

Iraq must accept return of arms inspectors: Bush

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush warned Wednesday that unless Saddam Hussein accepts a return of UN weapons inspectors to Iraq, "we will have to deal with him at the appropriate time."

"I expect Saddam Hussein to let inspectors back into the country," Bush said at the start of a meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit at the White House.

"We want to know whether or not he is developing weapons of mass destruction. He claims he is not. Let the world see."

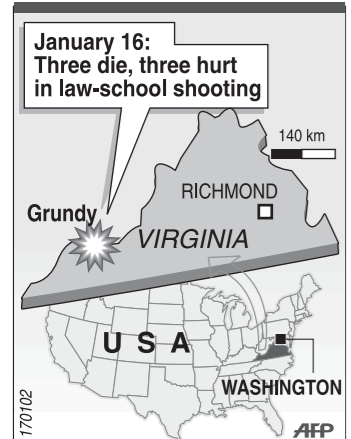
Elephant tramples 10 to death in India

AFP, Ranchi

At least 10 people, including a woman and two children, were killed and several others injured when an elephant went on the rampage in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand, officials said Thursday.

All the victims were villagers who were sleeping outside their houses on Tuesday night to guard their harvest in Dumka district, 200 km northwest of Jharkhand's provincial capital Ranchi, local police chief Bhavesh Thakur told AFP by telephone.

The elephant, which had been deserted by its herd, went on the rampage in the area, trampling to death 10 villagers.



Shooting spree at Virginia law school: 3 killed

AP, Grundy

A student who had been dismissed from law school went on a campus shooting spree, killing the dean, a professor and a student before he was tackled by students, authorities said.

The attack on Wednesday also wounded three female students at the Appalachian School of Law. They were hospitalized in fair condition.

"When I got there were bodies laying everywhere," said Dr. Jack Briggs, one of the first to arrive after the shooting in this tiny mountain community in western Virginia.

Dean L. Anthony Sutlin and Professor Thomas Blackwell were gunned down in their offices, according to school officials. Police said the third person slain was student Angela Dales, 33.

US faces uphill task in war against Abu Sayyaf

AFP, Manila

The United States faces a formidable enemy in the next phase of its war on terrorism when it targets the Abu Sayyaf, the most deadly kidnap-foransom group in Asia, analysts said Thursday.

After effectively crippling suspected global terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network in Afghanistan, the US military is to embark on joint operations with Philippine troops against the Abu Sayyaf operating deep in the jungles of the southern Philippines.

Tree kills 3 soldiers in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Three Indian soldiers were killed and two others injured when a huge tree fell on their bunker in Indian-administered Kashmir overnight, a police spokesman said Thursday.

The soldiers were manning their bunker along the Line of Control -- the de facto border dividing Indian- and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir -- when the Chinar tree was uprooted during a blizzard and toppled over.

"Three soldiers died on the spot, while two were removed to hospital with serious wounds," the spokesman said.

The Kashmir Valley has witnessed heavy snow and blizzards in the past two days.



US Secretary of State Colin Powell (R) shakes hands with Afghanistan's Interim leader Hamid Karzai at the presidential palace in Kabul on Thursday. Powell's visit to Afghanistan is the first by an American state secretary since the last visit by Henry Kissinger 25 years ago.

US promises to stand by Afghans

AFP, Kabul

The United States will do everything it can to help Afghanistan recover from two decades of devastating conflict, Secretary of State Colin Powell vowed Thursday.

Two months after US firepower ousted the Taliban regime from power, Powell flew in under extremely tight security for a brief but historic visit.

He brought with him a reassuring message that was gratefully received by the country's interim government.

"We will be with you in this current crisis and in the future," Powell, the highest US official to visit Afghanistan in quarter of a century, said after meeting interim president Hamid Karzai.

"We are committed to doing everything we can to assist you in this time of transition... so the Afghan people will be able to live in peace and security," he said.

Karzai, standing beside Powell at Kabul's presidential palace, welcomed Powell with open arms, describing him as a "distinguished world personality, a very tough soldier and a top diplomat and an excellent human being."

He praised Powell for taking the "time to visit Afghanistan, to visit, to take the risks to come here. The Afghan people appreciate it."

Karzai said the Afghan people had questioned whether the United States would remain involved in the country even after the Taliban and Osama bin Laden's terrorist al-Qaida network had been cleansed from the country but that Powell's visit now allowed him to answer affirmatively.

The visit "shows to us the commitment of the United States of America... now I can tell them 'Yes', the United States is committed."

Karzai said he had told Powell of the extreme needs of his administration which is now in dire need of additional funds and as if to demonstrate that point joked that a power outage that hit the palace just as their joint news conference was to begin was intended as a demonstration of the problem.

Powell said Washington would make a significant contribution to Afghan reconstruction at a donor's conference for the country next week in Tokyo that he will attend, but was unable to offer a specific amount although he said it would be "significant." He arrived here a day after the UN Security Council renewed sanctions against the Taliban but exempted the three-week-old interim Afghan administration, allowing the release of state assets frozen last year in an effort to force the Islamic militia to hand over bin Laden.

En route to Asia, Powell said the United States, in accordance with the UN move, would shortly free up some 220 million dollars in frozen Afghan assets to help Karzai's government which is teetering on the brink of bankruptcy.

In Kabul, Powell was unable to announce that the money had been freed up, but said he still expected it to be in "a matter of days."

Afghan officials said they have only 10 million dollars available and need at least 10 times as much to meet the government payroll. The country's 250,000 civil servants have not been paid in six months.

The bulk of the assets to be freed by Washington is gold worth around 195 million dollars, some 25 million dollars in frozen bank accounts and another 23 million in overflight charges paid by foreign airlines for use of Afghan airspace.

Powell came into Afghanistan under extremely tight security, as remnants of the Taliban and Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terrorist network are still roaming the Afghan countryside and US troops and aircraft are still hunting them.

The secretary and his entourage arrived under a total news blackout, flying in to Bagram Air Base from Islamabad on a military transport plane and then taking Chinook helicopters, trailed by at least three smaller Blackhawk attack helicopters to Kabul, skirting the rugged terrain at very low altitude.

KL steps up crackdown on illegal migrants

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia has deployed 40 patrol boats and surveillance aircraft and arrested hundreds of illegal immigrants in a drive for "zero-entry" this year, a security official said.

Marine police have also asked for 15 new boats, worth 14.7 million dollars, to step up the all-out war against illegal immigrants, Internal Security deputy director Mamat Talib told reporters.

"I believe the government is aware of our needs and we hope this request (for new boats) will be approved in order to step up security off our coasts," Mamat said in remarks published Thursday.

Police operations had so far been successful in preventing an expected influx of post-festive

season illegal migrants, mostly from Indonesia, he said.

More than 300 would-be immigrants had been detained since Tuesday.

"We are maintaining our vigilance and have about 40 boats with more than 300 personnel including air cover from the police air wing for the task."

Malaysia announced earlier this month it would tighten coastal security in the narrow Straits of Malacca and along the northern Penang coast line as it aims for zero illegal entry this year.

Meanwhile, some 400 Indonesian textile workers staged a violent protest in central Malaysia after police tried to detain 16 of their co-workers for drug abuse, police said Thursday.

Probe into Indonesian plane crash begins

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian investigators Thursday began gathering debris from an airliner which crash-landed in a shallow river in bad weather, killing a female flight attendant.

The 59 others aboard the Garuda Indonesia Boeing 737 had a near-miraculous escape when the plane came down in the Bengawan Solo river in Central Java Wednesday afternoon.

Flight GA-421 from Lombok island was headed for Yogyakarta with 54 passengers and six crew members when it made an emergency landing 30 kilometers (19 miles) northeast of its destination.

At least 32 passengers were taken to hospital and 12 were still being treated Thursday, but others managed to wade through the river to safety with the help of residents.

A group of 17 experts from the state National Commission on Transportation Accidents and state-owned Garuda arrived late Wednesday and immediately began their work.

"We are currently gathering scattered parts of the plane's wing as well as other components of the plane," one of the government experts, Suryanto, told AFP from the scene.



Indonesian Garuda airplane lays down in the water of the Bengawan Solo river in Klaten, Central Java on Thursday while the investigators looks for clues. Indonesian investigators began gathering debris from an airliner, which crash-landed in a shallow river in bad weather, killing a female flight attendant.

'Israel wants to kill all Palestinian leaders'

AFP, Paris

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Israel wants to kill "all Palestinian leaders" and accused Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of seeking conflict rather than a resolution to the Middle East crisis.

"This is a systematic tactic," Arafat told the French newspaper Le Figaro on Thursday. "The Israelis want to kill all Palestinian leaders, one after another."

In an interview from his Ramallah headquarters in the West Bank -- where he has been under virtual house arrest since December --

Arafat said the Palestinian Authority was jailing militant Palestinian leaders, but Sharon was not playing a fair game himself.

"Our problem with Sharon is that in reality he does not want a (peace) accord. He prefers conflict so he blocks everything," Arafat said.

He said the Palestinian Authority was making a "100 percent effort" to resolve the crisis with the Israelis. A government could never promise 100 percent results, but what mattered were the efforts.

"The Israelis do nothing to reduce the tension. What right do they have to keep me from leaving

Ramallah? And look how they treat the Palestinian population," he said.

"This is not the way to create an atmosphere favorable to the resumption of negotiations," he added.

Sharon says Arafat will be free to move once those responsible for last year's assassination of Israel's minister of tourism Rehavam Zeevi are arrested.

Ahmed Saadat, head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), was arrested Monday in order to get him to hand over the alleged killers, Arafat said.

Norwegians top shoplifters' list

AFP, Oslo

Norwegians are Europe's biggest shoplifters despite enjoying one of the highest standards of living in the world, according to a European-wide study quoted in the Norwegian daily Dagens Naeringsliv (DN).

Norwegians top the list ahead of Greeks, Portuguese, Austrians and Spaniards, DN said, citing a study conducted by the universities of Leicester and Northampton covering the 15 European Union countries, Switzerland and Norway.

Shoplifting in the 17 countries in 2001 amounted to a total value of 29.6 billion euros (26 billion dollars), or almost 77 euros (68 dollars) per inhabitant, the study said.

Terrorism holds back South Asian development: Deuba

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, said Thursday development in South Asia was being held back by terrorism.

Deuba, who is fighting a Maoist rebellion in Nepal, said much needed resources were being put into maintaining security rather than into alleviating poverty.

"The development efforts in the region have been hindered by terrorism as we are forced to divert our already scarce resources to maintain peace and security," Deuba said as he opened a two-day conference of the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and Pacific (CIRDAP) in Kathmandu.

"This has been a matter of growing concern for all of us."

He said the solution was to address the problem of

insurgency through better development.

"The Nepalese government is working to address the insurgency problem on two fronts -- providing greater security to the general public and measures to remove socio-economic insurgency breeding grounds through increased level of developmental activities," Deuba said.

"These developmental activities target backward regions and disadvantaged groups."

CIRDAP, which was established in 1979 and has its central office in Dhaka, groups 13 countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

In November Nepal's government declared emergency rule in order to combat renewed violence from the Maoist rebels who had broken a four-month ceasefire.

HRW paints grim picture of HR abuse in S Asia

AFP, New York

Religious and caste violence in India, tightened military rule in Pakistan and ethnic bloodshed in Sri Lanka tainted the human rights situation in South Asia in 2001, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in its annual report.

While praising India for holding fast to its "vibrant and stable democracy" even as its neighbours experienced dramatic and often violent shifts in power, the New York-based watchdog also listed numerous rights violations in the world's second most populous country.

Police violence, attacks on India's minority communities -- specifically Muslims, Christians and lower castes -- continued to be "serious problems," said the report released Wednesday.

Violence against Indian women, including rape, kidnapping, dowry

deaths, domestic violence, female foeticide and human trafficking "continued unabated," although the report said some "positive steps" had been taken to help better ensure women's and children's rights.

Increased violence in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh in the run-up to key elections there in February this year "highlighted the dangerous results of exploiting communal and caste tensions for political ends."

The long-running Muslim insurgency in Kashmir remained a flashpoint for violence, with Indian security personnel targeting Muslims suspected of supporting militant groups.

Incidents of arbitrary arrest and torture were reported in the restive Himalayan region throughout the year, including during a unilateral government ceasefire which was finally withdrawn in May.

UN imposes sanctions on al-Qaida, Taliban

AP, United Nations

The UN Security Council imposed sanctions Wednesday on Osama bin Laden, his al-Qaida terror network and remnants of the Taliban wherever they are in the world.

The resolution, adopted unanimously on Wednesday, requires all countries to impose an arms embargo and travel ban on individuals and groups associated with bin Laden, al-Qaida and the Taliban

and to freeze all their financial assets.

The United States strongly backed the resolution. A US official said it will help accomplish the Bush administration's goal of going after the Taliban and al-Qaida wherever they may be hiding and operating.

The resolution ends sanctions against Afghanistan, imposed in November 1999 and strengthened in December 2000 to pressure the hard-line Taliban militia to hand over

bin Laden for trial in the 1997 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. These included an arms embargo, a travel ban and the freezing of assets.

With the Taliban thrown out of power by a US-led military campaign following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, and a new interim administration installed with wide international support, the council needed to overhaul sanctions.

Monica to steal HBO show

AP, Pasadena

Four years after the start of the scandal that almost toppled a president, Monica Lewinsky says she's still trying to figure out how to live a normal life.

Fighting back tears, and laughing a little, Lewinsky appeared at a news conference Wednesday to promote a documentary on the US cable TV network HBO scheduled to debut on March 3. Called "Monica in Black and White", it largely consists of her answering questions from an audience of HBO staff and college students.

Lewinsky initiated the project

and was paid for her participation, but she wouldn't say how much.

The former intern said she made the film partly because she was worried other TV movies being made about her case would perpetuate inaccuracies and misconceptions.

What is the biggest misconception people have about her?

"That I sought this celebrity by seducing the president and going to the White House with an agenda and turning on him so all of this could happen, so I could enjoy it and cause trouble for this country and make millions of dollars and perpetuate my celebrity," she said.

Asia-Pacific debate ways to curb people-smuggling

AFP, Jakarta

Officials from 35 Asian-Pacific nations met in the Indonesian capital Jakarta on Thursday to hammer out an agenda for next month's regional ministerial conference on people-smuggling.

The trade sees thousands of mainly Middle Eastern asylum-seekers brought each year through Malaysia and Indonesia by syndicates, and sent on perilous sea voyages to Australia.

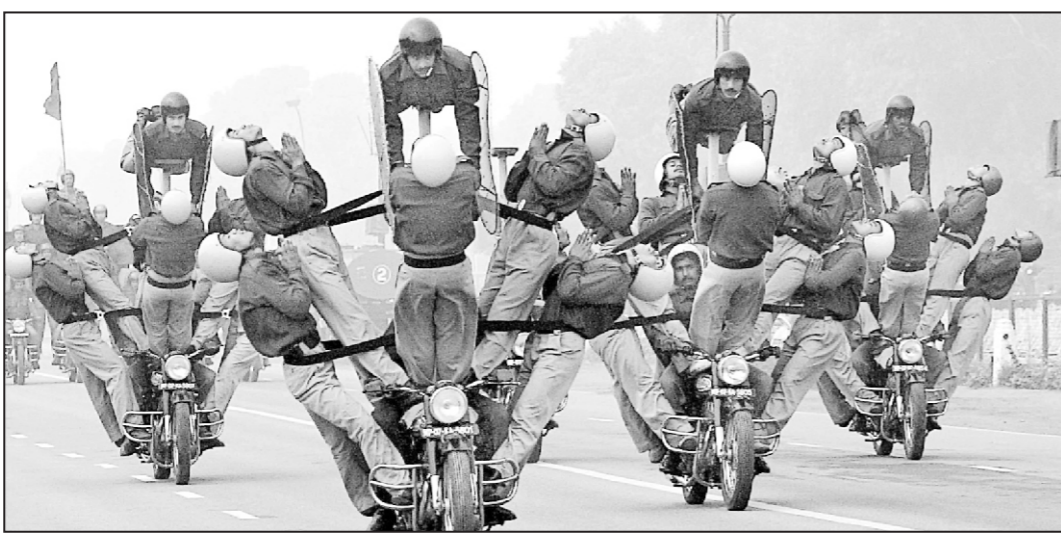
Hundreds are known to have drowned on the journey, including some 350 asylum-seekers whose vessel sank in October off the coast of Java.

Australia and Indonesia, the co-hosts of next month's conference in Bali, and 33 other countries sent representatives to Thursday's preparatory meeting.

Afghanistan and Iraq, the source of most of the boat people, failed to send anyone despite being invited.

Opening the meeting, Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda said next month's conference would address the "rising incidence of people-smuggling, the trafficking in people and related transnational crime."

Wirayuda called the practices "particularly deplorable... because of the physical and mental suffering that their human contraband is subject to."



Soldiers from Border Security Force (BSF) rehearse their routine on motorcycles for India's Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi on Thursday. Security has been tightened ahead of the January 26 celebrations amid threats of fresh attacks in the Indian capital by Muslim militants.