

## French protest possible war in Iraq

AFP, Marseille

Around one thousand French activists protested Thursday a possible a US strike on Iraq as the aircraft carrier USS Harry S Truman stopped in this Mediterranean port on its way to the Gulf.

Carrying signs including "US Go Home!" and "Don't Chop Up Iraq!", activists shouted "Bush, the killer!" at a group of the ship's 5,000 sailors on one of the city's main streets, before police moved in to prevent a confrontation.

"Residents of Marseille can see with their own eyes the reality of the preparations for war," said Bernard Genet, a spokesman for the organisers of the demonstration.

Marseille is home to one of France's largest Muslim and North African communities.

"Even if there is blood flowing in Iraq, one must say that this American operation is a failure," Genet added.



PHOTO: AFP

More than a thousand leftwing activists and supporters march on the Canebiere at Marseilles, in France to protest American policy against Iraq on Thursday.

## 3 killed in US, British airstrike in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Three Iraqi civilians were killed and another 16 wounded Thursday in an air raid by US and British warplanes on southern Iraq, the official INA news agency said.

"Enemy warplanes bombed civilian installations in the provinces of Basra and Zi-Qar, and three Iraqi civilians were killed and sixteen others wounded in the attacks," said a military spokesman, quoted by INA.

The spokesman said anti-aircraft defences opened fire on the attackers and that they fled back to their bases in Kuwait.

Earlier, US Central Command said US and British aircraft attacked an air military communications facility in southern Iraq in retaliation for the downing of an unmanned US spy plane earlier this week.

## LTTE blames army for trying to scuttle peace process

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas on Thursday accused the military of trying to scuttle the peace process and rejected its demand to decommission weapons ahead of a final settlement.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rejected as "belligerent and hostile" a proposal by the Sri Lankan army for the guerrillas to dismantle camps in the island's north in return for a decommissioning of weapons by the rebels.

The issue of military camps has been controversial even as the two sides hold talks brokered by Norway aimed at ending three decades of ethnic bloodshed.

## India eyes own fighter plane in 3-yrs

AFP, New Delhi

India said Friday it will be ready in three years to produce its super-sonic Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), considered vital to upgrade the air force's ageing and crash-prone fleet.

Defence Minister George Fernandes said two LCA models would be shown off at a February airshow in the southern city of Bangalore.

"After prototypes have been test-flown and completed the cycle of tests, we should be ready for production of LCAs in about three years time," Fernandes told the Press Trust of India news agency.

## Laden sends message to Algerian rebel

REUTERS, Algiers

Three members of al-Qaeda delivered a message this month from Osama bin Laden to a leading Algerian Islamic rebel believed to be in Nigeria, news reports said on Thursday.

The three emissaries, all Saudi nationals, travelled through Syria and Egypt and met Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a regional leader of Algeria's Islamic rebel Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat.

The group, known by its French acronym GSPC, is on the US black list of "foreign terrorist organisations". Algerian military officials say it has between 350 and 380 men and operates mainly in the east of the country.

## N Korea to expel UN nuclear experts

### Pyongyang blames US for courting confrontation

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea will expel UN nuclear inspectors who have been monitoring the communist state's atomic facilities under a non-proliferation pact, South Korea's Yonhap news agency quoted the North as saying on Friday.

Yonhap, which publishes Korean-language reports by the North's state-run Korean Central News Agency, said the two-man team of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors was no longer needed.

"As our freeze on nuclear facilities has been lifted, the mission of IAEA inspectors, who have been in Yongbyon under the (1994) Agreed Framework between North Korea and the U.S., has naturally drawn to an end," said the report, quoting a letter North Korea sent to the IAEA.

"In a situation where there is no longer justification for the inspectors to stay in our country, our government has decided to send them out," it said of a move that escalates

North Korea's two-month nuclear showdown with the international community.

The IAEA, the UN nuclear watchdog, said Thursday it had "serious non-proliferation concerns" after North Korea said it planned to restart the Yongbyon nuclear reactor, which was frozen in 1994 after a crisis over Pyongyang's nuclear arms ambitions.

The reactor and three related facilities at Yongbyon, 55 miles north of Pyongyang, were mothballed under a 1994 pact with the United States, which offered oil and safer reactors in return for North Korea's freezing the reactor.

The United States said in October the North had admitted operating a secret weapons program using highly enriched uranium. In response, the United States, South Korea and other allies suspended fuel oil shipments to the North in December.

North Korea says it is reactivating the plant to produce electricity to make up for lost fuel oil supplies. Pyongyang also insists on its right to

have nuclear weapons and wants Washington to sign a non-aggression pact to defuse the row.

Earlier, a defiant North Korea accused the United States Friday of seeking to overthrow its political system, adding that Washington was rushing into an extremely dangerous confrontation.

The reclusive communist state's latest salvo, carried by its official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), said a US demand that it scrap its nuclear program as a condition for talks was a prelude to a surprise attack.

Its comments followed a demand from South Korea's president-elect, a dove on relations with the North, that it drop plans to reactivate a reactor capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons.

"(The United States) is rushing headlong into extremely dangerous confrontation with the DPRK (North Korea), saying that it would neither have dialogue with the DPRK nor rule out a war against it," KCNA said.



PHOTO: AFP

Hindu Devotees queue to worship at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple in Kolkata on Thursday. The temple, one of the most popular in Kolkata has taken out an insurance policy on Friday to cover worshippers if terrorists strike, officials said.

## Israel 'turns up the heat' on Palestinians

### Tel Aviv accused of torpedoing truce efforts

AFP, Jerusalem

One of the most violent days of the Intifada in recent weeks, with nine Palestinians killed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, came as the Israeli government ordered the army to "turn up the heat" on the Palestinians.

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz commanded the military to "step up the pressure and act with all the force required against terrorists wherever they are," the ministry said Friday.

A spokesman for the ministry of defence added that the order to "turn up the heat" on the Palestinians was issued by Mofaz during a meeting with the country's top brass and the Shin Beth internal security services on Thursday.

The fresh crackdown on suspected Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, which has been reoccupied since June

and systematically raided and combed by the army, followed one day after Christmas and after a four-week lull in attacks inside Israel.

Nine Palestinians were killed in the occupied territories Thursday as the army seized the initiative in its bid to "dismantle terrorist infrastructure".

Most of the violence stemmed from Israeli commando operations to snatch militants during the lifting of the daytime curfew in West Bank towns.

The bloodshed fuelled fears militant groups would escalate their own attacks in revenge after more than a month without a major bombing or shooting in Israel.

Most of the main Palestinian factions are currently engaged in talks aimed at harmonising their positions and halting suicide attacks, while many commentators also suspect Palestinians are curbing their violence to bolster the centre-left Israeli Labour party in

## N Korea may have N-bomb in 30-day

AFP, London

North Korea, which has begun work to reactivate a nuclear reactor capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium, could have a nuclear weapon within 30 days, British expert John Large was quoted as saying by The Times Friday.

"All scenarios point to the finishing of the development (by North Korea) of nuclear weapons," said Large, who advised Russia after the sinking of the nuclear submarine Kursk in August 2000.

The United Nations' nuclear watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said the North Koreans had moved 1,000 fresh fuel rods into the Yongbyon reactor building, north of Pyongyang, which is capable of producing military plutonium. The IAEA called the move "very serious".

# 'War with Iraq would be humanitarian disaster'

## US uses strategy of lies to justify attack: Baghdad

REUTERS, London

War with Iraq would prompt a humanitarian disaster, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said Friday.

Speaking to BBC radio, Ruud Lubbers said the international community should make prevention of such a conflict a top priority and should encourage Arab countries to take part in the inspection of suspected weapons sites in Iraq.

"Believe me, it will be a disaster from a humanitarian perspective," Lubbers said when asked about the prospect of a US-led attack on Iraq.

"There's even a risk if there are bacteriological and chemical weapons (in Iraq) that people there will die because of the attack."

The United States has threatened to go to war with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein if Iraq cannot prove it has scrapped all its banned weapons programs, as required by UN resolutions.

UN inspectors are due to issue a final report on their findings in Iraq on January 27. With Iraq insisting it no longer has the capacity to develop weapons of mass destruction, speculation is growing the report could trigger war.

"I think such a war has to be prevented in the first place," Lubbers told the BBC.

"We should indeed be very strict and strong on Saddam Hussein, but the ambition is to disarm him with his potential of chemical and bacteriological

weapons...

"I would be in favour of the Arab world participating in the inspections and the conclusions," he added.

"Only, only, when Saddam Hussein does not comply with both the inspections and the consequences of the inspections...then there can be reason for a military intervention."

AFP adds: Iraq accused the United States Friday of following a "strategy of lies" by pretending that Baghdad has prohibited arms so that it can justify an attack on the country.

"The American administration accusing Iraq of possessing weapons of mass destruction is part of its strategy of lies, but Baghdad has succeeded in unmasking these deceptions by accepting the return of (UN arms) inspectors," wrote Ath-Thawra, mouthpiece of Iraq's ruling Baath party.

"The inspectors themselves have uncovered these allegations on the ground, because they have found nothing, and how could they find anything if it does not exist," the newspaper continued, referring to prohibited arms.

"These lies are being spread at the highest levels in the United States, beginning with the president and including the vice president and the secretary of defence," and are "laying the groundwork for action."

"The people of the world consider the United States today to be their Enemy Number One ... and the pillages of their riches despite their hypocrisy by pretending to aid them."

## Queen orders Prince Charles to stop hunting

AFP, London

Queen Elizabeth II has ordered her son and heir to the throne Prince Charles to give up hunting, which is opposed by a majority of British people and members of parliament, the Daily Mirror reported Friday.

"The Queen believes that continuing to hunt when the majority of MPs and the nation at large abhor it, is a step too far," a senior courtier was quoted as saying by the tabloid.

"It would be out of the question, of course, for Charles to continue hunting if a total ban is introduced," the source went on.

"But the Queen believes that even if there is only a partial ban, Charles would court disaster for his future reputation if he over-rode the will of the people."

Charles, his sons William and Harry and his companion Camilla Parker Bowles regularly go hunting near Highgrove, the prince's residence west of London.

Under a new bill put before the House of Commons on December 3, a permit may become necessary to practise hunting in England and Wales.

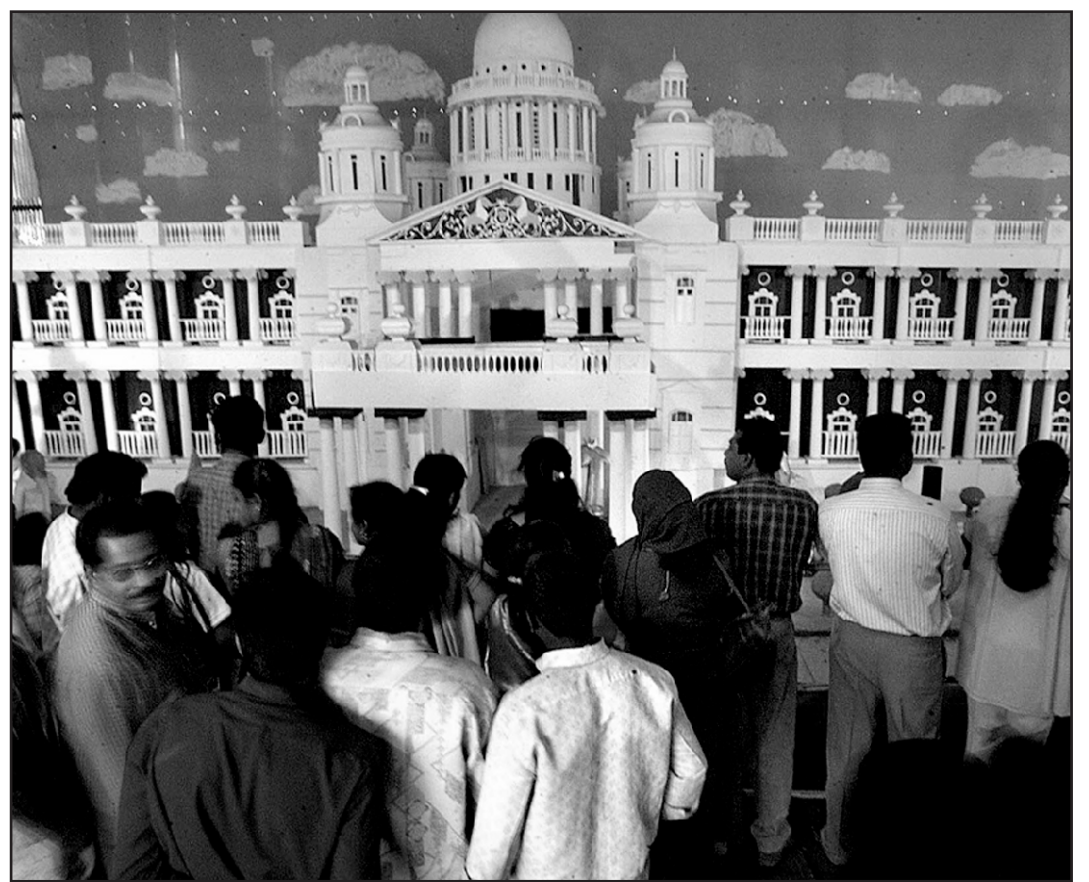


PHOTO: AFP

Visitors look at a 60 feet-long cake replica of the famous Lalitha Mahal palace on display at the 30th Nilgiri's cake exhibition in Bangalore on Thursday. The model, made with 6000 kilograms of sugar, was prepared by 15 artists working round-the-clock for 45 days.

## Indonesian HR court jails ex-Dili military chief

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's human rights court yesterday jailed its first military or police officer for crimes against humanity in East Timor in 1999.

Lieutenant Colonel Sujarwo was sentenced to five years for failing to prevent attacks on the Dili diocese and on the residence of Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo in September that year, in which a total of 15 people were killed.

The court had previously acquitted nine police and army officers and one civilian over the savage army-backed militia violence before and after East Timor's vote in August 1999 to break away from Indonesia.

"I reject the verdict," Sujarwo, the former military chief in the capital Dili, told reporters.

"This trial is not fair. I feel like I'm being sacrificed. I did the best I could to provide security."

Surjarwo remains free pending his appeal. Prosecutors had demanded he be jailed for 10 years.

"The defendant is guilty of human rights abuses, causing the death of other people," said Judge Andi Samsan Nganro.

Judges said Sujarwo had failed to provide adequate security at the premises.

"The defendant had been negligent in carrying out his duties," Nganro said.

Pro-Jakarta local militias, who were armed and organised by the Indonesian military, launched a brutal campaign of intimidation before the vote and carried out revenge attacks afterwards.

An estimated 1,000 people were killed.

Indonesia set up the rights court this year to deflect pressure for an international war crimes tribunal. But before yesterday, only two ethnic East Timorese civilians had been convicted.

The former provincial governor Abilio Soares was sentenced to three years in jail and ex-militia leader Eurico Guterres was sentenced to 10 years. Both are free pending an appeal.

Five more senior soldiers or police officers, including the then regional military chief Major General Adam Damiri, are still awaiting verdicts.

International rights groups have strongly criticised the previous acquittals and described the Indonesian court as a sham.

The New York-based Human Rights Watch last week called the trials a whitewash.

"Indonesia has failed in its promise to hold the military accountable for the atrocities in East Timor," it said.

The United States suspended military relations with Indonesia over the 1999 bloodshed. It has said it cannot resume full military ties without an accounting for the abuses.

## Opposition scents victory in Kenyan polls

REUTERS, Nairobi

Kenyans voted Friday in landmark elections that mark the end of almost a quarter century of rule by President Daniel arap Moi, with many pundits predicting an unprecedented opposition victory.

Clad in overcoats in the chilly dawn after overnight rain, voters streamed to polling stations in the capital Nairobi as election officials opened voting at 6 a.m. (10 p.m. EST Thursday).

"We want to vote for democracy. That is NARC. It's obvious," Ndirangu, a 54-year-old shopkeeper and supporter of the opposition National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) queuing to vote in the city's Westlands constituency.

"We have been suffering for quite a long time."

Kenyans hope the departure into retirement of Moi, one of Africa's last "Big Men" rulers, will herald a new dawn after years of economic stagnation and corruption.



PHOTO: AFP

Taiwan Air Force couples listen to a speech at a mass wedding ceremony at the Air Force Entertainment Centre in Taipei on Friday. Sixty-two couples, took part in the annual event, ten of whom were Air Force employees.