



PHOTO: AFP  
An Iraqi child along with others light candles to wish for peace at the Tigris river on Monday in Baghdad. Iraqi presidential advisor Amer al-Saadi said in a press conference that excavations at the al-Aziziya air base, 104 km southwest of Baghdad, have nearly uncovered all bomb fragments filled with tonnes of toxic agents Iraq had destroyed unilaterally in 1991.

## Al-Qaeda planned to strike Pearl Harbor

### Arrests can't cripple Laden's network

REUTERS, Washington

Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network planned to attack the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, using hijacked airliners, The Washington Times reported on Monday.

The potential targets included nuclear powered submarines and ships, the newspapers said.

Intelligence reports about the threat to the naval base were sent to senior US officials in the past two weeks and coincided with reports that al-Qaeda was planning a major attack, the newspaper reported.

The CIA had no immediate comment on the report. A spokesman for the Pentagon was not immediately available.

The newspaper said officials pointed to the intelligence reports as a factor in the US government's decision earlier this month to raise the terror threat level to orange, or "high" risk of attack.

The terror threat level was lowered one notch on Thursday to

yellow, or "elevated" risk of attack.

The Washington Times cited officials familiar with the intelligence reports as saying that al-Qaeda was planning to take aim at Pearl Harbor because of its symbolic value. Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese, which began the United States involvement in World War II.

AP adds: Osama bin Laden's terrorist network lost a key operative with the arrest of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, but Taliban fugitives and al-Qaeda allies said Sunday the arrest will not cripple the organization.

"There is not just one person there. For every one Khalid Shaikh there are 10 others. There are lots of people who can do his work," said an Afghan rebel who gave his name as Ahmed but who also goes by Abu Bilal.

Mohammed, 37, is suspected of planning the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States. He was captured early Saturday in a joint raid by Pakistani and CIA agents, officials said, and now is believed to be in US custody overseas.

## Williams shoots down 007 rumours

AFP, Tokyo

British pop sensation Robbie Williams is not interested in being the next James Bond - because the modern-day 007 is too politically correct.

Williams, in Tokyo Monday to promote his fifth solo album Escapology, said British tabloid gossip that the singer was being groomed to take over as the British superspy was wide of the mark.

"They are not interested in me playing James Bond, I am not interested in playing James Bond either it is not my bag," he said.

"I love James Bond but I preferred him when he was sexist and he can't be now because everything is so PC (politically correct)."

Williams said it was more important for him to taste success in Japan than in the United States, ignoring a chorus of voices who criticise him for failing to break the US market.

"At home they are always asking why has he not gone to the States yet, is it because he is crap?" Williams told a press conference.

## China's lower house begins annual meet

AFP, Beijing

China's nominal lower house of parliament started its annual meeting Monday under tight security as the country braced for the biggest leadership transition in almost a decade.

The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a 2,238-member assembly, kicked off its annual full session at the Great Hall of the People near Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

The delegates, which includes representatives of non-Communist parties and other organizations, began meetings two days ahead of the 2,900-member National People's Congress (NPC), China's legislature which will usher in a generational change in the top political leadership.

Once the two bodies have completed their sessions mid-month, Hu Jintao is likely to have added the state presidency to the leadership of the Communist Party which he was given in November.

Hu stands at the head of China's so-called fourth generation of leaders, who are being handed the torch by the group of politicians around Jiang Zemin who have

governed the country since 1989.

Delegates entering the Great Hall said they were happy about the handover of power.

"These are the best leaders in our party and country," said Chen Wenhua, from the southwestern province of Sichuan.

Even Communist Party founding father Mao Zedong would have been pleased, according to CPPCC delegate Shao Hua, the late chairman's daughter-in-law.

"He would be very happy," said Shao, adding that Hu seemed "very capable".

Delegates' predictions about who will take up the other top government posts reflected long-time speculations.

Analysts say Vice Premier Wen Jiabao will assume the premiership from Zhu Rongji while Jiang's right-hand man, Zeng Qinghong, will become vice president.

Vice Premier Wu Bangguo is expected to be the new chairman of the NPC, replacing Li Peng.

Delegates also believe Jiang will likely keep his post as chairman of the state's Central Military Commission.

## US turns to dolphins, sea lions for spying

AFP, San Diego

The United States could field some unusual stealth weapons in its crusade against Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein - a battalion of sea lions and dolphins trained as US secret agents.

The military mammals, trained under a special scheme in the California city of San Diego, can play a key role in defending fleets from attacks during war and preventing terrorism at home, their trainers say.

The US Navy's Marine Mammal Program boasts a unit of 20 crack sea lions as well as about 70 dolphins also specially-trained to defend US sailors and installations from explosive marine attacks.

Some of the aquatic defenders have already been deployed for key training exercises in the Gulf as the Iraq crisis reaches fever pitch.

Sea lions have joined the US fifth fleet that is in Bahrain in a key test of the animals' ability to detect enemy divers menacing the fleet.

While the US Navy has used sea lions for recovery missions for the last 30 years, some of them are now being retrained to not only to detect enemy divers, but to catch them too.

"We train a select small set of sea lions to actually find divers and attach recovery lines to the divers" to allow them to be captured, said Tom LaPuzza who has run the mammal programme since its inception in 1960.

"Those are the sea lions that are in Bahrain. This is a new capability that we are demonstrating for the first time," he said adding that if the new recruits did well in their test, they could be used to protect US harbours.

## Pak politicians ask govt to explain al-Qaeda suspects' JI links

AFP, Islamabad

The Pakistani government was being asked Monday by politicians and the US to explain why several al-Qaeda suspects have been found in the homes of members of a powerful Islamic political party, following the weekend arrest of al-Qaeda master planner Khalid Shaikh Mohammed.

"The Pakistani government is under enormous pressure from the US to explain the pattern of raids suggesting links between al-Qaeda and Jamaat-i-Islami (JI)," a senior security official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Mohammed, credited with planning the September 11 terror attacks in the US, was nabbed in a pre-dawn raid Saturday in the northern city of Rawalpindi in a house owned by an activist of JI's women's wing, security officials said.

The woman's son, Ahmed Qadoos, was also arrested in the raid, along with a Middle Eastern al-Qaeda suspect. She denied to AFP, however, that anyone other than her immediate family were in

the home during the raid.

Ahmed's uncle, a serving army major, was arrested Sunday in the north-west district of Kohat, officials said.

Saturday's raid was the latest of several to net al-Qaeda suspects in JI homes, according to security officials.

On January 9 two Arab al-Qaeda suspects, identified as an Iraqi and a Jordanian-Palestinian, were arrested from a house in the southern city of Karachi belonging to another JI women's wing activist.

Raids in the north-west frontier province city of Peshawar and the south-west city of Quetta also netted al-Qaeda suspects in JI member's homes in recent months, according to security officials.

The ethnic-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) party, which jointly rules southern Sindh province and is a rival of Islamic parties like JI, demanded answers from the government on the apparent JI association.

PHOTO: AFP

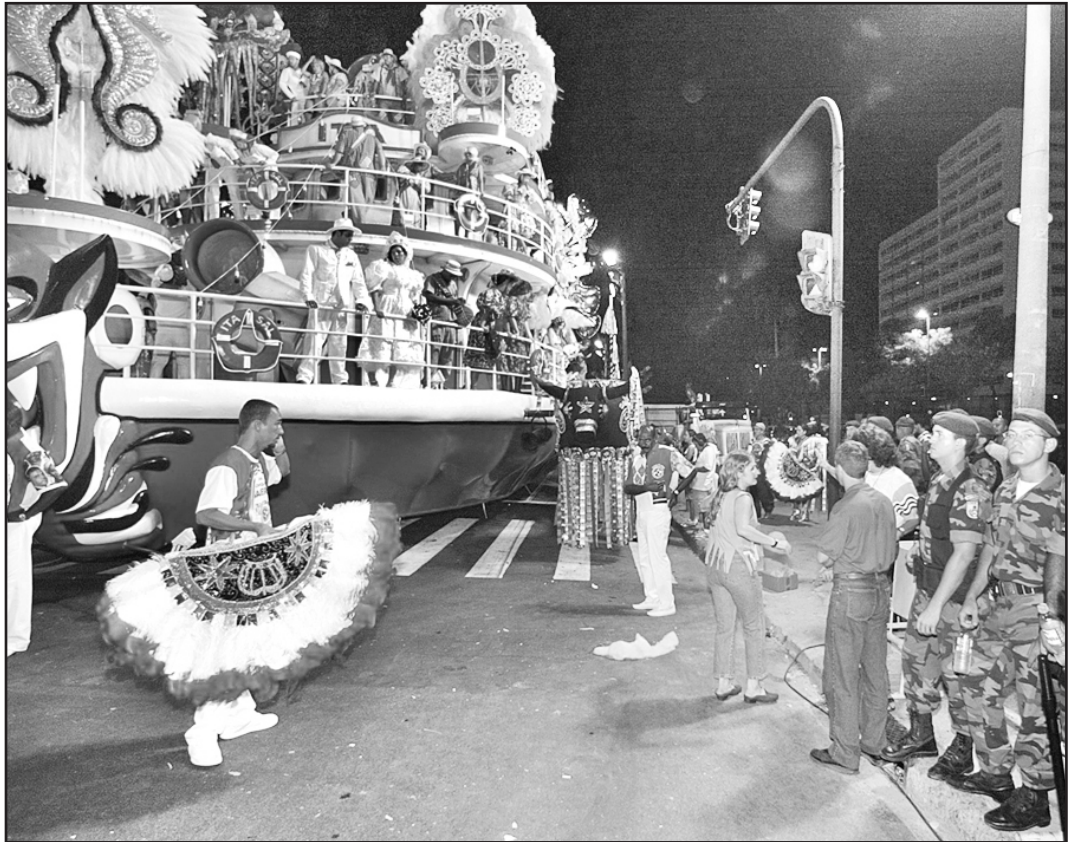


PHOTO: AFP  
Anti-riot police (R) guard a float from the Salgueiro samba school on Sunday in the warm-up area during the traditional samba school parade at the Rio de Janeiro Sambodrome in Brazil. Thousands of tourists and revellers take part in the two-night parade, the climax of Rio's carnival. After riots provoked by drugs traffickers during the week, police security was increased to protect the parade.

## 44 killed in communal clashes in Nigeria

AFP, Lagos

At least 44 people, including seven policemen, were killed at the weekend in clashes between farmers and nomads in northeastern Nigeria, police told AFP Monday.

Fighting began on Friday when Fulani cattle herders stormed the village of Dumne in Adamawa State and began killing residents, including women and children, a federal police spokesman said.

"I can confirm to you that no fewer than 37 civilians and seven policemen were killed," Chris Olakpe said.

## China may have first female vice-president

THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN, Singapore

A prominent vice-chairman of China's Parliament, whose family has long been associated with the Kuomintang (KMT), could become the country's first female vice-president.

A well-placed source told The Straits Times that Madam He Luli, 68, was nominated by the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to succeed Mr Hu Jintao.

She heads the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese KMT, one of China's eight CCP-sanctioned non-communist parties.

## Prabhakaran set for talks with envoys of Japan, Norway

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger reclusive supreme leader Velupillai Prabhakaran is set to hold crucial talks with envoys from Norway and Japan, two countries taking a hands-on approach to ending the island's ethnic war, the rebels said Monday.

Prabhakaran, who heads the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is due to meet with the visiting dignitaries in the next two weeks ahead of the next round of peace talks with the government in Japan from March 18 to 21.

## N Ireland powersharing talks enter crucial phase

REUTERS, Belfast

Efforts to secure a final Northern Ireland peace deal enter a crucial phase on Monday as British and Irish Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Bertie Aherne host a summit on restoring the province's powersharing government.

With Blair's time increasingly taken up by the prospect of war in Iraq, many observers see the summit as the last chance for making progress in the immediate future.

Adding to the sense of urgency is the fact elections to the Northern Ireland assembly are scheduled for May 1, and if they are to go ahead the governments would like to have a deal in place before the official start to campaigning on March 21.



PHOTO: AFP  
Chinese President Jiang Zemin (L) and his successor Vice President Hu Jintao (R) clap as the new Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Jia Qinglin (C) announces the end of the opening session of the conference at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing Monday. The CPPCC, a 2,238-member nominal lower house, acting as an advisory body that gives China's political system a democratic veneer and little else started its annual meeting with much fanfare and under tight security.

## Libya recalls envoy to KSA amid row

AFP, Tripoli

Libya is to recall its ambassador to Riyadh for consultations following Saturday's Arab summit clash between Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, an official statement said Monday.

The statement said the decision was taken by the Libyan parliament, the General People's Congress, which expressed its "discontent" at what it called Prince Abdullah's "aggression" towards Kadhafi.

Television viewers across the Arab world saw Abdullah cursing Kadhafi at Saturday's Arab summit in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

"Who exactly brought you to power?" the Saudi royal asked the Libyan leader, alluding to suggestions that his 1969 overthrow of the British-backed monarchy had US support.

"You are a liar and your grave awaits you," the crown prince said.

Kadhafi had roundly criticised the Saudi kingdom's support for the United States at the summit that focused on US-led war threats against Iraq.

The spat sparked demonstrations by thousands of Libyans near the Saudi embassy here, and on Monday Saudi daily newspaper Okaz said Kadhafi's regime posed more of a threat to the Arab world than foreign powers and should be toppled.