

## 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 men 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 Meadea," 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 guerillas 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 Meadea 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 a 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.

Wisner, making his third trip to Kashmir, called for an end to the violence.

"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 Hsrt 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," Ballou Yacouba, President of the Congress's organising committee, told a press conference.

## China blasts US criticism of human rights abuses

BEIJING, Feb 19: China attacked the United States for its criticism of human rights abuses abroad today and in turn highlighted high US rates of child a recent study, a signed commentary in the official China Daily, said five times more children under the age of 15 are likely to be killed in the US than in 25 other developed countries, reports AFP.

It also quoted a study by the US government-sponsored centre for disease control as saying that between 1950 and 1990, the child murder rate tripled and the child suicide rate quadrupled in the US.

"Had the US government focused all its attention on the children's situation at home... then in the past years, the rates of child murder and suicide would not have been so shocking," the commentary said.

"The fact is that year after year, the US government has persisted in other countries' human rights situation 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 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' intolerance 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 people 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 Cochab and Pumaranna 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 on Tuesday 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 guerillas 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 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 guerillas there.

When the PLO was driven out of Beirut after the 1982 Israeli invasion, some allied groups stayed behind in the Syria-controlled Bekka 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.

Abdulla 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 guerillas 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 (centre-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.

A statement issued by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the ministerial committee on Jerusalem approved construction of a new highway leading into northern Jerusalem through occupied West Bank territory.

At Netanyahu's request, the committee postponed discussion of an explosive plan to

build homes for some 25,000 Jews in the east Jerusalem district of Har Homa, known to Palestinians as Mount Abu Gneim.

"We've said to both parties, since the Hebron agreement, that they should act in ways which build confidence and enhance prospects for future progress," 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.

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



The new US Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson (L) shakes hands with Kofi Annan (R), Secretary General of the United Nations, Tuesday at UN headquarters in New York. Richardson is replacing Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as US Ambassador to the UN. — AFP/UNB photo

## Phoolan Devi to surrender to court on Mar 3

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: India's "Bandit Queen" — turned politician Phoolan Devi said today she would surrender to a court on March 3 on charges of murder and robbery, reports AFP.

Devi, a member of parliament, made the statement in an affidavit before a judge in the northern city of Kanpur, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said.

Devi has been ordered to surrender on charges of killing 20 men in a village in 1981 to avenge her rape. She had been earlier asked by the court to surrender before February 17.

## UN official in Myanmar for govt-opposition talks

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 19: In a rare move by the United Nations, a top official is in Myanmar this week to try and set the state for talks between the government and opposition leaders, a UN official said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The visit by Francesco Vendrell, Director of the Political Affairs Department's East Asia desk, is part of the United Nations' "quiet diplomacy" with Yangon, said the official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Vendrell is on "a routine visit" in the context of "on-going contacts" between the United Nations and Myanmar's military regime, the official added.

No meeting was scheduled between Vendrell and opposition figures.

## Hostage crisis Mediators meet Fujimori

LIMA, Feb 19: Mediators in Peru's hostage crisis Tuesday held a surprise two-and-a-half hour meeting with President Alberto Fujimori, officials said, reports AFP.

The meeting, which had not been previously announced, was held at the government palace.

Official sources said the mediators brought Fujimori a preliminary proposal aimed at moving forward negotiations with the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA).

They did not disclose the contents of the talks that came after negotiations with rebels broke down Saturday.

The leftist rebels have been holding 72 prominent Latin American and Japanese hostages at the Japanese ambassador's residence here since December 17.

**Satellite to help track down malaria-carrying mosquitoes**

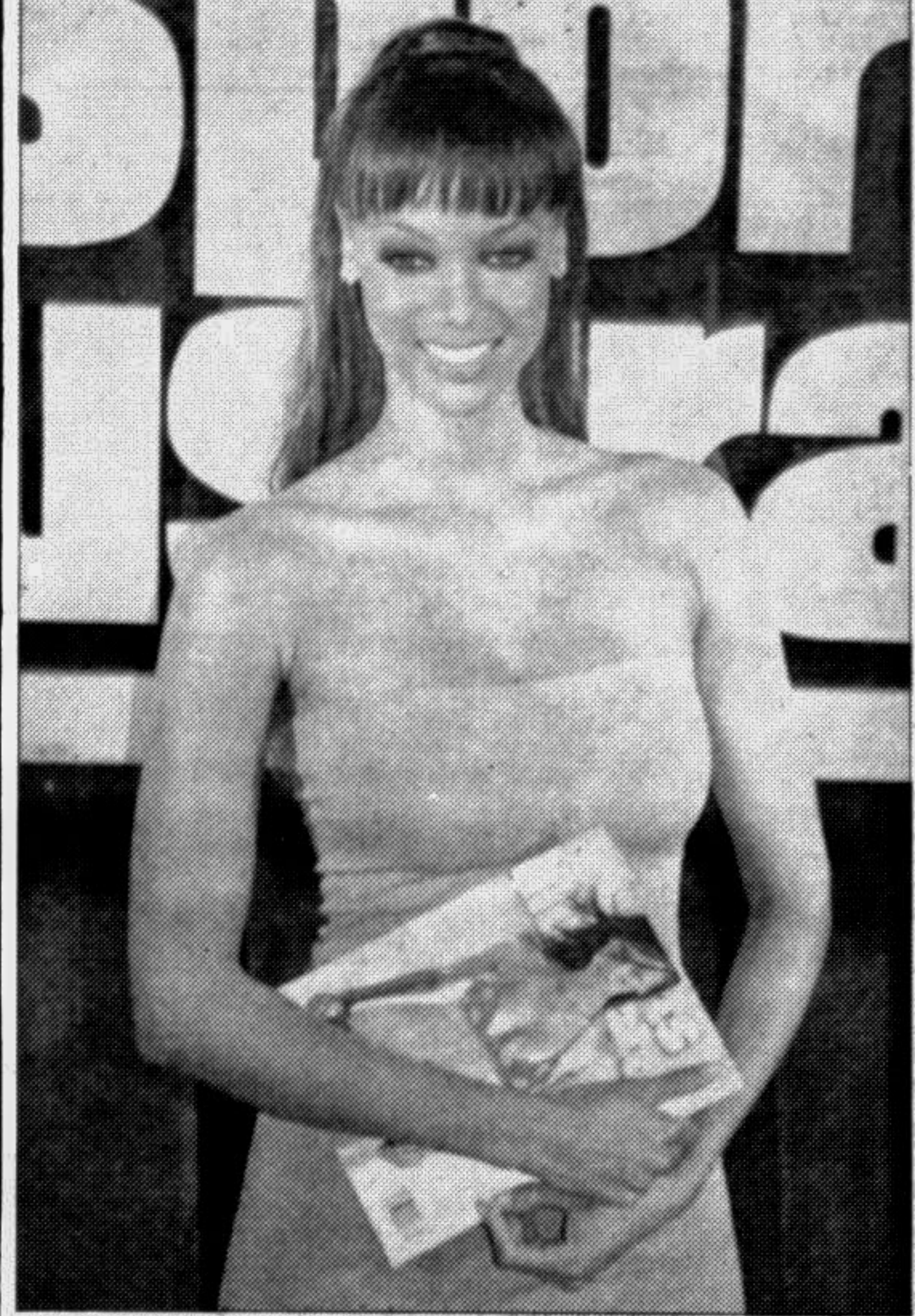
NEW DELHI, Feb 19: India scientists are to use satellites to help track down malaria-carrying mosquitoes, a newspaper reported today, says AFP.

The Asian Age said the malaria research centre had approached the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for help.

Remote sensors on a satellite will be used to pinpoint mosquito breeding areas around cities.

"Indiscriminate use of pesticides can increase the resistance to them. It also pushes up costs," said Sarala K. Subbarao of the Malaria Research Centre.

## Off the Record



Supermodel Tyra Banks poses with a copy of Sports Illustrated during the 1997 Swimsuit Issue press conference Tuesday in New York. Banks is on the cover for the second consecutive year following her appearance a year ago when she was pictured along with another supermodel in South Africa. — AFP/UNB photo

## Battle over Monroe's pornographic film

STOCKHOLM: Two Swedes are battling over the rights to a seven-minute pornographic film that reputedly stars the late screen legend Marilyn Monroe, reports AFP.

Book and film international, which transfers films and books to CD-ROM, said Tuesday it would sue Swedish police officer Oerjan Saether on behalf of a man identified only as Ali.

"We can concretely prove that we have acquired the copyright," Ali was quoted as saying by the Swedish news agency.

But Saether, whose stepfather Reijo west was one of Sweden's biggest porn dealers in the 1970s, insists that the rights belong to him.

"I have the original and the rights to the film. I don't know what the other guy has," he said.

Filed in the United States in 1947, the short features a woman alleged to be Monroe performing a striptease, then having sex with a man.

It was screened at the Vila-Seca film festival in Spain on February 1-2, but the American Film Institute has expressed doubt as to whether its actress really is Monroe, who died in 1962 of an overdose.

## Because she snores all sight

TEHRAN: An Iranian man has filed for divorce from his wife of 40 days because she snores all night a newspaper said Tuesday, reports Reuters.

Believe me over the past nights I have not been able to sleep at all I am ready to divorce her on whatever legal grounds she wishes, the husband named Gholam was quoted by Iran news Daily as telling the judge.

Farzaneh, the wife said she tried to hide her heavy snoring by dissolving sleeping pills.

But to avoid divorce, said Farzaneh, I am ready to sleep during the day and stay awake at night so that Gholam will not hear me snore.

The daily said Gholam had rejected Farzaneh's offer and arbiters had been appointed to consider the case.

## Estrogen helps women to strengthen bones

CHICAGO: A new study suggests that for women in their 60s, it may not be too late to start taking estrogen to strengthen their bones, reports AP.

Researchers from the University of California at San Diego found that some women who didn't start using estrogen until many years after menopause had bone density similar to that of women who had been taking the hormone since menopause.

The findings were reported in Wednesday's issue of The Journal of the American Medical Association.

Estrogen is frequently prescribed to women to head off osteoporosis, a slow thinning of the bones that begins after 40. In some women, the bones become so fragile that they break easily.

## Warmer temperatures change penguin numbers

SYDNEY: A penguin biologist says global warming is dumping more snow on coastal Antarctica, covering bare rock that Adelle penguins need for nesting and contributing to the extinction of their colonies, reports AP.

Bill Fraser of Montana State University analysed the Adelle penguin population decrease on Litchfield Island between 1975 and 1992, near the US National Science Foundation's Palmer Station on the Antarctic Peninsula.

He found that the 12 extinct colonies on the island all had a southwest aspect where most snow accumulates, adding further fuel to his theory that warmer temperatures are having a marked impact on the ecology of the area.

In 1992, a team led by Fraser rocked the Antarctic science community by debunking the accepted view that increasing numbers of Chinstrap penguins on the peninsula were due to the reduced competitions for krill from whales, due to whaling.

Fraser's team claimed that warmer temperatures and reduced sea ice were the real culprits for the decline in ice-dependent Adelle penguins and the increase in species which prefer open water, including Chinstraps.

## Albright proposes joint NATO-Russia military brigade

BRUSSELS, Feb 19: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright proposed Tuesday that NATO form a joint military brigade with Russia to link Russia to the alliance as it expands eastward, reports AP.

In a speech to NATO foreign ministers, Albright also called for a meeting in the spring with Russia and prospective new alliance members "to give every ally a chance for direct discussion" with the candidates.

Formal invitations to the candidate nations are due to be issued in July at a NATO summit meeting President Clinton would attend in Madrid, Spain.

Russia is concerned about the expansion, Albright's proposals were designed to ease Moscow's worries.

She envisioned a council linking NATO to Russia, an idea

she has been developing on her trip to Europe, that would deal with major security issues.

NATO and Russian military partners would work together and we could begin immediately to develop a joint NATO-Russia brigade," she said.

Russian troops are already serving alongside NATO forces in a peacekeeping mission in Bosnia.

Albright met with European and NATO officials, but could not talk EU leaders out of opposing the controversial American law punishing countries that trade with Cuba.

Meeting with the top EU officials in charge of foreign affairs and trade, Albright referred to herself "a child of a divided Europe" and said she wanted to work to make the "continent whole and free again."

Later Tuesday she was to address a meeting of NATO foreign ministers at the Atlantic alliance's Brussels headquarters before leaving for London.

Her first stop was the 15-nation EU, which celebrates its 40th birthday next month, for talks with its top executive. The European Union, like the 16-member North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, plans to expand its membership over the next few years.

Albright, whose remarks were relayed by EU spokesmen, stressed the importance of the EU's plans to add as many as a dozen new members over the next decade, but said entry into the EU should not be considered a consolation prize for those newly democratic countries who do not make it into NATO in the first wave.

The most controversial issue during the talks, however, was the EU's radically different approach to Cuba. The Europeans believe the West must talk and trade with Fidel Castro's government to make headway in human rights and democracy.

The United States has spent the past 37 years trying to isolate and weaken Cuba through an economic embargo. Irked at different thinking by Canada, Europe and others, Washington retaliated with the Helms-Burton Act, which takes action against companies who do business with Cuban companies that use assets confiscated from Americans in 1959.

The EU is taking the issue to a World Trade Organisation dispute settlement panel, but the United States maintains it is a national security rather

than a trade issue. The panel is scheduled to be named Thursday.

Sir Leon Brittan, the EU's commissioner for trade, said in his remarks to Albright that despite many current efforts to defuse the Cuba issue, prospects of doing so before Thursday were not bright. EU spokesman Klaus von der Pals said. Even if the disagreement went to the panel, the EU would try to keep talks going with Washington.

van der Pals quoted Brittan as saying.

We would like the United States to help us defuse the issue, not exacerbate it, even if the panel is named," said Joao Vale de Almeida, another EU spokesman.

Yves-Thibault de Silguy, EU commissioner for financial and monetary affairs, ex-

plained to Albright the importance of the single European currency, scheduled to go into circulation in 1999.

He called for close consultation with the United States on related macroeconomic issues.

At NATO, enlargement is also the preoccupying issue. Washington wants the first new member, expected to be named at a July 8-9 summit in Madrid, to be taken in by NATO's 50th anniversary in 1999.

To address Moscow's concerns, NATO has opened negotiations on a charter outlining the specifics of a new NATO-Russia relationship.

Those negotiations are headed by NATO Secretary General Javier Solana, who is scheduled to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov on Sunday in Brussels.