

## US envoy in DPRK for talks

REUTERS, Seoul

Special envoy James Kelly arrived in Pyongyang Thursday to restart high-level talks with North Korea, the most senior U.S. official to visit since President Bush said the country was part of an "axis of evil."

Kelly, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, and his nine-member delegation made the short flight out over the Yellow Sea and on to the North Korean capital from South Korea.

North Korea's official KCNA news agency reported Kelly's arrival and outlined the purpose of his mission to Pyongyang, which has launched tentative economic reforms and pushed ajar its long-closed diplomatic door.

## US Marines hold joint war games with Kuwaiti forces

AFP, Kuwait City

US Marines are holding a "regularly scheduled" two-week-long amphibious exercise with Kuwaiti forces, a US embassy spokesman said here Thursday.

The exercises, which started on Tuesday, are "regularly scheduled. We hold them every year," the spokesman told AFP of "Eager Mace 2002", which is being held to the backdrop of an anticipated US military offensive against Iraq.

"The exercises focus on joint training with Kuwaiti forces. They are an opportunity to enhance interoperability, to test communication systems and conduct training," he added.

About 2,000 Marines were earlier said by US officials to be taking part in the Gulf drill.

Participants include troops from the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit based in Camp Pendleton, California, as well as the amphibious transport ships USS Denver and USS Mount Vernon, the US embassy here said.

## Thousands flee as Lili roars to US coast

REUTERS, Houston

Thousands of people fled inland on Thursday as Hurricane Lili bore down on the coast of Louisiana and Texas packing a punch that included 145 mph winds and a wall of water that threatened to sweep far inland.

Rains and rising winds were already lashing parts of Louisiana even though the storm was still 195 miles offshore in the Gulf of Mexico.

Forecasters at the U.S. National Hurricane Centre in Miami said Lili appeared to be taking aim at Louisiana's central coast near the Cajun town of New Iberia, 150 miles west of New Orleans.

A hurricane warning was posted from High Island, Texas, to the mouth of the Mississippi River, with Lili expected to come ashore on Thursday.

## Germans celebrates unification

AFP, Berlin

Germany celebrated the 12th anniversary Thursday of its reunification with solemn dignity and the unveiling of the newly-renovated Brandenburg Gate, even if east and west are still not totally at one.

Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, President Johannes Rau and a host of other dignitaries and invited guests attended a religious service in the Berliner Dom, the city's historic main cathedral.

## Turkey provides aid for Afghan reconstruction

Turkey will provide 5 million dollars for reconstruction of Afghanistan, says a press release of Turkish embassy in Dhaka recently.

Turkey has taken an active role in Afghan re-construction and will provide 5 million dollars of assistance for this process within a period of 5 years. Out of which 500,000 dollar has already been handed over to the International Aid Fund, set up by the World Bank. This was disclosed during "The International Conference on the Re-Construction of Afghanistan" held on January 21-22, 2002 in Tokyo.

The said amount was transferred to the World Bank account on September 24 with a notification of preference for its utilisation in feasibility studies.

Turkey, thus, has fulfilled the first step of its commitment it undertook in Tokyo Conference.



Iraqi policemen (R), from the security of diplomatic missions, stand guard at the entrance of the UN headquarters in Baghdad on Thursday. Chief UN arms inspector Hans Blix was set to brief Security Council members on his deal with Iraq amid mounting US pressure to get tough with Baghdad after France joined forces with Germany in opposing an automatic recourse to force.

# Blair threatens war on Iraq if diplomacy fails

Tough UN resolution absolutely essential

REUTERS, Blackpool

British Prime Minister Tony Blair vowed on Thursday that Saddam Hussein would be disarmed by force if the United Nations failed to persuade him through diplomacy.

He also demanded the Iraqi president open up his sprawling palace complexes to full scrutiny by weapons inspectors.

"If it doesn't happen peacefully, it will have to happen through military action...he can't avoid disarmament," Blair told a news conference at the end of his Labour Party's annual conference in Blackpool, northern England.

"Diplomacy not backed by force, when dealing with a dictator, is not merely useless, it's often counter-productive," he said. "They have to know that force will be used."

Blair, who backs President Bush's tough stance against Iraq and claims Saddam is stockpiling weapons of mass destruction, insisted that if and when weapons inspectors return to Iraq, they must do so only with a new UN resolution behind them giving them tough and sweeping powers.

"It is vital that a new resolution is passed making sure that this weapons inspection and monitoring regime is different, tougher and more effective than the last," he said.

"The world demands total unfet-

tered, unobstructed access to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs," he added.

The United States and Britain are pressing at the United Nations Security Council for a new resolution including an explicit threat of military action if Saddam thwarts inspections on the ground.

France and Russia, both permanent council members with a veto power, have voiced opposition along with Germany. Blair will visit Russian President Vladimir Putin next week.

"The access that we require must include the presidential palaces. It is no good allowing inspectors access to 99 percent of Iraq if the weapons of mass destruction are actually located and stored...in the remaining one percent," Blair said.

He said military conflict with Saddam and his regime was not inevitable but stressed that the stronger and more united the message sent by the international community, the less likely it was that a strike would be needed.

"What is very important...is he doesn't get any mixed messages," Blair said.

Bush was equally uncompromising on Wednesday saying that if Saddam did not disarm and "persist in his defiance, the use of force may be unavoidable."

Iraq has said it will allow inspec-

tors, who left in 1998, back into the country, but has indicated it wants some limits on their work. Bush says that is not acceptable.

Chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix reports to the Security Council on Thursday after reaching agreement with Iraq on the return of inspectors.

Blix had intended to send some advance teams to Iraq in about two weeks but the United States is expected to tell him to hold off until a new UN resolution is adopted.

Earlier, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Thursday that weapons inspectors should not return to Iraq until a new tougher UN resolution had been passed.

Asked on BBC radio whether a resolution should be passed before arms inspections are resumed, Blair said:

"I think it is necessary to have a tougher resolution yes, because what is absolutely clear is that the previous inspection regime wasn't tough enough to get the job done."

"A new resolution is absolutely essential," he said.

The British premier also urged the international community to present a united front on Iraq, avoiding "mixed signals" which he said could increase the likelihood of military action.

# UNSC to look into Iraq-UN deal amid US pressure

Russia rejects automatic force in draft resolution

AFP, United Nations

Chief UN arms inspector Hans Blix was set to brief Security Council members Thursday on his deal with Iraq amid mounting US pressure to get tough with Baghdad, after France joined forces with Germany in opposing an automatic recourse to force.

The closed-door briefing, scheduled to begin at 1430 GMT, comes after US President George W. Bush scored a political victory by reaching agreement with leaders of the House of Representatives on the wording of a resolution authorising him to use force against Iraq.

But US efforts abroad to push through tougher UN terms for Baghdad's compliance with its disarmament obligations appeared to be stalling.

French President Jacques Chirac joined German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder late Wednesday in declaring opposition to a resolution providing for automatic use of force against Iraq if it fails to comply with UN conditions for arms inspections.

"We are totally hostile to a resolution now which is based on making military intervention automatic," Chirac said with Schroeder at his side after a joint dinner at the Elysee palace.

"The French and German approach (to the crisis) is the same," Chirac said.

However, France has not ruled out an ultimate recourse to force if it is backed by the Security Council.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Bush's strongest supporter on Iraq, said on Thursday it was "absolutely essential" that the United Nations adopt a tough new resolution before the return of UN arms inspectors to Baghdad.

Russia said for the first time on Wednesday it would consider a new UN resolution setting out the international community's demands to Iraq.

Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said it was too soon to talk about Russia agreeing to a new resolution but that "if that should prove necessary, we would be prepared to consider it."

Blix, who heads the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), struck the deal with Iraq under the existing inspection regime in Vienna on Tuesday, which set several conditions.

But Washington immediately made clear the inspectors should not return until the Security Council accepted a new resolution setting stricter terms.

US officials have demanded that new instructions remove restrictions imposed on the inspectors under a 1998 agreement that limited their access to so-called "presidential sites" around the country.

A diplomat from a non-permanent council member Wednesday dis-

missed as "ridiculous" certain suggestions contained in a leaked US-British draft text.

These would give the right for the inspectors to be accompanied by armed guards, "no-fly" or "no-drive zones" to be established to smoothe their progress, and representatives of the five permanent members to pick sites to be inspected and accompany the inspection teams.

"France, Russia and China want to eliminate the more ridiculous elements such as armed guards, no-drive zones and so on," he noted. "All this nonsense has to go. The main issue at the end of the day will be the one-stage, two-stage process. That will be the fault line."

Washington is pushing for one all-inclusive resolution -- containing the UN demands as well as the option to use military force in case of non-compliance -- while France wants two resolutions: one with the demands and, later, a second one, if necessary, that would lay out the consequences of failure to comply.

"The real problem is the clause that gives the United States the possibility of launching a military campaign without the formal green light from the Council," the diplomat said.

Bush, bolstered by his deal with the House of Representatives, said on Wednesday that attacking Iraq may become unavoidable if President Saddam Hussein does not disarm. Foreign ministry official on Iraq on Thursday sharply attacked a US and British draft for a tough UN resolution against Baghdad, saying Russia could not accept mention of an automatic use of force.

Russia is one of the five veto-wielding permanent members of the UN Security Council which will debate the US-proposed resolution backed by Britain.

"Attempts to make the UN Security Council subscribe to automatic use of force against Iraq are unacceptable for us," Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov told Interfax news agency.

"What the U.S. and the British have provided us with only strengthens us in the correctness of our position in favour of the quickest possible resumption of inspection activities in Iraq, and a political settlement around this country as a whole without automatic use of force," he said.

France and Germany also have voiced opposition to the draft.

The Bush administration has hesitated to introduce to the 15-member Security Council its draft resolution, which allows a UN member, such as the United States, to determine if Iraq has violated UN demands and follow up with military action.

# NATO alarmed at world security

REUTERS, Brussels

NATO Secretary General George Robertson predicted Thursday the world would face more instability, more terrorism, more failed states and more proliferation of weapons in the decade ahead.

Painting a bleak picture of what he described as a "guaranteed supply chain of instability," Robertson said NATO must revamp its military capability, reach out for new allies and join hands with Russia against security challenges.

His remarks, prepared for delivery at a conference on the alliance's future, covered familiar ground but sounded an unusual note of urgency on the risk of failing to act.

Robertson did not mention Iraq, but he has urged allies in recent days to take the danger of "criminal states" seriously and called for threats to be smashed when deterrence fails.

"The Caucasus, Central Asia, Northern Africa and the Middle East all offer a rich current and potential cocktail of instability," Robertson said.

"All of these regions are going through political and economic transitions of historic dimensions... but only the most blinkered optimist would argue that this process of change will happen without major convulsions."

He said the September 11 attacks on the United States had revealed "a special breed of terrorism... driven not by political aims,

but by fanatical extremism and the urge to kill."

"It is difficult to imagine how one could return this cruel genie to its pre-9/11 bottle," he said.

The Brussels conference was billed as a curtain-raiser for next month's NATO summit in Prague, when the 19-nation defence alliance is expected to invite up to seven new members from behind the old Iron Curtain and agree on a strategy to refit its military toolbox for post-September 11 security threats.

NATO's relevance to the post-Cold War world has been thrown into doubt since the September 11 attacks.

The alliance invoked its "all-for-one and one-for-all" mutual defence clause for the first time after the attacks, but Washington took its military response to Afghanistan without seeking its help and no one expects it to be called on if there is a military strike on Iraq.

Part of the problem is the yawning gap in military capabilities between the United States and its European allies: last year Washington spent 85 percent more on defence than the other 18 members of NATO combined.

"Military capability is the crucial underpinning of our safety and security," Robertson said. "... in the real world, the more military capabilities you have, the less you may need to use them."



A relative comforts Geraldine Busman in Zamboanga on Thursday who was injured in a restaurant where a powerful bomb exploded in the southern city of Zamboanga late Wednesday which claimed the lives of one American soldier and two Filipinos and injured more than 20 people. The motive for the blast still remains unknown.

# War against Iraq to unify Asian Muslims with Arabs

AFP, Singapore

A US-led war against Iraq must be swift and decisive, Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew said Thursday, warning that a prolonged conflict would whip Asian Muslims into anger as they sympathise with their Arab colleagues.

In an article published in the Straits Times, Lee said that "if an attack on Iraq were to drag on for months, it would rouse the Arab street to frenzy and Asian Muslims would react in sympathy."

"To avoid this, America needs to deploy overwhelming force in Iraq to ensure a swift campaign that can ultimately showcase the Iraqis celebrating their liberation from a tyrant," said Lee, Singapore's former prime minister whose views on Asia are sought by Western leaders.

Asia is home to key largely Muslim countries, among them Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation, and Malaysia, whose outspoken Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has called for sanctions to be lifted now that Iraq has agreed to readmit United Nations weapons inspectors.

Remnants of the al-Qaida terror network are believed to have sought refuge in Southeast Asia, home to an estimated 250 million Muslims, after their defeat in Afghanistan.

Lee, considered an elder statesman in the region, said dissent

against a US unilateral attack on Iraq had helped Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "work up opposition" among Islamic followers in Southeast Asia.

Since the 1991 Gulf War, Arabs have "cemented their solidarity" with Muslims in Asia by financing mosques, religious schools and preachers.

Daily television broadcasts of the sufferings of Palestinians battling Israel for a homeland have aroused sympathy for the Palestinian cause among Asian Muslims, he said.

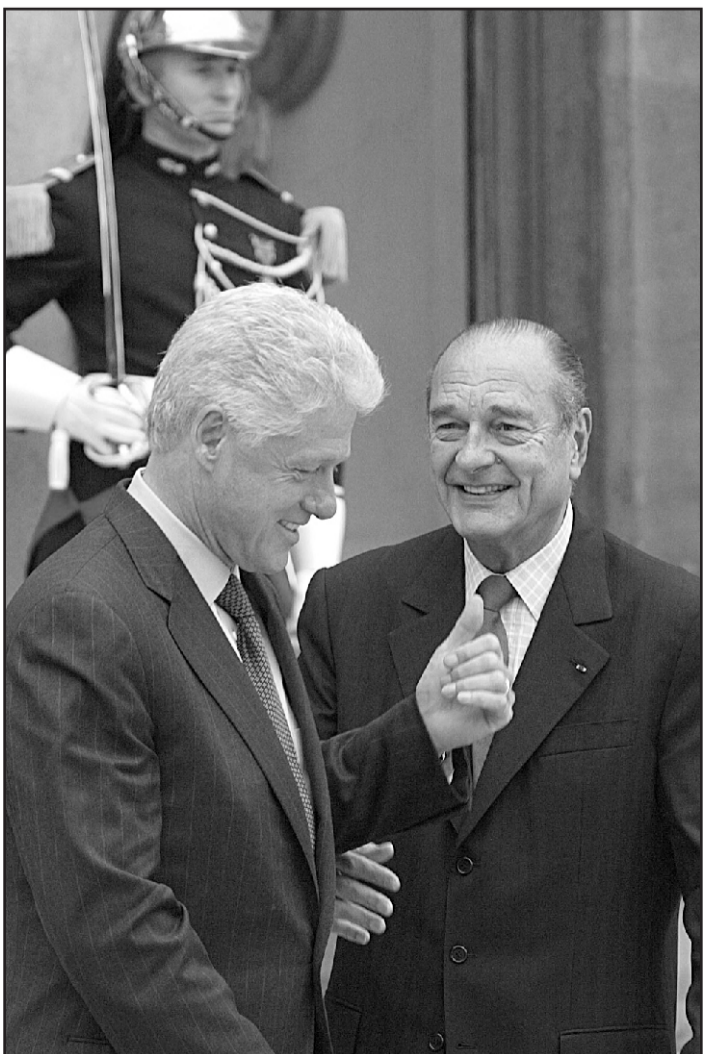
Lee said "a great unknown is how long the US will have to remain in Iraq in order to set up a news dispensation there" in case Saddam is ousted.

Another challenge for US President George W. Bush is to "keep the global economy on an even keel despite a war with Iraq."

He noted that talk of war has already sent oil prices to just under 30 dollars a barrel and unsettled economic recovery in the US and led to a slowdown in Asian exports.

"A prolonged war might spike the price of oil even higher, causing a worldwide recession," he added.

East Asia's biggest worry is how long the low interest rate regime will boost the US housing prices and consumer confidence, pointing to predictions by some analysts that the US housing market was another bubble waiting to burst.



French President Jacques Chirac (R) escorts former US President Bill Clinton on Thursday out of the presidential Elysee Palace in Paris after their meeting.