

## International

# NATO rejects Russian-brokered deal: Air strike continues

WASHINGTON, Mar 31: NATO vowed Tuesday to continue air strikes against Yugoslavia, rejecting a Russian-brokered proposal to end the bombing while US officials warned Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic he risked losing Kosovo, reports AFP.

Warplanes continued their aerial blitz of Yugoslavia after the Russian mediation mission failed to budge Belgrade enough to satisfy alliance leaders.

Seven explosions were heard early Wednesday southeast of Pristina, Kosovo's provincial capital, as the attacks entered their eighth day, Tanjug News Agency reported.

"President Milosevic's proposal is unacceptable," US President Bill Clinton said in a statement after a telephone conversation with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who shared Clinton's assessment.

Schroeder was briefed on the Milosevic plan by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, who travelled to Belgrade earlier Tuesday in an effort to restart talks over the Kosovo crisis.

The German leader dismissed the Russian effort as "no basis for a settlement."

In talks with Primakov, Milosevic agreed to "begin to withdraw part of the forces" in Kosovo, but only if the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation halted its air strikes first.

"We remain firmly committed to a political settlement through negotiations," Milosevic said.

He put two conditions before any political settlement: "A total halt to NATO support for Kosovo separatists who have resorted to terrorism" and "a return to the situation in the region which preceded the concentration of NATO forces on

the borders of Yugoslavia" — an implicit call for the withdrawal of 12,000 NATO troops deployed in Macedonia.

But British foreign secretary Robin Cook said NATO attacks would only stop when Milosevic called a ceasefire and accepted the peace plan proposed by the West.

"Milosevic's proposals fall far short of what is required," Cook said.

UN Chief Kofi Annan and NATO leaders decried the Serb ethnic cleansing operation that has caused nearly 100,000 Kosovo Albanians to flee.

"I am profoundly outraged by reports of a vicious and systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing conducted by Serbian military and paramilitary forces," Annan said.

As reports of atrocities continued to rise, refugees continued to stream out of Kosovo into Albania, Macedonia and the

Yugoslav republic of Montenegro.

NATO spokesman Jamie Shea said some 118,000 Kosovo Albanians had fled the province since March 10 when NATO's air campaign began.

In Pristina, some 100,000 people have been rounded up by Serbian forces, Kosovo Liberation Army Commander Hashim Thaci told German television.

If the reports were confirmed, Shea said, "This is something we have not seen since the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge in the mid 1970s."

Air raid sirens went off Tuesday as darkness fell in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kraljevo, Niš and Trstenik, indicating more NATO missile and bombing attacks were imminent.

US officials conceded, however, that NATO's air assault is far from accomplishing its goals.

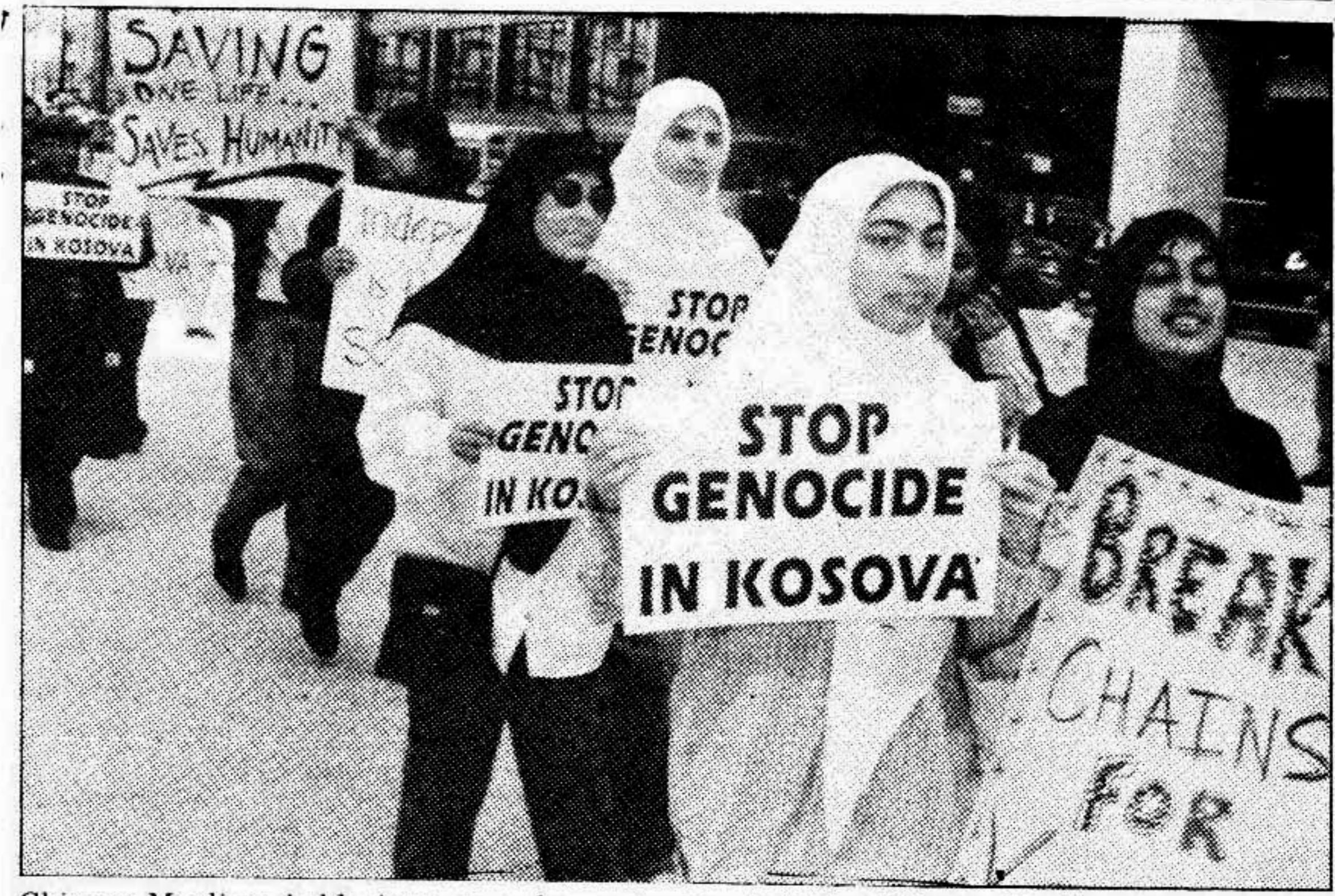
GMT Tuesday), and other impacts were reported around the province, the state-run news agency Tanjug said.

NATO has said it is shifting its attacks to the troops and security forces operating in Kosovo, where they are accused of terrorising the ethnic Albanians into fleeing.

Hashim Thaci, a leader of rebel Kosovars, told Germany's ZDF television that the Serbs had created three concentration camps, including one in the stadium of Pristina, which he said is holding 100,000 people.

US President Bill Clinton warned that atrocities against Kosovars would weaken Serbia's claim to the separatist province and increase NATO's determination to destroy Milosevic's army.

US officials conceded, however, that NATO's air assault is far from accomplishing its goals.



Chicago Muslims hold signs at a demonstration held by Chicago Muslims Kosova Task Force on Tuesday at the Daley Centre in Chicago, Illinois. This gathering is to support the NATO bombing campaign targeted against Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic.

— AFP photo



Indonesian students try to break through a police barricade yesterday during a demonstration in front of the defence ministry. Hundreds of students were baton-charged by police and soldiers as they were trying to reach the military headquarters to demand a speedier investigation into the shooting of four of their colleagues by police and soldiers last May.

— AFP photo

## DPRK rejects US demand for halting missile development

SEOUL, Mar 31: North Korea rejected a US demand for a halt to its missile development and exports but agreed to further talks with American officials, South Korean officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

"As expected, there was no agreement reached at the US-North Korea talks," Kwon Jong-rak, a South Korean Foreign Ministry official, said after meeting with US negotiators.

Kwon, Director-General of the American Affairs Bureau in Seoul's Foreign Ministry, was briefed on two days of US-North Korea missile talks which ended in the North's capital of Pyongyang on Tuesday.

Robert Einhorn, US deputy assistant secretary of state for political and military affairs, flew in late Tuesday night to brief South Korean officials on his talks with North Korean officials.

Quoting Einhorn, Kwon told South Korean reporters that while maintaining its recalcitrant stance, North Korea agreed in principle to hold another round of missile talks with the United States as soon

as possible.

The venue and date of the next talks, the fifth since 1996, will be decided through consultations between US and North Korean diplomats assigned to the United Nations in New York, he said.

At the Pyongyang talks, North Korea maintained that it will continue its missile development unless Washington ceases its hostile policy toward the communist country, Kwon said.

North Korea, Kwon said, also repeated its earlier stand that it would stop missile exports if the United States makes financial compensation. The North reportedly is demanding 1 billion dollars annually for three years.

Einhorn scheduled a separate briefing for the foreign news media later Wednesday.

Before briefing South Korean officials earlier in the day, the US envoy said he had intensive discussions in Pyongyang.

"Altogether, we met 11 hours over two days for quite intensive, serious talks," Einhorn said.

## Future of N Ireland peace accord hangs in balance

BELFAST, Mar 31: The prime ministers of Britain and Ireland are committed to brokering this week's negotiations day and night to keep Northern Ireland's nearly year-old peace accord from unravelling over IRA disarmament, reports AP.

Tony Blair, trying to keep one eye on Britain's commitment to the NATO bombardment of Serb military targets, had hoped to achieve a breakthrough during the course of 15 hours of talks Tuesday alongside Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern.

But their effort, which broke up at Hillsborough Castle southwest of Belfast shortly before midnight, produced little beyond a red-eyed determination to try again Wednesday morning.

The goal of forming a new Protestant-Catholic government by Friday — one year after the Good Friday accord — remains elusive, and the future of much of the landmark accord hangs in the balance.

"I will not stop or rest until this thing is done," said Blair.

Ahern — who earlier said he didn't intend to stay in Northern Ireland unless both sides were prepared to compromise — flew back to his Dublin home for a few hours' sleep before a planned return. Irish government aides, envisaging deadlock, booked weekend accommodation in Belfast.

The future Northern Ireland government's 12 members — six Protestant, six Roman Catholic — are supposed to receive powers gradually from Blair's government, and pursue joint policy-making in committees with Ahern's government.

But the largest Protestant party, the Ulster Unionists, is insisting that the Irish Republican Army — now 20 months into a truce after violently destabilising Northern Ireland for 27 years — must start to disarm before the outlawed group's Sinn Fein party can receive two posts in the government.

## Indo-Pak expert level talks next month

ISLAMABAD, Mar 31: India will hold expert level talks here next month on several crucial issues including advanced notification on ballistic missiles, reduction of risks of an accidental use of nuclear weapon and preparations for their foreign secretary-level talk in May, reports PTT.

Pakistani Foreign Secretary Shamsul Ahmed told PTV in an interview here that the expert level talks will be followed up in the second half of May when the secretaries meet in New Delhi to discuss the two main issues of peace and security.

The foreign secretaries will also review the composite and integrated dialogue process on all outstanding issues between the two countries, he said.

Ahmed dismissed apprehensions expressed in a section of Pakistani media over the implementation of Lahore declaration, saying that the spirit of Lahore declaration is intact and media statements could not become a hurdle in its implementation.

His comments come after Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Sartaj Aziz agreed during their Colombo meeting last month that experts will meet over next two months to sort out how to implement the memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed during Prime Minister AB Vajpayee's Lahore visit.

The MOU, signed by Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries, says the two nations shall engage in bilateral consultations of security doctrines to develop confidence building measures in the nuclear and conventional fields.

Meanwhile, China is closely watching the political fallout of the much-hyped tea party hosted by Muslim separatist militants in a village near Anantnag, the spokesman said.

Thirty civilians were also injured in a grenade attack by Muslim separatist militants in a village near Anantnag, the spokesman said.

The SPLA said it had liberated the city in the last four months.

## Junta condoles death of Suu Kyi's husband

YANGON, Mar 31: The Myanmar junta on Sunday offered its "sincere condolences to opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi over the death of her husband," reports AFP.

The junta said it would allow Aung San Suu Kyi to go to England to attend Michael Aris's funeral.

"The government of Myanmar is deeply saddened to hear Michael Aris's demise and sends its sincere condolences and sympathy to the bereaved family in this time of grief," it said in a statement.

The junta, which strictly controls Aung San Suu Kyi's movements, had effectively refused Aris a visa to Myanmar to allow him to visit his wife to say goodbye before he died.

The academic died in a British hospital on Saturday of cancer.

The junta said Sunday it would help with funeral rites in Yangon and stands ready in providing Suu Kyi with all possible assistance if she desires to travel to England to attend the funeral rites and family affairs at this time of bereavement.

Authorities in Yangon said they were reluctant to allow Aris to visit Myanmar in the condition he was in and said it would be more "humane" if Aung San Suu Kyi visited him in England.

Three soldiers and an equal number of militants were killed in two separate gunbattles in the northern Kupwara and southern Anantnag district of the troubled state of Kashmir, police said on Sunday, reports AFP.

In a third incident "in a fire-fight with militants in Rajouri district of Jammu, late Saturday a soldier was killed," he said.

Meanwhile, China is closely watching the political fallout of the much-hyped tea party hosted by Muslim separatist militants in a village near Anantnag, the spokesman said.

Aung San Suu Kyi married Aris in 1972. Their two sons live in England.

## Death toll rises to 110

## Fresh tremor rocks quake-hit region in India

LUCKNOW, India, Mar 31: A fresh tremor rocked India's Himalayan foothills early today, two days after a powerful earthquake and aftershocks killed at least 110 people and injured more than 300, officials said, reports Reuter.

The latest earthquake, which hit the Garhwal region at 2:32 am (2102 GMT) measured 5.2 on the open-ended Richter scale.

Sridhar Pathak, Superintendent of Police in Chamoli town, told Reuters by phone that there were no reports of casualties as yet, Chamoli was hit hard by Monday's earthquake, which measured 6.8 on the Richter scale.

Pathak said he had received information of one house collapsing in the fresh tremors, but details from far-flung areas would take time.

Monday's earthquake, which jolted many parts of

northern India, western Nepal and southern China, brought houses tumbling down on thousands of people as they slept in the towns for the survivors.

Rescue operations were continuing in remote areas where the extent of damage remained unclear.

A strong aftershock during the night toppled more houses, severely injuring at least one person in the town of Nandprayag, police said. A series of subsequent tremors, about one every hour until dawn, kept residents on the edge of panic.

In Gopeshwar, a town of several hundred families, most people slept in the streets, in playgrounds and even on an army helipad, listening in fear as the latest tremors disgorged more boulders from the hillsides and sent them crashing down the scarred slopes.

Some 350 people were injured in Monday's quake and

2,500 houses destroyed. Helicopters evacuated the most seriously injured. Tents and makeshift shelters sprang up in the towns for the survivors.

Men walked from distant villages to plead for help from relief and rescue workers who have focused their efforts on the worst hit town, Chamoli, and on the towns along the few paved roads in the Garhwal hills about 300 km north of New Delhi.

"It is the wrath of the gods. This is very unusual. We have never had so many shocks," said Vijay Prasad, the priest in charge of the 2,800-year-old temple of Gopinath.

The quake, which struck shortly after midnight Monday morning, measures 6.8 in intensity, one of the strongest in India in recent times and the most powerful this century in this quake-prone district in the lower Himalayas.



Family members sit in front of their damaged house in Chamoli Tuesday. More than 100 people have died as a result of an earthquake which struck the region in the Himalayan foothills on Monday.

— AFP photo

## Kosovo crisis may delay move to impeach Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Mar 31: Impeachment proceedings against Russian President Boris Yeltsin could be delayed due to the Kosovo crisis, a parliament Speaker said Tuesday, reports AFP.

State Duma, lower house of parliament, Speaker Gennady Seleznyov said that Russians were more interested in trying to end the war rather than turn inwards and devote attention to the impeachment bid.

"The soldiers were hit during an exchange of fire with Israeli helicopters in the area of Jineh just north of the Israeli occupied zone in Southern Lebanon, a statement issued by the army said. The Israeli helicopters were carrying out a mission of bombardment on nearby hills and areas believed to be hideouts for guerrillas of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, or party of god.

**4 Lebanese soldiers hurt in attack:**

Four Lebanese army soldiers, including an officer, were wounded Tuesday by Israeli helicopters raid in the country's eastern Bekaa Valley, Xinhua reports from Beirut.

The soldiers were hit during an exchange of fire with Israeli helicopters in the area of Jineh just north of the Israeli occupied zone in Southern Lebanon, a statement issued by the army said. The Israeli helicopters were carrying out a mission of bombardment on nearby hills and areas believed to be hideouts for guerrillas of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, or party of god.

**Bus accident kills 8 in Philippines:**

Eight passengers were killed and several others wounded when two buses collided in the central Philippine island of Samar, police said Tuesday. AFP reports from Manila.

A police report to headquarters in Manila said the Philtranco bus smashed against another vehicle running in the opposite direction on Monday in the town of Gaudana.

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