

## Violence claims 31 more in Algeria

KERRACH, Algeria, Feb 19: Thirty-one villagers, mostly women, were slain by Islamic extremists in a mountain Hamlet as the army Tuesday pursued its biggest anti-terrorist offensive in two years ahead of vital legislative elections, reports AFP.

The massacres occurred early Monday at the village of Kerrach near the town of Blida, 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of the capital, witnesses told an AFP correspondent.

A group of 30 to 50 men armed with guns, axes and swords took families out of their homes and decapitated some, the witnesses added. Survivors said that 24 women, six children and a child were killed.

Two Algerian newspapers reported earlier that 33 people had been killed. On Tuesday a handful of traumatised villagers were still reliving the

nightmare. A group of 20 people wandered among the ruins. Several women sobbed.

"They came across the mountains, probably from Medea," early Monday, a villager said. "Some were dressed in camouflage gear, the had beards and kalashnikovs, axes, swords."

The daily El Watan said the death toll would have been higher had a villager not escaped and alerted security forces.

It said the attackers waged a 10-minute gun battle with security forces and then fled, taking with them the bodies of at least eight rebels. Around 10 guerrillas were wounded.

The armed wing of the banned Islamic Salvation Front on Tuesday condemned the killings, saying it was "Innocent of all criminal actions" carried out in the Medea region.

## US urges India, Pakistan to end row over Kashmir

JAMMU, India, Feb 19: The United States Tuesday urged India and Pakistan to end their long-standing row over Kashmir but said Washington did not seek a mediatory role in the conflict, reports AFP.

US Ambassador to India Frank Wisner said in speech at Jammu University that South Asia would see real peace only when India and Pakistan resolved the ownership of Kashmir peacefully.

The United States seeks no role in this affair, other than as an advocate for peace and reconciliation," he said.

"India has made it clear it does not seek third-party mediation, and America is not offering to serve as mediator."

"No lasting solution can be imposed — not by Pakistan on

India, nor by India on Pakistan, or by the world on either country ... only India and Pakistan can make peace, and keep it."

Wisner added: "Unless this conflict is resolved, Kashmir risks becoming an even greater magnet for violent, radical politics that employ terrorism as their instrument of choice."

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training Muslim militants fighting to end Indian rule in Kashmir. Around 17,000 people have been killed in the Himalayan state in a bloody separatist drive since 1989.

The two countries have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir.

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"Violence must end," he said. "Terrorism from any quarter must end. It has no place in a civilised world. It must be rooted out."

The US envoy also called for information about four western tourists — an American, two Britons and a German — missing since they were kidnapped by Kashmiri Muslim militants in July 1995.

Britons Paul Wells and Keith Mangan, American Donald Hutchings and German Dirk Hsler were seized, while trekking along with another American, John Childs, and a Norwegian, Hans Christian Ostro.

Childs managed to escape, while Ostro was beheaded by the militants.

## 129 countries to participate in World Islamic Cong in May

ABIDJAN, Feb 19: Some 500 delegates from 129 countries will gather here between May 16 and 18 for a World Islamic Congress, Ivory Coast's Supreme Islamic Council (CSI) said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Initiated by the CSI, one of the top Islamic organisations in Ivory Coast, the congress aims to "adapt Islam to African realities" and "bring an end to quarrels between Muslims for a durable peace within Islamic communities."

"In Africa we have overcome the Gulf of fundamentalism thanks to our tolerant behaviour. We want to share this reality with our Muslim brothers from across the world in search of true unity," Balloh Yacouba, President of the Congress's organising committee, told a press conference.

## China blasts US criticism of human rights abuses

The fact is that year after year, the US government has persisted in other countries' human rights situations and turned a blind eye to problems in its own backyard.

It denounced the US State Department's series of annual human rights reports as hypocritical, saying they "want only to attack other countries' problems without mentioning domestic shortcomings."

The most recent report, released on January 30, said that Chinese repression had left no dissidents active by the end of 1996. China continued to commit widespread abuses stemming from the authorities' in tolerance of dissent and fear of unrest, it said.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is due to arrive in China on Monday for a two-day official visit.

## BRIEFLY

### Liz to undergo brain surgery:

Elizabeth Taylor checked into a hospital Tuesday in preparation for surgery to remove a benign tumor on her brain, AP reports from Los Angeles.

"She checked into the hospital this morning for tests and will remain there until after the surgery," said Maria Pignataro, publicist for the Oscar-winning actress. There was still no date for the surgery at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, but it will be sometime this week, she said.

**Gunmen kill 6 in Dushanbe:** Six people were killed and one injured in a terrorist attack late Tuesday in the Tajik capital and a Russian border guard was shot dead in a separate incident, local police said. AFP reports from Dushanbe.

In the first attack, four Russians died — including a military officer and two security guards of the American embassy — along with a Tajik scientist and a Tajik police officer who worked as a hospital guard.

**Gujral to visit Tehran:** The External Affairs Minister, I K Gujral, will leave for Tehran on February 21 to co-chair the ninth meeting of the Indo-Iranian Joint Commission which will give a new impetus to the bilateral relations in the field of trade, industry, agriculture, communications and culture, PTI reports from New Delhi.

The two-day meeting will have before the groundwork done by the six sub-committees of the commission. These cover trade and industry, petroleum and natural gas, communications,

**Saudi man beheaded:** A Saudi man was beheaded on Tuesday in the east of the kingdom for machine-gunning another man to death, the fourth execution so far this year, the Interior Ministry said. AFP reports from Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia, which is governed by Islamic law, applied the death penalty in cases of murder, rape, armed robbery and drug trafficking. It executed 68 people last year and a record 191 in 1995.

**Heavy rains claim 39 in Peru:** Floodwaters and mudslides caused by heavy rains have killed at least 39 people in southern Peru, officials said Tuesday. AFP reports from Lima.

Reports said up to 250 people could be missing. Late Tuesday, the bodies of 33 peasants were recovered from the communities of Cochas and Pumarra near Ampay mountain some 970 kilometres (600 miles) southeast of Lima.

**Road mishap kills 17 in Mexico:** At least 17 people were killed and five others seriously injured in a multi-vehicle collision and explosion in Mexico City, the local Red Cross said. Reuter reports from Mexico City.

There were 17 bodies at the scene," a spokesman for the Red Cross said, adding that five more people had suffered serious burns. He said a bus collided with a tanker truck carrying fuel which then exploded.

**Mild quake shakes Japan:** A moderate earthquake shook Tokyo and surrounding areas yesterday, but there was no danger of it causing tidal waves, the Meteorological Agency said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The quake, which occurred at 10:04 am (0104 GMT), measured 2.0 on the Japanese intensity scale of up to seven in Tokyo, Chiba and the Izu peninsula.

## Kurdish rebels operating secret bases in Lebanon

BEIRUT, Feb 19: The collapse of law and order during the 1975-90 civil war invited everyone from Kurdish guerrillas to the terrorist Carlos to set up base in Lebanon, reports AP.

The attraction of Lebanon as a haven, however, has not diminished with the return of state authority.

The government's ability to clear its terrain is limited by Syria and Israel's military presence in parts of the country.

Elsewhere, groups have managed to operate secret bases in remote regions or go unnoticed in urban areas.

When an all-out civil war erupted in 1975, Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation ruled as a state-within-a-state in regions it controlled.

International groups sympathetic to its cause, such as the Japanese Red Army, subsequently found refuge, training and assistance from the Palestinian guerrillas there.

When the PLO was driven out of Beirut after the 1982 Israeli invasion, some allied groups stayed behind in the Syria-controlled Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon. Others departed, including Carlos, who is now in French custody.

The Japanese Red Army's

Kozo Okamoto spent 12 years in an Israeli jail for a 1972 attack on an Israeli airport in which 24 people died. He was released in 1985 and reportedly moved to Lebanon.

Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal's Fatah-Revolutionary Council continues to be active in Lebanon, despite infighting that has sharply depleted its ranks. It gained notoriety for its attacks in December 1985 on airports in Rome and Vienna.

Other radical Palestinian groups such as Ahmed Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command are tolerated by the Lebanese government and by Syrian troops, who control two-thirds of the country.

Abdullah Ocalan's Kurdish Workers' Party, which has been fighting a guerrilla war in southeastern Turkey since the 1980s, is believed to have bases in the Bekaa.

Iran has several hundred Revolutionary Guards based in the Bekaa. They train guerrillas of Hezbollah, or the Party of God, which is trying to drive Israel from southern Lebanon.

Lebanese authorities say the Israelis harbor suspects wanted by the government for bombings and assassinations.



Standing beside a portrait of the slain former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi (extreme left) Robert Vadra (center-left) greets photographers after wedding Priyanka Gandhi (2nd-R) Tuesday at 10 Jan Path, the official Gandhi residence in the Indian capital. 26-year-old Priyanka wears a South Indian temple sari which had belonged to her grandmother Indira Gandhi. At left is Priyanka's mother Sonia Gandhi; at right is Priyanka's brother Rahul.

— AFP/UNB photo

## Netanyahu questioned for corruption

## Washington opposes Israeli move to open roads around E Jerusalem

WASHINGTON, Feb 19: The United States voiced disapproval Tuesday over a decision by the Israeli government to open roads around east Jerusalem, which the Palestinians hope will some day be the capital of their independent state, reports AFP.

"We would have preferred that the action just taken by the Israeli government ... not have been taken at this time," State Department spokesman Glyn Davies said.

"We would prefer to see steps taken now which continue to build positive momentum," he added.

Israel and the Palestinians reached agreement last month on the long-delayed Israeli redeployment from the West Bank town of Hebron.

It was the first accord reached by Netanyahu with the Palestinians since he was elected in May on a platform that called for placing Israel's security needs first in the quest

for peace in the Middle East.

The agreement called for the sides to begin final negotiations next month that are to address the status of Jerusalem, which Netanyahu has pledged to keep under Israeli sovereignty. Israel seized east Jerusalem from Jordan in the 1967 war and later annexed it.

Meanwhile, Israeli police questioned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for four hours Tuesday over alleged high-level corruption surrounding his short-lived appointment last month of a close political associate as attorney-general.

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A team of three policemen led by chief investigator Sandro Mazo probed Netanyahu in his Jerusalem office about the January 10 appointment of Roni Bar-On as Israel's top judicial official.

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