

International

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, reports AP.

over as his capital, as well as on the West Bank, where Arafat hopes to establish an independent state.

yet by Albright and other senior administration officials on how the blueprint will be presented.

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.

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.

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."



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.

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.

His Mideast tour will also take him to Syria, the Palestinian territories and Israel.

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."

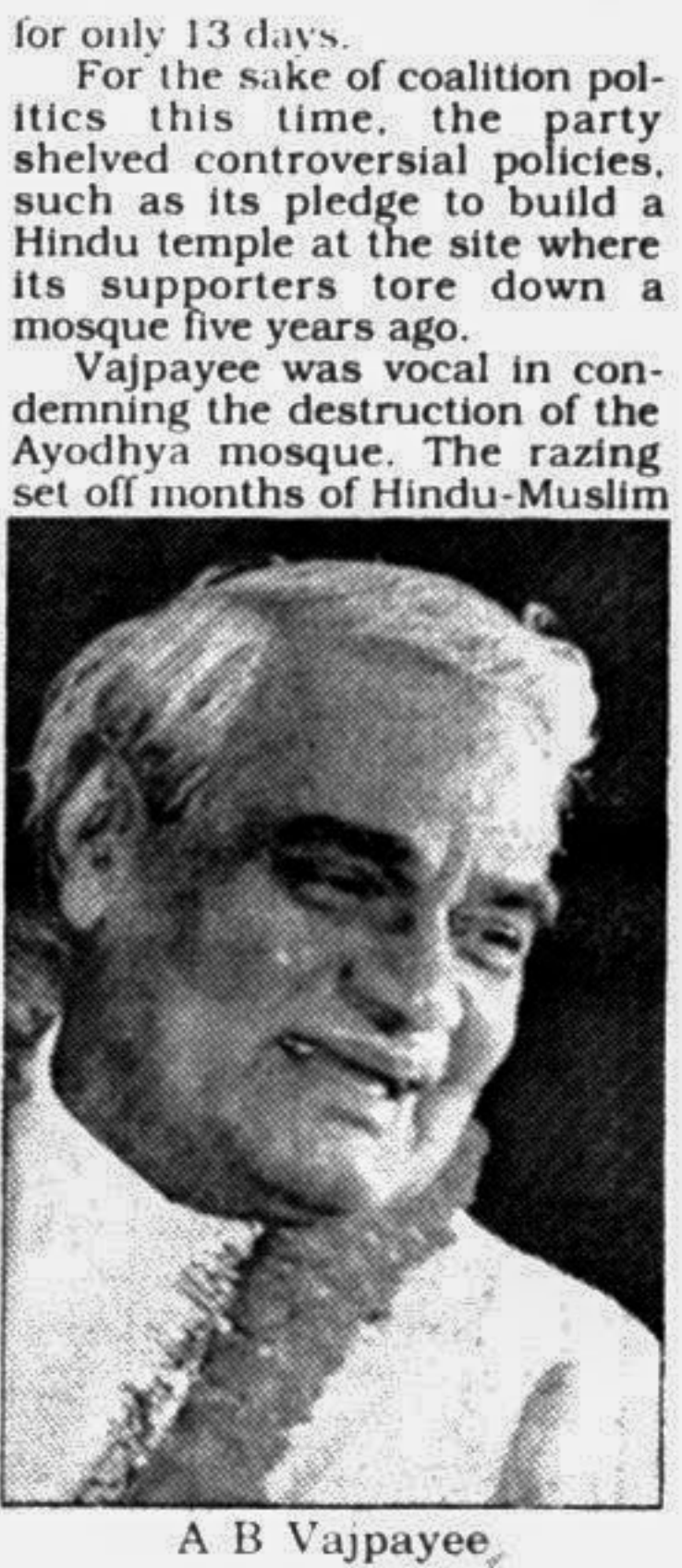
Government officials said Hassan and Annan talked about ways to make Israel comply with UN Security Council resolutions, which urge its withdrawal from Arab lands captured in the 1967 Mideast war.

Indian PMs since independence

- 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)

'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.



rioting across India that killed 2,000 people.

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.

Peng, Zhu's post-Congress news conference would be broadcast live.

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

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 report.

EU hails Chiluba's decision

The European Union on Wednesday welcomed Zambia's President Frederick Chiluba's decision to lift the state of emergency imposed shortly after a coup attempt last October, AFP says from London.

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."

Confce on acid rain opens in Japan

Asian nations are trying to hammer out an agreement in an 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 Itoyo.

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.

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, Reuters 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 Islamists held a commanding lead.

Rebels kill 7 in Colombia

Leftist rebels have massacred at least seven peasants and kidnapped three others in the southern Colombian town of Puerto Asis, 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 Alfonso 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 Vegas.

Prodi has accepted the invitation and will spend May 5-7 in Washington and May 7-8 in Chicago, said a statement issued by the White House.

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.

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 Reuters.

United Front, Congress ridicule agenda of BJP

NEW DELHI, Mar 19: The United Front and Congress yesterday ridiculed the national agenda of BJP and its allies saying they did not have the mandate to review the constitution and described the document as a "hoax", reports PTI.

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 PTI.

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.

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 toy stores said, reports AFP.

Accompanied by his son Prince Michael, Jackson used the ploy Wednesday to escape being mobbed by fans waiting outside his hotel.



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.

TB defies wonder strategies, remains biggest killer in India

NEW DELHI, Mar 19: India's strategy to combat tuberculosis is held as a model 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.

air, like the common cold.

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 Asia.