

## 'Kabila wins vote in tense Congo'

AFP, Kinshasa

Incumbent Joseph Kabila was on Wednesday declared the winner of the Democratic Republic of Congo's bitterly contested presidential election, sparking celebrations in the east and protests from his challenger's camp.

Kabila, Africa's youngest head of state at 35, took 58.05 percent of the vote in the October 29 second-round ballot, compared with 41.9 percent for his rival, Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba, the country's Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) said.

"Having taken the absolute majority of votes cast in the second round, Kabila Kabange Joseph is declared elected as president," announced CEI chief Apollinaire Malu Malu.

## Ulfa rebels ready for peace talks

AFP, Guwahati

A rebel group suspected of blowing up an oil pipeline on Wednesday in India's northeast said it would accept New Delhi's offer of fresh talks if the government sent a formal proposal.

National Security Adviser MK Narayanan Monday offered to renew talks with the banned United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), which has battled for independence for the Indian state of Assam since 1979.

The rebels, who are suspected of carrying out four attacks on oil and gas pipelines this week including the one on Wednesday, said the government should make the proposal through their representatives.

"Ulfa cares for a political resolution, and to keep the process rolling India must send a proposal through the People's Consultative Group," the Ulfa said in a statement in its fortnightly newsletter, Freedom.

# Israeli minister threatens to kill Palestinian leaders

AFP, AP, Jerusalem

An Israeli cabinet minister called yesterday for stepped up "targeted killing" operations of Palestinian leaders involved in rocket attacks, one day after the first such deadly strike in more than a year.

"Targeted killing operations must be broadened, not only against those who fire rockets but against their leaders," Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben Eliezer told public radio.

Ben Eliezer, a member of Israel's influential security cabinet and a former defence minister, was making a direct allusion to leaders of the ruling Hamas movement, whose armed wing on Wednesday claimed a rocket attack.

"They should be tracked night

and day. We will make them see this is deterrence," he said.

A 57-year-old mother of two was killed and two other people seriously wounded in the southern Israeli town of Sderot on Wednesday in a salvo of Palestinian rocket attacks fired from the Gaza Strip.

Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz vowed that the militants would "pay a heavy price" after talks with army top brass late Wednesday.

"We will move against those who are involved in the firing of rockets, starting from their leaders and down to the last of their terrorists," he said.

Militants affiliated with the Palestinians' ruling Hamas group and Islamic Jihad both claimed

responsibility for the fatal Sderot attack, calling it retaliation for 19 civilians killed by Israeli shelling last week in the Gaza town of Beit Hanoun.

"The occupation hasn't stopped attacking Palestinians before or after Beit Hanoun, so we say resistance is a right of Palestinians," Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said.

The deadly homemade rocket exploded 150 yards from the home of Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz in Sderot. The town of 20,000 is a favourite target of the militants because it is less than a mile from the Gaza fence. But Wednesday's attack was the first deadly strike there since the Gaza Strip evacuation last year.

The rocket badly wounded a

member of the minister's security detail. Another rocket fired later at Sderot seriously wounded a teenager, the rescue service said.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who is at a meeting of Jewish leaders in Los Angeles, talked to Peretz and generals before the meeting, said his spokeswoman Miri Eisin.

"The operations in Gaza will continue without letup," Olmert told reporters.

Another senior member of the Cabinet, Public Security Minister Avi Dichter, said Israel must expand its operations to bring halt rocket fire, "whether that means a ground operation, an air operation or other special operations."



PHOTO: AFP

An Indonesian firefighter vessel sprays water to douse a fire onboard a transport ferry in Cilegon, Banten province yesterday. The ferry, which was transporting 144 passengers and 55 vehicles from Lampung to Merak, caught fire due to engine problems and incident left the ferry and all 55 vehicles burnt out, but all the passengers survived.

# Climate change worsening biodiversity crisis: UN

AFP, Nairobi

Climate change is having an alarming impact on whales, dolphins, turtles and birds and other rare species that migrate over long distances, the UN Environment Programme said yesterday.

Rising temperatures are already having a dramatic effect on many of these species' food, habitat, health and reproduction, Unep said in a report coinciding with UN talks on climate change in the Kenyan capital.

Achim Steiner, executive director of Unep, said evidence was mounting that when a migratory species dwindled or an exotic species

showed up in places where previously it was absent, global warming was to blame.

"The consequences of habitat change — changes in temperature, food — will, and is already beginning to, fundamentally affect the ability of species to survive," Steiner said.

"If people in one part of the world don't have a species there, the cause for its disappearance may well be at the other end of the world."

The species at risk include the North Atlantic right whale, whose main food supply, plankton, is declining because of a shift in ocean currents, according to the document, compiled by Unep's Convention on Migratory Species

(CMS) with help from Britain's Department of the Environment.

The range of white-beaked dolphins is reducing because it follows its prey and cannot adapt to warmer waters.

"Global warming may engender algal blooms and contribute to epizootics," or outbreaks of disease among animals, Unep warned.

"Mass die-offs of marine mammals have increased, and where the cause has been viral, environmental factors have contributed to the outbreaks or reduced the ability of the animals to fend off the illnesses."



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinians inspect a damaged house destroyed by an overnight Israeli airstrike on the northern Gaza Strip refugee camp of Jabalia yesterday.

## Debate boils over Iraq as Bush demands policy review

AFP, Washington

The United States said Wednesday it had launched a nuts and bolts review of policy in Iraq, as lawmakers angry at deepening anarchy in the country roasted the top US general in the Middle East.

Debate over the US entanglement in Iraq reached new heights one week after US voters punished congressional Republicans over the conflict, which has killed more than 2,800 US troops and thousands of Iraqi civilians.

The White House said President George W. Bush formally ordered disparate reviews from his national security agencies and government departments of US strategy in Iraq to be gathered in a single, comprehensive internal report following a

string of meetings with top advisors.

"For many weeks we have been doing a series of reviews, fairly discreetly," national security advisor Stephen Hadley told reporters aboard Air Force One as Bush flew to Asia.

Bush "thought it was high time that these reviews be brought together and put in an integrated form so he can get a look at it and begin getting in his own mind what the way forward needs to be in Iraq," Hadley said.

The internal review would not conflict with the Iraq Study Group, a panel of veteran Washington power brokers expected to deliver its eagerly awaited report on the way forward in Iraq within weeks, Hadley said.