

Parlez Vous Strine?

World headlines were being made on our doorstep.

David Lange's newly-elected government took on the United States by banning nuclear warship visits, and the independence struggle in New Caledonia was growing increasingly violent.

Wellington correspondent John Coomber's coverage of the ANZUS crisis was used in the Australian press almost daily during December and January, and he was part of a trans-Tasman effort also involving Brisbane's Jamie Collins when Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen started the "Chocolate War" by banning a brand of New Zealand confectionary.

In the midst of the main drama, John still found time to file daily on the annual Trentham Yearling Sales, and to score a by-lined front page splash in the Sydney Sun with his story on Karen Soich telling of life with her former lover, "Mr Asia" Terry Clark.

The troubles in New Caledonia led to assignments there in January for Melbourne News Editor Jim Dallmeyer and, not long afterwards, for Ian Pemberton of the Sydney bureau.

Jim arrived in Noumea straight from an idyllic holiday by a lagoon in nearby Vanuatu, to find himself staying in a hotel where most of the guests were heavily armed French CRS riot police.

Jim's French was only just equal to the task of translating the diplomatic language used by Special Commissioner Edgar Pisani to outline his proposals for the future of the islands, and he was again sorely taxed the following day when he covered six news conferences — all of them in French.

His coverage of the crisis was run in many papers and one of the by-products of the week was a



AAP's Sydney bureau pieced together a "(Not So) Mixed Mean Machine" to do battle with other media and business groups in a charity swimming relay night at North Sydney Pool last November in aid of Multiple Sclerosis.

Machinists from left to right standing proudly prior to participating are — Margaret McDonald, Debra Bull, Ian Pemberton, and Paul Grigson.

For the record: no record was set — but AAP maintained a high standard of sportsmanship by letting Channel Ten win our heat.

feature on New Caledonian cricket which led the Australian's sports page and was given good runs elsewhere.

After a week's filing, Jim flew out — just three hours before major rioting broke out in the streets of Noumea. He returned home to another battle as bushfires swept across Victoria, claiming five lives. The bureau's cover of the fires was widely run around Australia.

A week after Jim left New Caledonia, French President Francois Mitterand decided to make a flying visit to the island. As soon as the announcement was made in Paris, Ian Pemberton was booked on the next available plane to Noumea.

By his own admission, Ian's French was poor even by schoolboy standards, but that was the least of his problems during his six-day stay.

"When 30,000 pro-French city residents took to the streets with the arrival of Francois Mitterand, local officials could not guarantee

the safety of foreign journalists who many thought were in the pocket of the militant native independence party," Ian recalled.

"Our solution was to don French tri-colour T-shirts which were selling at exorbitant prices but at least allowed us to melt into the crowd."

No Nukes is Good Nukes.

Perth correspondent Diana Plater was not surprised when Western Australia became the only state to elect a Nuclear Disarmament Party candidate, Jo Vallentine, to the Senate in the Federal Election.

Anti-Nuclear sentiment runs strongly in the state, where U.S. nuclear warships regularly visit Fremantle and the Cockburn Sound naval base.

Last December, 400 women from all over the country descended

on Cockburn Sound for a two-week "Peace Camp".

Diana arranged to join an "Affinity Group" for a night at the camp, which for the participants was a constant round of meetings and discussions on subjects ranging from child minding to storming the gates of the base.

While she was walking back from a 24-hour vigil at the gates with two other women, a convoy of cars drove past, filled with local youths who started yelling, swearing and throwing eggs at them.

The next day Diana witnessed a "Game of Human Volleyball" when women climbing the gates were tossed back and forth as they tackled Federal Police. Seventy women were arrested.

Diana's cover of the event was used internationally.

Games People Play.

The Australia Games in January was the biggest sports carnival in Melbourne since the 1956 Olympics, with more than 1,000 competitors taking part.

Covering the 23 sports represented was a big challenge for the AAP reporting team which included Melbourne Sports Editor Mike White and his bureau colleagues Rob Grant, Jeff Turnbull, Peter Fogarty, Mike Hedge, Mark Ryan, Rosemary Calder, Jim Dallmeyer and Sally Dusting; Adelaide's Tim Dornin and Winsor Dobbin and Trevor Robb from Sydney.

Mike says the subs on the Sydney sports desk were a great help in making our cover a success, as the Melbourne team often had to battle organisational problems at the Games.

On the Wing.

Ted Simmons of the Sydney sports desk hasn't been to the South Pole, but he's been just about everywhere else in the past five years covering Australian soccer tours for AAP.

He's filed soccer stories from the Great Wall of China to the canals of Venice on tours which have taken him to Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas.

Last November he completed

a five-week tour with the Socceroos of China, England, Scotland, Holland and Italy.

As Ted points out, none of the more popular Australian sports offer journalists the opportunity for that kind of travel itinerary.

Money market roundsman Ron Corben spent a fortnight in Hong Kong in November-December, on secondment to the Reuters finance desk.

Editor-in-Charge John Radovan was in Kuala Lumpur from late October through November as consultant to a training course for ASEAN news agency journalists, hosted by the Malaysian national agency BERNAMA.

It was made clear during John's stay in KL that AAP's growth as a national agency is regarded as a model for ASEAN agencies, particularly by BERNAMA which is closely following our lead in developing computer-based information services such as Newscan.

In fact, it was for this reason that BERNAMA persuaded the organisers of the training course to invite a consultant from AAP despite frequent offers of help from international agencies.

Craig Skehan transferred from Canberra bureau to Port Moresby in December replacing Chris Pash, who took up his appointment as Adelaide bureau chief.

One of Craig's first big stories was the dispute between PNG Government and the OK Tedi consortium over the mine's future development. His cover earned bylines in the Canberra Times, the Courier Mail and the Financial Review.

Brisbane's Jamie Collins flew to Birdsville to cover the end of marathon runner Ron Grant's midsummer jog across the Simpson Desert.

Jamie's efforts were plagued throughout by communications problems on the shaky radio-telephone link, and the last straw came when he dashed up the main street to the sauna-like public phone booth to report Grant's arrival, only to find that the town's sole policeman/air traffic controller/switchboard operator had left his post to control the crowds.

The Icebird Cometh.

Tasmanian correspondent Andrew Darby joined the newly-built Antarctic resupply vessel, Icebird, on its voyage round the Australian bases for four weeks in January and February.

His berth was the only one offered to an Australian print media journalist this season.

The ship was equipped with satellite communications including video-editing telex, but at \$12 per minute, it was a good thing the stories he filed were so well used.

Andrew sent a series of features logging the voyage through the iceberg fields, pack ice, and calls at two of Australia's stations more than 5,000km. south west of Perth.

There was also the chance discovery of a very rare iceberg coloured a translucent bottle green. But there was frustration too.

"Two days out of Hobart we heard a third hand report that Australia's only active volcano, Big Ben on Heard Island, had been seen erupting," Andrew said.

"For the next three weeks in our travels across the ocean we tried to confirm the report.

"Not only was it a decent story in its own right, if we had been able to confirm it there was every chance that we would have gone to Heard to see it."

The only people able to provide confirmation were scientists aboard a French research ship which Icebird could only communicate with on a pre-arranged radio telephone call.

"We tried about eight times to set up the call but we couldn't do it—the French weren't getting the message or weren't answering.

"Once we even rode over a call from the French ship to another vessel, asking if we could come in at the end to speak to them.

"They agreed, then at the end of the call switched off."

Eventually the sighting was reported through tediously slow international channels, and the eruption was one of the first stories Andrew wrote on his return to Hobart.