

## Leonardo's bridge

AP, Oslo

Almost 500 years ago, Leonardo da Vinci -- the original Renaissance man -- sketched out what fans call the "Mona Lisa of bridges" and critics said couldn't be built.

Five centuries after a Turkish sultan rejected the project, the bridge was finally scheduled to open on Wednesday, 2,400 kilometers north of the sunny spot Leonardo had in mind.

"This is the first time any of Leonardo's architectural and civil-engineering designs has been built. There have been models, but this is the first in full size," said Vebjoern Sand, a Norwegian artist who says he fell in love with the structure when he saw a model of it in 1995.

Leonardo's design pleases aesthetes as much as engineers.

"It just had to be built. This has taken years of effort," said Sand, who has described it as the "Mona Lisa of bridges."

Leonardo designed the bridge in 1502 to cross the Golden Horn inlet in Istanbul. With a length of 346 metres, it would have been the world's longest bridge at the time, and Sultan Bajazet II didn't believe it could be completed.

Sand convinced the Norwegian Highway Department that it could, which led to their building a modest 100-metre long, eight-metre high wooden version of the bridge in Aas Township.

"The bridge is such a beautiful mixture between the functional and the aesthetic," Sand said.

Leonardo envisioned the bridge in stone. When that proved too expensive, the Norwegians settled for a graceful wooden version for 1.36 million dollars.

The bridge, actually a pedestrian crossing, is supported by three light-coloured wooden arches, like a series of archer's bows pulled back in parallel. Over them, a pathway in wood spans the E-18 highway, about 35 kilometres south of capital, Oslo.

The arches are built in glued pine, a process used in many of the stunning venues at the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway. The railing is in stainless steel and teak.

# UN urged to include Afghan women in peace talks

AP, United Nations

An Afghan woman urged the UN Security Council to ensure that the war-battered country's women are included in any peace negotiations, despite the second-class status they hold under the Taliban regime.

"Do not think that because women wear a veil we do not have a voice," said Jamila, who heads an organisation that helps Afghan refugee women in Pakistan. "When the UN is looking for leaders, look to us."

On the first anniversary of a UN resolution that committed governments to include women at peace tables while protecting them from the abuses of war, Jamila joined women from Kosovo and East Timor in urging the council to keep its promises.

"I have often heard that Afghan women are not political. That peace and security is man's work. I am here to challenge that illusion," Jamila told council members at a closed meeting on Tuesday. "For the last 20 years of my life, the leadership of men has only brought war and suffering."

The remarks were released at a press conference after the meeting. Council members were expected to formally adopt a statement Wednesday calling for greater implementation of the resolution.

Jamila, who uses one name, said the timing of the council meeting was particularly important given the current discussions on the future of Afghanistan.

Last week, she and other Afghan women sought the support of Lakhdar Brahimi, the U.N. special envoy for Afghanistan. Brahimi is currently in

Pakistan, as part of an international effort to ensure that any future government of Afghanistan represents all ethnic groups.

Jamila strongly opposes the ruling Taliban militia, which controls 95 percent of Afghanistan and imposes a harsh brand of Islam, especially on girls and women. It prohibits women from working outside the home, bans schooling for girls over the age of 8 and requires all women to be shrouded in a burqa from head to toe.

"The Taliban - they are extremist elements," Jamila said. "They are not acceptable for Afghan women. We want a government which is acceptable for the people of Afghanistan (where) women should have equal rights."

Noeleen Heyzer, head of the U.N. Development Fund for Women that was the moving force behind last year's resolution, said "the Security Council is extremely interested in having the issue of women in Afghanistan addressed."

Since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, however, Heyzer said, "we have yet to hear women's voices in the political debates on terrorism and conflict, on Afghanistan, on the refugee crisis, on the way forward."

Jamila said Afghanistan can be a model for the Security Council resolution if women take part in peace negotiations and are consulted on refugee issues.

Women and girls represent 54 per cent of the Afghan population, she noted. Women served as government ministers in the 1960s and by 1970 were taking part in grand councils known as loya jirga - traditional gatherings of elders.



Activists from Mulsim religious group shout slogans seeking to fight for Afghanistan in the jihad or holy war against the US during a demonstration in Peshawar yesterday. More than one thousand Islamic activists took part in the protest shouting slogans against US-led strikes on Afghanistan.

# Japan to press Pakistan to sign CTBT

AFP, Tokyo

Japan will press Pakistan to sign a nuclear test ban treaty, warning it could impose economic sanctions again, a senior ruling party official said yesterday.

"Regarding ratification of CTBT (the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty), our stance has not changed," Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) secretary general Taku Yamasaki told a news conference ahead of a visit to Pakistan.

"We will strongly ask" Pakistan to ratify the treaty, said Yamasaki, the LDP's number two after Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

Yamasaki and senior members of the three-party ruling coalition will fly to Pakistan on Friday for a three-day visit to hold talks with President Pervez Musharraf and other top government officials.

Japan has been urging Pakistan and India to ratify the treaty after they both conducted nuclear weapons tests in 1998, prompting economic sanctions from several countries including Japan.

Last Friday, Japan said it was removing the sanctions against India and Pakistan in light of their contributions to the US-led war on terrorism.

But Yamasaki warned that

Japan could reimpose sanctions if Pakistan did not now comply with the CTBT.

"There is concern about its possession of materials related to nuclear arms," he said. "We will fully seek" to remove the concern during the visit.

Japan has said it will reschedule 550 million dollars of Pakistan's debt in recognition of Musharraf's support for the international war on terrorism.

However, Tokyo has refused to waive some five billion dollars in loans, despite a request from Musharraf in a telephone conversation with Koizumi.



French astronaut Claudie Haignere smiles upon her landing in Kazakhstan yesterday after the mission on the International Space Station. Haignere, the first European woman on the international space station, and her two Russian teammates returned safely to earth on Wednesday in Kazakhstan.

# French-Russian space team lands safely

AFP, Kazakhstan

French woman astronaut Claudie Haignere and her two Russian teammates landed yesterday in Kazakhstan after a 10-day mission to the International Space Station, the federal Space Search and Rescue Service told AFP.

The three were pulled out of their landing capsule, wrapped up in double fur bags and placed in special chairs to readjust to gravity.

"The descent was more difficult than going into orbit," said Haignere.

"It all went very well. Only there wasn't very much time, I would have liked to have had more time to live among the crew and to be able to look at the Earth through the porthole," said the French astronaut who spent eight days aboard the ISS.

Her husband, astronaut Jean-Pierre Haignere, was there to welcome her back to Earth.

The Franco-Russian team was due in Star City near Moscow Wednesday afternoon.

The landing took place as planned 180 kilometers (112 miles) southeast of the town of Dzhezkazgan, ground officials said.

"They're feeling fine," a spokesman told AFP by telephone from the flight control centre in Moscow.

Haignere, the first European woman to board the ISS, was accompanied on the Andromeda mission by Viktor Afanasiev and Konstantin Kozyev.

Russia was laying on almost 300 soldiers, three planes and nine helicopters to ensure that the team returned safely, officials said on Tuesday.

# Kofi Annan calls for quick end to US strikes

AP, United Nations

Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Tuesday called for a quick end to the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan so the United Nations can get as much food as possible into the country before winter.

Annan, who won the Nobel Peace Prize last month, made it clear he was not talking about a temporary bombing halt to facilitate humanitarian relief efforts.

"What I am saying is that we would want to see this whole military operation ended as soon as possible, particularly the air action, so that we can begin to move in our supplies," he told reporters.

The United States has said that

it, too, wants an early end to the military action, but it also has said the campaign will go on as long as is necessary to achieve the US goals.

Annan said the United Nations was getting "quite a bit" of food into the poor and war-stricken country despite the military operations.

"I think that is a credit to the courage of our staff, and also to the truck drivers who are prepared to take the risks," he said.

But Annan stressed that ending the military action quickly is key.

"I think what is important from our point of view is that we need to see the operation ended as soon as

possible so that we can step up our humanitarian effort, get in as much food as we can, and prepare for the winter," he said.

Last week, UN deputy humanitarian relief coordinator Carolyn McAskie said the United Nations was getting "about 50 per cent of our needs" into Afghanistan.

Annan's special envoy for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, is currently in Pakistan for talks to promote the establishment of a broad-based government in Afghanistan after the current conflict.

Whether the Taliban is represented in a future government "is a decision for the Afghans to make," the secretary-general said.

# Peru approves charges against Fujimori

AP, Lima

Peru's Congress on Tuesday unanimously approved embezzlement charges against ex-President Alberto Fujimori, accusing him of illegally paying former spy chief Vladimir Montesinos \$15 million to leave the country last year.

In a special session, Congress voted 65-0 to lift the immunity of Fujimori and three former Cabinet ministers, clearing the way for prosecutors to file charges of embezzlement and criminal activity against them.

Fujimori, 63, allegedly signed a secret decree in September 2000 to divert defense funds for the payoff to Montesinos, the ex-president's top aide, so that he would leave without a fight.

Fujimori is in self-exile in his parents' native Japan, which has refused to extradite him on other charges. Fujimori and the three former officials deny any wrongdoing.

The vote came as Attorney General Nelly Calderon announced Tuesday that she asked the legislature to approve further charges of embezzlement as well as illicit enrichment against Fujimori and ten former officials.

# Hypersonic 'scramjet' engine fails first test

REUTERS, Canberra

The world's first test flight of a hypersonic "scramjet" engine, which some believe may one day fly people at eight times the speed of sound, failed because the rocket flew off course, scientists said on Wednesday.

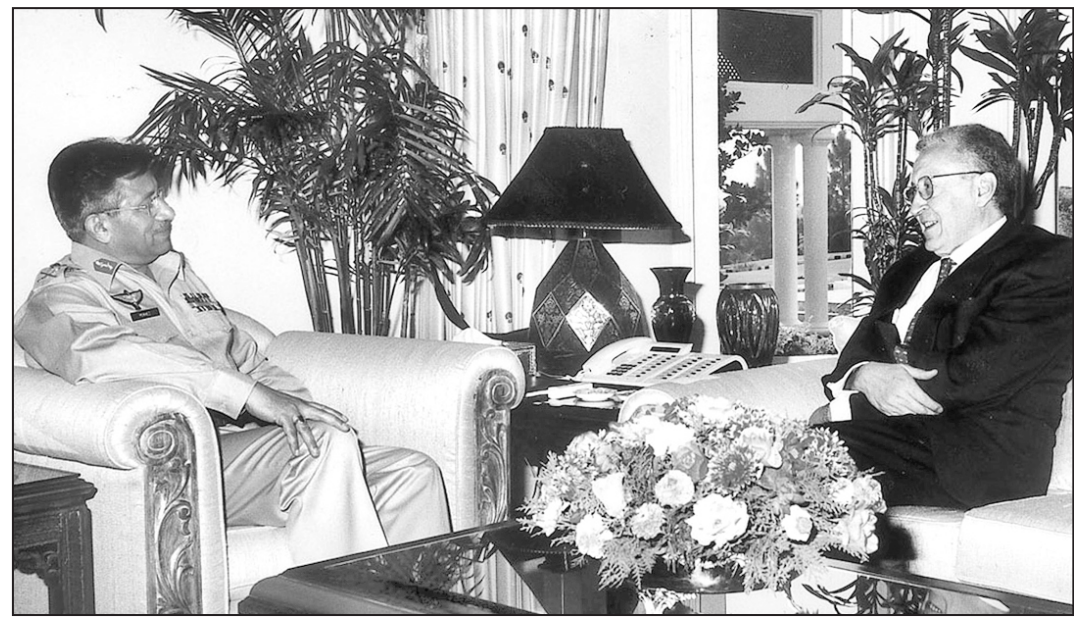
A rocket with the scramjet attached was launched from a military site at Woomera in South Australia state Tuesday but results showed the world's first air-breathing hypersonic test flight was thwarted and further testing has been put on hold.

Test project leader Allan Paull from the University of Queensland, which developed the prototype engine, said despite planned tests being delayed until flight path glitches were fixed, all was not lost.

"Although we didn't achieve all that we set out to achieve, we succeeded in gathering valuable data, and we are encouraged by the fact that the payload survived one hell of a ride," Paull said in a statement.

A second experimental launch scheduled for next week will not go ahead until investigations are concluded into data from the flight box, which recorded the failed attempt, Paull said.

"Scramjet" is short for supersonic combustion ramjet.



Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf (l) holds a meeting with the visiting United Nations special envoy to Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi in Islamabad on Tuesday. Brahimi discussed formation of new government in Afghanistan with Musharraf.

# Israeli army raids Palestinian village

REUTERS, Arrabe, West Bank

Israeli soldiers backed by tanks and helicopters raided a Palestinian-controlled village in the West Bank yesterday in a sweep for Islamic militants.

The Israeli army gave no immediate details of what it called a security operation in the village of Arrabe, south of Jenin. Witnesses said the Israeli force wounded two Palestinians in an exchange of fire.

Soldiers arrested Nabil Mgiera, an Islamic Jihad militant on Israel's most-wanted list, and six other people including a member of the Islamic resistance movement Hamas, witnesses and sources in the radical Palestinian groups said.

On the diplomatic front, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said he was drafting a new Middle

East peace initiative, a step which could risk a new rift with right-wing Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The United States and its allies have urged Israel and the Palestinians to end more than a year of fighting and resume peace talks as they seek to bolster Arab support for the anti-terror campaign, including military strikes on Afghanistan.

Witnesses said helicopter gunships, tanks and armored vehicles participated in the Arrabe raid, which coincided with an alert in Israel for a possible suicide-bomber on the loose in the center of the country.

In the West Bank, Israeli troops held fast to positions in and around five Palestinian cities, defying repeated U.S. calls for a full withdrawal from areas occupied after

Palestinian militants killed an Israeli cabinet minister on October 17.

A week ago, Israeli forces killed five Palestinian gunmen in a raid on the West Bank village of Beit Reema.

Peres and Sharon were expected to meet later Wednesday.

Peres would not divulge details of the proposal but the Maariv daily printed what it said were some main points, including the dismantling of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip.

The two leaders, sporadically at odds with each other in a broad coalition government, were poised for fresh disagreement over a possible weekend meeting in Spain between the dovish foreign minister and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

# Global warming: Parts of Greenland's icesheet melting fast

AFP, Paris

Parts of the Greenland icesheet are melting at up to nearly 42 centimetres (16.8 inches) per year, and the thinning is affecting ice at higher altitudes than expected, according to a global warming study published yesterday.

Leading Canadian glaciologist W.S.B. Paterson and Danish scientist Niels Reeh of Denmark's Technical University compared modern measurements with those made by intrepid British explorers who trekked across northern Greenland between 1952-54.

The Britons used trigonometry to calculate the elevation as they headed along, and Paterson and Reeh compared this data with radar measurements made by satellite to give an idea as to how the icesheet's thickness may have changed over the decades.

The eastern side of the icesheet has remained stable or thickened slightly at up to 9.7cms (4.1 inches) per year, they found.

"On the west side, however, the thinning rates of the icesheet are significantly higher and thinning extends to higher elevations than had been anticipated from previous studies," they report in Nature, the British science weekly.

In the worst section, the estimated thinning was between 20.3 and 41.7cms (8.1 and 16.8 inches) per year.

The pair carried out their measurements in 1995, at elevations ranging from 1,500m to 2,500m (4,875 to 8,125 feet).

The study could be a valuable contribution to one of the big unknowns about global warming -- how much the oceans will rise, thanks to a melting of the polar ice caps and expansion of the seas through higher temper-

atures.

The best estimate, made earlier this year by the UN's top scientific authority, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is of a sea-level rise of between eight and 88 cms (five and 55 inches) between 1990 and 2100.

At the higher end, that could drown small island states such as the Maldives as well as vulnerable delta regions, such as coastal Bangladesh.

In another study, also published in Nature, a British team hit at assumptions by sceptics that global warming could benefit many species of wildlife.

They looked at 46 species of rare butterflies that like warm weather and are at the limit of their climate range in Britain.

In theory, the butterflies should thrive in Britain's warmer climate, where average temperatures today are 1-1.5C (1.8-2.7F) higher than they were 25 years ago.

In fact, three-quarters of the species declined in numbers because their source of food declined through habitat loss, the scientists report. Talks are underway in Marrakesh, Morocco, to conclude the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, a treaty that would cut carbon emissions from burning oil, gas and coal.

Fossil fuels are the main suspected causes behind a perceptible century-old rise in atmospheric temperatures.

However, global warming can also be a "natural" part of planetary physics, in which the Earth undergoes long periods of Ice Ages interspersed by periods of milder climate.

