



An East Timorese protester is carried off by police and soldiers during his arrest after breaking through a police blockade during a demonstration near the US embassy in Jakarta Monday. About 100 East Timorese activists staged a protest to commemorate the 23rd anniversary of Indonesia's invasion of the formerly Portuguese colony and underscored their demand for independence. The arrested protester was later released. — AP/UNB photo

DPRK to build 3 underground missile-launch bases

TOKYO, Dec 8: North Korea is developing three underground facilities capable of launching ballistic missiles, Japan's public broadcaster reported Tuesday, reports AP.

US spy satellites have confirmed what appear to be three missile-launch bases under construction in the northern part of North Korea, NHK television quoted Japanese Defense Agency sources as saying.

The three facilities are being built at varying depths ranging from 50 metres (562 feet) to 100 metres (1,125 feet) below ground, the report said.

A Defense Agency spokesman contacted by the Associated Press had no comment. He spoke on condition of anonymity.

The report comes as former US Defense Secretary William Perry, the newly appointed US government policy coordinator for North Korea, is on a three-nation Asian tour.

On Monday, Perry met South Korean President Kim Dae-jung in Seoul. Kim proposed a "package deal," in which the United States would provide economic and diplomatic benefits to North Korea in exchange for access to a suspected nuclear weapons site. Perry plans to visit Tokyo and Beijing later this week.

Under a 1994 agreement with the United States, North Korea agreed to abandon its suspect nuclear weapons programme. In return, it is to receive two safe nuclear reactors worth \$4.6 billion plus substitute fuel oil and other economic benefits.

The US military believes it will be difficult for US intelligence satellites to monitor the North's underground missile facilities if they are completed, NHK reported.

The report said a fuel storage facility will be completed in one or two years at one of the underground sites, where work is advancing the fastest.

Japanese were unnerved by the firing of a rocket by North Korea on Aug 31 US and South Korean officials say North Korea test fired its Taepo Dong-1 missile, which flew over Japan and landed in the Pacific Ocean, proving the communist country can strike any part of the nation.

North Korea has refused to accept a US demand for outside inspections of the suspected underground nuclear facility under construction at Keumjigang, 40 kilometres (25 miles) northeast of the North's main nuclear complex at Yongbyon.

US spy satellite photographs taken earlier this year showed thousands of North Korean workers burrowing into a mountainside at the site, rising suspicion that the facility may be nuclear-related.

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The fundraising extravaganza was to benefit the Entertainment Artists' Benevolent Fund.

The four-member Spice Girls performed their song, "Goodbye," for the show at the Lyceum theater in London. They did the performance sitting down so the pregnant Spice wouldn't have to dance.

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Strike continues in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Dec 8: Streets were quiet and shops and businesses closed for the third day Tuesday in an anti-government strike in the capital of Indian-held Kashmir, reports AP.

Groups opposed to Indian rule in Kashmir had called the three-day strike to protest a visit by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Vajpayee's two-day visit, his first since taking office earlier this year, ended Monday night.

As he arrived Sunday, police said explosives hidden in a public toilet shattered windows of houses and hotels less than three kilometres (two miles) from the state governor's guest house it has been blamed on anti-India militants.

The militants say Muslim-majority Kashmir should not be part of predominantly Hindu and officially secular India. Several groups are fighting India's forces, with some demanding independence and others union with officially Islamic Pakistan. More than 15,000 people have been killed in the fighting in the last nine years.

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Iraq getting ready to test fire short-range missiles

BAGHDAD, Dec 8: Iraq is preparing to test fire short-range missiles, the foreign minister said Monday, reports BSS.

"We are producing at the moment missiles for our defence," Foreign Minister Mohammed Said Al-Sahhaf told journalists.

"We already have missiles with a range of 150 kilometres (90 miles) and several types, including 'sumud' and 'Ababil,'" he added.

Iraq was preparing to test fire the missiles, the minister said.

"A (military) team is now somewhere in Iraq preparing to test fire the 150-kilometre missiles," he said.

But he gave no further details.

In Bucharest, the authorities admitted Thursday a Romanian arms firm had signed a deal

with Iraq in 1995 to supply missile equipment, but denied the contract involved material banned by UN sanctions.

General Amer Al-Saadi, scientific adviser to President Saddam Hussein said last week the UN special commission (UNSCOM) on disarming Iraq "knows very well that there is a project for a missile of less than 150 kilometres."

The ceasefire terms of the 1991 Gulf War called for the destruction of Iraqi biological, chemical and nuclear weapons as well as missiles with a range of more than 150 kilometres.

Iraq's military installations, including missile test sites, are subject to UNSCOM surveillance.

Another report from UN adds: Iraq has begun exporting oil under the latest phase of the oil-for-food humanitarian pro-

gramme without waiting for UN approval of a distribution plan, a UN spokesman said Monday, reports AP.

It is the first time that Iraq has not disrupted oil sales between phases of the oil-for-food scheme, which has been in force since December 1996.

Baghdad usually argues that the plan for the distribution of humanitarian supplies had to be approved first.

The distribution plan for the current phase is expected to be submitted to UN chief Kofi Annan in the coming days.

The UN Security Council on November 24 authorised the fifth six-month phase of the scheme which allows sanctions — hit Iraq to export limited quantities of oil in return for badly-needed food and medicine.

UN spokesman John Mills said in a statement that two ships loaded with Kirkuk crude oil at the Turkish port of Ceyhan during the weekend, and four ships loaded with oil at Iraq's gulf platform of Mina Al-Bakr, on Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

Mills said that the total value of oil sales contracted under phase V at current prices was about \$15 million dollars.

The oil-for-food scheme currently enables Iraq to export 5.2 billion dollars worth of oil in return for humanitarian supplies.

However, because of a dip in oil prices, Baghdad was only able to export a total three billion dollars worth in the last six-month phase.

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Off the Record

Balmy weather graces US east coast

WASHINGTON, Dec 8: Roses and Camellias were unseasonably in bloom here on Monday as balmy weather graced the US east coast, reports AP.

Meanwhile, in the country's western deserts, snow was falling.

Temperatures more than 15 degrees Celsius above normal for the season were forecast on Monday in major eastern US cities.

It was expected to be 23 degrees Celsius in Washington, 21 degrees in Philadelphia and 20 degrees in New York.

Meanwhile, virtually on the other side of the continent, five centimetres of snow fell on parts of Las Vegas, Nevada, the nation's gambling capital in the middle of the desert.

Snow also fell in Phoenix, Arizona, on Sunday, creating the bizarre spectacle of cactuses covered in snow.

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