

BRIEFLY

Ghali meets Somalian leaders:

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali met Thursday with delegations representing the two main warring factions in Somalia in an effort to stop the brutal clan war that has engulfed Mogadishu, the capital, AP reports from United Nations.

There was no word of progress in achieving a cease-fire as rebel forces stepped up attacks in Mogadishu in an attempt to capture an airstrip.

UN officials said the secretary-general met separately with representatives for interim Somali President Ali Mahdi Mohamed and his archrival, Gen Mohamed Farrah Aidid — both of opposing factions of the same clan.

In the afternoon Undersecretary-General James Jonah met representatives of the interim government and planned to meet separately Friday with the rebel side.

Details of the talks were not disclosed and neither side commented.

ROK plane crash claims 7 lives:

Seven South Korean army officers including a three-star general were killed Friday when an army helicopter crashed in a provincial town, static radio and other reports said, Reuter reports from Seoul.

Lieutenant General Lee Hyon-Bu, commander of the army's seventh corps, and six other officers from Lees' Unit were killed in the crash on a mountain in the southeastern town of Somsan, the Korea Broadcasting System (KBS) and the domestic Yonhap news agency said.

KBS quoted a witness as saying the helicopter crashed suddenly but did not explode.

Military authorities are investigating, the reports said.

Fire kills 8 in New Jersey:

Fire swept through a two-story row house Thursday morning, killing eight people including at least six age 18 or younger, authorities said and two other residents were seriously injured, AP reports from New Jersey.

The victims' ages range from 2 years to 72 years, said police Lt Joseph Richardson. "It's a terrible, terrible tragedy, God forbid."

Three kerosene heaters and an electric space heater were found in the house, whose main heating system was not operating, said Fire Chief Kenneth L Penn.

"They should be outlawed. There are too many things that can go wrong with them," Penn said. He added that the house had no smoke detectors.

Officials stressed that the cause of the fire had not been determined for certain, and said damage was so extensive it may be hard to confirm.

It appeared that all were asleep when the fire broke out but that some tried to flee before being overcome, Penn said.

The fire spread so fast "they never had a chance," he said.

Iraq, Iran talk POWs issue:

Officials from Iraq and Iran met here Thursday to discuss the repatriation of some 35,000 prisoners of war who are reportedly still being detained nearly four years since the end of fighting between the two countries, AFP reports from Geneva.

"We hope that definitive procedures will be found to ensure the speedy repatriation of the living prisoners and that the families of the missing will be informed of their fate," said a spokesman for the sponsors of the talks, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Violence leaves 3 dead in Punjab:

A Congress-I election campaigner and two militants were killed in Punjab since last night, PTI from Chandigarh says.

Vijay Singh, a rickshaw puller canvassing for the Congress (I) was gunned down by militants near Kamla Nehru Colony under Kotwali police station area of Bathinda district last night. Empties of AK-47 were recovered from the spot.

An unidentified militant was killed in an encounter with security forces near village Kathoor Chawk in Sangrur district while his associate managed to escape. One 315 bore rifle and a scooter were recovered from the spot.

Police also recovered bullet ridden body of an unidentified militant from a village in Batala police district today. It was reported to be a case of inter-gang rivalry.

India won't sign nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

NEW DELHI, Feb 14: India has made it clear that it will retain its nuclear option and will not sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as long as other nations possess nuclear weapons, reports Xinhua.

This stand was stated by Minister for External Affairs Madhav Singh Solanki at a parliamentary consultative committee meeting here on Wednesday local press reported today.

Supporting the government's stand on the nuclear issue, the committee members agreed at the meeting that it is difficult to accept a proposal by Pakistan on regional nuclear weapons issue.

The proposal was put forward in June last year for a

five-country meeting involving Pakistan, India, the United States, the erstwhile Soviet Union and China to discuss the question of declaring South Asia as a nuclear weapons free zone.

Some committee members accused Pakistan of attempting to use uranium from Kazakhstan, hiring nuclear scientists from the former Soviet Union and establishing collaboration with Kazakhstan. Solanki also noted Pakistan's recent declaration of its capacity to build a nuclear device.

The committee members added that discussions on nuclear proliferation must be held in a context acceptable to India.

Lankan troops overrun two Tigers' hideouts

COLOMBO, Feb 14: Government troops have overrun two Tamil guerilla lairs in eastern Sri Lanka as a fresh drive against the militants continued, a military spokesman said today, reports AFP.

He said troops had captured the two jungle hideouts of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in coastal Batticaloa district and destroyed at total of 12 huts within them.

An unknown number of militants fled in the face of the major drive by the security forces against LTTE positions in eastern province — including Batticaloa — which has been underway for two weeks, he said.

We have killed five terrorists in the Batticaloa district alone yesterday (Thursday) and recovered some automatic assault rifles and grenades, the spokesman said.

He also said three LTTE men were killed in neighbouring Trincomalee district, while another three drowned when the navy fired and sank their boat off the island's northern coast Thursday.

The spokesman did not say if the security forces suffered any casualties during the overnight battles.

Russia may form own army if others disapprove jt command

MOSCOW, Feb 14: President Boris Yeltsin may form a separate Russian army this week if the commonwealth states don't accept united military control, his aides said Thursday, stepping up pressure on the eve of their third summit, reports AP.

Leaders of the 11-member Commonwealth of Independent States began gathering Thursday in Minsk, Belarus, for a two-day meeting that leaders' hope will resolve the divisive military disputes threatening the 9-week-old association.

The military schisms already have hurt its ability to coordinate economic reforms in the former Soviet Union and thrown doubt on hopes for a smooth alliance of former Soviet republics.

"There's nothing strange in independent states having

their own national armies. But it's something else to establish their (good) relations within the framework of the commonwealth," Azerbaijani President Ayaz Mutalibov said upon arriving in Minsk, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

Military officials on Thursday hammered out 13 proposals intended for discussion, including one setting each state's share of a common defense budget and another underscoring their right to form separate armies.

The working group, chaired by interim commonwealth military commander Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, apparently failed to resolve details about the size, type and command of the forces. And they skipped discussion entirely of the Black Sea fleet, the target of competing claims by Russia and Ukraine.

Yeltsin, before boarding his presidential jet in Moscow, said he thought the meeting would "not be easy" but could still make "headway," Russian media said.

But Belarussian Prime Minister Vyacheslav Kebich predicted "difficult" talks and Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov said he thought plans for united force would fail, ITAR-Tass reported.

Moldovan President Mircea Snegur was even more pessimistic, saying flatly the "commonwealth is not long-lasting."

Moldova, Azerbaijan and Ukraine pushed the commonwealth to let them form separate militaries out of the former Soviet forces on their territory. Russia and Kazakhstan want a unified force, saying divisions could be lethal.

Hoping to scare other states from breaking out of the united military, Yeltsin in recent months has said Russia is prepared to form its own army to protect itself. Such a force would easily be the most powerful in the former Soviet Union, automatically possessing most nuclear and conventional weapons.

His aides turned up the heat Thursday, saying Yeltsin was ready to sign a decree sometime after Friday to create a Russian military force and a defense ministry, and to appoint a defense minister.

"Russia stated more than once that it was not going to form its armed forces first. But after the Minsk meeting, that will be the moment for us to declare formation of the Russian army," said former Soviet Col. Gen. Dmitri Volkogonov, now the top defense adviser to President Boris N. Yeltsin.

Newspaper reports said the Russian army could number up to 1 million men and include land and naval forces, interior troops and border guards.

But when asked in Minsk whether he intended to sign the decree, Yeltsin said: "I do not intend to do that for the time being."

Under the draft documents Thursday, the commonwealth states would reiterate their commitment to keeping strategic forces, including an estimated 27,000 nuclear warheads, under united control.

It also would commit them to joint command of all conventional forces, and would have Russia shoulder the biggest burden of defense spending at 62.3 per cent, followed by Ukraine at 17.3 per cent and Kazakhstan at 5.1 per cent.

Officials and news reports did not give a list of participants at the working group session and it was unclear whether all states had attended.



WASHINGTON, Elizabeth Dole, President of the American Red Cross, holds up Tuesday (Feb 14) an original document from one of the Nazi concentration camps. The Red Cross will use this and other documents to help people worldwide determine the fate of loved ones lost during the third Reich Regime. — AFP/UNB photo

Snake's appearance triggers riot in Delhi: 8 killed

NEW DELHI: The mysterious appearance of a snake under a peepul tree in a town near the Indian capital triggered Hindu-Muslim riots that left eight people dead and several injured, a newspaper reported Friday, says AFP.

The snake's appearance was perceived as a divine sanction for plans to construct a temple at the site by Hindus, and when a group of Muslims objected street battles erupted, the pioneer said.

The violence Wednesday evening at Hapur, 55 kilometers east of here, left four people dead in police firing and four others in stabbings, news

reports said. Nineteen people, including 15 policemen, were injured.

The snake itself left as soon as the clash erupted, but its devotees plunged headlong into a violent battle" the pioneer added. Police said most of the dead were Muslims.

The Daily said the tree was located near a drain where people came only for morning ablutions until one morning some four weeks ago when a small stone idol of the Hindu God Shiva was found there.

The drain then acquired a holy touch and Hindus began making plans to construct a temple, despite opposition

from Muslims, one of whom owned the land and thought the Hindus were trying to usurp it.

The objections led to arguments and finally to riots Wednesday, when both groups attacked each other with acid-filled bottles, missiles and petrol bombs, forcing the police to use tear gas and finally open fire.

Rajesh Kumar Rai, a superintendent of police and a Hindu, was quoted as saying that the reptile "probably came from the basket of a snake charmer" and accused Hindus of going back on their promise to take the idol elsewhere.

UTA bombing Suspects may appear before court in France

PARIS, Feb 14: Libyan Leader Muammar Gaddafi indicated on Thursday that four of his officials accused of involvement in the 1989 bombing of a French airline might go to France to stand trial, reports Reuter.

"They have themselves said they are ready to go to France to appear in court," Gaddafi said in an interview with French television. "Even if they are sure of their innocence they have their responsibilities and must take them."

However Gaddafi ruled out handing over two Libyans wanted by Britain and the United States for the bombing of a Pan Am airline over Scotland in 1968.

"Those two have no responsibilities, they are simple citizens," he said.

Honecker suffers from cancer

SANTIAGO, Feb 14: Former East German leader Erich Honecker suffers from terminal cancer and needs urgent medical treatment only available outside the Chilean embassy in Moscow, where he is currently held up, Foreign Ministry sources said Thursday, reports AFP.

Chile's acting Foreign Minister, Edmundo Vargas, declined to confirm the report, but acknowledged that the former communist leader "is in serious condition."

"It is urgent that he immediately receive the best medical attention without risking his personal liberty," he said.

Reports from Germany indicated that Chile would ask the UN Human Rights Commission, which is based in Geneva, to intervene so that Honecker could be hospitalized in the Russian capital.

Rafsanjani for solidarity among Muslims to confront US threat

TEHRAN, Feb 14: Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani yesterday appealed for solidarity among the Muslim people to confront the threat of the United States, reports Xinhua.

He was referring to the U.S. demand that Tripoli hand over two Libyans accused of involvement in the bombing in Scotland of a Pan Am airliner three years ago in which 270 people were killed.

Washington and London are pushing for the adoption of a U.N. resolution to impose economic and military sanctions against Libya, which insists on the formation of an impartial international tribunal to investigate incident rather than extraditing the two suspects.

Meeting with Chairman of Libya's General People's Congress (GPC) Abdul-Razak Sosah here yesterday Rafsanjani said that as Washington is

staging an anti-Libyan campaign, Muslim states should

The Libyan official, before winding up his four-day visit to Iran, said the Libyan and Iranian leader were undertaking the task of mobilizing Muslims against their enemies.

He thanked Iran for its support to the Libyan government, saying his talks with Iranian officials will enhance Tehran-Tripoli cooperation.

Iran's Majlis (parliament) Speaker Hojatoleslam Mahdi Karrubi, who saw his Libyan counterpart off at the airport, said the Iranian people "are beside the Libyans in their anti-imperialist campaigns".

During his stay here, the Libyan official and his high-level delegation also held talks with Iran's foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati.

strengthen unity and coordination.

Croats have been made homeless.

In Belgrade, representatives of Serbs from Croatia and ethnically mixed Bosnia-Herzegovina met with representatives from Serbia and Montenegro to discuss forming a new, smaller Yugoslavia.

Serb rebel leader opposes UN troops deployment

BELGRADE, Feb 14: A rebel Serb leader in Croatia on Thursday warned of "large casualties" if U.N. peacekeepers are sent to the republic, as U.N. officials said the secretary-general would recommend their deployment, reports AP.

U.N. spokesman Francois Gualiani said in New York that Secretary - General Boutros Boutros-Ghali would recommend deployment of 13,000 peacekeepers to the Security Council early next week.

But Milan Babic, leader of the self-proclaimed Serbian republic of Krajina in southwestern Croatia, warned in a

letter to Boutros-Ghali that deployment "without our agreement, will certainly cause large casualties," the Belgrade-based Tanjug news agency reported.

Babic opposes the U.N. peace plan because it call for the withdrawal of federal forces and disarming of irregular forces such as Babic's.

The U.N. Security Council voted last week to defer deployment of peacekeepers until all parties to the conflict agree.

U.N. officials said the deployment of peacekeeping troops could further isolate Babic and put pressure on him to cooperate. Serbian, Croatian

and army leaders have accepted the plan.

A precondition for deployment of peacekeeping troops was continued observance of a January 3 ceasefire. There have been repeated reports of violations.

At least two people were reported killed Wednesday early Thursday, Croatian defence officials reported new attacks Thursday on the eastern stronghold of Osijek and around Nova Gradiska on the central front.

Thousands have died in fighting which escalated into civil war after Croatia declared independence last June 25. About 700,000 Serbs and

recognized by the European Community and two dozen other countries last month.

Eleven EC countries appear prepared to recognize Macedonia as early as next week, despite objections by neighboring Greece, which claims Macedonia wants to take over some Greek territory.

The federal army speeded up its surprise pullout from Macedonia Thursday.

In Bosnia, which also seeks recognition and has scheduled a referendum on independence later this month, leaders of the Muslim, Serb and Croat communities met in a bid to resolve differ-

ences over the republic's future, Tanjug reported.

Bosnia has stayed out of the conflict in Croatia. But rising ethnic tensions have heightened fears of armed conflict in the republic, where Muslims account for 40 per cent, Serbs 33 per cent and Croats 17 per cent of the population.

Leaders of Serbs and Croats want Bosnia divided among the three ethnic groups, while Muslims who advocate a unified sovereign Bosnia, say fragmentation would cause bloodshed.

The deployment of U.N. peacekeepers could ease fears that the conflict would spread to Bosnia.

Off the Record

Rushdie says 3-year in hiding paid the price

LONDON: Author Salman Rushdie said Thursday his three years in hiding were a high enough price to pay for offending Muslims and appealed to the British government to put pressure on Iran to lift its death threat against him, reports Reuter.



Rushdie, speaking on the eve of the third anniversary of the Iranian Death Decree, said Britain should insist there could be no improvement in relations with Tehran until the sentence was revoked.

Indian-born Rushdie, 44, has been in hiding under police guard since February 14th 1989, when the late Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini ordered his death for allegedly insulting Islam in his book 'The Satanic Verses'.

"Three years of my life — that's a high price," the author said in an interview with a British radio programme.

The biggest burden of being in hiding was the enforced separation from his son Zafar, he said. "Three years of my son's life — missing it — that's an even higher price."

Pet pit bull kills infant

ANCHORAGE, Alaska: A 9-month-old boy died after the family's pit bull clamped its jaws on the back of the child's head when his mother picked him up, reports AP.

The 60-pound (27 kilo) dog ran away and returned to attack again Wednesday, biting the boy's mother, Chris Coffman, on the neck and face before it was confined to a bathroom.

The child, whose name was not released, died about an hour after the attack.

Investigators said the attack was unprovoked. The child was standing in the living room when his mother picked him up and the animal snapped.

"The mother hadn't even picked him up quickly or anything like that," said police Lt. Shirley Warner.

The dog is being quarantined for 10 days to see if it is rabid.

Strangest volcano on cold hearted Triton?

LOS ANGELES: Enhanced versions of the Voyager 2 spacecraft's pictures reveal what look like three gigantic, ice-gushing volcanoes on Neptune's frozen-moon Triton, scientists reported Friday, says AP.

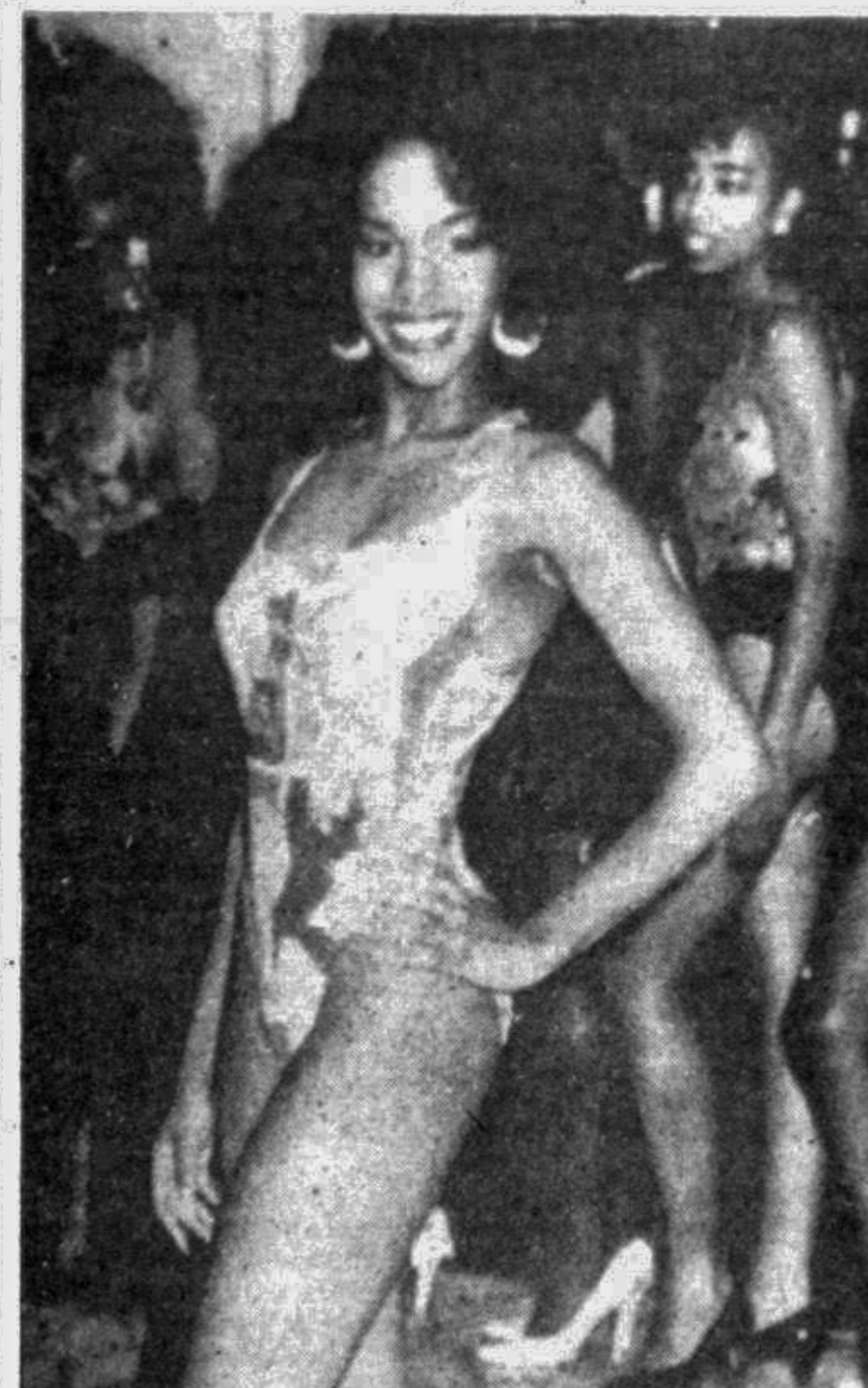
If the flat, nearly circular features are volcanic, they are the fourth kind of ice volcano seen on Triton and a type never before seen in the solar system, said Pascal Lee, a Cornell University planetary scientist.

The smallest circle is 282 kilometers wide and the largest measures 933 kilometers across — more than one-third of the moon's diameter.

"We think we're seeing volcanism on a global scale," although it isn't known if they are still active, Lee said Thursday.

Triton is the coldest object ever measured in the solar system, with a surface temperatures of 39) degrees below zero Fahrenheit.

The idea of icy volcanism may seem strange considering Earth's volcanoes produce hot molten rock. But if the ice inside Triton is warmer than the material on the surface, it can produce eruptions, scientists say.



File photo of Desiree Washington, the Miss Black America contestant who accused boxer Mike Tyson of raping her, was one of the pieces of evidence in Tyson's trial. This undated photo was released to the news media during the trial by Marion Country court. — AFP/UNB photo

Baker visits Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, Feb 14: U.S. Secretary of State James Baker visited newly-independent Tajikistan yesterday in a campaign to build ties between Muslim Central Asia and the West, reports Reuter.

Turkey and Islamic Iran are competing for influence in former Soviet republics with large Muslim populations and Baker is attempting to ensure that Turkey and the West prevail.

After two hours of talks in the snow-blanketed capital Dushanbe, Baker and Tajik president Rakhman Nabyev told reporters they were pleased with the meeting and would hold more discussions.