer compact discs, 10 floppy disks, three Afghan and three Egyptian passports were recovered from the home of Ahmed Javed Khawaja and given to the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency on January 4.

"We have handed over these items to ISI lawfully," Shabbar told the court.

Judge Javed Buttar, hearing petitions challenging the detentions of Khawaja and his two

Americanised sons, his brother and his Canadian national brother, had asked the government to show proof of their alleged links to al-Qaeda.

The five men have been jailed for almost two months under state security and anti-terror laws for allegedly harbouring key four al-Qaeda figures.

They were arrested in a midnight raid on their home in the eastern city of Lahore on December 18.

All five men were being held under the Security of Pakistan act, deputy attorney general Sher Zaman Khan said.

Khawaja and his brother also face separate charges of attempted murder and illegal weapons possession for allegedly firing on police and intelligence agents during the December raid.



PHOTO AFP  
Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) and his wife Lyudmila Putina (L) confer with French President Jacques Chirac (2ndL) and his wife Bernadette Chirac (3rdL) during a private dinner at "D'chez eux" restaurant on February 11, 2003 in Paris. Putin was on a three-day visit in France. Putin and French President Jacques Chirac announced the adoption by Paris, Moscow and Berlin of a joint declaration calling for reinforced inspections in Iraq, countering Washington's calls for war.

## Powell says French inspection plan would delay Iraq solution

AFP, Cairo

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said in an interview published on Tuesday that a plan from France, Germany and Russia to increase the number of weapons inspectors in Iraq would only put off indefinitely a solution to the current crisis.

"The problem is not the number of inspectors, but to know if Iraq is complying with the (UN) Resolution 1441," Powell told the Egyptian daily al-Ahram, in comments published in Arabic.

"If Iraq complies with this resolution, it is not necessary to have more inspectors -- their number is enough -- but if it does not cooperate then

increasing the number of inspectors will not solve the problem," he said.

France, Russia and Germany united last Monday behind proposals made last week by French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin which called for doubling or tripling the number of UN arms inspectors.

But Powell said: "The Iraqis have been playing a game ... for 12 years. It would be better for the region if this game comes to an end one way or another."

He made clear that the United States would be "happy if we could reach a peaceful solution ... but we hope that the people understand that if we resort to force ... we will not

use it to cause suffering to the Iraqi people."

Powell also said that any US intervention in Iraq must help the Iraqi people install a new government that preserves the unity of the country, preserves human rights and dispenses with weapons of mass destruction.

He pledged that after any conflict the United States will make sure that Iraq's 20 billion dollars of annual oil revenues are used "to build hospitals, schools and roads, improve agriculture and attack the question of poverty, and are not spent on weapons of mass destruction."

## Nearly 200 dead in worst rebel outbreak in Philippines

AFP, Manila

Fighting between government forces and Muslim insurgents raged yesterday in the worst rebel flare-up in three years in the southern Philippines, with the death toll nearing 200, officials said.

Halfway into the fourth day of the major military offensive, the armed forces vowed to capture by sundown a major Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) base defended by up to 2,000 gunmen on the marshy outskirts of this town on Mindanao island.

Infantry units continued to meet stiff armed resistance as they advanced into the 200-hectare (500-acre) Bulioik complex under cover of army artillery and helicopter gunships, military spokesman Colonel Essel Soriano told reporters in Manila.

MILF forces in the area refused a truce unless the military gave back territory.

"As of this reporting time, the resistance is still heavy but we hope that before sundown we could practically take out this Bulioik complex," Soriano added.

A government tally said 175

people have been killed, including 161 guerrillas and associated armed groups, eight soldiers and militiamen, and seven civilians. Some 5,000 soldiers were thrown into the campaign.

Only 43 guerrilla corpses had been found, but the death toll made the hostilities the most serious flare-up of the 25-year-old MILF rebellion since 2000, when the military seized more than 40 MILF camps.

More than 41,000 people have fled their homes due to the fighting this week, relief workers said. At least three children died of illnesses in evacuation camps.

The MILF attacked more villages elsewhere on the island early Friday to relieve pressure on the Bulioik complex.

Major General Generoso Senga, the army division commander directing the assault, said his troops have occupied Kasabalan, one of the villages that make up the rebel base.

"Our troops have practically secured all the objective areas in the Pikit side and we are moving also toward the same (MILF) areas in other towns," he said.

## 'Lost' Beatles recordings found in Australia

AFP, Sydney

Police in Australia seized reel-to-reel tapes believed to be original recordings by The Beatles stolen from London's famous Abbey Road studios in 1969.

Police found the tapes and original album artwork after raiding the home of a 27-year-old man at Lidcombe, in Sydney's western suburbs.

The tapes, which have yet to be verified by a musicologist, contained recordings of the Fab Four's "White Album" and "Abbey Road", police said.

"They are either the original tapes of the actual recording sessions or studio copies of the original tapes," police said.

A large number of tapes were stolen from the Abbey Road studio in 1969, including material for a never released album called Get Back.

A police spokesman said it was unclear whether the tapes found in Sydney contained any new material.

She said the tapes would be sent to London after they had been authenticated.

## Bali bomb suspect asks accomplices to surrender

AFP, Bali

A key suspect in the deadly Bali bombing on Friday urged accomplices who are still on the run to surrender and apologised to Muslims worldwide for his action.

"To my friends who are still on the run, I ask you to join me here and surrender because our action was correct and we must account for it," Ali Imron told reporters outside his cell in Bali police headquarters.

Imron has admitted he drove a van carrying the deadliest bomb part of the way to the Sari Club in the Kuta resort area on October 12.

"I apologize to Muslim clerics, scholars and Muslims worldwide because my action has defiled the Islamic community. I also apologize to families of the victims," he said.

Imron did not explain the reference to a "correct" action.

On Tuesday he gave details of how the terror attacks were carried out, boasting of his group's bomb-making prowess but apologizing to families of the victims.

"We should be proud of the capability of our group as sons of the Indonesian nation. The mistake that needs to be pointed out is the way we apply it," he said Tuesday.

Asked if he knew where his

accomplices were, he said: "If I knew their locations, I and policemen would come to them."

Ten people, including three Malaysians, are on the wanted list over the Bali bombing, which killed more than 190 people. Thirty people including five key suspects are in detention.

Investigators gave prosecutors Friday a 1,922-page file of evidence against one of the key suspects, Amrozi, in preparation for a trial.

Police say Amrozi has admitted buying the van which Imron drove and purchasing chemical ingredients for the bomb.

Prosecutors last month returned the file on Amrozi to police, saying it needed to be improved. "We have included some additions as suggested by prosecutors," said Yatim Suyatmo, the Bali police spokesman.

Police have said they expect the trial of the Bali suspects to start later this month or next month in the resort island.

Amrozi was the first suspect detained over the bombings, which are widely blamed on the regional terror group Jemaah Islamiyah.

## Police in Zimbabwe arrest women from rally

AFP, Harare

Police in Zimbabwe yesterday picked up around 40 women handing out flowers in the capital to protest against violence, an AFP reporter saw.

The woman had gathered outside United Nations offices in central Harare, where they sang an African hymn and handed out red roses with a label that read: "Women say no to violence."

At least three cameramen trying to cover the demonstration were also picked up. An AFP photographer covering the demonstration had his cameras confiscated.

They were part of an organisation named Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), which had planned to hold demonstrations in several Zimbabwean cities on Valentine's Day, in what they said was "a march for love".

Some of the demonstrators, who included nuns and elderly women, were dressed in white as the protest organisers had asked.

They had not been granted police clearance for their demonstrations, necessary under Zimbabwe's strict new security laws.

Riot police maintained a heavy presence in the city and the women were rounded up and taken away in the back of police Land Rovers.

## "Chicago" tops Oscar nominations

### Actress Meryl Streep makes history

AFP, Beverly Hills

The sizzling musical "Chicago" swept Tuesday's 2003 Oscar nominations, dancing off with 13 nods, including best picture, making it a favourite to win cinema's highest honours.

And Academy Awards history was made at the pre-dawn unveiling of the films and stars that will compete for golden statuettes, when superstar Meryl Streep won her 13th nomination, becoming the most Oscar-nominated actress ever.

"Chicago" shot ahead of Martin Scorsese's long-awaited epic "Gangs of New York," which won 10 and Stephen Daldry's wrenching and dark drama "The Hours," which took nine nominations.

The steamy musical directed by Rob Marshall and starring Renee Zellweger, Richard Gere and Catherine Zeta-Jones, tells the story of two rival 1920s nightclub singers competing for fame against a backdrop of murder and passion.

It snatched a best actress

nomination for Zellweger and best supporting actor nods for Welsh-born Zeta-Jones, Queen Latifah and John Reilly as well as best director for Marshall, but the Academy snubbed Golden Globe winner Gere.

Next in line, with 10 nominations was celebrated US director Scorsese's "Gangs of New York," a story of vengeance among 19th-century immigrants to the United States.

They included best picture, best director for Scorsese and best actor for Daniel Day-Lewis.

In addition to best picture, "The Hours" won nominations for best director for Stephen Daldry, best actress for Australia's Nicole Kidman, best supporting actor for Ed Harris and best supporting actress for Julianne Moore.

"Chicago," "The Hours" and "Gangs" had all been tipped by pundits as frontrunners in the race for Oscar nominations, which mark the start of the final straight in tinsel town's annual awards season.

Streep's best supporting

actress nomination for the comedy "Adaptation," which won four nominations broke the joint record that she held with Katharine Hepburn, but she lost out on a best actress nod for "The Hours."

Competing against Marshall, Scorsese, Polanski and Daldry for best director was Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodovar, whom Academy voters honoured even though his film "Talk To Her" was not Spain's entry for best foreign film.

The best foreign film contenders were China's epic "Hero," Mexico's "El Crimen del Padre Amaro," Finland's "A Man Without a Past," Germany's "Nowhere in Africa" and the Netherlands' "Zus and Zo."

The 75th-annual Academy Awards are March 23 in Hollywood, marking the climax of the cinematic year, but even nominations can launch an actor's career or boost a movie's box office success.



PHOTO AFP  
US actress Meryl Streep is shown in a scene from "Adaptation," for which she was nominated for Best Supporting Actress at the 75th Academy Awards nominations, in Beverly Hills, California last Tuesday.