

## Some rebels lay down arms Islamic rebels clash with Tajik govt troops

**DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, Feb 6:** Islamic rebels clashed with government troops on Monday in the mountains of central Tajikistan, while the president appeared to have ended an insurgency in the south of the country, reports AP.

Up to 350 rebel troops under the command of Mirzo Ziyoyev attacked government troops in the Tavildara region east of Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, the interfax news agency said.

But in the southern city of Kurgan-Tyube, armed fighters loyal to warlord Mahmud Khudoberdyev began returning to their barracks and turning in their heavy weapons, the agency said.

Checkpoints around Kurgan-Tyube were dismantled as well as those at the Fakhrabad pass that links the region with Dushanbe, the agency said.

Desperate to avoid civil war, Tajik President Emonnakhonov on Sunday fired some top officials to placate Khudoberdyev and another warlord, Ibrodullo

Boimatov, who each seized a city and advanced on Dushanbe late last month.

"It was a forced concession," Tajik Interior Minister Saidamir Zuhurov told interfax. "The president dismissed these officials only for political reasons, as the country faced a real threat of civil war. Tajikistan simply cannot survive a new conflict."

The insurgency and the Islamic attacks deep inside Tajikistan deeply worried Russia and Tajikistan's neighbours in Central Asia.

Rakhmonov's hard-line Communist government has been propped up by the Russian army since it won a 1992-93 civil war against a loose coalition of democratic and Islamic groups.

The latest round of UN-mediated talks with these opposition groups in Ashkhabad in the former Soviet republic of Turkmenistan stalled on Monday.

The Russians are increasingly fed up with Rakhmonov's inability to maintain stability in the country.

## EC to step up anti-terrorist efforts against LTTE

**COLOMBO, Feb 6:** The European Community (EC) will step up anti-terrorist efforts against Tamil rebels, especially surveillance of their offices in Europe, following last week's suicide bombing attack in Colombo, an official said on Tuesday, reports AP.

"The LTTE (rebels) have achieved nothing but discredited themselves and their own cause a lot with this terrorist action," Francine Henrich, the New Delhi-based European Union ambassador to South Asia, told reporters.

There is some indication that the European mafia is backing the Tamil tigers and that the separatists are involved in drug-running, she said. Tamil rebel supporters maintain offices in many European cities, including London, Paris and Geneva.

On Wednesday, a suicide bomber rammed a truck filled with hundreds of kilograms (pounds) of explosives into the Central Bank, killing at least 82 people and destroying several buildings.

The EU is considering providing aid to rebuild the

capital of Colombo's devastated business district, said Mrs. Henrich, who met with President Chandrika Kumaratunga during her visit to the Sri Lankan capital this week.

"We are reinforcing more and more the linkage between our anti-terrorist efforts, especially surveillance of LTTE offices in Europe," said Mrs. Henrich. "This bombing has hurt European interests," including foreign companies that operate in Colombo.

The Tamil rebels are fighting for a homeland in the north and east for minority Tamils who claim discrimination by the majority Sinhalese, who control the government and the military. More than 40,000 people have been killed in the fighting since 1983.

Reuters adds, the European Commission's envoy to South Asia said today there was "some indication" that organised crime was backing Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas.

Francine Henrich, stress-

ing the European Union's solidarity with Colombo's efforts to stem the rebels' separatist campaign, also said there were indications the guerrillas were involved in drug-running in Europe.

There is some indication of the mafia backing the LTTE, she said, adding that there was also evidence of drug running.

Henrich was speaking to reporters after a meeting with Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar. She was due to meet President Chandrika Kumaratunga later in the day.

She said police forces in member states of the European Union had cells of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) under surveillance but was unable to give details of action.

The rebels fighting for a homeland in the north and east of this tropical island, has been blamed by the government for a bomb attack on Colombo's financial district last Wednesday which killed more than 80 people and wounded more than 1,300.

## PLO leaders end 1st round of talks on amending charter

**EL-ARISH, Egypt, Feb 6:** PLO leaders today finished a six-hour first round of talks on amending their 1964 Charter calling for Israel's destruction, reports Reuters.

But officials said the 11 members of the 18-member Executive Committee who met in El-Arish, Egypt, had yet to decide when to convene the 446-member parliament-in-exile, the Palestine National Council (PNC), to make the change.

Some PLO officials said they did not expect the PNC to meet until May. The Executive Committee would meet again later on Tuesday. The meetings are prompted by breakthroughs with Israel, once the PLO's worst enemy and now its partner to peace.

Under a September 1995 peace deal with Israel, the PNC must convene to amend the Charter within two months of the Palestinian elections in West Bank and Gaza areas handed over by Israel to PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

## Greece protests to Turkey over shot at trawler

**ATHENS, Feb 6:** Greece protested to Turkey on Monday that a Turkish coast guard vessel had fired a warning shot at a Greek trawler in the northern Aegean, Foreign Ministry officials said, reports AP.

The shots were fired on Sunday in international waters south of the Greek island of Samothrace, they said.

Greece's member of the European Commission, the European Union's executive body, warned Turkey that claims on Greek territory would harm its interests in the EU, with which it recently entered a customs union.

"In no instance will the European Union accept the violation of Greece's sovereign rights, nor Turkey's violation of international agreements," said Christos Papoutsis, the commissioner for energy.

## China concerned at Haitian links with Taiwan

**UNITED NATIONS, Feb 6:** China has expressed concern over plans by Taiwan's vice president to attend the inauguration of Haiti's new president as the Security Council considers expanding its peacekeeping mission there after the UN mandate expires this month, diplomats said on Monday, reports AP.

US Ambassador Madeleine Albright, the council president, met Monday with Chinese Ambassador Qin Huasun, and diplomatic sources said Beijing's concern over Taiwanese-Haitian relations "were on the agenda."

The sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, refused to elaborate. They also said there had been no explicit threat by China to veto any extension of the UN peace force when the current mandate expires February 29.

## It will damage peace talks: Syria Decision on early polls in Israel next week

**JERUSALEM, Feb 6:** Prime Minister Shimon Peres said Monday that he will announce his decision on holding early elections next week, reports AP.

Elections were originally scheduled for October 29, but Israeli media has reported that the polling would be moved up to May.

"I said I would announce the decision in the middle of this month and that is what I will do," Peres told Israel television, adding that the announcement would come next week.

In anticipation of an early election call, the opposition Likud and Tsomet parties said Monday that they would run on the same ballot.

A Reuters report from Damascus adds: Syria said today talk about possible early Israeli elections would damage peace talks between the two countries.

"It is hard to accept that elections will not affect the process of negotiations with Syria," the official daily

Tishreen said in an editorial signed by its chief editor, Mohammed Khair Al-Wadi. "Making peace with Syria needs intensive efforts by the Peres government to prepare Israeli public opinion for peace and to accept the requirements of this peace," he said.

It said it would be difficult to achieve this during the election campaign because competition for voters would feed extremism in Israeli society.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, leading in opinion polls since taking over from assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November, is under pressure within his Labour Party to move up elections by five months to May. He promises a decision around February 15.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher is due to arrive in Damascus later today from Israel for talks with President Hafez Al-Assad on how to advance the slow-moving peace negotiations.

## BRIEFLY

**Blizzards kill 42 in China:** Severe blizzards on China's remote Qinghai Plateau have killed at least 42 people and injured nearly 40,000 others, an official report said Tuesday, AP reports from Beijing.

The unusually heavy snowfalls, which began in October, have endangered the lives of another 18,000 people in the northwestern part of Sichuan province, in western China, the newspaper China Daily reported. The government has launched a major relief effort to aid local herdsmen who are running short of food and fuel.

**France sells missiles to Romania:** France has sold missiles to Romania in the first such deal to an eastern bloc country since the fall of the Berlin Wall, a newspaper reported on Monday, AP says from Paris.

Le Monde said France recently sold an unspecified number of M16 2 air-to-air missiles to the Bucharest government. The Paris daily said the missiles would be used to arm Romania's fleet of MIG fighters. French defence contractors also have received a contract to supply Indonesia with an unknown number of Mistral surface-to-air missiles, Le Monde said.

**Lightning kills 6 in Indonesia:** A mother and her five children were killed by lightning while they worked on their farm, a report said Monday, AP reports from Jakarta.

The mother, 28, and her children aged five months to 15 years, were struck Sunday, the official Antara news agency said.

The victims were residents of Jasa Mulia, a village in Irian Jaya about 3,640 kilometers (2,275 miles) southeast of Jakarta, it said.

**5.3 kg heroin seized in Canada:** The Canadian government said Monday that it had seized more than 5.3 kilograms of heroin and arrested a jeweller from India, AFP reports from Ottawa.

The seizure, at Toronto's Pearson International Airport, followed the discovery of the drugs sewn into the waistbands of 26 pairs of trousers in the baggage of Rajinder Sethi, 44, has been charged with importing a narcotic.

**Iran offers help to China:** Iran said Monday it was ready to help the victims of China's earthquake which killed at least 242 people and seriously injured 3,700, AP reports from Tehran.

The official Islamic Republic News Agency said Iran's offer of help came in a message from Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati to his Chinese counterpart. Saturday's magnitude 7 quake in China left 260,000 people homeless in freezing conditions.

**32 killed in Brazilian road mishap:** A bus carrying 51 people skidded on a rain-slicked highway and collided head-on with a lumber truck in northeastern Brazil, killing 32 people, police said Monday, AP reports from Rio de Janeiro.

The accident occurred Sunday near the town of Peritoro in Maranhao state, about 1,300 miles (2,092 kilometres) northeast of Rio. The bus was headed from the state capital of Sao Luis to the town of Teresina in neighbouring Piaui state when the driver lost control on a curve and skidded into the oncoming lane, police said.

**4 drown as Taiwanese boat sinks:** Four people were killed and 24 were missing after a Taiwanese fishing boat sank off the northern coast, state television said yesterday, Reuters reports from Taipei.

It said the reason for the boat's sinking was not clear but added that it may have collided with another vessel near the small island of Peng Chia-Yu, about 70 km (44 miles) north of Taiwan.

**Gunmen kill 9 in Thailand:** Nine people were killed and three others wounded in northern Thailand when gunmen ambushed a truck and fired at it in what police said yesterday appeared to be a drug-related attack, Reuters reports from Bangkok.

Four or five gunmen fired at the truck with automatic rifles in the northern province of Nan, near the border with Laos, some 750 km (460 miles) north of Bangkok on Monday, police said.

**Pope seeks Guatemalan peace:** Pope John Paul appealed to Guatemalans on Monday to make peace and end a bloody left-right struggle that has cost the lives of 140,000 people over the last three decades, Reuters says from Guatemala.

Arriving in cold, windy weather at the start of a week-long trip to Central America and Venezuela, the 75-year-old pontiff descended the steps from his aircraft slowly to a greeting from a young indigenous boy and girl.

## Manila, MNLF closer to peace accord

**ZAMBOANGA, Philippines, Feb 6:** The Philippines government and the country's main Muslim rebel group are closer to a full peace accord after agreeing on the size of an autonomous Muslim region, a source said today, reports AP.

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) will settle for self-rule over seven provinces in the southern Philippines, instead of the 13 provinces and nine cities they had initially asked, said a source from the joint ceasefire committee who is involved in the peace talks.

However, the MNLF will not govern major cities within the provinces.

## Kashmir border clash: Tension mounts between India, Pakistan

**POONCH, India, Feb 6:** After two weeks of intense gun battles across one of the world's most dangerous frontiers, Maj. Gen. GK Duggal was in a foul mood, reports AP.

Pointing toward a Pakistani outpost on a nearby mountain peak, Duggal said the soldiers there had fired three small rockets at his base along the Kashmir ceasefire line.

"The Pakistanis plan to target our posts again," probably with heavier anti-tank missiles, he said. "If that happens, it will be an act of escalation."

Pakistan and India have fought two wars over Kashmir, which was divided between the two countries when they were formed at the end of British colonial

rule in 1947. The Indian part of Kashmir, Jammu-Kashmir state, is the only majority Muslim state in India.

But the recent fighting was some of the worst in years, and it comes at a time of rising tensions between the two archenemies.

Twenty-five people were killed before the fighting tapered off last week, including 20 who died when a rocket hit a village mosque across the border. Each side says the other fired the rocket. UN observers are investigating.

The conflict is especially significant because each country is believed to have a well-developed nuclear weapons programme — and each is building up its arsenal.

India denied that it was planning a nuclear test, but the main opposition party, which has been gaining ground in state elections, is pro-nuclear and polls indicate that most Indians would approve of a nuclear test.

Pakistan is believed to be capable of building nuclear weapons. India accuses China of helping Pakistan develop nuclear capability.

At about the same time as the missile test, Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao proudly displayed the nation's new Arjun tank. Pakistan, meanwhile, is developing a battle tank with help from the Chinese.

The tensions in Kashmir make the arms race all the more ominous.

At a V-shaped section of the frontier known as "the chicken neck," Border Security Force officer KS Vohra warned that fighting could resume at any moment because talks last week failed to reach an agreement.

At the talks, he said, Pakistani demand that India drop

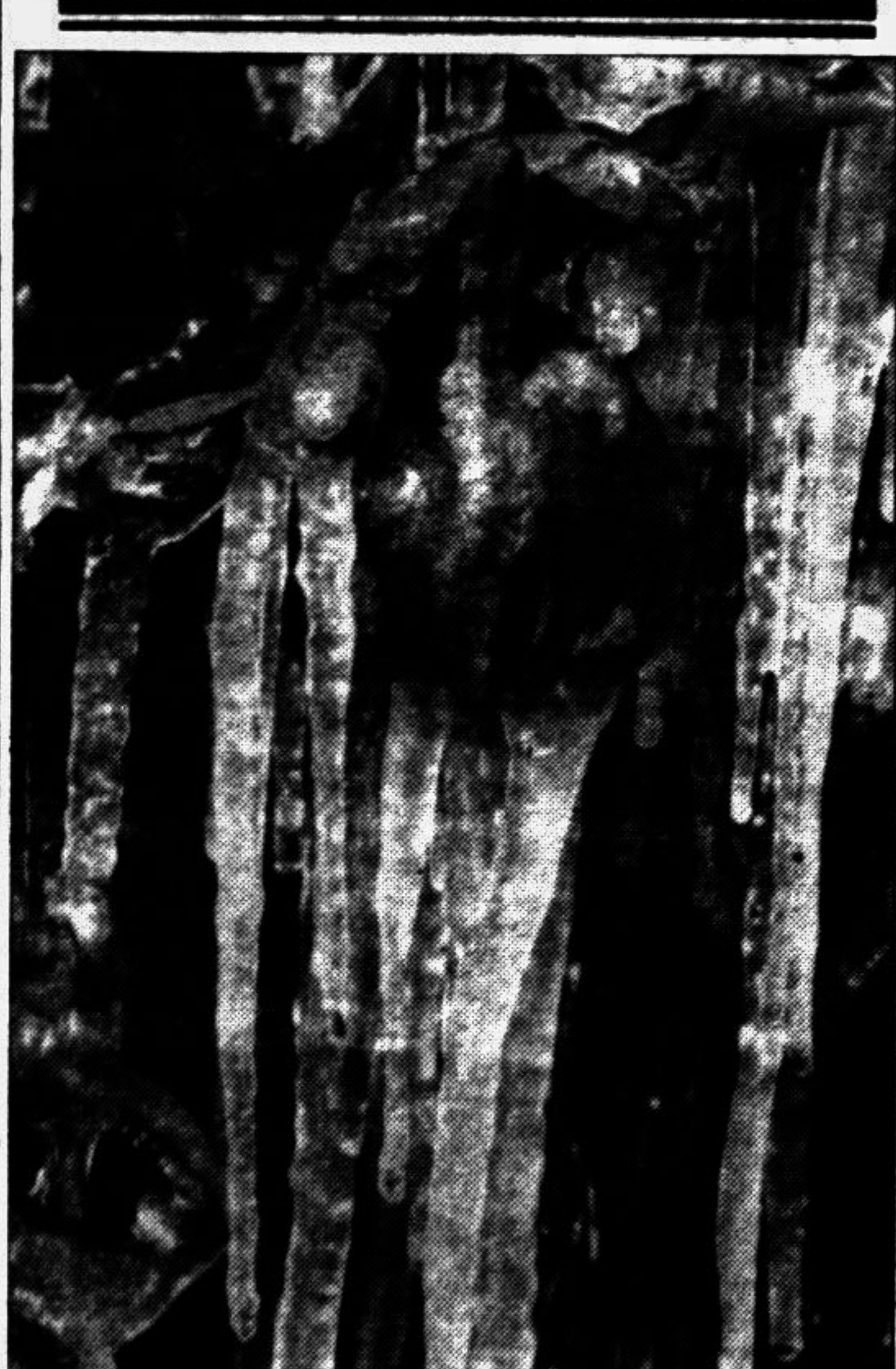
a plan to build a fence along the entire front line. When India refused, he said, Pakistani negotiators warned: "If you put up a single picket, we will open fire."

In Pakistan, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto called a one-day strike Monday in support of separatist rebels in the India part of Kashmir.

Stores and financial institutions were closed, and city buses stayed off the streets. Government and opposition politicians held rallies in major cities, and in Islamabad, the capital, demonstrators burned effigies of Rao.

In a televised address Sunday, Bhutto offered — as she has in the past — to meet with Indian officials to discuss how to end the war.

## Off the Record



A Florida orange hangs frozen in ice after temperatures dropped below 25 degrees Fahrenheit (31.5 degrees Celsius) for more than six hours in Lakeland, Florida, early on Monday. Damage occurs to the fruit when temperatures stay below 28 degrees for more than four hours.

## No more with 7th ....

**LOS ANGELES:** Critics of the marriage said it was a virtual union between the beauty and the beast — a much-wed Hollywood goddess and a lowly construction worker — and predicted it would never last. And it didn't, reports Reuters.

The goddess, Elizabeth Taylor, one of Hollywood's most glamorous stars, finally did what most had predicted, she formally ended her 52-month marriage to her seventh husband, Burly Larry Fortensky, when she filed for divorce on Monday.

Taylor, who announced a "trial separation" from Fortensky on Aug 31, cited "irreconcilable differences" in the routine three-page petition she signed and filed with the California superior court in Los Angeles.

No date was set for a hearing and the petition did not specify how the couple's assets would be divided. The marriage, that lasted, on paper at least, four years and four months.

The whole thing is going to be handled privately, said Taylor's lawyer, Neli Papinao. "Everyone is cooperating. I think it will be handled well and in a fashion that will be pleasing to everyone."

He declined to say whether the two-time Academy Award winner and the twice-divorced building labourer had a prenuptial agreement. But he said that Taylor still had affection for Fortensky and that she was getting on with her life as a single woman once again.

Taylor, who will be 64 on February 27, met Fortensky at the Betty Ford Clinic, where they were both undergoing treatment — Taylor reportedly for dependency on painkillers.

Fortensky, then 39, married Taylor on October 5, 1991 in what was supposed to be a private ceremony at pop singer Michael Jackson's Neverlands Estate in central California, but press helicopters hovering above and photographers hiding in bushes made it a public event.

## Shevardnadze warns Abkhazia

**TBILISI, Georgia, Feb 6:** President Eduard Shevardnadze warned the breakaway region of Abkhazia on Monday that it will not get any supplies from Georgia until it abandons its bid for independence, reports AP.

He urged Abkhazian leaders to negotiate a peaceful settlement.

Shevardnadze has demanded that the region remain part of Georgia but has agreed to allow Abkhazia to have its own constitution, parliament, and courts, as well as flag, national anthem and other symbols of statehood.

The conflict in Abkhazia flared up in August 1992 when the Georgian government sent troops into the fertile Black Sea province to quell its secessionist drive.

But in the fall of 1993, Abkhazian forces drove the Georgians out, and Russian peacekeepers were deployed in the region. Peace talks have stalled, as Abkhazians have refused to bow to Georgian control or allow 250,000 ethnic Georgian refugees to

return.

The Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose federation of former Soviet republics, decided last month to stop all trade, economic and financial contacts with the separatist Abkhazian government.

Shevardnadze said on Monday in his weekly radio address that this embargo created "a much improved climate for negotiations and settlement."

Ravaged by war and corruption, Abkhazia depends for survival on humanitarian aid from Russia and Turkey, as well as on cross-border trade with neighbouring Russian regions. The embargo, which includes a blockade of Abkhazia's Black Sea ports, will effectively cut off those lifelines.

"Abkhazian people are our citizens and we are not going to abandon them," Shevardnadze said. "They'll get whatever is necessary for survival, but only from the government of Georgia."

## AI accuses German police of beating foreigners

**BONN, Germany, Feb 6:** Amnesty International said on Monday it has received numerous reports over the past 10 months of German police officers beating up detained foreigners. It demanded the allegations be investigated, reports AP.

It was at least the third time in three years the human rights organisation has charged that foreigners have been mistreated by German police officers.

Klaus Steffenhagen, deputy chief of the German Police Union, conceded there have been a few isolated instances of police mistreating foreigners