

BRIEFLY



Britain's Princess Diana leaves Brown's Hotel in London's Mayfair after a private lunch with the American Correspondents Association on Monday. The Princess of Wales is still consulting her lawyers over a possible divorce from Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales. — AFP/UNB photo

Blast damages mosque in Russia: A powerful bomb on Tuesday severely damaged a mosque in the capital of an ethnically troubled region of southern Russia, a news agency reported. AP reports from Vladikavkaz, Russia. The bomb exploded about 4 am (0100 GMT) and destroyed one of the walls and the interior decorations of a mosque belonging to the main Islamic authorities in the region of North Ossetia in the Caucasus Mountains, the ITAR-Tass news agency said. The blast shattered windows in neighbouring houses, but there were no injuries.

12 killed in China bus plunge: Twelve migrant workers were killed and 63 others injured when their bus plunged into a ravine in southern China, it was reported yesterday. AFP says from Hong Kong. Eight men and four women were killed instantly when the privately chartered bus taking them home for lunar new year celebrations in Anhui province left the road and plunged into a 70-metre (234-ft) ravine in Meizhou, Guangdong province, late Sunday, newspapers said.

UN extends Lebanon mission: The Security Council voted unanimously Monday to keep its peacekeeping force in Lebanon for another six months, AP reports from United Nations. Some 4,600 UN peacekeepers patrol a buffer zone in South Lebanon above the Israeli border. The area overlaps an Israeli-occupied strip. The council also reiterated its "strong support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized boundaries." The UN force was deployed in 1978 after an Israeli invasion.

Arafat arrives in Sweden: Only hours after a top Israeli aide conferred with Swedish officials, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived Monday for a 24-hour stay including meetings with royalty and government members, AP reports from Stockholm.

5 killed in NZ plane crash: Two honeymooners and an Irish woman tourist were among five people killed in Monday's crash of a New Zealand commuter plane, police said yesterday. Reuter from Wellington.

State Deptt condemns test firing of Prithvi US urges India, Pakistan not to develop missile tech

WASHINGTON, Jan 30: The United States on Monday condemned India's test-firing of a ballistic missile and urged both India and its rival Pakistan not to develop such weapons, reports Reuter.

India on Saturday successfully tested a longer-range version of its medium-range Prithvi missile, capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

"Our position is that the deployment of ballistic missiles, the test firing of ballistic missiles, the acquisition of this kind of technology is not a good idea," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

"We encourage both India and Pakistan to forgo any kind of ballistic missile development programme because we think it is destabilising the subcontinent," he told reporters.

Burns dismissed suggestions that India had to develop the missile because of Pakistan's reported acquisition of Chinese M-11 missiles.

"I don't think that kind of logic is going to achieve stability or peace on the subcontinent," he said.

But he also said the testing should not give Pakistan and excuse to build up a missile force.

Earlier PTI adds: "Our position is that the deployment of ballistic missiles, the test firing of ballistic missiles, and acquisition of this kind of technology is not a good idea," US State Department

spokesman Nicholas Burns said in a statement on Monday.

We encourage both India and Pakistan to forgo any kind of ballistic missile development programme because we think it is destabilising the subcontinent, said Burns in response to a question on India's latest Prithvi test.

Tajik govt-opposition resume peace talks

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, Jan 30: Peace talks between the Tajik government and Muslim opposition leaders resumed on Monday while the government faced new unrest in the eastern mountains and two separate warlords, reports AP.

The negotiations, mediated by the United Nations, opened in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, a fellow Central Asian nation, the Interfax news agency reported. The last round of talks adjourned on December 21.

Chief opposition negotiator Akbar Turadkhonzoda demanded that a council of national reconciliation be set up to represent all regions, ethnic groups and parties in the troubled republic, it said.

The Tajik rebels, supporters of Muslim fundamentalist and democratic groups, fled to Afghanistan after being defeated in a bloody 1992 civil war.

They now wage cross-border raids aimed at destabilising the Moscow-propped government of President Emomali Rakhmonov.

On the eve of the talks Rakhmonov replaced his chief negotiator, Foreign Minister Tablak Nazarov took over from Makhmad said Ubaidullayev, first deputy premier in charge of military and security affairs.

Interfax said Ubaidullayev was needed in the capital because of the "aggravated military situation" in some regions.

In one mutiny Makhmad Khudoberdiyev, who commands an army brigade near Kurgan, Tyube, raided the southern town Saturday and reportedly seized key government buildings. He demanded the replacement of city and police leaders.

Asked whether the testing of missiles by India would trigger a response in Pakistan, Burns said: "We are encouraged by the Pakistani President Leghari's statement over the weekend that there is no imminent threat of conflict between India and Pakistan."

Burns insisted that India and Pakistan have to excuse to emulate each other in the acquisition or development of ballistic missiles.

The US, Burns indicated, would itself tighten export controls and would try to persuade other G-7 countries and Russia to do likewise.

"We will have discussions with both the Indian and Pakistan governments about our very, very strong hope that there will be peace in the subcontinent, that both states will take actions in support of peace and stability."

Burns claimed that the international community thinks it would be inadmissible for one state to acquire ballistic missiles just because another state has tested one.

We think, said Burns, that the threat of missile proliferation is one of the greatest threats to global stability.

That in part is one reason we are having a G-7 summit in Moscow in April to talk about that and the proliferation of fissile material — nuclear materials and components that can be used to fabricate nuclear weapons, said Burns.

He said that the US is trying very hard to strengthen export controls.

The US is also giving assistance to other countries — the Russian government, Ukrainian government and so on — to strengthen their export controls, he said.

China to use force to prevent Taiwanese independence

HONG KONG, Jan 30: China would use force to prevent Taiwanese independence, a Beijing government-backed newspaper said today, reports Reuter.

China will use non-peaceful means to oppose any forces wishing to divide the motherland whether they emerge overseas or in Taiwan," Ta Kung Pao newspaper, regarded as one of China's mouthpieces in Hong Kong, said in an editorial.

The newspaper report coincided with growing speculation that China was about to announce a timetable for recovering Taiwan, which it has regarded as a renegade province since 1949.

The Chinese Communist Party and the government uphold the one China principle and its determination on reunifying the motherland is not to be shaken," the newspaper said.

It said the handover of the British colony of Hong Kong in mid-1997 was the first step towards reunification to be followed by the incorporation of the Portuguese territory Macau, in 1999, and then Taiwan. China has never before set a timetable for reunification.

Meanwhile, a top Taiwan newspaper said China's Premier Li Peng would not announce any timetable for reunification with Taiwan in a speech he was likely to make later today.

The mass-circulation China Times said Li, who was expected to make the speech to mark the first anniversary of President Jiang Zemin's key note address on Taiwan policy, would not announce a set time for recovering Taiwan.

A New York Times article last week quoted US officials as saying China had plans for a missile attack on Taiwan after the island's presidential polls on March 23. China has declined official comment.

Meanwhile, Chinese Premier Li Peng warned today that any attempt to separate arch rival Taiwan from China would fail, the Xinhua news agency said.

"Any attempt to put the interests of Taiwanese patriots against the interests of the Chinese nation as a whole is doomed to failure," Xinhua quoted Li as saying.

"There is only one China in the world and Taiwan is an inalienable part of it," Lie said in a speech in Beijing to mark the first anniversary of an eight-point proposal for reunification by President and Communist Party Chief Jiang Zemin.

"Whatever changes might occur in the way in which the leadership in Taiwan is chosen, they cannot change the fact that Taiwan is a part of China and its leaders are only leaders of a region in China," Li said, referring to Taiwan's presidential elections due in March.

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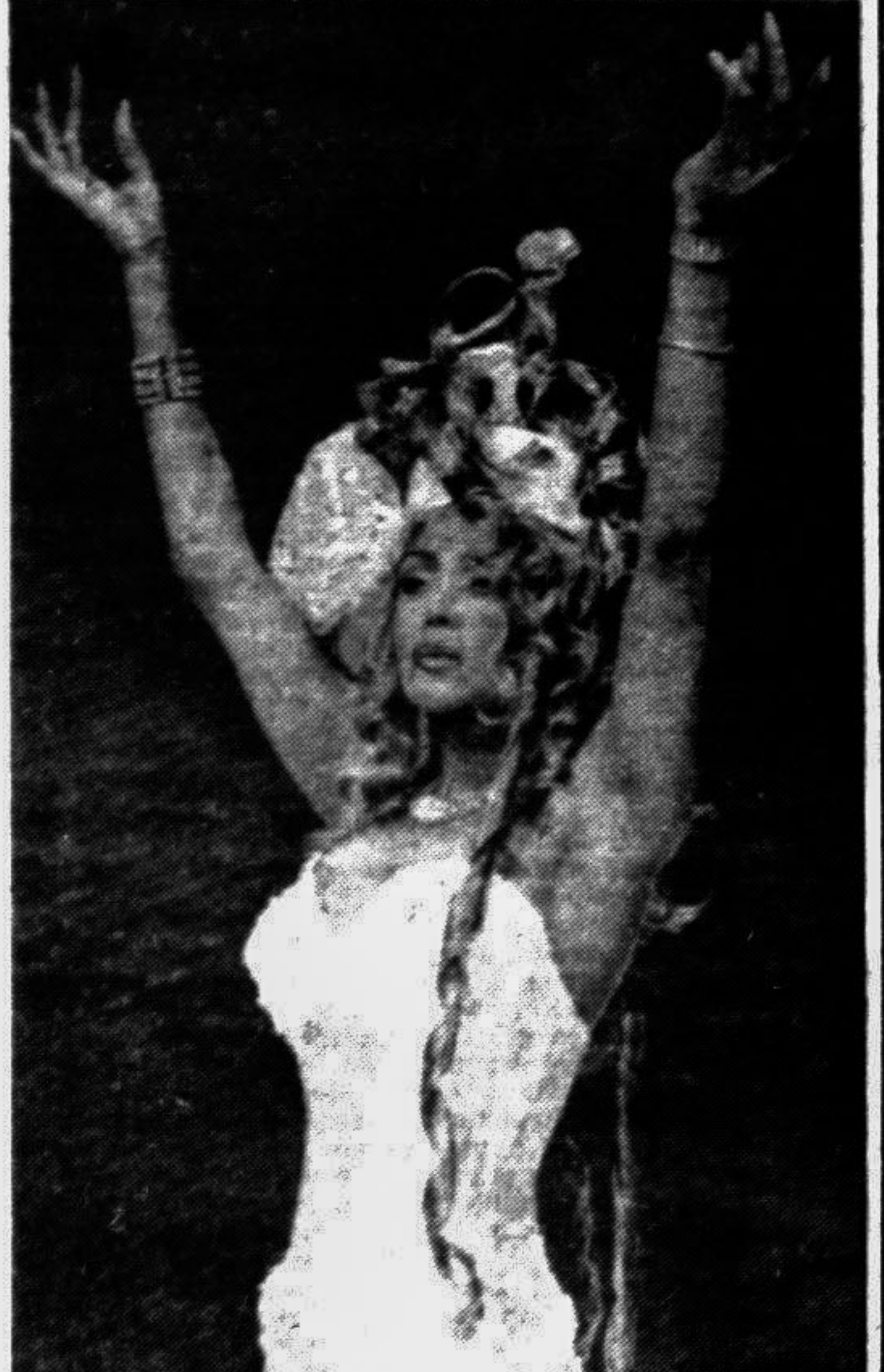
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Off the Record



Litoya Jackson, a sister of US singer Michael Jackson, in a new role of model late on Sunday as she helped top Italian designer Mattioli shows his Spring-Summer 1996 collections. — AFP/UNB photo

Enormous MEXICO CITY: A 28-year-old housewife has given birth to a baby weighing 15.84 pounds (7.2 kg), said by doctors to be the biggest ever born in Mexico, a hospital official said on Monday, reports Reuter.

Jorge Gonzalez, director of the Morelos maternity hospital in the southern town of Chetumal, said that both mother and daughter were doing well despite the baby's size.

"The two of them are well at home. They're both fine," he told Reuters.

The baby was delivered by caesarean section at 0020 local time on January 9. Doctors believe the mother's diabetes could have caused the girl's high birthweight, Gonzalez said.

Mother Patricia Perera Vidal had given birth earlier to babies of above-average weight, one 9.9 pounds and the other 12.1 pounds (4.5 and 5.5 kg). One died but the other is healthy.

Every kid's dream GATINEAU, Quebec: More than 150 volunteers who searched all night for two young brothers should have started in the logical place: Toys-R-Us, reports AP.

Antony Cerezo, 8, and his brother Jerome, 6, were found safe and sound when manager Michel Legault opened the store Monday morning, police Sgt. Richard Longpre said.

"I guess it's every kid's dream to be locked up in a toy store overnight, and they realised their dream," Legault said. "They played cops and robbers, rode bikes and played ball."

When the novelty wore off, Legault said, the boys apparently broke a small window in an attempt to get out. "At the end there, (the boys) were very worried because it's been a long night and they haven't slept very much," Longpre said.

They went to the store by themselves Sunday afternoon and were accidentally locked in. Antony said they fell asleep in a playhouse and when they woke up there was nothing to do but play and eat chocolate Easter eggs.



Bosnian Muslim refugees demonstrate outside the building of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on Monday in Tuzla. The refugees, most of them women from the former Muslim enclave of Srebrenica, ransacked the headquarters of the ICRC smashing windows and doors to protest continued silence over the fate of missing Muslim civilians. — AFP/UNB photo

Priest, nun to be jailed in India for converting tribesmen

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: After a seven-year trial, a court has ordered a Belgian priest and an Indian nun to be jailed for six months for converting 94 tribal people to Christianity in a central Indian state, a newspaper said on Tuesday, reports AP.

Their conviction last week has met with a strong protest from local Christian community leaders who claim the court penalised them on flimsy grounds, the Indian Express said.

Judge C L Patel said the conversions weren't carried out against the wishes of the tribals. But he said he punished Belgian priest Louis Birje, 82, and Sister Vridhi Ekka, 50, for not keeping local authorities informed about their work in the remote Sarguja district of Madhya Pradesh state.

"The fact that the law has been followed in letter and not in spirit rankled senior members of the Catholic church," the newspaper

quoted Bishop Pascal Topno as saying in Bhopal, the state capital.

Father Birje and Sister Ekka are out on bail and plan to challenge their conviction in a higher court, the newspaper said.

Evangelists and missionaries from the West have long come to India to convert tribal people. Some of India's original inhabitants still live in forests and wilderness areas and practice voodoo and witchcraft.

For example, in 1995 nine Americans belonging to an evangelical group based in Texas were sent home after a Christian prayer rally they organised in the remote eastern state of Orissa.

In the Birje-Ekka case, 19 tribal families — a total of 94 people — converted to Christianity in 1988 during the Belgian priest's stay in the area. A church also was built in their village with the funds provided by Birje.

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Singer Neil Diamond (L) helps country music superstar Garth Brooks hold the trophies he won on Monday at the American Music Awards in Los Angeles, California. Brooks won awards for favourite country male artist, favourite country album and favourite overall artist of the year. — AFP/UNB photo

Truce ends with rocket attack on Kabul

KABUL, Jan 30: A government-offered ceasefire collapsed on Monday when rival rebels rocketed and bombed the beleaguered Afghan capital, killing one person and wounding three others, reports AP.

The attacks were the first rebel assaults on Kabul since January 21 when President Burhanuddin Rabbani offered a ceasefire to his enemies to mark the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Eyewitnesses said several rockets landed near the historic Blue Mosque in Kabul's rocket-riddled suburb of Karte Se in the southwest of the city.

Cost of French N-tests in S Pacific too high for Chirac

PARIS, Jan 30: President Jacques Chirac has learned a painful political lesson: In the 1990s, the cost of nuclear tests is too high for even the world's toughest leader, reports AP.

Chirac's decision Monday to cut short his hotly contested series of underground nuclear tests in the South Pacific was almost a foregone conclusion. From the moment last June when he announced that France would break a three-year international moratorium on nuclear testing, Chirac had opened himself up to harsh criticism.

France's bold new conservative president pushed too far. In the end, he ended up nearly buried in the diplomatic fallout of what mushroomed into, politically at least, a nuclear nightmare.

Obviously his advisers led him to error," said Remi Parmentier, chairman of the environmental group Greenpeace's Paris office. "The lesson to be learned is the need for greater transparency and real public consultation."

On Monday evening, a beaten Chirac went on state television and announced that the final series of nuclear tests — originally envisioned as eight blasts, later trimmed to six or seven — was over. Last Saturday's detonation deep beneath Fangataufa Atoll in French Polynesia was the sixth, and Chirac said it would be the last.

region it had led and shaped for 200 years.

Much was at stake. Chirac was gambling that flexing his military muscle would improve his standing among world leaders and lift France to the status of superpower after 14 years of Socialist rule under his predecessor, the late Francois Mitterrand.

Some key allies — the United States, Britain and Germany among them — muted their disapproval, and an emboldened Chirac began portraying France's nuclear might as the cornerstone of a new European defence.

But Chirac didn't count on the explosive anger of Australia, New Zealand, Japan and other nations of the South Pacific, the deep distrust of longtime European trading partners like Den-

mark, Spain, Norway and Sweden — or the tenacity of Greenpeace, which fought France bitterly and skillfully.

In a series of colourful high-seas protests, Greenpeace thrust Chirac's 7-month-old government into the awkward glare of television lights. French Navy commandos repeatedly boarded and seized Greenpeace protest ships, and the Elysee Palace seemed helpless in dealing with the inevitable public relations nightmare.

Perhaps most seriously, Chirac's decision to resume nuclear testing undermined efforts to promote the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. From the beginning, Chirac promised to sign the pact being negotiated in Geneva, but his government sent a

very different signal by detonating warheads beneath the crystal seas of French Polynesia.

By resuming testing, France joined China as the only other nuclear power to actively test weapons of mass destruction since 1992.

Many scientists and military analysts still fear the fall-out among developing nations tempted to develop nuclear capability or worse, to use nuclear weapons they might already have.

French trade in the South Pacific lost some ground, and Australia canceled a \$1.36 billion jet order from French defence giant Dassault Aviation. Economic boycotts of French made goods were repeatedly threatened, and though they were never organized on any global level

French winemakers winced when the evening news showed angry Australians pouring bottles of Beaujolais out onto the sidewalks.

At home Chirac's conservative Rally for the Republic party stuck with him through plummeting popularity polls to the bitter end. In a statement issued Monday, party secretary general Jean Francois Mancel saluted Chirac for guaranteeing the future of the country and the security of his fellow citizens.

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Mandela gets U Thant peace award

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 30: South African President Nelson Mandela was awarded the U Thant Peace Award here on Monday by United Nations peace envoy Sir C. Innuov, reports Xinhua.

Mandela was the second South African to receive the award following the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The peace award was in remembrance of U Thant.

Sir Chirnov, who is on a two-month peace tour of South Africa and Zimbabwe, is expected to return to New York on Tuesday.

Recipients of U Thant peace Award include former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and Catholic nun Mother Teresa.