BUILFILY

US may sell 'Amraam' to Bahrain:
The United States said on Monday it had formally offered to sell 26 sophisticated "Amraam" air-to-air missiles along with associated equipment and training to Bahrain for 110 million dollars, Reuter reports from Washington.

The package was offered to Bahrain by Defence Secretary William Cohen last week during a visit to the Gulf but no

specifics were given at the time.

Japan to give Indonesia \$31m: Japan said yesterday it will give 31 million dollars to help Indonesia conduct parliamentary elections this summer in the first poll since former President Suharto resigned amid rioting last May. AP reports from Tokyo.

In a statement, the Foreign Affairs Ministry said the elections "have an important meaning as the basis for realising political stability and economic recovery." The money will go to a UN group overseeing the elections, which are scheduled for June 7, the ministry said.

African ministers' meet in US: Seeking to deepen relations with African nations, the Clinton administration will bring together government ministers from 46 nations for three days of meetings starting Tuesday. AP

reports from Washington. Administration officials call the gathering historic and say it underscores a new US commitment to Africa that President Bill Clinton and several Cabinet members have sought to reinforce through many visits to the continent. The ministers will discuss such issues as democracy building, conflict resolution, trade, investment, agriculture and AIDS. There will also be informal contacts on wars and other disputes afflicting the continent in Sierra Leone, Congo, Angola and Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Cambodia seeks Indonesia's help: Cambodia wants help from Indonesia in two fields where it had plenty of experience: Riot control and temple restoration, AP

reports from Jakarta. On a visit to Indonesia, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen also appealed Tuesday for Indonesian expertise in Developing rubber plantations as well as the oil, tourism and cigarette industries. In a two-hour meeting, Hun Sen asked Indonesian President B J Habibie for anti-riot training for the Cambodian police, who are novices in the field compared to their Îndonesian counterparts.

19 bodies recovered in E Java: Search teams have found 19 bodies following the sinking of a wooden tour boat in a reservoir in Ngawi, East Java, a report said yesterday, AFP says from Jakarta.

The boat, allowed to carry a maximum 15 people, had 44 on board when it sank after springing a leak in the middle of the Pondok Bringin Reservoir in Ngawi Sunday, the Kompas Daily

Twenty-four people, including the boat's crew, swam to safety and 19 bodies were recovered, the daily said, adding the search continued for one person still missing.

Quake hits Japan: A fairly strong earthquake jolted central Japan on Tuesday, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, AP reports from

The quake, with a preliminary magnitude of 5.1, hit the city of Suzuka and its neighboring areas at 4:43 pm (0743 GMT), the Central Meteorological Agency said. The quake was centered at about 10 kilometers (6 miles) underground near Suzuka. 310 kilometers (186 miles) southwest of Tokyo.

Arafat yet to decide on independence declaration

OSLO, Mar 16: Yasser Arafat said Monday it was still undecided whether an independent Palestinian state would be declared on May 4, even when key players in the Middle East peace process warn that such a step could be a grave threat to peace. reports AP.

This decision cannot be made until we have completed our consultations. This is a very important and basic issue for the Palestinian people," Arafat said at a news conference in Norway's capital, where the Oslo Accords that paved the way for the Middle East peace process were worked out.

Arafat claims the accords allow declaration of a Palestinian state after a five-year interim period that ends on May 4. He is on a wide-ranging tour

to assess support for his view. In Oslo, he met Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik and Foreign Minister Knut Volleback in the same Government House room where the Oslo accords between Palestinians and Israel were finalised in August

Even though Bondevik was not part of that effort, Norway has remained active in the peace process. Bondevik said he urged

1993 after months of secret

Arafat to postpone the date for independence. He said such an announcement just ahead of Israel's May 17 national elections could strengthen opponents of the peace process in Israel.

Nonetheless, Bondevik said he supports eventual indepen-The Palestinians should be

the full masters on their own land. We hope negotiations will result in an agreement that results in an independent Palestinian state", said Bondevik. Bondevik also announced that Norway would recognise

down under the right-wing gov-

The peace process has bogged ernment of Israeli Prime Min-

an independent Palestinian

ister Benjamin Netanyahu. Arafat claimed the Palestinians are still working to find a settlement.

"The problem is with the Israeli government," Arafat said. Arafat has been a frequent visitor to Oslo, where he shared the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize with the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and then-Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Confidence motion Janata Dal to vote against Rabri Devi

NEW DELHI, Mar 16: Janata Dal will vote against motion of confidence to be moved by Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi in the State Assembly on

Wednesday. The decision was taken at a meeting of the party here. Dal president Sharad Yadav told

Senior Dal leader Ram Vilas Paswan criticised the central leadership for its attitude towards Bihar and said the state unit of the party will question the senior leaders in this regard

especially on their stand on

imposition of central rule. The Bihar unit of the party with 17 MLAs in the 324-member house, will oppose the confidence motion, he told reporters here.

Paswan, who had voted in favour of central rule in the Lok Sabha, said it was unfortunate that several senior party leaders who demanded dismissal of Rabri government, had voted against the presidential promulgation.

Many of them even met President K R Narayanan twice to demand imposition of central rule, he said. The attitude of other leaders like I K Gujral, S R Bommai and Jaipal Reddy was known as they were soft to Laloo Prasad Yadav since beginning. Paswan said.

panel and said other members would be appointed later. The investigation was called after press reports in the last

damage from Chinese N-spying few weeks said China had obtained information from US National Laboratories in Los Alamos, New Mexico, in the mid-1980s that would help it

make compact nuclear war-

heads. President Bill Clinton defended his China policy in an interview on a Los Angeles radio talks show.

"I believe that the best policy with China is an honest one." Clinton said, "Where it's in our interest and theirs, we should work together for world pace and for economic prosperity and where we have honest differences, we ought to state

Republican members of Congress accuse the Democratic Clinton administration of failing to react quickly to prevent further damage to national security after learning of the leak in 1996, saying Clinton did not want to upset ties with China. China has denied the allega-

tions describing them as a 'farce. Premier Zhu Rongiji on

Monday called them a tale from the Arabian Nights. He said he was prepared for a hostile reception when he visits Washington in April and made clear he would not duck a fight over sensitive political issues.

Asked about Zhu's denials. Clinton's spokesman Joe Lockhart said. "Well, that's his view." He said the issue would come up during Zhu's visit to Washington in April.

NATO air strike threatened

Pressure mounts on Milosevic as Albanians agree to sign accord

PARIS, Mar 16: Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic faced renewed international pressure today after ethnic Albanian delegates to Kosovo peace talks agreed to sign an autonomy deal for the embattled Serbian province, reports Reuter.

Milosevic's 'representatives at the renewed talks, apparently taken aback by the Albanian move, showed no sign they were softening their opposition to the deal despite stern warnings from leaders of the big na-

tion Contact Group. But as allied officials hailed the first breakthrough in the negotiations and warned Yugoslavia that time was running out, fighting raged on the ground in Kosovo.

Serb security forces poured rocket and mortar fire onto suspected rebel positions along a 15-km front in northern Kosovo in the latest outbreak of

clashes that have been flaring sporadically for about three

French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, chairing the talks with his British counterpart Robin Cook, said in Paris that Belgrade now had to choose between isolation and peace.

"The Yugoslav representatives now have their backs to the wall," Vedrine warned at a news conference.

The United States and Germany threatened that NATO jets were ready to strike Serbian targets if Milosevic refused to make peace in Kosovo and allow a 28,000-strong NATO-led force into the province - something he has consistently rejected.

"The handwriting is very much on the wall for him," US Defence Secretary William Cohen said in Washington after talks with German Defence Minister Rudolf Scherping. "I hope there is no illusion about NATO's ability and readiness to act if necessary," Scherping said.

The Western military alliance has more than 400 attack and support aircraft within striking distance of Yugoslav targets.

US President Bill Clinton said NATO will have little choice but to launch airstrikes if Milosevic fails to back the deal endorsed by the ethnic Albanians.

"If he shows intransigence and aggression, from my point of view we would have little option," Clinton told reporters before a meeting with NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana. Russia, the only members of the Contact Group that has op-

posed airstrikes, repeated its rejection of the use of force. Clinton said the peace talks should be given some time to bring the Serbs on board, another US officials played down

strike at Yugoslavia, although he insisted that the threat was Ethnic Albanian delegation

the possibility of an immediate

chief Hashim Thaqi broke the three-week-old logjam in the negotiations by telling Contact Group ministers in a letter he would sign an overall peace deal providing wide autonomy for Kosovo and a NATO-led military force to implement the political parts of the accord.

Officials greeted the news with relief because Thaqi, an influential commander in the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army, had refused to back the deal, which aims to end a year of fighting that had killed 2,000 people and forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes.

The ethnic Albanians' "yes" means the West is finally in a position to exert maximum leverage on Milosevic, although diplomats say the outcome is far from certain.

Taliban rule out coalition govt

ISLAMABAD, Mar 16: Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia on Monday ruled out a coalition government emerging from its weekend's power sharing deal with its opponents, re-

ports Reuter. The two warring sides announced on Sunday they had agreed to share power and try to hammer out a permanent cease-

But Taliban negotiator Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil arriving home from three days of UN-mediated talks in Turkmenistan told the militia's Voice of Shariat radio that "the agreement does not mean that a coalition government will be formed in the futures."

"We have agreed to have a shared executive a shared legislation and a shared judiciary." Muttawakil said through an interpreter in the Turkmen capital Ashgabat on Sunday.

The Taliban radio quoted him as telling reporters that representatives from the country's provinces would take part in future peace talks to be held within Afghanistan.

AP adds: The first UN international staff member has returned to Afghanistan after a seven-month absence that was sparked by the slaying of three UN staffers last summer, a UN

spokesman said Monday. Mike Sackett, the World Food Programmes director in Afghanistan, arrived back in Afghanistan on Sunday, two days after the United Nations announced it would begin the gradual return of international

The top UN humanitarian coordinator, Sergio Vieira de Mello, cited "satisfactory" prog-ress with the investigation of the killings by Afghanistan's Taliban militia as well as evidence of Taliban efforts to address UN security concerns.

UN spokesman Fred Eckhard, who announced Sackett's return, said Friday the United Nations will continue to monitor the situation in Afghanistan closely as a basis for its continued presence in the country.



US Vice President Al Gore greets Democratic supporters at the New Hampshire Institute of Art in Manchester Monday. Gore is making his first campaign trip for the 2000 presidential race and is currently the Democratic front runner. - AFP photo

Iraq sends Hajj pilgrims defying UN sanctions

BAGHDAD, Mar 16; An Iraqi Airways aircraft flew to Saudi Arabia today carrying 110 Iraqi pilgrims, the officials Iraqi News Agency reported -- an apparent violation of UN sanctions that bar flights to and

from Iraq, reports AP. The Russian-made IL-76 took off from Al-Rashid military air base 15 km south of Baghdad, INA said.

Iraq apparently did not seek UN permission for the flight, which is of a humanitarian nature.

"We have not contacted anybody for approvals." Rabi Mohammed Saleh, the Director-General of Iraqi Airways, was quoted as saying by INA.

This would be lrag's second violation of the air sanctions. which are part of the economic embargo imposed in 1990 fol lowing Iraq's invasion of

WASHINGTON, Mar 16: The

CIA said on Monday an inde-

pendent panel would assess

damage from Chinese nuclear

spying, which has caused a po-

litical firestorm in Washington

and strained Sino-US rela-

Central Intelligence, said this

would provide an outside review

of damage assessment which is

now being completed by ana-

lysts from across the US intel-

David Jeremiah, a former vice

chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff who left the service in

1994, to head the independent

He named retired Admiral

George Tenet, the Director of

tions, reports Reuters.

ligence community.

Kuwait. The sanctions also prevent the sale of oil, except under a UN oil-for-food programme. In April 1997, an Iraqi Air-

ways jet flew 104 pilgrims to

Saudi Arabia, angering the United States, the most vocal advocate of the sanctions. However, the UN Security Council failed to take action against Iraq. Instead, a mild statement was issued, saying

Baghdad should have waited for permission. The plane that flew today will make two more trips to ferry pilgrims, Saleh said,

adding that it is the only airworthy commercial plane in

The airline's remaining air-

craft are parked in other coun-Saleh said he hoped that Saudi authorities will "cooper-

ate with us by facilitating ser-

Independent panel to assess US

The pilgrims, who are being

vices needed for the plane," INA

led by Religious Affairs Minister Abdel-Munim Ahmed Saleh, are mostly elderly people and women. INA said. lraq argues that the air em-

bargo is a violation of its people's religious rights. Islam requires all able-bodied Muslims to make a pilgrimage, or Haji, to Makkah at least once in a lifetime, if they can afford it. The Security Council has

said the sanctions will not be lifted until Iraq eliminates all its weapons of mass destruc-

lrag's defiance of the air sanctions is similar to that of Libya, which is also under a UN air embargo. Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi has regularly sent passenger jets from Libya to Saudi Arabia.

Catholic HR lawyer killed in N Ireland

LURGAN, Northern Ireland, Mar 16: Pro-British extremists have killed a leading Catholic human rights lawyer in Northern Ireland, sending shock waves through the province's faltering peace process, reports

The car bomb killing of Rosemary Nelson was the third by the Red Hand Defenders, and outlawed group formed since mainstream Protestant guerillas and their Irish Republican Army (IRA) enemies backed their political allies in signing a peace accord on April 10.

The blast 50 km southwest of Belfast came as politicians struggle to meet a deadline for implementing the deal and draw a line under more than 3,600 deaths in 30 years.

The White House and leaders of Britain and Ireland, and signatories of the deal from most shades of Northern Irish politics who are in the United States to mark St Patrick's Day. Condemned the killing, saying it would harden their resolve in the run-up to the deadline of the week of March 29.

UAE threatens to pull out of deal for 80 US F-16s

ABU DHABI, Mar 16: The United Arab Emirates says it may pull out of an 8 billion dollars deal to buy 80 F-16s from Lockheed Martin Corp because it wants the jet fighters equipped with technology that is restricted by Washington, reports AP. The Emirates want software

codes for the F-16 Fighting Falcons' electronic warfare systems that would enable the planes to discern whether other aircraft are friendly or hostile. The United States does not allow release of the full codes. However, a Lockheed Martin

spokeswoman said Monday the United Arab Emirates has no requested the restricted software codes. "Both Lockheed and the UAE

remain committed to bringing the F-16 contract to completion," said Katherine Hayden at Lockheed Martin Tactical Aircraft Systems in Fort Worth

Lanka's Vavuniya district in the north of the country has been liberated from the Tamil rebels and life there has returned to normal, the official Daily News reported today, says

Military sources said all sound of the war).

Earlier, this month, Sri Lankan government troops launched the operation to expand the security force-controlled territory in the northern

Anwar aide will form new party to face Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 16: A key aide of sacked Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, just back from self-imposed political exile, intends to form a multiracial party to challenge Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, reports AP.

Mohamed Ezam Mohamad Nor, Anwar's former political secretary, said he had met many top Malaysian politicians and intellectuals during his six-month exile. He said he was overwhelmed by the demand for a broad political front comprised of all races and religions to put an end to Mahathir's 18-year leadership.

"They all want Anwar to lead the political party," Mohamed Ezam told The Associated Press on Monday, one day after he returned to the Malaysian capi-

Mohamed Ezam fled the country soon after Anwar's arrest last September, fearing he would also be jailed and tortured. He spent six months in Indonesia. Hong Kong, the Philippines and Thailand canvassing for Anwar among Islamic groups in these countries and meeting with Malaysian politicians.

On Tuesday, he planned to meet Anwar in prison for the first time since the ousted Minister's arrest to brief him on his travels and the political support that he claims the jailed leader enjoys in Southeast and East Asia.

Anwar, 51, was fired on September 2 and arrested 18 days later for organising mammoth public rallies demanding Mahathir's resigna-

by the majority Malay-Muslim vote, has ruled since independence in 1957 in an unequal partnership with parties that claim to be the sole representatives of the Chinese and Indian minorities.

Although he never spelled out how he would bring about a change, Anwar has said that Malays should tear down the political walls separating them from the economically prosperous ethnic Chinese and the poorer Indian minorities.

"Only a political party can do that. And that's what I want to discuss with Anwar," Mohamed Ezam said. "I am conveying to Anwar that people want him to lead."

Nigeria won't pull out troops from Sierra Leone now

CAIRO, Mar 16: Nigeria will keep its troops in Sierra Leone until peace is restored, arrangements are in place for their withdrawal, Nigerian President-elect Olusegun Obasa njo said Monday, reports AP.

Obasanjo addressed reporters before meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak for talks on African issues, including Sierra Leone, investment ties and border clashes between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Earlier, Monday in Nairobi. Kenya, Obasanjo made similar comments about Nigeria's role in the turbulent West African nation of Sierra Leone.

"We are in Sierra Leone, and we will not abandon Sierra Leone without ensuring there is peace and security," Obasanjo told a gathering of Kenyan and Nigerian business leaders in

Nigeria is leading a West

train accident

BOURBONNAIS, Illinois. Mar 16: An Amtrak train carrying 215 people slammed into a truck loaded with steel bars at a crossing, derailing several cars and engines and catching fire. At least five passengers were killed and more than 100 were injured, reports AP.

As many as 20 other people were missing and were believed to be trapped in the wreckage. said Chief Mike Harshbarger, fire chief of the Bourbonnais Fire Protection District. "To find survivors in the wreckage would be pretty un-

Emergency workers climbed

atop overturned cars and en-

gines searching for passengers

who may have been trapped on

the New Orleans-bound train.

likely," he said.

chief of the fire department in nearby Herscher. Six cars and two engines derailed, with three of them ending up on their sides, he said.

the City of New Orleans. The

lead engine was split in half

and burning, along with one

train car, when emergency

right away and also they were

dealing immediately with ex-

trication," said Alan Ramsey,

"They had two cars on fire

crews arrived Monday night.

Don O'Dell, who lives a block away from the crash, was watching television when he heard the collision at about 9:40 pm Monday. "The windows rattled. We got up and looked around to see what was going on," the 36-year-old said early

US Senate debates deployment of missile defence system

WASHINGTON, Mar 16: The US senate opened debate on Monday on committing the United States to deployment of a national missile defence system as Democrats dropped efforts to block consideration of the bill, reports Reuters.

The House of Representatives was expected later in the week to approve a similar but weaker version of the proposal. which has been identified by congressional Republicans as one of their top legislative priorities in the new Congress. Recent missile tests by North Korea and Iran, along with reports of Chinese espionage at a

US nuclear weapons plant, have melted some resistance to the measures as even Democratic opponents and the Clinton administration admit the existence of a growing missile threat. The Senate bill would commit the United States to deploy as soon as technologically possible a national missile defence that would resist a limited at-

tack it does not specify a time

frame the costs or specifics of

the system. There are no other ulterior motives, no hidden goals. There

is only an intent to correct a defence policy that leaves US vulnerable to a serious and growing threat, said Sen Thad Cohran, a Mississippi Republican who sponsored the bill.

Republicans failed by one vote last year to muster the 60 votes needed to break a Democratic filibuster and forced consideration of the bill. But with national defence looming as campaign issue in

The administration has said the legislation undermines the ABM treaty which limits both sides' ability to deploy antimissile systems and cold face a veto. Russia says it will not carry out strategic arms cuts

the treaty agreed with the former Soviet Union is now outdated and inhibits US ability to protect itself against rogue nuclear states.

2000. Democrats say they will push to amend the bill to give "It's a great experience," said the Clinton administration 71-year-old Modi as he was ofmore flexibility in negotiation with Russia on changes in the 1972 anti-ballistic missile (ABU) treaty.

petals and handed out flowers as another bus left Lahore for the Indian capital carrying 20 passengers. unless the ABM treaty is observed. Many in Congress believe

NEW DELHI, Mar 16: He fled Pakistan to India just before it was created more than five decades ago. Early today. RC Modi boarded the first commercial bus to travel to Pakistan in the hope that it would demolish the walls of distrust between the two hostile neighbours, reports

fered a red rose and warm hand shakes by government officials who saw off 29 passengers on the 11-hour journey to the Pakistani border city of Lahore. At about the same time, government officials threw rose

"I have to say I am grateful to the prime minister for starting this bus service," said Abdul Majeed, a retired Pakistani banker who was going to visit an ailing brother in New Delhi. Three weeks ago, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee inaugurated the service

by riding the bus to Lahore for peace talks with his Pakistani counterpart. The bus service is part of an attempt to improve relations between the two countries who have gone to war three times since they won independence from British colonialists in 1947. The main dispute over con-

bus service in 51 years

trol of the Himalayan territory of Kashmir continues to defy a solution. But after both India and Pakistan carried out nuclear weapons tests in May last year, world powers have pressed them to ease tension through dialogue. Though both Vajpayee and

Sharif faced opposition from rightists in both countries over their peacemaking efforts, there was little protest over the bus service. Nonetheless, two police officers rode along with passengers from New Delhi and other officers escorted the bus in a jeep. Pakistani officials took similar precautions. Train and plane service is available between India and

Pakistan.

But the train takes more than twice as long as the bus, in part because of the toms shecks at the border which separates the uneasy neighbours. Officials streamilined customs and immigration procedures for the bus trips.

is 950 Pakistan rupees or 800 Indian rupees (19 dollars) per person. Parvez Hashmi, the New Delhi Transport Minister,

"This is a good day for relations between Pakistan and India," said Imtiaz Saced, chairman of the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation who



Delhi yesterday. Indian Premier Atal Behari Vajpayee travelled on the inaugural bus to Lahore February for landmark talks with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a bid to improve people-to-people ties after three wars, rival nuclear tests and a 50-year-old dispute over Kashmir. - AFP photo

Mahathir also expelled Anwar from the ruling United Malays National Organisation. In his speeches before his arrest. Anwar spoke about the need for a new political culture Nairobi. in Malaysia, one that turned away from the tradition of cul-African intervention force that backs the government of Sierra tivating religious and ethnic Leone's President Ahmed Tejan voting banks to maintain Kabbah in its drawn-out battle Mahathir's JJMNO, sustained against rebel forces. 5 killed in Chicago

Lankan dist liberated from Tamil rebels

COLOMBO, Mar 16: Sri

four divisions of Vavuniya and most of the northern Wanni area have been liberated after government troops eliminated or drove away the rebels there in 'Operation Rana Gosa' (the

India, Pakistan start first

At about 140, dollars air fare is out of reach for many. A oneway bus ticket from Lahore to the Indian capital of New Delhi

broke a coconut on the ground, a gesture meant to bring good fortune, before the gold luxury bus festooned with balloons and flowers pulled out of the Indian station. Once on the road, the driver blared his horn like a clarion call to peace.

saw off passengers in Lahore.