INTERNÂTIONAL

US jets pound artillery site in Iraq

REUTERS, Washington

Coalition aircraft enforcing a no-fly zone struck an anti-aircraft artillery site in southern Iraq on Monday in an action unrelated to the US-led war on terror, the US Central Command

The strikes, using precisionguided weapons, "were executed as self-defence measures in response to Iraqi hostile threats against Coalition air crews and their aircraft and are not related to the President's campaign against terror," a state-

"If Iraq were to cease its threatening actions. Coalition strikes would also cease." said the Tampa Florida-based command, which is also running the US-led war in

Jiang's plane bugging affair won't affect ties: China

AFP, Beijing

China said Tuesday it does "not see any impact" on Sino-US ties from the reported discovery of a series of bugging devices on President Jiang Zemin's US-built personal jet.

In China's first reaction to the reports three days ago that 27 bugs had been discovered after the Boeing 767 was delivered from the United States, foreign ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi denied knowledge of the incident itself.

'I have also heard this news, but at present I have no knowledge of this, and don't see any impact of this event on other issues," he told a

"China is a peace-loving country and constitutes no threat to anyone, so it is of no use to be bugging

Shoot on sight ordered for Goma looters

AFP, Goma

At least 13 looters have been shot dead in this town ravaged by volcanic lava and those tempted to steal in houses and stores have been warned by radio there would be no

Military sources late Monday confirmed reports that 13 people, including seven soldiers, had been shot by officers of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), the Rwandan-backed rebel group that controls the Democratic Republic of Congo town of Goma.

Some of those executed were caught looting the offices of the United Nations observer mission in the DRC, MONUC, and a warehouse of the UN World Food Programme.

Philippines VP heads for showdown with Arroyo AFP, Manila

President Gloria Arroyo is headed for a showdown with her vice president, Teofisto Guingona, over his opposition to deploying US troops in the fight against local allies of Osama bin Laden, officials said Tuesday.

The Philippines' two highest officials are to meet Wednesday with other members of the National Security Council, with Guingona reportedly weighing his options. including quitting his post as foreign secretary.

His exit from the cabinet would be a major blow to the Arroyo administration, which has been buffeted by rumours of a destabilisation plot.

Arroyo aides disclosed last week that Guingona had "raised some issues" over the deployment of up to 660 US soldiers, including at least 160 Special Forces trainers to be sent to the southern strongholds of the Abu Sayyaf Muslim guerrillas.

TV-6 goes off the air

AFP, Moscow

Russia was left without a national independent television broadcaster for the first time in the post-Soviet era Tuesday after TV-6 went off the air without warning at midnight, only to be replaced by a sports channel.

The station, which has frequently aired criticism of President Vladimir Putin's campaign in Chechnya and was financed by the controversial selfexiled tycoon Boris Berezovsky, served as home to many of the journalists who fled NTV, the private station that was taken over by the government amid great protest last year.

Israel kills 4 Hamas men in Nablus

Troops quit Tulkarem after 24-hour occupation

Four members of the radical Islamic group Hamas were shot dead by Israeli troops in Nablus Tuesday during the second major incursion into an autonomous Palestinian city in 24 hours.

Israeli radio, quoting military officials, said two of the men killed in the swoop were expert Hamas bomb makers who figured high on Israel's list of

The raid on Nablus, the largest city in the West Bank, came just as Israeli forces were pulling out of Tulkarem, where for the first time since partial Palestinian self-rule was granted in 1994 they had reoccupied a whole Palestinian town for a day.

An Israeli army spokesman said the four Hamas men had offered resistance and been killed in a gun battle.

The soldiers discovered a secret laboratory used to make explosives, he said, adding that "the terrorists were apparently preparing to commit attacks

Israel radio quoted military sources as saying the army discovered the lab in an apartment which it then destroyed

An AFP correspondent on the scene said an explosion had gutted the flat, on the ground floor of a 10-storey apartment block

Palestinian hospital sources identified three of the dead as Nasim Abu Arus, Yusef Surahji, et Jasser Samaru. Palestinian security officials said all three were Hamas members

The army said four Israeli troops were also wounded in the operation.

The Israeli forces also arrested nine suspects, adding to the 20 they had detained in Tulkarem, described by the army as a jumping off point for attacks across the adjacent border into Israel.

The troops went into Tulkarem following last Thursday's shooting at a coming-of-age party in Hadera, 20 kilometres (12 miles) from Tulkarem, when a Palestinian gunman killed six Israelis and injured 30 before being

After the Israel tanks had left Nablus a few hours later, some 5,000 Hamas supporters marched through heavy rain in the city centre toward the governor's office, calling for an end to all security cooperation with Israel.

Shouting and shooting rifles into the air, they also demanded the execution of all Palestinians caught collaborating with Israel, after it appeared that the Israel strike was a precision raid based on leaked intelligence.

On their march they stopped outside a prison where both Hamas members and collaborators were being held by Palestinian police. The crowd stoned the building, demanding the liberation of the Islamists and the death

Police inside fired warning shots in the air and lobbed tear gas grenades while Hamas officials tried to calm the situation.

While Israel pulled out of Tulkarem, the town's mayor, Mahmud al-Jelad said the troops and tanks were still on the edge of the town

An Israeli military spokesman said, "The Israeli army has successfully completed its mission and has deployed around Tulkarem to be ready for



A member of the paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force stands guard outside of the US Embassy on Tuesday in New Delhi. Security is on high alert after four unidentified gunmen sprayed bullets outside the American Center in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata, killing four guards and injuring 14 other people.

Bodo rebels kill 16 in Assam

India must agree to 3-way talks on Kashmir: Hizbul

The chief of a leading Kashmiri militant group said in remarks published Tuesday that the key to peace in South Asia lies with India, which must agree to holding tripartite talks on Kashmir.

"If New Delhi agrees to holding of tripartite talks on Kashmir, involving India, Pakistan and Kashmiris, I think we will reach some solution which will lead to peace," Saif-ul-Islam, chief commander of Hizbul Mujahedin, said in an article published by the local Urdu weekly

"Hizbul Mujahedin is keeping the option of dialogue to resolve the Kashmir issue open," he wrote. "But our stress will be on tripartite talks."

"If tripartite talks are not held and the Kashmir issue not resolved as per the aspirations of the people, then armed struggle launched by us under compulsion is the only way out." wrote Islam, one of the Indian security force's most wanted militants. Islam two months ago became chief commander of Hizbul, replacing Abdul Majid Dar, who had announced a unilateral ceasefire in July 2000.

The truce was withdrawn within a fortnight by Hizbul's Pakistan-based to involve Islamabad in talks over

Hizbul, which is an indigenous Kashmiri militant group, maintains that Pakistan's involvement in any talks on Kashmir is mandatory.

Kashmiri separatists arque bilateral talks and agreements between India and Pakistan have failed to resolve the issue of Kashmir since the birth of the problem in 1947, when the now-nuclear rivals won independence from

Both claim Kashmir and have fought two of their three wars over the scenic Himalayan region.

The Hizbul commander also called the deadly December 13 attack on India's parliament a "terrorist act" and said it was "not within the means of Kashmiri militant groups to carry out such an attack after breaking a tight security cor-

India has blamed two Pakistanbased outfits for the attack and piled pressure on Islamabad to take action against them.

"By blaming Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed for the attack, New Delhi was trying to give terrorist colour to our freedom

'Indo-Pak tension affects all states in the region'

REUTERS, Moscow

An envoy of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf met Russian leaders on Monday and said the high state of tension with India affected all countries in the region, including Russia.

Special envoy Najmuddin Sheikh spoke to journalists after talks with Russian Foreign Minister Ivan Ivanov on his country's military stand-off with India, during which he handed over a message from Musharraf for President Vladimir

"The state of tension in South Asia should be a source of concern not only for India and Pakistan but for all regional powers, including Russia." he said. "There should be efforts by the

countries of the region to find an end to tension and a resumption of dialogue in the context of Kashmir, said Sheikh, a former deputy foreign Describing talks with Ivanov as

quite productive," he said the Russian minister had told him he would shortly be visiting New Delhi and had said he might also visit

The stand-off between Pakistan

and India was triggered by an attack on the Indian parliament in December that New Delhi blames on Pakistan-based guerillas fighting its rule in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir.

Moscow, an ally of New Delhi since the Cold War era, has called on Islamabad to take steps to rein in Islamic militants

Sheikh said he had given an account to Ivanov of steps taken by Pakistan to counter Indian charges that it is sponsoring "cross-border terrorism." These steps included banning extremist organisations, arresting their activists and closing their office, he said.

India is a major arms client of Russia, but Sheikh, replying to a question, said he had not broached the issue specifically in his talks.

Meanwhile, India said on Monday it would extradite swiftly any Pakistani fugitives hiding out in its territory if Islamabad made such

"Were any list to be provided by voices," said Amrit Rajbhor, a 30-Pakistan of any Pakistani criminals year-old daily wage earner. sheltering illegally in India ... I'll Bhajbhor, like many other villagimmediately return them to ers, opened their doors to be Pakistan," foreign minister Jaswant trapped by heavily armed rebels waiting outside.

"It was pitch dark and we didn't

At least 16 people, including nine

women and three children, were

killed when tribal separatists

attacked a village in India's north-

eastern state of Assam, lining up

and shooting residents and burning

down their huts, witnesses said

which five people were also critically

injured, was carried out late Sunday

by the outlawed National

Democratic Front of Bodoland

(NDFB) as part of a campaign to

drive non-ethnic Bodos out of west-

ern Assam and create an independ-

Jangalbari, a nondescript tiny

village along the Bhutan border

who had settled here decades ago

from the impoverished eastern

ent tribal homeland.

Indian state of Bihar.

Officials said the massacre, in

some people with guns asked us to follow them at least half a kilometer (a quarter mile) away near a big tree," Rajbhor said.
"There were some 50 villagers

who were asked to make a queue

and then we heard indiscriminate gunshots lasting for more than 15 minutes." said Buddhu Rajbhor, a 35-year-old peasant.

"There was chaos with people crying for help," he said. Women and children bore the brunt of the attack as male family members, sensing trouble, started

running helter-skelter. Accounts differed on the number of militants. Some said at least 30 to 40 rebels took part in the massacre, All of the victims of the attack in while police said 15 rebels were believed to have been armed with were Hindi-speaking peasants, labourers or their family members AK-47 assault rifles.

The NDFB operates out of wellentrenched bases inside Bhutan to carry out hit-and-run guerrilla strikes on federal soldiers in Assam.

More than 10,000 people have "I was fast asleep around 9:00 pm (1530 GMT) when I heard deslost their lives to insurgency in Assam during the past two decades. perate cries from outside asking for water and help by some unknown

"The NDFB rebels that carried out Monday night's attack had come from their camp in Jaabrang, 10 km from here," said K.K. Nath, the deputy inspector general of police

Four Indian Army columns have moved into the area, which borders combing operation. Panic-stricken villagers, who took shelter in nearby towns, were

frightened to return to Jangalbari, where smoke continued to smoulder from mud-and-thatch huts that were razed to the ground. Except for a few women, children

and elderly people, Jangalbari -140 km north of Assam's capital Guwahati -- was silent Monday. "I don't know where my husband

and my two kids have gone. People started fleeing for their lives, as the militants immediately after the attack started setting our huts on fire," said housewife Sobha Rani Rao, as tears welled in her eyes. Police arrived half an hour after

the incident from their nearest post in Udalguri, 10 km from here. "The sight was ghastly with

people being shot dead like animals. We bundled all the bodies together in a truck and sent it for autopsy," said Nath, the police

"We presume at least one family of three members were killed in the attack but we are to ascertain as most of the villagers have fled and now there is nobody to even the dentify the bodies," he said.

Lanka to lift ban on Tigers in 'last chance' for peace

Sri Lanka's prime minister strongly hinted Tuesday that his government would lift a ban on Tamil Tiger rebels to launch a "final bid" for peace, in a move backed by the influential

Buddhist clergy. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in a policy statement to parliament said that international opinion favoured peace talks with the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to end decades of ethnic bloodshed.

He stopped short of directly saving that the ban on the Tigers will be lifted, but said an option available to the government was to amend the

The Tiger guerrillas have demanded that the ban be lifted before entering peace talks which Norway has been trying to broker for nearly

The ban has had little practical effect on the Tigers who continued to fight regardless of the proscription.

However, the ban is an emotional issue since it was imposed a day after the Tigers bombed Buddhism's holiest shrine, the Temple of the Tooth, in the central town of Kandy, killing 16

A trustee of the Kandy temple and the head of the highly influential Asgiriya chapter of

regulations that proscribed the LTTE in January Buddhism, Udugama Buddharakkita, asked the new government to lift the ban on the LTTE and jump-start the peace process.

"Every possible step should be taken to restore peace in the island," the monk was quoted saying in the privately run The Island

English-language newspaper. The paper said the monk advocated auton-

omy for Tamils in the island's north. The remarks by the top prelate are seen as a major boost to peace prospects in a country where sections of the clergy had in the past opposed any compromises with the Tamil Tigers, who are fighting for an independent homeland for the island's Tamil minority.

AFP, Riyadh

Canadian Deputy Prime Minister John Manley (L) gestures as he speaks to Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) during a meeting in New Delhi on Monday. Manley expressed the hope that tensions between the rival new nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, which have risen in recent weeks, would

KSA denies asking US troops to leave country

Saudi Arabia's army chief of staff denied in remarks published Tuesday that the kingdom has changed its policy on military cooperation with the United States and asked the US troops to leave. "The reports that were published

n the press are not accurate, Lieutenant-General Saleh al-Muhaya was quoted as saying by Okaz newspaper. Muhaya said that some 5,000

troops from Britain, France and the

United States are stationed in the

kingdom with the sole purpose of

enforcing a no-fly zone over southern Iraq as part of the US policy to contain Saddam Hussein.

"The purpose of the presence of American, British and French forces in the kingdom is to monitor the no-fly zone in southern Iraq. Anything beyond this is untrue. There are no other purposes," Muhaya said.

"There has been no increase (lately) in the number of these forces

to warrant asking for a reduction," he The Washington Post, citing a senior Saudi official, last week said top Saudi rulers believe the United

States has "overstayed its welcome"

Norwegian PM meets Jiang

Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik held talks with China's President Jiang Zemin on Tuesday, on the fourth day of a fiveday visit to the country.

Bondevik met Jiang in central Beijing before flying to the eastern commercial city of Shanghai, the state Xinhua news agency reported.

On Monday the Norwegian premier met his Chinese counterpart

AKDN pledges \$75 m for **Afghans**

The Aga Khan, Imam (spiritual leader) of the Shia Ismaili Muslims on Monday announced, at the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan in Tokyo, a multiyear commitment of US\$75 million by the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) to help re-build Afghanistan,

says a press release. The recovery, reconstruction and long-term development programme will "span many regions of the country and range in scope from agriculture-based rural development, food and seed security, rehabilitation of capital infrastructure, to the provision and upgrading of health and education services from the primary to the tertiary levels, institution and capacity building, especially at the community-level and the restoration of cultural heritage for social inclu-

Afghans ready for rebuilding nation amid huge aid pledge AFP, Kabul Hamid Karzai's administration will lead efforts to provide basic needs

Afghanistan began preparing Tuesday for the long and complex task of reconstruction after an international donors meeting in Japan pledged 4.5 billion dollars over the next five years.

started handing out a month's salary to civil servants who have not been paid for seven months. "We have begun distributing salaries on a limited basis today, said Central Bank acting governor

In one hopeful sign Tuesday, the

Afghan interim administration

week for all civil servants to be paid. With refugees beginning to return to the war-ravaged country

Abdul Fitrat, adding it would take a

and services in the face of factional disunity and poor security.

The two-day donors' conference Tokyo ended Tuesday with pledges of 1.8 billion dollars for Afghanistan's reconstruction this year and 4.5 billion dollars over the longer term, according to the final statement seen by AFP

Already the winding down of the US-led military campaign after the deposing of the Taliban regime and dispersal of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida organisation has seen thousands of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran start to return

Pledges for Afghanistan Offers come in from some 60 countries, 20 international organisations totalling \$4.5 billion Partial list provided by Japanese foreign ministry BRITAIN \$750 (max.) \$100 \$288 \$100 \$362 (credit) **EUROPEAN** \$900 (max.) Tokyo **UNITED STATES** Jan 21-22 NETWORK \$296.75 **IRAN** \$560 \$220 ASIAN DEVELOPMENT DONOR OF LESS THAN \$100 (US\$ millions) \$500