

# Chirac slams Iraq war as boost to terrorism

**AFP, Paris**

French President Jacques Chirac on Friday unleashed a torrent of criticism against the US-led war in Iraq, saying the conflict, which he fiercely opposed, had boosted the spread of terrorism.

In a wide-ranging New Year's foreign policy speech, Chirac fired a broadside at what he called Washington's "adventure" in the Middle Eastern country, torn by sectarian strife three years after the invasion.

"As France had foreseen and feared, the war in Iraq has sparked upheavals that have yet to show their full effects," Chirac told the French diplomatic corps gathered in Paris.

He said the conflict, which the United States still describes as part of the "war on terror" it launched in 2001 following the September 11 attacks, had "offered terrorism a new field for expansion."

Chirac said it had "exacerbated the divisions between communities and threatened the very integrity of

Iraq". "It undermined the stability of the entire region, where every country now fears for its security and its independence."

As US President George W Bush prepares next week to announce a major overhaul in Washington's military strategy in Iraq, Chirac said "the priority, more than ever, is to restore full sovereignty to the Iraqi people."

Although Chirac, at 74, is thought deeply unlikely to stand for a third term in France's presidential elections in April, he has delivered a string of combative New Year's speeches to defend his 12-year legacy and fight off suggestions he is a "lame-duck" president.

The French leader attacked the "pitfalls of unilateralism" in foreign affairs -- a scarcely veiled reference to Washington's decision to launch the Iraq war without United Nations backing.

Chirac said France looked forward to the emergence of a "multipolar" world, as China, India and Brazil take on "the status of global powers", with influence

shared between the old and new giants.

He predicted their "rise will mark the end of the centuries long, undivided Western domination of the world", and hopefully address the "persistence of extreme poverty in a world growing ever richer" - "a moral scandal as much as an economic absurdity and a major political threat."

Speaking of the broader tensions gripping the Middle East, Chirac made a fresh appeal to Tehran in the standoff over its nuclear programme.

Iran "is feeding the world's apprehension through its proliferation activities and the unacceptable and provocative statements of some of its leaders."

"It is up to it to restore trust through a sovereign gesture," he said, urging Iran to suspend uranium enrichment-related activities and resume talks with the international community.

The UN Security Council voted unanimously on December 23 to impose sanctions on Iran for its

refusal to suspend activities which it fears are a cover for nuclear weapons development.

Chirac also renewed a call for an international conference on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process that would "provide the security guarantees sought by both parties, without dictating the terms of a settlement."

"What still lacks is trust. It is up to the international community to kickstart the process that will allow the restoration of trust."

The French president -- who met Friday with Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora to organise details of a January 25 Paris aid conference for the war-ravaged country -- appealed to the Lebanese people to rally behind the premier and "build their future regardless of outside interference".

Siniora's authority is contested by the Lebanese opposition loyal to Syria, which was the powerbroker in its smaller neighbour for decades until its troops left the country in 2005.



Jatiya Party stages a demonstration in the city yesterday demanding withdrawal of false cases against its Chairman HM Ershad.

PHOTO: STAR

## Blair's comment on Saddam's execution next week

**AFP, London**

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Friday he will comment next week on Saddam Hussein's execution after his long silence triggered criticism from within his governing Labour Party.

Saddam's hanging on Decem-ber 30 sparked outrage among Sunni Muslims for taking place at the start of a key holiday and because of mobile phone video footage which showed he was taunted and mocked as he stood on the gallows.

"I've decided to talk about health today," Blair told reporters while touring a London heart hospital Friday, the day after returning from holidaying at the home of Bee Gees pop star Robin Gibb in Florida.

"I will talk about all those other issues next week but not today. I'll find a way to talk about it (Saddam's hanging) but not today. I want to concentrate on the NHS," the state-run National Health Service, Blair said.

Blair has come under fire from members of his own party for keeping mum on the manner of an execution that many fear will fuel the Sunni-Shiite violence gripping Iraq.

The prime minister has lost standing within his own party and across Britain for his government's decision to send troops in support of the March 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

The day Saddam was hanged, British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett said he had been "held to account" while reiterating Britain's opposition to capital punishment.

Her comments came before leaked footage emerged showing the execution to be much more chaotic than the government coverage that was initially broadcast.

Blair's deputy John Prescott said Tuesday that the way Saddam was executed was "quite deplorable", admitting his remarks might stir controversy because they were stronger than Beckett's.

Saddam, 69, was hanged in Baghdad for crimes against humanity for the killing of 148 men and boys in the Shiite village of Dujai in 1982 after an attempt was made there to assassinate him.

## 8 killed in Iraq attacks

American, 2 interpreters kidnapped

**AFP, Baghdad**

At least eight people were killed in insurgent and sectarian attacks in Iraq on Friday, including five when a series of mortars slammed into a Baghdad neighbourhood, a security official said.

Five people were killed and 15 wounded when four mortars fell into Zafaraniyah, a mixed Shia and Sunni neighbourhood in southern Baghdad, he said.

Two of the mortars fell into a commercial area in the neighbourhood, while two others hit some residential buildings.

In another attack northeast of Baghdad, three Iraqi army soldiers were killed in a roadside bomb blast.

Police Lieutenant Ali Ismail of Baquba -- the restive city northeast of Baghdad -- said the soldiers were killed when the bomb went off near their patrol.

The attack occurred near the Bala Druz area of the Diyala province, of which Baquba is the capital.

Earlier an American and his two Iraqi interpreters were kidnapped near the southern Iraqi city of Basra Friday, Basra police chief said.

"The three were kidnapped this morning from Al-Haritha area north of Basra," said Mohammed al-Mussawi.

Another police officer from Basra said the three were travelling in a black Opel car when three other cars full of gunmen "ambushed them and kidnapped them".

US embassy spokesman Louis Fintor in Baghdad said the embassy was "looking into these reports".

It was not immediately clear if the missing man was a security contractor.

Last month five Westerners -- four Americans and an Austrian -- were kidnapped from Basra and are still being held hostage.

The group of private security contractors was escorting a convoy in Safwan near Basra on behalf of Kuwaiti-based Crescent Security when the men were abducted by kidnappers wearing police uniforms.

The kidnappers released a video of the five earlier this week showing them to be in a healthy condition but asking for the release of all prisoners in American- and British-run prisons in Iraq.

Several Islamist and nationalist resistance groups operate in the country, along with illegal political militias, corrupt security force units and criminal gangs who kidnap hostages for ransom.



PHOTO: STAR

People hang effigies of US President George Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair in front of Baitul Mokarram Mosque in the city yesterday protesting the execution of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. Sylhet Division Development Action Council organised the protest.

## China's largest lake may vanish in 200 yrs

**REUTERS, Beijing**

China's largest lake, holy to Tibetans but suffering from global warming and desertification, may vanish in two centuries even as the government pledges 870 million dollars to stop it shrinking, Xinhua news agency said yesterday.

Desertification had been brought about by overgrazing around Lake Qinghai, in the remote western province of Qinghai, which is at the crossroads of several bird migration routes across Asia and is about 360 km in circumference.

Overfishing has also reduced the catch of the unusual scaleless naked carp in the lake to just 10 percent of what it was 40 years ago, Xinhua said on its Web site (www.xinhuanet.com).

Over the next 10 years the government has pledged 6.8 billion yuan to address the lake's environmental problems, Xinhua added.

"Experts predict that if it continues shrinking at its present rate, the lake, which on average today is 18 metres, could completely disappear in 200 years time," it said.

## Full-fat dairy products linked to lower weight

**REUTERS, New York**

The health-conscious often shun whole milk but a new study suggests that adults who favour full-fat dairy gain less weight over time.

Swedish researchers found that among more than 19,000 middle-aged women, those who had at least one serving of whole milk or cheese each day put on less weight over the next 9 years than women who consumed these foods less often.

The potential role of dairy foods in weight control won much attention after some recent studies suggested that milk, yoghurt and other dairy foods might help regulate body fat. However, the picture is far from clear, as other research has failed to find that dairy products benefit the waistline.

The new findings, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, are unlikely to clear up the confusion.

For one thing, only whole milk, and not low-fat milk, seemed to offer protection against weight gain. For another, the benefit was seen only among women who were normal-weight at the start of the study.

It's always possible that the associations between dairy intake and weight gain do not reflect a direct action of dairy foods at all, according to Dr Magdalena Rosell, a researcher at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm and the study's lead author.

Eating habits can be seen as a marker of overall lifestyle, and women who favored whole milk might have had other habits that

aided their weight control, Rosell told Reuters Health.

It's also possible that women who had already been gaining weight opted to drink low-fat milk -- making the milk a "marker," but not a cause, of weight gain, according to Rosell.

The findings are based on data from 19,352 women ages 40 to 55 who were surveyed about their diets, weight and other health factors at the study's outset and again 9 years later.

Women who said they had whole milk or cheese at least once a day throughout the study period were less likely to report a significant weight gain -- defined as 2 pounds or more per year.

One theory on why dairy products have been linked to lower body weight is that the calcium aids

in fat regulation, but a number of studies have refuted that notion. The new findings cast further doubt, since low-fat milk showed no positive weight effects.

It's possible, according to Rosell, that a type of fat found in dairy foods called conjugated linoleic acid, or CLA, aids in weight control.

However, she added, there's not enough evidence yet to support that idea. At this point, there's no reason, Rosell said, for people to eschew the general advice to choose low-fat dairy products, which are lower in artery-clogging saturated fats.

"From what we know today, I do not see any reasons to change that recommendation," she said.

## Libya to build statue of Saddam

BBC Online

Libya has said it will build a statue of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, executed in Baghdad on December 30.

It would show him standing on the gallows with a Libyan resistance leader who fought Italian occupation, executed in 1931, Libya's Jana news agency said.

Libya declared three days of mourning after Saddam Hussein's death and cancelled public celebrations around the Eid religious holiday.

He was sentenced to death after being convicted of crimes against humanity.

An Iraqi court handed down the sentence in November after a year-long trial over the killings of 148 Shias from the town of Dujai in the 1980s.

Iraq's prime minister hailed the execution, but it also sparked protests among Sunni communities in the country.

Correspondents say the news was met with a mixture of surprise and anger in some parts of the Arab world.

On the eve of the hanging, Libyan leader Col Muammar Gaddafi said Saddam Hussein was a prisoner of war who must be tried by Iraq's invaders, the US and Britain, according to Reuters news agency.

Flags on Libyan government buildings flew at half-mast following his death.

## Archbishop-to-be was communist collaborator: church

AFP, Warsaw

Stanislaw Wielgus, who is poised to be sworn in as Catholic archbishop of Warsaw, collaborated with Poland's hated communist-era secret police, a church investigative commission said yesterday.

"There exist numerous, important documents which show that Father Stanislaw Wielgus said he was ready to collaborate, in a conscious and secret manner, with the communist security services, and that he had begun that collaboration," the investigative commission of the Polish Roman Catholic episcopate said in a statement.

Wielgus is at the centre of a storm over his past, after Polish media in recent days published files showing that he was recruited by the Sluzba Bezpieczenstwa (SB) secret police in 1967 when he was a 28-year-old philosophy student and continued to collaborate with its agents for two decades.

Wielgus has acknowledged having met with SB agents -- particularly ahead of foreign trips, something required of all Poles at the time -- but has consistently denied any wrongdoing.

"I did not spy on anyone, and I have done no harm either in words or deeds," Wielgus said in a statement on Friday.

"I am being accused of bad intentions and bad behaviour towards the church. That is false," he said.

Wielgus, 67, is due to take office later Friday.

A leading religious academic and currently bishop of Plock in northern Poland, he was nominated last month by the Vatican to replace Cardinal Jozef Glemp.

Glemp, the Polish church and the Vatican have all stood behind him.

But the scandal is rocking Poland, where more than 90 percent of the 38.5-million-strong population profess to be Roman Catholic and where the four-decade communist regime which fell in 1989 remains a sensitive subject.

## Kids with toy guns worry Nato troops in Afghanistan

KABUL, Ap

The Nato-led force in Afghanistan has urged parents to tell their children not to play with toy guns around military patrols, warning they could be mistaken for the real thing.

The plea comes after a series of incidents in which International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers, a target of Taliban attacks, have shot and killed civilians fearing they may have been attackers about to strike.

ISAF said in a statement late Thursday that its troops had reported an increase in the number of replica or toy guns being played with by children around military patrols, which was a concern for patrol commanders.

The increase may have come after the just-ended Eid holidays, when children may have been given toy guns as presents, it said.

"Playing with them and pointing them at patrolling ISAF troops

is a dangerous practice, which could result in troops mistaking the replica weapons for real ones, and reacting to protect themselves," the statement said.

"I would urge parents to ensure that their children do not play with toy guns around patrolling troops. Some of the toy guns are very lifelike and can easily be mistaken by troops as the real thing," spokesman Major Dominic Whyte said.

ISAF, which has more than 33,000 troops from 37 countries across the country, said this week one of its biggest mistakes last year was that it killed too many civilians as it went after the Taliban and other rebels.

Around 1,000 civilians are estimated to have been killed in Taliban-linked unrest last year, including suicide and roadside bomb blasts carried out by the rebels and foreign force air and ground strikes against suspected militants.

## ROK watchdog chief arrested

AFP, Seoul

South Korean prosecutors have arrested a financial watchdog chief on suspicion of accepting bribes from a former department store owner, official South Korean media reported yesterday.

Prosecutors said they arrested Kim Jung-hoe, vice governor of the Financial Supervisory Service (FSS), in connection with allegedly accepting tens of millions of won in kickbacks from the store owner, Yonhap news agency reported.

Kim reportedly strongly denies the charge, Yonhap said.

It quoted a Seoul prosecution official as saying Kim is suspected of accepting the bribes in return for agreeing to try to influence the owner's failed bid to take over a mutual savings bank in 2001.

At the time, Kim Jung-hoe was an FSS director in charge of overseeing non-bank financial institutions, and is suspected of introducing the store owner to officials at the mutual savings bank.

Kim Heung-ju, the former owner of the Grace Department Store in Seoul, has been under investigation since November last year on charges of fraud, embezzling funds from company coffers and issuing bad cheques, Yonhap said.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal stages a demonstration in the city yesterday demanding cancellation of the election schedule and resignation of the chief adviser.