



PHOTO: AFP

This photo released on Tuesday shows Queen Elizabeth II standing in the 18th Century Room at Buckingham Palace in front of a 1771 portrait by Johann Zoffany of George III, who was king for 59 years (1760-1820). This photograph is one of a Golden Jubilee portfolio of photographs being unveiled on Wednesday to mark the 50th anniversary of the Queen's accession.

## Queen marks 50 yrs in throne

AFP, London

Queen Elizabeth on Wednesday marks 50 years since her accession to the British throne, a date tinged with sadness because it is the anniversary of the death of her father, King George VI.

The queen usually spends February 6 quietly at the royal residence of Sandringham, eastern England, where her father, who had been suffering from lung cancer, died peacefully in his sleep.

But this year, her golden jubilee, she has decided to carry out a public engagement and will open a cancer care unit.

Her visit to the Macmillan Centre in King's Lynn, eastern England, will be a poignant reminder of her father's death half a century ago, when the world was a very different place.

In 1952, Britons were still languishing under austerity measures as the nation struggled to rebuild after the privations of the Second World War.

Those years, battling Nazi tyranny and the threat of invasion, had been a strain for the royal family and ordinary Britons alike.

In peace and victory, the nervous and somewhat reluctant king, thrust on to the throne in 1936 after the abdication of his love-struck brother Edward VIII, increasingly retired to Sandringham, where he enjoyed the life of a country squire.

Years of heavy smoking had taken their toll and, suffering poor blood circulation, George's health was in decline.

In May 1951, a shadow had been detected on the king's lung and in September a malignant growth was discovered.

He was not informed of the full extent of his illness but underwent surgery in London to have the cancerous lung removed.

## US indicts 'American Taliban' on 10-count

AFP, Washington

The United States threw the book at "American Taliban" John Walker Lindh, charging him with conspiring with the Afghan Islamic militia to kill his own countrymen, but denied it was planning to attack Iran, Iraq or North Korea.

A 12-member federal grand jury found the 21-year-old Walker Lindh, who was captured fighting on the side of the Taliban in Afghanistan, to be "an al-Qaida-trained terrorist who conspired to kill his fellow citizens," said US Attorney General John Ashcroft.

The 10-count indictment formalised six charges already levelled by the federal government and added four new ones: conspiracy to contribute services to al-Qaida, contributing services to the network, conspiracy to supply services to the Taliban, and using and carrying firearms and destructive devices during crimes of violence.

"If convicted of these charges Walker Lindh could receive multiple life sentences, six additional 10-year sentences, plus 30 years," Ashcroft said Tuesday.

Meanwhile US Secretary of State Colin Powell said that President George W. Bush's characterisation of Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an "axis of evil" was "deserving," but that the United States was not about to invade any of the countries.

"It does not mean that we are ready to invade anyone or that we are not willing to engage in dialogue - quite the contrary," Powell told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In an apparent response to US claims that Iran was helping al-Qaida members escape from Afghanistan, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi said Iran would deport to their home countries any al-Qaida or Taliban fighters found within its borders.

## Pak police close in on Pearl kidnappers

AFP, Karachi

Islamic militant Sheikh Omar, a leader of the Jaish-e-Mohammad extremist group, has emerged as a chief suspect behind the kidnapping of US journalist Daniel Pearl, investigators said Wednesday.

Sources involved in the police investigation said three men arrested overnight in connection with the kidnapping had identified Omar as the source of emails containing photographs of Pearl in captivity.

"They have told investigators that they sent the e-mails with photographs on the directives of Sheikh Omar," one investigator said, on condition of anonymity.

He said police raided Omar's in-laws' house in the eastern city of Lahore overnight Wednesday but it was not immediately known if anyone was arrested.

"I don't know whether they have

been able to arrest anyone from there or not, but the raid was conducted," he said.

Earlier police in the southern port city of Karachi, where Pearl was last seen 14 days ago, made a series of arrests in what they said could lead to a "breakthrough" in the search.

Three people were arrested during a raid on a house in Karachi where police had traced the source of the e-mails containing photos of Pearl, which were sent to media organisations.

"This was the place where the e-mails were sent from. We are expecting a breakthrough from these people, we are interrogating them," a senior investigator told AFP on condition of anonymity.

But the three were not Muslim militants Mohammad Hashim Qadeer, Mohammad Bashir and Imtiaz Siddiqui, identified earlier Tuesday as "prime suspects".



PHOTO: AFP

Kate Winslet with her Best British Actress award she received for her performance in Enigma, at the Empire Film Awards at the Dorchester Hotel in London on Tuesday.

## 22 killed in SA train crash

AFP, Durban

Twenty-two people died and 117 were injured in a train crash in South Africa's eastern KwaZulu-Natal province, police and rail officials said early Wednesday, adding that many of the victims were schoolchildren.

The accident occurred when a passenger train collided with a stationary goods train on the twin-track line through a valley at rural Charlotte's Dale, about 60 km north of the port city of Durban on Tuesday.

"Rescue workers and security forces worked through the night rescuing passengers from the train and taking victims to hospital," Superintendent Vish Naidoo said, adding that most of the casualties were schoolchildren from schools in the nearby Stanger and Glendow area.

## Howard in Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta

Australian Prime Minister John Howard arrived Wednesday for a visit aimed at improving relations with Indonesia, after curtly dismissing a snub from a top legislator who refuses to meet him.

Howard, paying his second visit in six months, arrived on a Qantas flight at a government air base to a red-carpet welcome and headed straight for a meeting with President Megawati Sukarnoputri at the palace.

Amien Rais, Speaker of the top legislative body, is boycotting a meeting with Howard because of Australia's stance on asylum-seekers and its supposed backing for independence supporters in Papua province.

## Lanka inches towards peace

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's government and Tamil Tiger rebels are poised to clinch a formal bilateral truce to be monitored by Nordic countries and clear the way for direct peace talks, official sources said Wednesday.

Peace broker Norway is sending deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen here Thursday to wrap up a bilateral ceasefire agreement ahead of negotiations aimed at ending decades of ethnic bloodshed.

Sources close to the peace process said considerable progress had been made in finalising the ceasefire deal, and both the Tamil Tigers and the Colombo government appeared to be more flexible than earlier.

Sources also revealed the Indian Ocean atoll nation of the Maldives was being considered as a possible alternate venue for talks after New Delhi was lukewarm to rebel demands for a base in the Southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is fighting for an independent homeland in the north and east of the island, has been banned in India since the group was blamed for the May 1991 assassination of

former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi.

After the Tigers and the government began observing unilateral ceasefires at Christmas, the LTTE asked that its London-based chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, be allowed to have a base in Tamil Nadu so he could travel the short distance to northern Sri Lanka to meet rebel leaders.

But after India's objections, hectic diplomatic efforts to find an alternative raised the possibility of the Maldives although the matter has not been decided yet, official sources said.

Meanwhile, Balasingham Wednesday accused President Chandrika Kumaratunga of trying to undermine Norway's peace drive and denied her claims that they were recruiting child soldiers.

He said Kumaratunga had raised the question of forced conscription of children in a bid to create "controversy and apprehensions" over the peace initiatives.

Kumaratunga Tuesday expressed "deep concern" that the guerrillas were conscripting children during the ongoing truce and urged the rebels to honour commitments on the issue given to the UN Children's Fund in 1998.

## US prepared for casualties in extended war on terror

AFP, Zamboanga

The US military said Wednesday it is prepared to take casualties in its joint operations in the southern Philippines against local allies of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terror network.

American involvement in the operations against the Muslim Abu Sayyaf guerrillas would only be temporary, however, and there are no plans to set up permanent bases in the strife torn south, said US Pacific Command special operations chief Brigadier General Donald Wurster.

At least 600 US soldiers will take

part in the six-month joint operations, formally launched last week.

Americans will serve only as observers and advisers in the operations, which would include accompanying Filipino soldiers on patrol in southern Basilan island where the guerrillas are holding hostage two US Christian missionaries and a Filipina nurse. However, the American troops would be armed and authorised to fire back in self-defence.

Wurster acknowledged US soldiers joining patrols could be killed if the joint patrols came under attack by the Abu Sayyaf gunmen.

"No question (about it), American

soldiers could be there where they could become injured or killed if the Philippine army is attacked," Wurster told reporters after calling on officials of this southern city, the staging ground for the joint operations.

The US government, however, is prepared to accept the risk "to achieve the more quality objective" of helping Manila crush the rebels.

He noted that the Philippine military has suffered heavy casualties while trying to rescue hostages Martin and Gracia Burmah of Kansas and Filipina nurse Deborah Yap.

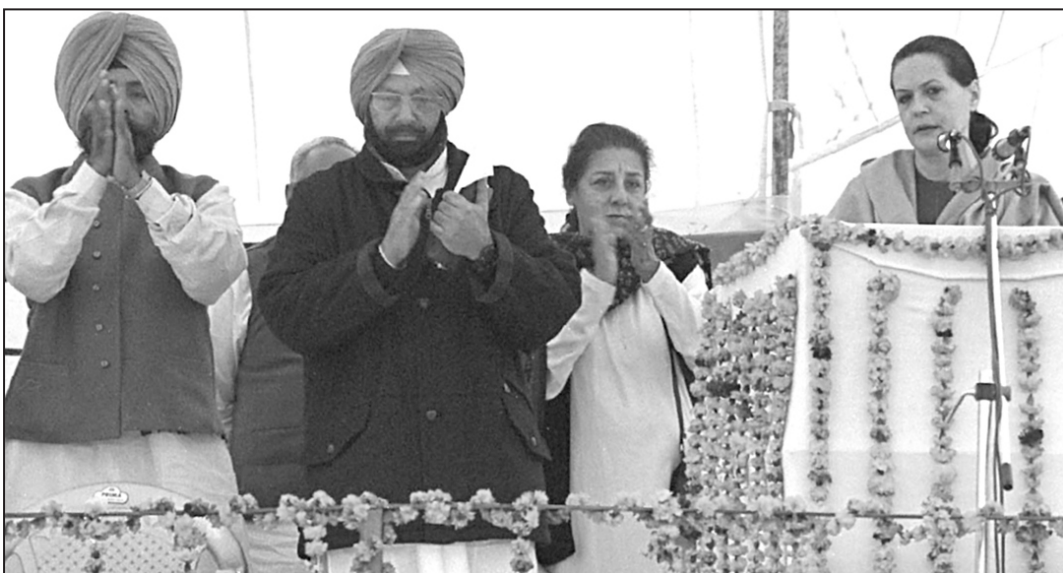


PHOTO: AFP

Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi (R) speaks at a Congress rally in Balachaur, in Punjab state, as Member of Parliament Jagmeet Brar (L), Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh (2nd L) and senior party leader Ambika Soni (2nd R) applaud on Tuesday. Sonia is in Punjab to campaign for the upcoming state assembly elections. Polling in Punjab begins February 13.

## US to continue to work with Arafat 'ME tensions threaten world stability'

AFP, Cairo

The United States will continue to work with the Palestinian Authority and its elected leader, Yasser Arafat, US Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East William Burns said here Wednesday.

"Our position is very clear, and that is that President Arafat is the elected leader of the Palestinian people, that we continue to work with the Palestinian Authority," Burns told reporters after meeting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

In the wake of Palestinian suicide bombings last month, US President George W. Bush accused Arafat of "enhancing terror" and has threatened to sever all links with the Palestinian Authority if he fails to crack down on terrorism.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said Monday that Arafat must "choose once and for all the option of

peace over violence" and that he "cannot engage with us and others in the pursuit of peace and at the same time permit or tolerate continued violence and terror."

Burns said he discussed with Mubarak "how we can work together to take advantage of what may be a renewed opportunity to move ahead," citing "many ideas that are out there contained in the Mitchell report, in the Tenet security workplan."

The Tenet understanding, named after US CIA director George Tenet, sets out a mechanism for implementing a ceasefire, after which the Mitchell plan, a blueprint for moving the peace process back on track, can be put into effect.

Resuming negotiations "requires some very difficult positions and some real actions on the part of the Palestinian Authority, and we've been frustrated by the failure to

## No Iraqi terrorism against US since '93

AFP, Washington

There have been no Iraqi terrorist operations against the United States since 1993 as President Saddam Hussein is mostly focused on evading economic sanctions imposed in 1990, The New York Times said Wednesday, quoting US intelligence.

The officials quoted by the daily also said the Central Intelligence Agency is convinced that Hussein has not provided chemical or biological weapons to al-Qaeda or related terrorist groups.

Since the failed attempt on former president George Bush's life during a visit to Kuwait in 1993, the officials said, Hussein has been reluctant to use terrorism again for fear of being detected.

The revelations come on the eve of CIA Director George Tenet's appearance before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to review issues related to the global threat.

They also come on the heels of a statement last week by President George W. Bush's -- the former president's son -- accusing Iraq, Iran and North Korea of forming an "axis of evil," in which he said Baghdad "continues...to support terror."

The unidentified intelligence officials also confirmed to the Times that there was a meeting in Prague between an Iraqi intelligence official and Mohamed Atta, the leader of the 19 people who hijacked four airplanes in the September 11 attacks on the United States.

However, the officials said they did not believe the meeting provides enough evidence to tie Iraq to the attacks.

Other experts maintain that even if Baghdad were somehow involved in the September 11 attacks, Saddam Hussein would never have entrusted such a sensitive matter to a mid level intelligence officer like Ahmed Khalil Ibrahim Samir al-Ani, who is reported to have met Atta.

## India, Russia in talks to finalise arms deal

AFP, New Delhi

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov held talks Wednesday with Indian leaders to finalise a billion-dollar defence deal and move military cooperation away from the simple purchase of hardware towards joint production.

"Russia is willing to go beyond the sale and lease of hi-tech weapons," Klebanov said after his talks with Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes, adding that he had come to New Delhi with "new proposals" for cooperation.

Later Klebanov and Fernandes co-chaired a session of the Indo-Russian commission on military-technical cooperation, which was expected to discuss the possible leasing to India of two Russian nuclear submarines capable of

firing cruise missiles.

The deputy prime minister also held talks with Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh.

Vladimir Ladanov, political analyst in the Russian embassy in New Delhi, said "a lot of good things" were expected from Klebanov's visit, which would include the signing of a military protocol on Thursday.

As well as the submarine leases, the protocol could also signal the joint production of Russian war jets in India as well as the sale of long-range Russian bombers to the Indian air force.

Experts say the whole agreement could be worth in excess of one billion dollars.

## US official in India to derail terror funding

AFP, New Delhi

Deputy US Treasury Secretary Kenneth Dam was in India Wednesday for talks aimed at cutting off financing to terrorist organisations.

Since the September 11 terror attacks on the US, the global alliance against terrorism has moved swiftly to freeze the assets of groups accused of funding alleged terrorists such as Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida network.

Dam arrived in New Delhi on Tuesday night following a two-day visit to Pakistan.

Dam's South Asian tour has carried with it US President George

Bush's message of restraint to India and Pakistan who have massed troops on their shared border.

The tense military face-off was triggered by a December attack on the Indian parliament which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based terrorist groups.

During his stay in Islamabad, Dam praised Pakistan's "essential leadership" in the financial war on terrorism, but warned more needed to be done.

"Pakistan's assistance has been very essential in what we're trying to do in leading this war," Dam said, describing Pakistan as "one of those countries that is putting their shoulder to the wheel."



PHOTO: AFP

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov (L) shakes hands with Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes before a meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday. Klebanov said on Tuesday that traditional allies India and Russia were on the threshold of a "quantum jump" in military partnership and called for greater defence cooperation between the two nations.

## Reagan beats longevity record of US leaders

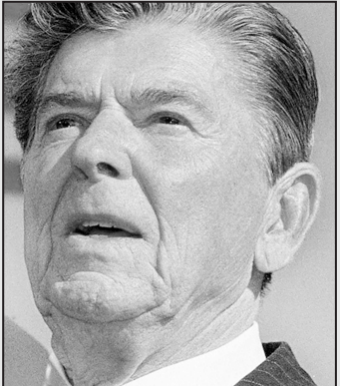
AFP, Los Angeles

Former US president Ronald Reagan became on Wednesday the United States' longest-living leader when he celebrated his 91st birthday with a slice of chocolate cake and a patriotic teddy bear, aides said.

By turning 91, Reagan -- the 40th US president -- beats the longevity record for a US leader by surpassing that of the second president John Adams, who served from 1797 to 1801 and lived for 33,119 days -- almost 91 years.

The US leader from 1981 to 1989, who has withdrawn from public life since being struck down with Alzheimer's disease, will spend the day at his mansion in the exclusive Bel Air area of Los Angeles with his wife Nancy, they said.

"There is nothing public planned



for the president, its very low-key at this time of his life and anyway Mrs. Reagan is not feeling well at the moment," his spokeswoman Joanne Drake told AFP.