

## US, UK plan seaborne invasion of Iraq

UN experts see US data on Iraqi arms

REUTERS, Baghdad

The United States and Britain were reported at the weekend to be planning a massive seaborne invasion if war broke out against Iraq, a war for which Syria said there would be no justification.

The top US military commander, Gen. Richard Myers, said his forces were ready to go into battle against Iraq and the New York Times reported in its Sunday edition that US intelligence agents were already working with anti-Saddam Kurdish groups in northern Iraq.

The specter of war has loomed steadily larger in recent days, with the United States condemning Iraq's UN-ordered weapons declaration delivered on Dec. 7 as a "material breach" of Security Council Resolution 1441 on Iraqi disarmament.

Scores of UN arms inspectors are scouring Iraq for evidence of banned nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, but Washington has made clear it believes it has enough evidence of its own to justify military action if Iraq does not come clean.

President Bush -- who has publicly declared he wants to force President

Saddam Hussein from power -- had a smallpox vaccination on Saturday, setting an example for hundreds of thousands of US troops who fear they may come under attack by biological agents.

Iraq denies possessing weapons of mass destruction and a newspaper owned by Saddam's eldest son Uday on Saturday likened US and British leaders to ruthless Mongol conquerors of old.

AFP adds: The United States started sharing sensitive intelligence with UN inspectors hunting for Iraq's suspected weapons of mass destruction as war preparations gathered pace Sunday.

UN experts were deployed across Iraq on the 23rd day of inspections as Washington gave the United Nations data on the locations of weapons factories and stores that Baghdad says do not exist.

"That process has started," a US government official said.

Chief UN arms inspector Hans Blix told the BBC that "the most important thing that governments like the US or the UK could give us would be to tell us the sites where they are convinced that they (the Iraqis) keep some weapons of mass destruction. This is what we want to have."



Famed Indian musician Ravi Shankar (L) and his daughter Anoushka perform in Kolkata on Saturday. The charity performance raised funds for the Arogya Sandhan health center for children.

## Pak PM wants talks with India

REUTERS, New Delhi

Pakistan's new Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali has said he is keen for peace talks with India and is committed to stop cross-border infiltration of terrorists, a key Indian condition to resume dialogue.

But New Delhi was behaving like a child crying for no reason, Jamali said in an interview to the weekly magazine Outlook which hit the stands on Sunday.

Nuclear rivals India and Pakistan have been locked in a military face-off since last December and nearly fought their fourth war earlier this year over Pakistan-promoted cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

Tensions have, however, eased after hectic global diplomatic efforts and the two countries began pulling back troops from the border in October.

"As prime minister, I want dialogue. This is the message I want to send to India," said Jamali, who became Pakistan's first premier in three years last month after elections conducted by the military regime of President Pervez Musharraf.

"There may have been stray incidents," Jamali said when asked how he planned to handle Indian charges of rebel incursions into Kashmir from Pakistan.

"But believe me, no country can afford to promote cross-border infiltration. My government is very clear that there will be no cross-border infiltration. We are not doing it, believe me."

Jamali said he discussed India and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee during talks last week with visiting US assistant secretary of state for South Asian Affairs, Christina Rocca.

PTI adds: Ahead of Iranian President Muhammad Khatami's visit to Islamabad on Monday, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf said that Tehran could facilitate an Indo-Pak dialogue to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir issue as it enjoyed good relations with New Delhi.

"By virtue of good relations with India, Iran could facilitate Islamabad-New Delhi talks, especially to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir issue," Musharraf said in an interview to Iranian new agency IRNA on Saturday.



Demonstrators protest in front of the federal building in Los Angeles, California on Saturday against new policies from the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS). The new regulations force citizens from Muslim countries holding visas to register at INS offices in the government's effort to track possible terrorists. The INS got involved in a controversy after arresting an undisclosed number of Iranians who were following the registration procedures.

## Bhutan warns of action against Indian rebels

AFP, Guwahati

The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has threatened to use its military might to remove Indian separatist rebels from bases within its borders, a report said Sunday.

"We will hold talks with the militants who have established camps inside Bhutan," Bhutan's King Jigme Singhye Wangchuk was quoted saying in the government-run newspaper Kuensel.

"If the militants refuse to leave our country through the process of peaceful dialogue, we will be left with no option but to use our military forces to remove them from Bhutan," he said.

Two separatist groups from India's restive northeastern state of Assam -- the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) -- have well-entrenched bases in Bhutan.

The separatist Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO) from West Bengal state is also there.

Bhutan has so far not taken direct action against the Indian

separatists for fear of retaliatory attacks on its nationals.

In an address to the nation, the king warned of a possible "war" in the event of Bhutanese troops carrying out a military offensive against the Indian rebels, the paper said.

"This (military crackdown) will result in war and it is very important for all of us to be fully aware that in such a situation the security of the country will be threatened," the king said.

"We will have to face loss of lives and economic hardship and all sections of Bhutanese people will be seriously affected."

A senior Bhutanese official said from capital Thimphu: "Bhutan is a landlocked country and many of its nationals have to traverse through parts of Assam to reach some of the kingdom's districts."

"There is a lurking fear that once we launch a military crackdown, the rebels would attack our citizens."

The ULFA and the NDFB are fighting from bases inside southern Bhutan for independent homelands

in Assam.

Bhutan has admitted that ULFA alone has six camps in the country, including the outfit's general headquarters and military training bases inside thick jungles in the southern Samdrup Johnkar district.

The NDFB has seven camps, while the KLO had set up two bases inside the tiny Buddhist kingdom.

Indian intelligence officials say there could be more than 4,000 ULFA and NDFB rebels in Bhutan who carry out their hit-and-run guerrilla strikes on federal soldiers in Assam.

The Assam government has repeatedly blamed Bhutan for the rise in militancy in the region.

"Unless Bhutanese troops dismantle the militant camps from their soil, insurgency in Assam would continue to thrive," Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi told AFP.

"We welcome Bhutan king's decision to launch a military crackdown."

More than 10,000 people have lost their lives to insurgency in Assam during the past two decades.

## Modi sworn-in as Gujarat CM

PTI, Ahmedabad

Narendra Modi, the architect of BJP's landslide victory in Gujarat assembly polls, was today sworn-in as Chief Minister of the state for the second time.

Modi was administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor Sunder Singh Bhandari at a grand ceremony here in the presence of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani and thousands of party workers and sympathisers.

Besides a number of Union ministers, Chief Ministers J Jayalalithaa (Tamil Nadu), Babul Marandi (Jharkhand) and Om Prakash Chautala (Haryana) attended the swearing-in.

BJP chief Venkaiah Naidu, supercop KPS Gill, who was security adviser to Modi for some time post Godhra, and Bollywood stars Juhi Chawla and Shekhar Suman as also Vinod Khanna, the Union Minister, were also present.

## 'Andhra train accident an act of Naxalites'

PTI, Ahmedabad

An act of sabotage by a Naxalite outfit was cited by a top railway official as the reason for the derailment of the Kacheguda-Bangalore Express from Hyderabad, which left 20 persons dead and 87 others injured here on Saturday.

"It is all a planned act of a Naxalite group", South Central Railway General Manager, SM Singla said on Sunday, a day after nine bogies of the Bangalore-bound train jumped off the track in this remote village in Andhra Pradesh.

Singla said the rail had been cut and iron filings available at the accident site below the tracks also justified the belief about use of hacksaw blades. Four or five hacksaw blades had also been recovered near the track.

The texture of the filings powder was smooth, he said, adding that had it been a 'normal break', the texture would be in a granule shape. The track had been cut using the hacksaw blade, he said.

Singla said with the police turning the heat on the Naxalites, their groups might have spanned out and sneaked into this region, taking advantage of the police apparently being on lower guard.

## DPRK starts removing UN nuke monitoring devices

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea, defying world opinion, said on Sunday it had begun removing UN monitoring equipment from a nuclear reactor at the center of the communist state's suspected pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Pyeongyang's announcement came after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said North Korea had disabled surveillance devices the agency had placed at the five-megawatt Yongbyon research reactor, which the United Nations believes was used to make plutonium capable of use in warheads.

The United States, Japan and South Korea urged North Korea to maintain the freeze on its nuclear facilities.

The Bush administration has lumped the reclusive communist state as part of an "axis of evil" with Iraq and Iran for developing weapons of mass destruction and back-

ing international terrorism.

The Yongbyon plant had been closed under a 1994 agreement with the United States in which North Korea froze its reactors in exchange for shipments of oil and the construction of more proliferation-proof reactors.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said it began removing the surveillance devices after the UN nuclear watchdog had not acted on Pyongyang's demand early this month to take the equipment away to allow the reactor to restart.

"This situation compelled the DPRK (North Korea) to immediately start the work of removing the seals and monitoring cameras from the frozen nuclear facilities for their normal operation to produce electricity," it said.

North Korea vowed to maintain a hard-line stance, accusing the United States and Japan of trying to isolate the communist state.

"It is the DPRK's invariable mode

to react to the US imperialists' hard-line policy with the toughest stand," KCNA said.

"To take a prudent stand and attitude rather than acting rashly by following the US in the Korean problem is more beneficial to Japan's existence and security."

KCNA said North Korea needed to end the nuclear reactor freeze "because the US unilaterally abandoned its commitment to supply heavy oil in compensation for the loss of electricity."

The United States, South Korea, Japan and the European Union moved to halt the oil supplies in response to US revelations of a North Korean nuclear weapons program using highly enriched uranium.

North Korea's move came two days after South Koreans elected a new president who campaigned against using pressure and sanctions to press Pyongyang to resolve the nuclear crisis.

## Helicopter crash marks Kabul peacekeeping anniversary

AFP, Kabul

Exactly one year after international peacekeeping operations began in Kabul, the 22-nation force was Sunday marking its darkest day following a helicopter crash in which seven German soldiers were killed.

Investigations into what is believed to have been an accident near the Afghan capital Saturday were due to continue as troops from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mourned the loss of their comrades.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder expressed "profound sadness for the German and Afghan victims," as Afghan security officials claimed two children playing near the crash site had also been killed.

German Defence Minister Peter Struck said he was "horrified" by the crash which occurred during a routine flight.

"We are doing everything to determine without delays or gaps

the cause of the accident," he said in a statement.

Eyewitnesses said the C-H53 aircraft appeared to develop technical difficulties, spewing flames and smoke before smashing into an industrial area of Kabul in a ball of fire.

Afghan authorities expressed their regret over the crash and pledged to launch their own probe.

"ISAF has helped Afghanistan a great deal in bringing security to Kabul and each ISAF soldier is the same as an Afghan for us. We send our condolences to the families of those killed," said Tayeb Jawad, a spokesman for Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

The crash marked the end of a difficult week for ISAF and other foreign military in Afghanistan as separate attacks claimed several lives one year after the country installed its first government after the collapse of the hardline Taliban regime.



Zahira Kamal (L) the head of the Palestinian Women's Union in the West Bank walks along with US Hollywood star Jane Fonda (2nd L) upon arrival in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Saturday. Fonda, travelling with a delegation of V-Day members, (Vagina-Day) for the protection of women, arrived in Israel for a three-day visit aimed at promoting peace in the region.

## Lanka marks a year without bloodshed

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka is set to mark a full year without major ethnic bloodshed as government forces and Tamil Tiger rebels notch up their longest ceasefire in the decades-old separatist war, officials said Sunday.

The truce, initially declared by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on Christmas Eve last year, and reciprocated by the new government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, was holding well, military spokesman Sanath Karunaratne said.

"We have not had any major incidents of violence in the past year," Karunaratne said. "The success of the ceasefire should lead us to a final settlement to the conflict and a permanent peace."

He said a sea battle with Tiger rebels in May was the exception to the guns falling silent across the island's embattled northeast as peace broker Norway helped upgrade the truce to a foreign-monitored ceasefire in February.

Following navy action in May, a rebel boat blew up just before sailors could board it for a search and among the debris were several heavy mortar bombs and rocket-

propelled grenades. One rebel craft was sunk by the navy.

The rebels denied gun-running but the US ambassador to Sri Lanka Ashley Wills promptly warned the guerrillas not to scuttle the bilateral truce.

The US, which is strongly supporting Norway's attempts to peacefully end Sri Lanka's conflict, which has claimed over 60,000 lives in the past three decades, has warned that the international coalition against terrorism could be extended to Tiger rebels if they jeopardise the peace bid.

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran signed the bilateral truce in February, two months into the ceasefire.

Despite the sea battle in May, the rebels and a government delegation held face-to-face talks in the island's rebel-held north three weeks later and formal peace talks opened in Thailand on September 16.

Norwegian peace broker Erik Solheim said earlier this month that only 20 people had been killed in Sri Lanka's embattled area since the ceasefire went into effect compared, to about 2,000 people who were killed in the corresponding period a year before.



US President George W. Bush's twin daughters Barbara (L) and Jenna Bush walk on the South Lawn of the White House to board Marine One on Saturday in Washington, DC. The Bush family is spending the Christmas holiday at Camp David in Maryland.

## Hillary Clinton is Democratic frontrunner for 2004 elections

AFP, Washington

Hillary Clinton is the Democratic Party frontrunner for the 2004 presidential elections following Al Gore's decision not to seek presidential nomination, according to a poll released Saturday.

Three out of ten registered Democrats, or 30 percent, support the former first lady as a nominee, according to a joint Time magazine/Cable News Network poll.

Two other likely Democratic candidates -- Massachusetts Senator John Kerry and Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman -- each have 13 percent support, according to the poll.

They are followed by former House minority leader Dick Gephardt with 10 percent, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle with nine percent, and North Carolina Senator John Edwards with eight percent.

The survey found that no single candidate would take Clinton's place at the front of the pack should she decide not to run, with Kerry and Lieberman polling an equal 16 percent support in that scenario.