

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa greets UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at Cairo Airport Wednesday. Annan arrived from Amman, Jordan and is on the second leg of a Middle East tour that will also include Syria, Gaza and Israel. - AP/UNB photo

cials. His Mideast tour will also

take him to Syria, the Pales-

have been deadlocked since the

right-wing administration in

Israel came to power in 1996

vowing a tougher line in negoti-

Hussein's brother and heir to

vices provided to camp refugees

who fled their homes in the

1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli

wars. About 120,000 Palestini-

ans live in the two camps run by

the UN Relief and Works

Hassan and Annan talked

about ways to make Israel

comply with UN Security Coun-

cil resolutions, which urge its

withdrawal from Arab lands

captured in the 1967 Mideast

that the UN should apply the

same standards while enforcing

its resolutions, in other words

to be as firm with Israel the way

it is with Iraq," said one senior

government official who spoke

on customary condition of

"Jordan stressed the fact

Government officials said

the throne, inspected the ser-

Annan and Hassan, King

ations with the Arabs.

Agency.

The Mideast peace talks

tinian territories and Israel.

US rejects Israel's appeal to hold off new ME peace plan

WASHINGTON, Mar 19: The Clinton administration has rejected Israel's appeal to hold off a new proposal for Mideast peacemaking that would ask for a substantial Israeli pullback on the West Bank, report AP.

An emissary from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made the request Wednesday and was turned down by Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk. Indyk contended that key elements of American peace proposals already were well-known to Israel and the Palestinians, a US official said.

These include a demand that Israel agree to a sizable withdrawal on the West Bank, in the range of 12 per cent to 15 per cent, and that Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority match the phased pullback with steps designed to enhance Israel's security against terrorism.

Also, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is demanding that Israel freeze construction of new homes for Jewish residents of east Jerusalem. which Arafat would like to take over as his capital, as well as on the West Bank, where Arafat hopes to establish an independent state.

The future of Jerusalem, the issue of Palestinian statehood and borders between Israel and whatever territory the Palestinians ultimately control are to be negotiated in so-called final-status talks between the two sides.

In asking the administration to shelve public announcement of its blueprint, the Israeli government wanted to head off what could be seen as US pressure for concessions.

The request was made to Indyk by Uzi Arad, a senior adviser to Netanyahu. Arad is on a visit here with Natan Sharansky. Israel's minister for trade and industry, the US official

Indyk, a former US ambassador to Israel, told Arad there was no point sidetracking a public statement about US positions already known to both

No decision has been taken

yet by Albright and other senior administration officials on how the blueprint will be pre-

AFP adds: Jordan's King Hussein on Wednesday urged the United States not to allow the Middle East peace process to wither away, but to "put the process back on the right track.

"It is very important for the future of our region to seize the opportunity and not permit the conditions to deteriorate," said the Jordanian monarch following a meeting with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Albright said Washington was "dedicated to making the process move forward. We are looking at how to proceed and looking at the pacing in terms of the ideas that we have presented to the parties." But she reiterated that it was

up to the leaders in the region to "make the hard decisions" — a statement some interpret as code for Washington's refusal to take the reins in the peace process.

China's legislature closed with appeals to unity

BEIJING, Mar 19: With a new Cabinet in place and policies to streamline the government and revamp state industries set, Chinese leaders closed the annual session of the legislature Thursday with appeals to unity. reports AP.

The top two Communist Party members, resident Jiang Zemin and Li Peng, the legislature's new head, both addressed the closing session, underscor-ing the largely powerless body's showcase role in the ritualised. carefully scripted world of Chinese public politics.

During the 15-day National People's Congress session, legislators approved pragmatic re-former Zhu Rongji as premier and appointed a Cabinet stacked with technocrats to help him shakeup the bureaucracy, cure insolvent state industries, rescue bankrupt state banks and prevent unrest among millions of laid-off

workers. An insight into how Zhu expects to tackle these challenges was expected later Thursday, when he holds his first news conference as premier. In a break with his predecessor, Li Peng, Zhu's post-Congress news conference would be broadcast

But given this year's high stakes, party leaders left little to chance. They arranged most government appointments at a closed-door meeting held in advance of the Congress. Delegates were not given any choice over the more than 40 state and government appointments but had to rubber-stamp the party lead-

ers' decisions. Delegates, more than 70 per cent of whom are party members, managed a few displays of slight independence, approving a few appointments by less than the usually overwhelming mar-

Legislators showed their displeasure with the government's fight against spreading crime and pervasive official corruptions. An astounding 45 per cent of delegates cast no votes or abstained in approving the top prosecutor's work re-

Jiang, sitting on the dais of the Great Hall of the People's main assembly room, looked on grimly as the vote tally came

US has key role in ME peace process: Annan

AMMAN, Jordan, Mar 19: The United States has the key mediating role in the Middle East peace process, the UN chief said in urging Palestinians and Israelis to work with American officials for a permanent settlement, reports AP.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's praise of the US effort came on the same day British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook wrapped up a visit to the region in a bid to expand Europe's role in the peace process.

Annan didn't comment Wednesday on the European initiative.

"The mediator for the Palestinian-Israeli issue is the United States, and I support very fully their efforts, and I encourage the parties to work energetically and constructively with them in search for a durable peace," said Annan, who reiterated that he did not plan to step in as mediator.

Annan, who arrived a day earlier in Jordan, toured two Palestinian refugee camps with Crown Prince Hassan in Amman, where he chatted with residents under freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall. Annan later flew to Cairo for

meetings with Egyptian offi-

Indian PMs since ındependence NEW DELHI, March 19: List

of Indian Prime Ministers since independence: Jawaharlal Nehru: Congress Party, 15 August, 1947 to 27 May, 1964 (6,131 days)

Gulzari Lal Nanda: Congress 27 May, 1964 to 9 June, 1964 (caretaker prime minister) Lal Bahadur Shastri: Congress 9 June, 1964 to 11

January, 1986 Gulzari Lal Nanda: Congress 11 January, 1966 to 24 January, 1966 (caretaker prime minister) Indira Gandhi: Congress 24 January, 1966 to 24 March.

Morarji Desai: Janata Party 24 March, 1977 to 28 July, 1979 Charan Singh: Janata Party 28 July 1979 to 14 January.

Indira Gandhi: Congress 14 January, 1980 to 31 October,

Rajiv Gandhi: Congress 31 October, 1984 to 1 December, VP Singh: Janata Dal 2 De-

cember, 1989 to 7 November, Chandra Shekhar: Socialist

party 10 November, 1990 to 21 June. 1991 PV Narasimha Rao:

Congress 21 June, 1991 to 16 May, 1996 Atal Behari Vajpayee: Hindu

Nationalist 16 May, 1996 to 28 May, 1996 (13 days) HD Deve Gowda: United

Front Coalition 1 June, 1996 to 11 April, 1997 (to April 20 as caretaker prime minister) Inder Kumar Gujral: United Front coalition 20 April 1997 to

28 November 1998 (continued as caretaker prime minister) Atal Behari Vajpayee: Hindu Nationalist coalition sworn in March 19, 1998, reports AFP.

Pakistan may review peaceful nuclear policy

ISLAMABAD, Mar 19: Pakistan said today it could review its declared peaceful nuclear policy in response to India's plan to keep its option open to develop nuclear weapons, reports Reuter.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said the policy announced on Wednesday by the New Indian ruling coalition, led by the Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had created a "fearsome situation". "In this situation, if need arises, we shall review our policy to safeguard our sovereignty, territorial integrity and national interests," the spokesman said.

The spokesman called the new Indian policy "a dangerous development" for South Asia and the world and said: "the open threat to exercise nuclear option thus creates a fearsome situation.

"It multiplies manifold the threat to Pakistan's security besides dealing a grievous blow to global and regional efforts at nuclear non-proliferation."

'Vajpayee a mask, LK Advani real face of BJP'

NEW DELHI, Mar 19: The hard-liners in Atal Bihari Vajpayee's party may question his credentials, but they had to fall back on his moderate image to come to power, reports AP.

The 73-year-old Vajpayee. sworn in Thursday as India's 16th prime minister, has more than four decades of political experience and is known as a centrist among rightists. In the months before the last elections, a party official was quoted as describing Vajpayee as a mask and LK Advani, the conservative party president, as the real face of the BJP.

Though the official later denied having made it, the comment was widely believed to reflect the sentiments of some party stalwarts.

The BJP won the most seats in the 545-member lower house of parliament during elections held last month and early this month. But it failed to win a majority, and must govern with partners. Vajpayee must submit to a vote of confidence within 10 days. The BJP had been unable to

find partners after winning the most seats in 1996 elections. and Vajpayee was able to hold onto the prime minister's seat

For the sake of coalition politics this time, the party shelved controversial policies, such as its pledge to build a Hindu temple at the site where its supporters tore down a mosque five years ago.

Vajpayee was vocal in condemning the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque. The razing set off months of Hindu-Muslim



A B Vajpayee

rioting across India that killed 2.000 people.

During Vajpayee's tenure as foreign minister in a coalition government from 1977-79, India's often strained relations with Pakistan, its officially Islamic neighbour, were at their warmest and Vajpayee traveled widely to Muslim countries.

Born Dec. 24, 1924, Vajpayee was one of seven children of a provincial school teacher in the central Indian town of Gwalior.

He abandoned a career in journalism at 28 to become involved in politics, joining the Hindu revivalist movement that had emerged as a political force in opposition to the Congress party's agreement to the creation of Pakistan at the time of independence from Britain in 1947

Vajpayee shot into political limelight in early 1950s when India's first prime minister. Jawaharlal Nehru of Congress, praised his powerful oratory. Nehru "must have seen something in me." Vajpayee said in a recent television in-

He entered parliament in 1957, and quickly made a reputation as an orator and racon-

terview.

US sending 39 fighters, bombers to Bahrain

WASHINGTON, Mar 19: The United States is sending a fresh air expeditionary force of 39 fighters and bombers to Bahrain next week to relieve the air forces already there. Pentagon sources said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The deployment would be the first major rotation of the US air forces massed in the Gulf against Iraq since last Novem-

The arriving air expedi-tionary wing will come from mountain home air force base in Idaho and was expected to begin arriving Monday in Bahrain, a Pentagon source

The deployment was scheduled to be completed March 27. Originally it was scheduled to begin Friday, but was the starting date was put back, the source said.

It consists of 12 F-15C fighters, 12 F-15E fighter bombers, 12 F-16CJ fighters, three B-1 bombers, and four KC-135 air refueling aircraft from the 366th air expeditionary wing, the source said

They will replace a force of two dozen F-16S, 12-15CS, three B-1 bombers and four KC-135 tanker planes from the which was deployed to Bahrain in November.

The only difference is that this time the force will include F-15ES, the only fighter capable of dropping 5,000 pound bunker busting bombs

It is the first time the air force has replaced one air expeditionary force with another in the Gulf, and signals a US intention to maintain its current force levels in the region.

Jackson goes for shopping in disguise!

MUNICH, Germany, Mar 19: Pop superstar Michael Jackson went out shopping in Munich disguised as an Arab woman to avoid being recognised, the manager of one of the city's biggest toys stores said, reports

Accompanied by his son Prince Michael, Jackson used the ploy Wednesday to escape being mobbed by fans waiting outside his hotel. The star is currently in Munich to show support for his friend and concert organiser Marcel Avram who is due to go to prison on 347th air expeditionary wing. April I for tax fraud.

anonymity.

EU hails Chiluba's decision: The European Union on Wednesday welcome Zambian President Frederick Chiluba's decision to lift the state of emergency imposed shortly after a coup attempt last October, AFP says

The EU "notes that all the detainees (arrested in connection to the coup attempt) have either been charged or released, and welcomes the resumption of normal legal process," said foreign office minister Tony Lloyd of Britain, which holds the rotating EU chair. In recent weeks, 82 people including former president Kenneth Kaunda have been formally charged in connection with the coup attempt.

Confce on acid rain opens in Japan: Asian nations are trying to hammer out an agreement in a international conference opening Thursday to begin monitoring acid rain in the region, AP says from Tokyo. The agreement would set up a uniform monitoring method

that will last for two years starting in April, said Japanese Environment Agency official Shuji Iitoyo. It is unclear whether all the nations will sign the agreement before the conference in Yokohama, near Tokyo, ends Friday, he said.

Vatican sends envoy Cuba: A senior Vatican official has gone to Cuba to meet with local church and charity officials to help coordinate assistance programs for Cubans, the Vatican said Wednesday, AP reports from Vatican city. Pope John Paul II's historic visit to Cuba in January

prompted Catholic charities, including Caritas, to pledge

greater assistance to the country, Vatican Radio said. Monsignor Paul Josef Cordes traveled to Cuba several days ago to guide efforts by the church to provide better health services. food aid and social assistance to Cubans. Norway, Canada asked to help Algeria: Strife-torn Algeria has made an unusual invitation to Norway

and Canada to provide humanitarian assistance, officials said on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Ottawa. Algeria has kept a tight limit on missions by foreign dignitaries and aid workers during its struggle with Islamic militants since it cancelled general elections in 1992 in which the

Rebels kill 7 in Colombia: Leftists rebels have massacred at least seven peasants and kidnapped three others in the southern Colombian town of Puerto Asis,

Islamists held a commanding lead.

officials said Wednesday, AFP reports from Bogota. All 10 victims were grabbed from the town under "very bizarre" circumstances, "apparently by members of the Communist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Interior Minister Alfronso Lopez said.

Drought threatens crop in Vietnam: Rice and cash crops in northern and central Vietnam will be affected by falling water levels in rivers, streams and ponds, Vietnamese

media reported Thursday, AP reports from Hanoi. The official Vietnam News Agency estimates that water levels are about 10 per cent to 20 per cent lower than average in northern provinces and about 20 per cent to 30 per cent lower in central provinces.

Clinton invites Prodi to visit US: President Bill Clinton has invited Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi for an official visit to Washington in May, the White House announced Wednesday, AFP reports from Las

Prodi has accepted the invitation and will spend May 5-7 in Washington and May 7-8 in Chicago, said a statement issued Evada where Clinton was travelling. The two leaders will discuss a wide range of issues from bilateral cooperation to transatlantic and global developments the statement said.

SA approves arms sale to Algeria: South Africa has approved a 173-million-rand (35 million US dollars) arms sale to Algeria. South African Press Association (SAPA) reported on Wednesday, Xinhua says from

Johannesburg. SAPA quoted National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC) Chairman, Kader Asmal as telling the parliament that the arms in the contract included both sensitive and non sensitive equipment. He said the deal was first approved by the NCACC, but because of the sensitivity of the issue it was submitted to the cabinet for final decision.

United Front, Congress ridicule agenda of BJP NEW DELHI, Mar 19: The policy pursued so far.

yesterday ridiculed the national agenda of BJP and its allies saying they did not have the mandate to review the constitution and described the docu-

ment as a "hoax", reports PTI. Reacting to the agenda, a Congress poohpoohed the BJPled combine's commitment to review the constitution as it did not enjoy two-thirds majority to undertake such an exercise.

Calling the document a 'rehash' of BJP's election manifesto, Congress spokesman VN Gadgil said his party will oppose any constitutional amendment for a presidential form of government and expressed apprehension that there may be "a hidden agenda" on core issues like Hindutva. Ayodhya, article 370 and uniform civil code.

The left parties charged BJP and allies with trying to subvert the Constitution without a mandate to tamper with it and described the document as a hoax to hoodwink people. While CPI leader A Raja ac-

cused BJP of wanting to "impose a monolithic theocratic sociopolitical order," the CPI-M in a statement blamed BJP for not accepting secularism as a basic feature of the constitution.

Both the parties criticised the promise of exercising the nuclear option as "wrong and dangerous" saying it went against the country's foreign

United Front UF and Congress Janata Dal president Shared Yadav described the document as "vague" and said it was a bunch of false propaganda.

Another PTI reports says Congress president Sonia Gandhi yesterday reviewed party's state-wise performance in Lok Sabha elections with the AICC office-bearers and later individually with party general secretaries. During her first interaction

with the office-bearers after she took over as Congress president on Saturday replacing Sitaram Kesri, Sonia Gandhi also discussed organisational matters with them. Party sources said she also discussed the future strategy to

hya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Mizoram where assembly elections are due this year. In an unusual step. Sonia Gandhi preferred to walk across from her ten Janpath residence to the AICC headquarters to at-

tend the meeting which lasted

be adopted by the party in Mad-

nearly three and a half hours. She was greeted by the officebearers and staff of the AICC at the main gate. She also met staff separately to discuss their problems.

Vice President Jitendra Prasad and General Secretaries... Tariq Anwar, RK Dhawan, Ghulan Mabi Azad, Oscar Fernandes and Madhavrao Scindia — were present during the meeting.

New Indian govt to try to solve bilateral problems, hopes Sharif

ISLAMABAD, Mar 19: Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif Wednesday hoped that the new Indian government would make serious effort to solve all bilateral problems but refused to comment on BJP's declared nuclear policy, reports

We want to solve our problems with India through bilateral negotiations and I hope the new government in New Delhi would make serious effort towards that direction. Sharif told newspersons here. Stressing that a serious ef-

engineering recent bomb blasts in Pakistan and said such things have to stop to maintain normalcy. the blasts.

problems, he accused India of

economic conference, refused to comment on nuclear policy of about it in press and I don't

Meanwhile, Pakistan Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan was quoted by a report from Qatar's capital, Doha, as saying that Islamabad would watch the situation carefully.

fort was needed from both the sides for solving all bilateral

India has denied any role in Sharif, who was speaking after inaugurating second SAARC

I have been only reading want to comment on the basis of press reports, he quipped.

New Chinese PM says No reassessment of Tiananmen crackdown

BEIJING, Mar 19: New Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji ruled out Thursday any re-evaluation of the military assault on democracy demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989, reports AP. Zhu, in response to a re-

squelch foreign media speculation that he differed with other Communist Party leaders over the crackdown that killed hundreds and jailed thousands. "On this matter the whole party is entirely to one mind,"

porter's question, sought to

Zhu said in his first news conference since being appointed premier Tuesday. The massive protests in Beijing and other cities and the ensuing crackdown remain the most contentious issues in Chinese politics of the past decade.

It fractured the party and still

angers people, especially in the politically minded capital. Zhu's response matched his reputation as a pragmatic reformer focused on the economy and dampened hopes that his tolerance for capitalist financial methods would extend to

politics. To justify the armed quelling of the peaceful protests, Chinese leaders termed the demonstrations "a counterrevolutionary rebellion." They have never provided a full

accounting of the decision to launch a crackdown nor of the

dead, wounded or arrested. Although Zhu used a more moderate term — "political disturbances — to refer to the protests, he made it clear the official verdict would stand.

"Over the past years, meetings and conferences have already drawn a correct conclusion on this matter, and this conclusion cannot be changed,"

Zhu said. Mayor of Shanghai at the time. Zhu managed to end demonstrations without violence — source of much of the speculation he was at odds with Beijing. But Zhu told reporters he had been "completely in line with the central government."

His predecessor as premier, Li Peng, was a high-profile supporter of the crackdown. Li's still powerful role in the leadership will make any re-evalua-

tion unlikely. The crackdown remains an emotive issue in China's newly reacquired territory of Hong Kong. Thousands of people gather to commemorate anniversaries of the June 3-4 assault, and protests demanding a reassessment dog visiting Chi-

Zhu said he was prepared to face protests when he next visits the territory.

nese leaders.

Iraqi women demonstrate against UN trade sanctions which they say are harming the health of their children, in Baghdad Wednesday. The gathering also marked the fourth symbolic funeral for 36 children as coffins were carried on cars and paraded with the crowds of angry demonstrators. - AP/UNB photo

TB defies wonder strategies, remains biggest killer in India

NEW DELHI, Mar 19: India's outside her slum. worldwide and has even been used in New York city to prevent an tuberculosis epidemic. But an estimated 750,000 people still die from the disease each year in India, reports AP. The reason is easy to see in a

shanty of 50,000 people in the southern fringe of the federal capital, New Delhi. For six-year-old TB patient, Tabassum, breaking a cycle of three doses a week for anything

less than six months can be fa-

With so much going on in her family of 12 - parents, brothers and cousins, crowded into two rooms separated from the next hut by a two-feet-wide alley - it would be easy to forget medication for Tabassum, who uses one name only.

So now doctors don't give medicines to TB patients anymore, but insist that patients like Tabassum walk to the nearest free clinic three times a week where staff feed her tablets. For Tabassum, help is about a kilometer (half mile)

Nearly one billion more

people will become infected and 70 million will die by the year 2020 unless urgent action is taken, the World Health Organization said in a statement to coincide with a three-day meeting of international public health and medical experts in

London which ends Thursday. India is the most populous of the 22 countries the World Health Organisation is targeting in a campaign to rid the world of TB. More than half the world's TB cases are found in

"There are good drugs for TB and 95 per cent cure is possible, but people don't take medicines properly," says Dr Thomas R Frieden, head of World Health Organization's TB program in

Not completing the prescribed drug course increases the risk not just for the patient, but for the community too, doctors say. The TB germs become drug resistant, and the new strain then infects other people. TB spreads though the

air, like the common cold. So poorly-managed TB programmes threaten the world with a new epidemic as thousands get the disease for which conventional drugs don't work.

"TB never went away, global attention went away," says Frieden. Experts complain that attention has shifted instead to more publicized diseases like AIDS, while other diseases kill more people. Many AIDS patients, whose

immune systems are ravaged,

die of TB. TB germs spread by

coughing and sneezing prompt a toxic reaction in victims, usually in the lungs but sometimes in other tissue. India's strategy is sound and has been used effectively in nearly 100 other countries, but the numbers alone are stagger-

ing in India, with its population

of nearly 1 billion. Frieden said

in an interview. When doctors in New York city began using the system of administering anti-TB medicines under supervision in the early nineties, the number

of patients dropped from 4,000,