US, UK citizens won't be allowed to work in Iraq

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 2: Iraq has told the United Nations it would no longer accept American or British citizens working in the country as part of its humanitarian pro-gramme because of the bombing raids conducted by both countries, diplomats said, reports Reuter.

The news, which reached New York on New Year's Eve. could cause a crisis in the oilfor-food programme that allows Iraq to use oil revenues to purchase food, medicine and other supplies under UN super-vision. In theory, the United Nations does not allow governments to dictate the makeup of its staff.

So far the diplomats, who reported the news to Reuters on Thursday, said Iraq has not put

Suharto family

controls 4.3m

hectares of forest

JAKARTA, Jan 2: Indone-sian former president Suharto's

family controls at least 4.3

million hectares of forest areas

in the country, a senior official

forest were owned by the

Suharto family through their

stakes in 65 timber companies.

local leading newspapers on

Saturday quoted minister of

forestry and plantations Mus-

timber companies is in the

names of Suharto's children.

grandchildren, brother and his

sons-in-law and daughter-in-

law. There is no stake in either

Suharto's name or Ibu Thien's

(Suharto's late wife) name," the

minister told the ministry's

year-end media briefing on

size of the forest areas con-

trolled by the Suharto family

was based on the percentage of

their shares in the 65 timber

between 10 per cent and 100 per

cent in the 65 companies.

The family has stakes of

He said the estimate of the

Thursday.

companies.

"The ownership of those

limin Nasution as saying.

The 4.3 million hectares of

said, reports Xinhua.

its directive in writing. But they said Foreign Minister officials had communicated the government's decision orally to UN authorities in

The exact number of American and British citizens among the 420 UN humanitarian works is not known. But the sources said on Friday that Baghdad would not allow about 20 Americans and Britons on leave to return to their posts and wanted the United Nations to send home Britons and Americans still in the country.

UN officials declined to comment, "We've heard such reports but we have nothing in writing," said John Mills, spokesman for the UN oil-forfood humanitarian pro-

But the diplomats, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Iraqi officials had told UN coordinators of the programme in Baghdad they were concerned about the security of US and British citizens since several days of American and British bombing raids from December 16 to 20.

The United Nations has some 420 international staff in Iraq, based in Baghdad and in the three Kurdish-dominated northern provinces.

At the height of the bombing, the United Nations withdrew most of its staff from Baghdad but left them in the north. They returned after three days.

The oil-for-food programme permits Iraq to sell up to 5.256 billion dollars worth of oil ev-

ery six months to buy humanitarian supplies for ordinary Iraqis living under 8-year-old UN sanctions.

The programme is an exception to the sanctions imposed since Baghdad's troops invaded Kuwait in August 1990. The main requirement for lifting them is certification from UN arms inspectors that Iraq no longer has any weapons of mass destruction.

Since the bombing raids, Baghdad has refused to allow any further UN arms inspections until the sanctions are lifted. It has periodically threatened to end the oil-forfood programme, which it views as another method of maintaining the punishing sanc-

Shi'ite-Sunni clash leaves 7 dead in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Jan 2: Heavily armed Sunni and Shi'ite tribesmen exchanged mortar fire near a northern Pakistani district over a land dispute. At least seven people died and several others were wounded. newspapers reported on Saturday, says AP.

Four people died of shelling in a Shi'ite Muslim village and three in a Sunni Muslim village in the remote Hangu district, located some 60 km south of Peshawar, the capital of North West Frontier Province, the English-language daily The News said.

The two sides shot at each others villages from hill tops. officials said

The authorities called in paramilitary troops to quell the

violence. Hundreds of people have been killed in recent years in clashes between Sunni and Shi'ite tribes in northern Pakistani areas close to the border

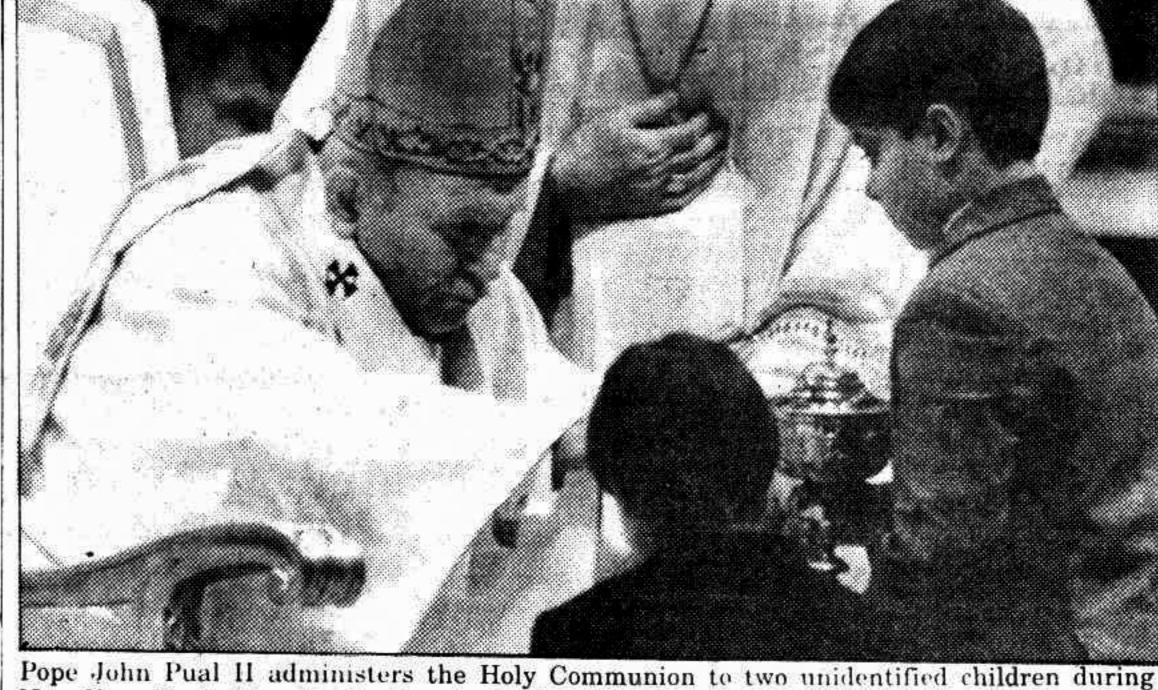
with Afghanistan. Sunnis are a majority in Pakistan, while Shi'ites comprise barely 15 per cent of the population.

Nine killed in Kashmir violence

SRINAGAR, Jan 2: Nine people, including four militants and two security personnel. were killed in various militaryrelated incidents across Jammu and Kashmir since last evening. an official spokesman said here yesterday, reports PTI.

Panic gripped historic Lal Chowk in the heart of Srinagar city this afternoon when militants hurled a powerful grenade toward a BSF jawan and six pedestrians, the spokesman said, adding all the injured were admitted to hospital.

The spokesman said a foreign mercenary, Abdul Hassan, and two security personnel were killed and four others, three of them securitymen, were wounded in a fierce encounter between militants and security forces at village Wanihama-Beerwa in Badgam district of central Kashmir yesterday.



New Year Day's Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Friday. The two-hour ceremony was one of the final events of the holiday ceremonies that ends on January 6 with Epiphany. - AP/UNB photo

New Mars mission set to take off today

WASHINGTON, Jan 2: A new US probe, Mars Polar Lander, was set to take off from Florida's Kennedy Space Centre tomorrow on a mission to seek water on and below the red planet's surface, reports AFP.

Weather permitting, the craft will ride into space atop a Delta-2 rocket at 3:21 am (2021 GMT) then separate from the launcher some 42 minutes later to begin its long voyage to Mars. the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

Mars Polar Lander is expected to reach the planet on December 3, 1999 after an 11month long journey, touching down lightly after letting fall Deep Space 2, two mini-probes that will stab into the Martian surface.

Another probe, Mars Climate Orbiter, was launched into space early in December to study the planet's seasons and water distribution after achieving orbit on September 23.

When it reaches its destination, first a parachute and then Retro rockets will slow the Mars Polar Lander's descent so that it hits the ground at the

planet's south pole at a speed of 2.5 metres a second (5.4 miles per hour).

Ejected while the lander is still high above the surface, bullet-shaped parts of the two Deep Space 2 mini-probes will penetrate a meter (three feet) into the ground upon impact, while another part will remain on the surface to transmit results.

stand 1.06 meters (3.5 feet) high, is a square platform bristling

Former aide of Netanyahu to form party

JERUSALEM, Jan 2: One of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's staunchest allies plans to announce the formation of a new political party for immigrants, an Israeli television station reported Friday, reports AP.

The creation of the "Israel is

with scientific instruments that measures 3.6 meters (12 feet) on each side.

Once on Mars, it will collect rocks and soil samples with a robot arm. These will be heated and any

volatile gases that escape, such as water vapor, will be anal-The Deep Space 2 mini-

probes will do the same with underground samples.

The information gathered by Mars Polar Lander and Mars Climate Orbiter should provide a greater understanding of the history of water on Mars, says Richard Zurek of the Pasadena, California-based Jet Propulsion Laboratory, who is responsible for the two probes.

Scientists already know that water once flowed freely, but do not yet understand why it disappeared. Mars Polar Lander also is

equipped with a microphone that, for the first time in space history, will allow scientists to

craft sent by the United States to the planet.

A British fire eater of the Rumpledrumskin group performs at the Sacre Coeur basilica during the New Year parade in the Montmartre district of Paris on Friday. - AP/UNB photo

BRIFF

Rains cause havoc in Malaysia: More than 1,500 Malaysians were forced to evacuate after monsoon rains caused several rivers to spill their banks and

partially submerge dozens of nearby villages, news reports said The victims from a half-dozen districts in the central state of Pahang were forced out of their homes by early Saturday morning, the national news agency Bernama said. Thousands of other villagers along the east coast of West Malaysia are vulnerable to the heavy seasonal rains, which usually occur from November till February. They have also been put on flood alert.

More protests likely in Thailand: An aide to Thailand's Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai predicted that there will be more protests in Bangkok during the first half of 1999 as prices for agricultural products drop, local papers reported on Saturday, AP reports from Bangkok.

Amnuay Patise, the prime minister's deputy secretary general overseeing problems by various protest groups, told the Bangkok Post that a new surge of protests are expected between February and April when the price of rice and tapioca is expected to drop.

Latypov appointed Belarussian DPM: Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko issued a decree on Friday appointing Foreign Minister Ural Latypov as the country's deputy prime minister, ITAR-Tass news agency reported, AFP says from Minsk.

Latypov became foreign minister on December 4. He was born in 1951 in Bashkortostan in the Russian federation and worked from 1974 until 1989 for the Soviet KGB security police. The former KGB colonel served as an adviser on foreign affairs to the Belarussian president from 1994 until his appointment as foreign minister.

Footbridge collapse kills 2 in Chile: Two people died and 90 were injured when a footbridge in the main port city of Valparaiso collapsed, police said on Friday, AFP reports from Santiago.

The accident occurred shortly after New Year's celebrations began. Some 300 people were on the footbridge when it suddenly collapsed and plunged six meters (20 feet). Police identified the dead as Angela Carrasco, 14, and Iris Elena Estay Contreras, 40. Nine people were reported in serious condition, and two were near death.

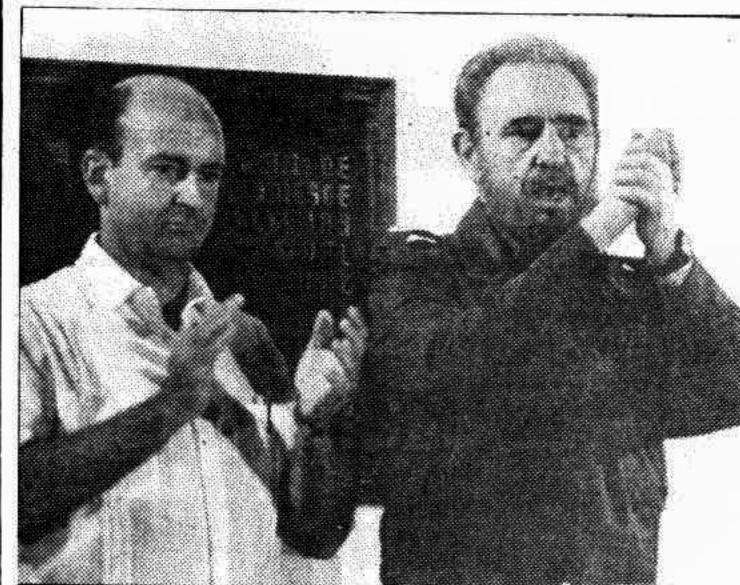
50,000 killed in Colombia in 10 yrs: More than 50,000 people have died violent deaths in the Colombian drug capital of Madellin in the last 10 years according to a study published Friday, AFP reports from Bogota.

Between 1990 and 1998, a total of 50,359 people died from violence, according to the report from the Colombian Institute of Foreinsic Medicine. In 1998 there were 2,877 homicides in

the decade, 4,000 to 6,500 people a year were murdered, the study Hezbollah bomb expert killed: Israel said on Friday it had killed a top Hezbollah explosives expert in South Lebanon earlier in the week, Reuter reports from

Medellin, the lowest in the period serveyed. In the first half of

"On December 29, the Israeli Army caused the death of a Hezbollah explosives expert northeast of Baalbek, which is 100 km from the border with Israel," Israeli Army Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz told reporters. He identified the man as Zahi Naim Hadr Ahmed Mahabi but gave no further details.



Cuban President Fidel Castro, right, gestures to the crowd after finishing his speech at Cespedes Park during the official ceremony for the 40th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution on Friday in Santiago de Cuba, on left, is Cuban Vice President Carlos Laje. AP/UNB photo

Avalanche death toll rises to 9 in Quebec

KANGIQSUALUJJUAQ, Quebec, Jan 2: A wall of snow crashed down on a New Year's celebration in a remote northern village in Canada, killing mine people, including five children, and injuring 25 when it broke through a gymnasium wall, police said, reports AP.

Six people died shortly after Friday's avalanche in the coastal village of Kangiqsualujjuaq (pronounced Kan-JIKsoo-an-oo-joo-ak), in an Inuit region 1500 km northeast of Montreal.

Three other victims - a mother, her young daughter and son - were discovered several hours later buried under tons of snow, said Luc Harvey, chief of the Kativik regional police force in Kuujjuaq, 300 km west of the village.

Police said they had accounted for everyone and were calling off the search. The names and exact ages of the victims were not released, but police said five of the victims were under the age of eight.

The toll from the avalanche could have been much worse as between 400 and 500 people were packed into the gym.

Before the last body was recovered, local residents had dug frantically through snow that slid down the 250-foot (75-meter) hill and punched through the wall of the school gym, Harvey said.

They faced a fierce snowstorm, 95 kph wind and minus 4 degree Fahrenheit (minus 20 Celsius) temperatures looking for those buried under snow up to 10 feet (3 metres) deep.

NDFB militants kill 3 policemen in Assam

GUWAHATI, Jan 2: Three policemen were killed and four others seriously injured by suspected National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) militants in Assam's Kokrajhar district yesterday, official sources said here, reports PTI.

A group of NDFB militants arrived in two jeeps at Bhumuka Maligaon Relief Camp under Saiphunga police station lobbing grenades and opening fire from light machine guns at the policemen posted on duty. Two policemen of the Seven

Assam Police Battalion were killed on the spot while another succumbed to his injuries on way to the hospital and four constables were critically injured.

Four thatched houses of Adivasis were burnt by the grenade and this created panic in the area.

The Adivasis in a retaliatory action attacked the Bodo villages of Jadanpur and Maligaon and burnt houses. Sixteen houses have been burnt in Jadanpur village and ten in Maligaon. Senior police and civil offi-

cials have rushed to the spot the incident occurred a day after 36 NDFB militants surrendered to the state government here yesterday. Assam Chief Minister Pra-

fulla Kumar Mahanta reviewed the latest law and order situation in Kokrajhar with senior police and civil officials here.

Air traffic control system upgraded at Delhi Airport

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: The international airport in New Delhi has begun operating on a sophisticated air traffic control system, more than two years afeter it witnessed one the worst midair aircraft collisions, an official said Saturday, reports

The new system by US-based manufacturer Raytheon was put in use on New Year's Day and is expected to make plane landings and takeoffs safer. "It worked more or less all right on the first day," said Brijendra Shekhar, general secretary of the Air Traffic Controllers

The system includes advanced radar and flight data processing that identifies aircraft and provides warnings of possible collisions or dangerously low altitudes.

India's outdated air traffic control system came in for sharp criticism after the midair collision of a Saudi jetliner and a Kazak cargo plane over New Delhi killed 349 people in November 1996. The sophisticated system is

expected to become operational at the international airport in Bombay in six months' time. Shekhar told The Associated Press.

But the new system was of little help to flights badly disrupted by a dense fog over New Delhi for the past two weeks. The airport doesn't have an upgraded version of the instrument landing system which pilots rely on when visibility is

India's Civil Aviation Minister Ananth Kumar earlier this week promised that the upgraded version would be in place by November.

The current system permits landing when runway visibility is at least 600 meters (660 yards). In recent days, fog has reduced visibility at New Delhi to well below that.

China lashes out at Indian minister's remarks on Taiwan

BEIJING, Jan 2: China on Friday lashed out at New Delhi over comments it said India's Urban Development Minister made in support of international recognition for Taiwan, reports AFP.

"The utterance by Indian Urban Development Minister Ram Jethmalani on Taiwan last Sunday was evil-minded and dangerous as it was preaching recognition of the island province of China," Xinhua

The official news agency said the minister had said in an interview with the Week magazine there was "a strong case" for recognition of Taiwan because it was an "independent and democratic country. "Jethmalani, as a minister

of India, should not be ignorant of the simple fact that there is only one China in the world," the commentary said. China regards Taiwan as a break-away

New Year's amnesty Indonesia frees 42 political prisoners

JAKARTA, Jan 2: The government freed 42 political prisoners in a New Year's amnesty and plans to revoke a key legal weapon used to bolster the rule of former authoritarian President Suharto, local media reported Saturday, reports AP. The moves are part of a re-

form programme led by Suharto's successor, President B J Habibie, who has been targeted by student protesters demanding swifter democratic change. Shortly after Suharto quit

in May after riots and protests against his 32-year rule, Habibie freed dozens of political prisoners and pledged parliamentary elections this year.

The prisoners released on Dec 31 include 26 separatist activists from the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, where rebels have fought the Indonesian military since it invaded in 1975.

However, East Timor's jailed rebel chief, Xanana Gusmao, was not granted his freedom. He is serving a 20-year sentence in a Jakarta prison and is seen as a major player in UN-sponsored talks between Indonesia and Portugal to solve the longrunning conflict.

The government also freed 16 prisoners involved in other separatist movements, including 15 people from the Sumatra island region of Lampung and one from Aceh province. They had been sentenced in 1990 to jail terms ranging from 16 years to life.

The lander itself, which will

Our Home" party by Avigdor Lieberman would run in the May 17 elections for parliament and support Netanyahu as prime minister, Channel Two

hear wind and other sounds originating on another planet. These two probes are only the latest in a series of space-

Khmer Rouge leaders must be tried, says Hun Sen

PHNOM PENH, Jan 2: After a week of feting two Khmer Rouge defectors around the country. Prime Minister Hun Sen made a surprise turnaround Friday and announced they must be tried for helping draw up the movement's genocidal policies, reports AP.

Hun Sen said in a broadcast statement that local and international preparations for a tribunal on crimes against humanity would proceed, but he would allow the two guerrilla leaders to remain free until a warrant is issued for their ar-

Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, members of Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot's inner circle during the group's brutal 1975-79 rule, emerged from hiding last week and struck a defection deal with Hun Sen.

On Monday Hun Sen told his Cabinet that the two would not be tried in what he called "a purely Cambodian solution" to ensure reconciliation after decades of civil war.

But the prime minister reversed his stance in Friday's statement, claiming his support of a trial had never wavered.

"A court must be set up on the advice of national and international lawyers who are currently conducting their work," Hun Sen said. "I am one among many people who support an investigation into the genocidal regime of Pol Pot, which must be punished."

The whereabouts of Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea could not be confirmed on Friday. The day before, they arrived with their well-dressed wives and families to a red-carpet welcome at a luxury hotel in Sihanoukville, a port 110 miles (180 kilometers) southwest of

the capital. It was the start of a government-arranged pleasure tour of the country that at the height of their power they turned into a slave labor camp. Up to 2 million people are thought to have died of starvation, disease and systematic executions due to Khmer Rouge policies.

The special treatment the two received - and their blithe calls to "let bygones be bygones" - have outraged local and international human rights

King Norodom Sihanouk said Wednesday he would refuse to grant them or any other Khmer Rouge leaders amnesty. While Sihanouk is a figurehead, he is popular among Cambodians and his move would have delegitimized an amnesty by Hun Sen in the eyes of many.

Separately, an aide to the two defectors warned that any trial would expose the roles of the United States and China in the Khmer Rouge's brutal rise to

"Implementing a trial would also involve the 200 days and nights of bombing in Cambodia," aide Long Norin said Friday in reference to the US carpet bombing of Cambodia in the early 1970s before the Khmer Rouge took over.

Lewinsky scandal casts shadow on US Democratic presidential race

WASHINGTON, Jan 2: For Al Gore, the vice president who wants to move into the Oval Office, Bill Clinton represents the biggest obstacle — and perhaps the greatest asset — in fulfilling that ambition in 2000, reports AP. The impeachment proceed-

from the Monica Lewinsky affair have drowned out numerous attempts by Gore to develop his own message. The scandal has forced Gore to delay plans to step out on his own, because it might look dis-

ings and continuing fallout

loyal to distance himself from Clinton. Gore downplays such analysis, telling The Associated Press in a recent interview: "Since I have not announced (as a presidential candidate), there has

been no impact.' Gore mailed official papers Friday to the Federal Election Commission, however, establishing a presidential campaign committee for the 2000 election, his staff chief, Ron Klain,

On the plus side, the economy has remained vibrant under Clinton and pocketbook issues resonate with voters. The president's job approval ratings continue at high levels. And · Clinton's strong political network stands ready to mobilize for Gore.

Still, the vice president will have to fight for the Democratic presidential nomination. House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, a potential Gore ri-

val, has earned his fair share of

loyalty points. He held Democratic lawmakers in line against impeachment and delivered a rare impassioned floor speech on the day of the historic vote.

Gore, may opt out of the race and remain in the House of Representatives, where he could become speaker if Democrats pick up six seats in the 2000 congressional elections. Former Sen Bill Bradley of

New Jersey could emerge as a powerful alternative to Gore. 'No idea who fired first'

Hostages deny Yemeni pressure to shift blame

LONDON, Jan 2: The survivors of a hostage gun battle in Yemen said on Friday they were amazed to be alive after being used as human shields but denied they had been pressured by Yemeni authorities to shift blame for the massacre, reports

Reuter. The hostages, looking drawn, effusively praised each other's courage and calm in the hall of bullets. Giving graphic and vivid ac-

simply do not know."

counts of their terrifying ordeal, the hostages said they could not tell who had opened fire first - the kidnappers or Yemeni troops. "None of us had any idea who fired first," Smith said, "We

Bradley retains the allure of his basketball career with the New York Knicks, though he is considered an uninspiring speaker. Sen Paul Wellstone of

Minnesota is running on the Gephardt, more liberal than ' left end of the spectrum. Sen John Kerry of Massachusetts and civil rights activist Jesse Jackson also are considering bids. One potentially strong challenger, Sen Bob Kerrey of Nebraska, decided not to run. Looking far into the election

> hurt their presidential nominee, particularly if Gore is the pick. He was intensely loyal to Clinton, issuing statements of support a dozen times during the week of the House impeachment vote. Americans are tired of the scandal and may turn away from any reminder of the

> Clinton-Gore administration, some party officials say privately. "I don't buy that," Gore adviser Bob Squier said recently. "The president's (poll) numbers and vice president's numbers

have never been better." Gore allies say they are more concerned about the economy than scandal. As long as voters feel good about where the country is headed, they will back Clinton and his vice president, the allies contend.

Gore's loyalty throughout the Lewinsky scandal may pay off in the short run, as he navigates the field of Democratic challengers for the nomina-



The 81st Rose Queen, Christina Farrell and Princess Chaitali Gala of Arcadia, California, along with the Royal Court, wave to the crowd as they ride down the 110th Tournament of Roses Parade route in Pasadena, California on Friday. - AP/UNB photo