



# The Southeast Asian Times

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## Invaders lose battle of the airwaves

From Chris Ray, in Dubai

Anglo-American aircraft may control the skies above Iraq but the invaders have lost their domination of the airwaves throughout the Middle East. In the satellite TV information war, America's CNN and Britain's BBC have been eclipsed by new Arab-owned

channels whose coverage of the invasion has helped turn Arab public opinion overwhelmingly against the war. It has also put the coalition's public relations effort on the defensive and forced Western television to follow stories and borrow footage which fuels anti-war sentiment worldwide. I am watching this information war from Dubai, the Gulf finance centre where Arabs of all nationalities come to do

business with the rest of the world. CNN and BBC World are available here round the clock. But these established players face tough competition from several Arabic-language newcomers which did not exist in the last Gulf War, when CNN made its name. In the cafes of Dubai, sometimes described as the most "pro-Western" of Arab cities, Arabic TV news of each Anglo-

American setback is greeted with satisfaction and sometimes cheering. Footage of the killing and maiming of Iraqi civilians by coalition missiles brings controlled anger. It is an historic moment: Arab families following the progress of a major war through the eyes and ears of Arab reporters whose scope and depth of coverage leave the English-language channels scrambling to

keep up. In 24-hour satellite TV coverage of this war the major Arab players are: Al Jazeera (it means Island or Peninsular). Now in its sixth year, the station is partially financed by the government of Qatar, which also hosts the US military's Central Command for the region. Abu Dhabi Television (ADTV) has played an important role as al-Jazeera in feeding crucial

footage on the Iraq war to international networks. It claims that more than 120 broadcasting networks and media organisations including CNN are picking up its exclusive live footage of the war. LBC (Lebanon Broadcasting Corp) now in alliance with the Saudi-owned, London-based daily Al Hayat. The alliance gives Al Hayat mass reach beyond its traditional elite readership.

Meanwhile Australians continue to visit and do business in Dubai and the rest of the Emirates, despite a travel advisory warning from the Department of Foreign Affairs. A trade exhibition opened in nearby Sharjah last week. The organiser was Australian Neil Baird, chairman of Baird Publications. Interviewed by Gulf News, he was scathing in his criticism of John Howard and Australia's

participation in the invasion of Iraq. "We shot ourselves in one foot by getting into a war we had no business to be in, and we shot ourselves in the other foot by issuing this travel advisory against a country (the UAE) that is very, very friendly, totally safe and secure, set in a prosperous region, and has a sophisticated business environment with good upside potential," he said.

### Australia, East Timor Treaty now in force

Darwin: Timor Sea Treaty between Australia and East Timor has become law following the exchange of notes between the two governments in Dili. The treaty provides the basis for the development of the major oil and gas deposits in the Timor Sea between Australia and East Timor. It is the fundamental document underpinning that development in the area of seabed referred to in the Treaty as the Joint Petroleum Development Area or JPDA. This includes Bayu-Undan development with

a gross value estimated at about \$A20 billion. The gas from the project will be processed in Darwin for export, providing substantial downstream benefits for Australia and, in particular, the Northern Territory. The revenue to Governments from oil and gas production in the JPDA will be shared in the proportion 90 percent East Timor, 10 percent, Australia. The Treaty also provides for the development of the Greater Sunrise reservoirs that lie partly within the JPDA.

### 13 charged after Phom Penh brothel raids

Phom Penh, March 3: Seven Vietnamese women and five Vietnamese men have been charged with using children as prostitutes. The charges follow a police raid near the capital that rescued 37 Vietnamese girls — one as young as five and another

### Balinese celebrate despite gloom

From Rob Smith

The Indonesian island of Bali has had little reason to celebrate. Terrorist bombs last October brought the tourism industry to its knees; the US-led offensive against Iraq has prompted many countries to warn their nationals not to visit Indonesia and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or Sars, has curbed travel. But Bali did celebrate this week. It was Nyepi, an event variously described as the Hindu New Year and the 'Day of Silence.' Nyepi Eve — April 1 this year — involves ritual offerings and sacrifices to evil spirits and cleaning around temples. At sunset, rituals begin to create noise and rice is sprinkled over roads and ally ways. Entire villages parade, carrying Ogoh-Ogohs — elaborate caricatures of evil spirits that are 'willed' to earth by the noise. One Ogoh-Ogoh was designed with his foot on the head of alleged Bali bomber Amrosi. Nyepi is a day for absolute silence so that the evil spirits will believe that Bali is uninhabited and move to another island. The rules of Nyepi are strictly observed. Amati Geni forbids light and fire; Amati Karya forbids physical activity; Amati Lelungan forbids travel; and Amati Lelungan forbids entertainment. Nyepi is a day for quiet contemplation and the banjar, village chiefs, ensure the rules are strictly observed. exceptions in the provision of



Among the demons at this year's Nyepi or Day of Silence was the alleged Bali bomber, Amrosi.

electricity and lighting are made for hotels. The rules enable the celebrants to turn off the fire of the five senses and any inappropriate emotions. It is a day for introspective reflection and aspiration to dharma in the next life. Nyepi is so important that

Ngurah Rai international airport and ports are closed for the day. While there were rumblings from some tourists objecting to being "confined to quarters" for Nyepi, the days leading up to it are fascinating and colourful, as is the day after when Ogoh-Ogohs are displayed on

the beach. Most tourists, however, were interested in festivities, respected their cultural value. They were more than happy for a day of enforced rest. This is the antithesis of the regular hustle and bustle of what has become overcrowded urban Bali.

### Jakarta's residents plan legal action against higher water charges

Darwin: The Jakarta Residents Forum is planning to help with a class action against the city's administration and two private water providers following a 40 percent increase in water rates. "We are inviting the people to lodge their complaints about the increase," said the forum's chairman Azas Tigor Nainggolan. The increase - approved by the Jakarta City Council - was lower than Governor Sutiyoso's proposed 45 percent. The increase was approved in response to a requested increase by the water providers. It was the third since the city administration signed an agree-

ment with two foreign investors in 1998. The first was in 1998 (20 percent) and the second was in 2001 (35 percent). A number of non-governmental organisations argue that the tariff should not have been increased before the water operators managed to significantly reduce water leakage, which is 45 percent of their total production. These included the Indonesian Consumers Organisation, the Jakarta Drinking Water Consumers Community, the Water for All Group and Community Association for Humanity and Justice



Expensive water in use against Jakarta protestors.

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