



Demonstrators wave signs during an anti-war rally in Washington on Saturday. Vietnam War protest icon Jane Fonda took the stage in her first anti-war demonstration in decades as tens of thousands massed to demand that Congress cut off funds for the Iraq war.

Abe rebukes minister for roiling US alliance

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's defence minister has been slapped down by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's office after stirring up the long alliance with the United States by criticising the Iraq war and a realignment of US forces.

Four days after calling the US decision to invade Iraq "wrong", Fumio Kyuma said Saturday that Washington was "too cocky" in pressuring Tokyo to relocate a US military base on the strategic island of Okinawa.

The US State Department lodged a protest with the Japanese embassy after Kyuma's comment on Iraq, saying it took the remark seriously as it immediately followed US President George W. Bush's State of the Union speech, Kyodo News reported.

Hours after his latest remarks about the Okinawa base, a senior government official in Tokyo expressed the prime minister's

displeasure.

"We must remember there is another player in this matter, that is the United States," the official told Japanese reporters on condition of anonymity.

"Prime Minister Abe is also worried," the official went on, referring to concerns that such remarks could hurt the Japanese-US alliance, touted in both capitals as the strongest in decades.

The official said Kyuma had been advised by the premier's right-hand man, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhiro Shiozaki, to be "careful not to send a wrong message."

The Japanese and US governments agreed last May to relocate a US marine air base to a scenic beach from a cramped urban area.

But local residents have demanded a review of the plan due to concerns over noise and safety.

In a speech Saturday in the southern prefecture of Nagasaki, Kyuma said the plan cannot be implemented

"unless the Okinawan governor says yes."

"The United States doesn't understand spadework," he added. "We've been telling (the United States), 'Please don't say things that are too cocky. Let Japan handle matters in Japan.'"

Kyuma may be asked to retract the comment because Bush badly needs support from his Pacific ally after losing control of the US Congress to the opposition Democrats, reports here said.

On Wednesday, he told the Japanese National Press Club that Bush decided to invade Iraq in 2003 on the assumption there were nuclear weapons there.

"I think that decision was wrong," he said.

Kyuma later said his remarks did not reflect the government's position -- the country has deployed troops with the US-led coalition in Iraq -- and that he was talking about how he felt when the war began.

Military sources said the Indian project would try and replicate the North American Aerospace Defence Command set up by the United States and Canada which detects and tracks threatening man-made objects in outer space.

The Indian command's charter will also include ensuring air sovereignty and air defence, they said.

"The aerospace command will be an integration of various components of the airforce, Indian satellites, radars, communications systems, fighter aircraft and helicopters," PTI quoted an unnamed airforce official as saying.

India to set up aerospace defence command

AFP, New Delhi

PARIS MEET BEGINS TODAY

Climate scientists set to serve up bad news

AFP, Paris

Hundreds of the world's top climate scientists gather in Paris today to frame a report expected to issue the bleakest assessment yet about global warming and its effects on the weather system.

On Friday, they will issue the first update in six years of the scientific evidence for global warming.

The 2001 report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was in many ways a shocker.

It delivered a jolt to politicians about the perils of fossil-fuel pollution and reduced the powerful lobby of climate-change "deniers" to a shrill, if well-funded, rump.

Sources familiar with the drafting of this year's report -- the first of three mammoth IPCC tomes to be issued this year -- say it will not offer any good news.

"It will be a confirmation of what has been said for a long time, but point to additional risks," said French climatologist Hervé Le Treut.

Over the past few years, many published studies suggest that climate change, which many had expected to kick in several decades from now, is already underway.

In alpine areas, glaciers are melting and snow cover is shrinking. The North Pole's summer icefield is a mere fraction of what it once was. Permafrost in high northerly latitudes is retreating. The oceans are becoming more acidic through absorption of carbon dioxide (CO₂).

In 2001, the IPCC said that carbon pollution from burning oil, gas and coal had helped drive atmospheric levels of CO₂ to their highest in 420,000 years.

CO₂ is the principal "greenhouse gas," a term that applies to half a dozen substances that linger invisibly in the atmosphere, trapping the Sun's heat instead of letting solar radiation bounce back into space.

Over the previous 50 years, temperatures climbed by around 0.1 C (0.2 F) per decade and most of the warming could be attributed to Man, the 2001 report said.

It predicted that by 2100, the global atmospheric temperature will have risen between 1.4 and 5.8 C (2.5-10.4 F) and sea levels by 0.09 to 0.88 metres (3.5-35 inches), depending on how much greenhouse gas is emitted.

The biggest interest in this year's report will be whether the nearly 500 scientists who make up this working group of the IPCC will amend these figures.



MELTING ARCTIC: The Arctic Ocean's pack ice is expected to disappear entirely in the coming decades and that will bring unforeseeable changes to the region, scientists fear.

First Arab Muslim to join Israeli cabinet

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli government voted Sunday to appoint an Arab Muslim to the cabinet for the first time in the history of the Jewish state, the prime minister's office said.

Ghaleb Majadreh, 53, from the centre-left Labour party becomes minister without portfolio.

A senior government source said all ministers except for the ultra-nationalist Minister of Strategic Affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, voted in favour of his appointment.

The move is largely seen as a step forward by Labour to counter Lieberman's ultra-nationalist stance against Israeli Arabs, who make up about 20 percent of Israel's population.

In 2001, Salah Tarif, a member of the Druze minority, was made minister without portfolio but he resigned shortly afterwards after being indicted on corruption charges. He was convicted in December 2003.

Lieberman has been accused of racism over his calls for the enforced transfer of Israeli Arabs and the land where the minority is concentrated in northern Israel to the West Bank.