

BRIEFLY

Albright's 9-nation tour ends:

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright left China yesterday after a visit shortened because of the funeral of paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, airport officials said, Reuters reports from Beijing.

After talks with Chinese leaders of Monday, Albright reported no concrete progress on human rights or breakthroughs on other issues. But she pronounced herself satisfied with the warm reception she received and touched by the fact that Chinese leaders did not cancel the trip after the death of Deng, as she expected.

Road mishap kills 10 in Philippines:

Ten people were killed and several critically injured yesterday when an overcrowded bus rolled into a ditch in the central Philippine island of Masbate, a radio report said, AFP reports from Manila.

Up to 60 people were in the bus, going to the town of Aroray, a local official told DZMM radio. He said a front wheel exploded near the town of Milagros, causing the vehicle to swerve and overturn into a ditch.

Saudi ministers arrive in US:

Saudi Arabian Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz and Foreign Minister Prince Saud arrived in Washington Monday for talks with US officials on bilateral relations and regional developments. Xinhua reports from Washington.

State Department spokesman Glyn Davies told reporters that talks will be on a wide range, including economic subjects, military subjects, the kinds of topics especially concerning the regional development. "In our discussion with the Saudis, clearly one of the big issue areas is a discussion of the region, where Saudi Arabia plays a leading role and they have concerns about Iraq," Davies said.

Funeral pyramids found in Siberia:

Pyramids—in Russia? A Russian news agency reported Monday that archaeologists claim to have discovered funeral pyramids in the remote Altai territory of Siberia, AP reports from Barnaul.

The step pyramids, similar to Latin American ones, were found last summer in the Sentelek Valley of the Charysh district, Interfax said. Subsequent research has found that the structures date to the fourth century BC. Pyotr Shulga, head of the Inheritance scientific research centre, was quoted as saying.

AIDS cases rising in S'pore:

More Singaporeans are getting infected with the AIDS virus each passing year, and the number of victims jumped 25 per cent in 1996 over the previous year, the government said Tuesday, AP reports from Singapore.

From a mere two people infected with HIV in 1985, the number bloated to 111 in 1995 and 139 in 1996, most of them men, a Health Ministry statement said. Of the 139 victims, 135 were infected by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus through sexual contact; 103 are heterosexual, 20 bisexual and 12 homosexual. Four were infected by intravenous drug use, the statement said.

Kim apologises for loan scandal:

South Korean President Kim Young-sam apologised with "agony and sorrow" on Tuesday for a loan scandal that has put three of his close associates in custody and rocked the nation, Reuters reports from Seoul.

In a television address on the fourth anniversary of his inauguration Kim also said he was shamed by his second son being embroiled in the scandal swirling around the failed Hanbo Steel Co.

The scandal involved leading politicians from both ruling and opposition parties, a former Cabinet minister, top bankers and the founder of the Hanbo Group, the country's 14th largest industrial conglomerate. Kim's son, Hyun-Chul, was questioned over the weekend in connection with the affair but cleared of any wrongdoing.

Jiang vows not to swerve from policies of Deng



President Jiang Zemin wiping a tear as he delivers a speech during the funeral of China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in Beijing yesterday.—AFP/UNB photo

BEIJING, Feb 25: China's President Jiang Zemin has wasted no time since the death last week of his mentor Deng Xiaoping to tell the 1.2 billion Chinese over whom he now wields sway that he is in charge, reports Reuters.

In his first public remarks after Deng died on Wednesday at 92, Jiang vowed not to swerve from the policies of the man China hails as the architect of its sweeping reforms, and said he would outdo those achievements.

The death of Deng, the supreme leader of China for the last 18 years, paves the way for his anointed heir Jiang to assume the reins of power after seven years of waiting in the wings for his patron to pass away.

President and Communist Party chief Jiang, who takes full power with Deng's death, is a technocrat and career Communist with a sure grasp of

Chinese politics but a personal history that has little in common with his revolutionary predecessors.

Jiang, who combines the largely symbolic title of president with the really powerful roles of Communist Party general secretary and chairman of the Central Military Commission, was widely seen as a bland compromise candidate when he shot to power from relative obscurity in 1989.

The former tractor factory manager has fought to emerge from the shadow of patriarch Deng.

Jiang was dismissed at first by foreign analysts as a powerless transitional figure whose rule would end with Deng's death. But he has in recent years promoted allies and dominated the middle ground on policy to bolster his position as the favoured successor.

He has shown himself an as-

tute politician, edging his way through a minefield of enemies and rivals to consolidate a grip on power that appeared unshakable as Deng's influence waned.

It was unclear whether his vow to do better would be regarded as a disrespectful show of arrogance and self-assurance so soon after Deng's passing from the scene.

He was appointed party chief after Zhao Ziyang, a reformist closely associated with Deng, was toppled by hardliners who accused him of supporting the democracy movement that swept China until crushed by the army in Beijing on June 4, 1989.

Unlike Deng or his predecessor chairman Mao Zedong, Jiang has no experience of war or the military, which impairs his standing with China's three million-strong army.



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat (L) and Dutch EU Foreign Ministers Council Chairman Hans Van Mierlo (R) exchange documents Monday after an official signing of a temporary cooperation and trade agreement at the EU's Justus Lipsius building in Brussels. The agreement makes the Palestinian Authority a full-value partner of the European Union. Persons in background not identified.—AFP/UNB photo

Diana sues The Express

LONDON, Feb 25: Princess Diana is suing The Express on Sunday newspaper, saying it falsely reported that she would personally profit from an auction of her dresses, reports AP.

"A writ was issued today against the editor and publishers of the Express on Sunday and The Express," her attorney, Anthony Julius, said Monday, a day after the report appeared.

"In it, the Princess of Wales claims damages for the libel that, contrary to earlier press reports, she will benefit personally from the sale of a number of her dresses."

Dick Saunders, head of communications at The Express's parent company United News and Media, said the company had no comment. The report was splashed on the front page of at least one edition of the Sunday paper.

Christie's auctioneers were expected to announce details of the sale this week.

Diana's senior financial manager Michael Gibbins said all the profits would go to charity.

"The entire proceeds will be divided equally between the Aids Crisis Trust and the Royal Marsden Cancer Research Fund," said Gibbins, controller of the princess's household.

"The princess herself will not benefit financially in any way from the sale," he said.

The story in the Express on Sunday concerning the proceeds of the sale of the Princess of Wales's dresses is completely unfounded.

India may offer to withdraw its forces from Siachen glacier

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: India may offer to withdraw its forces from the Siachen glacier, known as the world's highest battlefield, in a prelude to proposed talks with arch-rival Pakistan, a daily said today, reports AP.

The Asian age quoted unidentified officials as saying that New Delhi would demilitarise the glacier in the disputed state of Kashmir if Islamabad also agreed to pull back troops.

"We also want assurances that Pakistan will not indulge in any kind of military activity in the area after the Indian withdrawal," an official said.

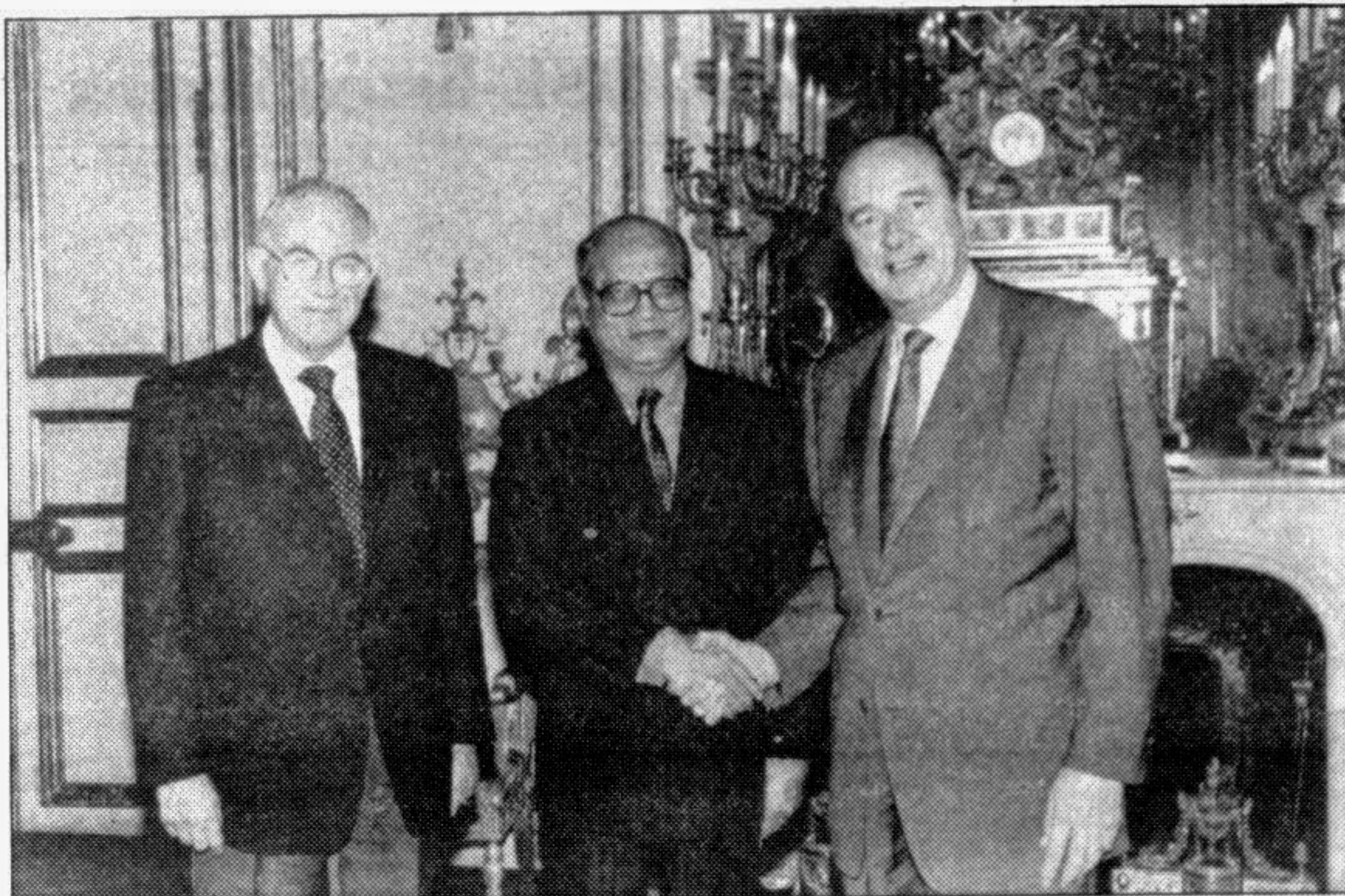
Naz Sharif, the newly-elected Pakistani Prime Minister, has offered to resume talks with India over a range of contested issues including Kashmir, parts of which are held by both countries.

The official, however, said India would not allow a third round to become involved in Kashmir talks, a reference to US Ambassador Frank Wisner's recent statement that it was time to resolve the problem.

The 20,000-foot (6,066-metre) glacier was a no-man's land until a ceasefire line was drawn by the United Nations in 1949 after the first war between India and Pakistan in 1949. It was readjusted after a second war in 1965.

Troops at Siachen risk avalanches, blizzards, snow blindness and frostbite and have to rely on oxygen cylinders.

Pakistan says India has 4,000 troops in the forward area and some 25,000 men in reserve.



New Bangladesh Ambassador to France, Tufail K Haider, recently presented his credentials to President Jacques Chirac in the Elysee Palace, Paris. French Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette (left) is also seen.

Mexico denies involvement of 2 governors in drug trafficking

MEXICO CITY, Feb 25: Mexico has denied a newspaper report alleging that two state governors are aiding drug-traffickers, reports AP.

In a related matter, Attorney General Jorge Madrazo Cuellar said the government has fired 36 people from the National Drug Control Institute following the arrest of its director for allegedly collaborating with drug traffickers.

Madrazo Cuellar said Monday that government investigations had revealed nothing of substance to implicate the two governors, Sonora Gov. Manlio Fabio Beltrones and Morelos Gov. Jorge Carrillo Olea.

Various investigations carried out to date in Sonora and Morelos... have not resulted in any legally grounded accusations," Madrazo Cuellar told the official Mexican news agency Notimex. Sonora state borders the US state of Arizona, and Morelos state is south of Mexico City.

The New York Times reported Sunday that accusations linking Beltrones to drug smugglers are based on interviews with US officials, realms of intelligence data and "highly reliable" informers.

Beltrones threatened to take legal action against the newspaper.

"I communicated to the newspaper my complete rejection and indignation over these aspersions... against myself and the people of (Sonora) who for so many years have worked in neighbourliness and cooperation with the people of Arizona," Beltrones wrote in a full-page ad published in Mexico City dailies.

Carrillo Olea said he sent a letter of protest to The New York Times that challenges the paper to back up claims made by its sources.

The accusations add to a growing list of real and rumored Mexican failures in the fight against drug trafficking.

currently the key issue in US-Mexico relations.

Mexico last week indicted Gen. Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, the country's top anti-narcotics official, on charges of cooperating with drug cartels.

After being appointed head of Mexico's National Drug Control Institute in December, Gutierrez Rebollo moved into a Mexico City apartment reportedly loaned to him by a top drug lord, Amado Carrillo Fuentes.

Responding to reports the United States might place conditions on the certification, Foreign Minister Angel Gurría said Monday that Mexico will not negotiate.

Gurría said discussions last week in Washington on the certification decision had been "tense."

"Clearly, this issue has an enormous potential to divide us, to create fissures in a relationship which is, as of now, excellent," Gurría told local radio.



The Spice Girls perform on stage at the Brit Awards ceremony in London on Monday where they scooped awards for Best British Video and Best Single.—AFP/UNB photo

Fighting seems imminent in northern Iraq: KDP

CAIRO, Feb 25: An Iraqi Kurdish group backed by Saddam Hussein accused a rival faction Monday of preparing for war in northern Iraq, reports AP.

In another sign of possible fighting, a major opposition group reported large troop movements by Iraq's elite Republican Guard.

The Kurdistan Democratic party said its rival, the Iranian-backed patriotic Union of Kurdistan, has been massing troops and heavy weapons along their front lines in the largely autonomous region the two groups have controlled since the end of the 1991 Gulf War.

In a statement faxed to The Associated Press in Cairo, the KDP accused its rival of "escalating media attacks and making agitating and threatening statements for their intended action."

It also said the movements "are causing a sense of fear among the population that their security and stability is being once again threatened."

Mandela hopes to organise peace talks to end war in Zaire

STELLENBOSCH, South Africa, Feb 25: South Africa's President Nelson Mandela said yesterday he hoped to organise peace talks next month to settle the conflict in Zaire, but its President Mobutu Sese Seko said he knew nothing of the plans, reports AP.

Mandela said here that African states leading a bid to end the civil war in Zaire hope to meet Mobutu on March 19.

But in the southern French city of Nice, where he is recuperating after cancer surgery, the long-time Zairean leader said he knew nothing of the possible meetings aides reported.

Mobutu, who officially rejects any negotiations with the rebels who have captured a swathe of territory in eastern

Zaire since October "has not been informed" of the meeting and therefore does not plan to attend it, he said.

However, highly placed South African diplomatic sources said the probable reason for Mobutu's ignorance of the meeting was that he had not yet received his invitation.

Mandela speaking to journalists in this farming town outside Cape Town, said yesterday "a great deal of progress" had been made in efforts to end the war that has seen the mainly Tutsi rebels take a string of eastern towns.

The rebels are eager for talks but, failing negotiations have continued their attacks and are reportedly heading for the major town of Kisangani.

Sharif announces death penalty for gangrape

ISLAMABAD, Feb 25: Pakistan is to introduce the death penalty for anyone convicted of gangrape, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced, reports AP.

"Our religion and culture has given due status to women," he said in a nationwide broadcast late Sunday, adding that his government would protect the dignity and honour of women and of all citizens.

I will personally reach the spot where such crime occurs and take action against the culprits involved in oppression and highhandedness, he said.

Sharif assumed office last week after his Pakistan Muslim League trounced former premier Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party in general elections earlier this month.

Ecologists trying to restore Brazil's dwindled Atlantic Forest

MAQUINE, Brazil, Feb 25: High in a tangle of creepers and branches in the Atlantic Forest, Maria Luiza Klippert strikes "green gold"—the fruit of a heart-of-palm tree, reports AP.

It has taken Klippert, a geneticist, several days to find a fertile heart-of-palm, a once plentiful but now dwindling species prized for a soft, rich core that is often served in salads.

Using long shears, Klippert prunes hundreds of red fruits that contain the precious seeds she needs to grow new heart-of-palms. Then she climbs down a ladder 30 feet (9 metres) to the forest floor to gather her catch.

"As long as there's a seed, there's hope for a species," she says. "Now we can reproduce the heart-of-palm, and, with some luck, use them to regenerate the Atlantic Forest."

The seeds will go to Brazil's first "endangered tree bank"—a laboratory where scientists will reproduce species nearly wiped out by encroaching loggers, farmers and miners.

The tree bank is the centerpiece of an unusual World Bank project aimed at restoring Brazil's Atlantic Forest, one of the world's most diverse—and endangered—ecosystems.

The Ecological Corridor Project is to link pockets of surviving Atlantic Forest in the southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul with "corridors" of new forest regrown with native plant and tree species.

The corridors will connect patches of public and private land that are registered as "ecological protection zones" for tax breaks, said Daniel Gross, a task force manager for World Bank environmental projects.

The 1.28 million dollars project represents a major shift in World Bank funding away from immense projects drawn up by federal bureaucrats to smaller programmes designed and implemented by scientists in the field.

The Atlantic Forest is, indeed, running out of time and trees.

When Portuguese explorers arrived in 1500, the wilderness spanned 4,500 square miles (11,700 square kilometres) along Brazil's eastern seaboard. It covered 40 per cent of what is now Rio Grande do Sul state.

Over the years, loggers, ranchers and farmers gnawed at the forest. And the more it shrank, the faster it was devastated. Between 1985 and 1990, government studies showed the Atlantic Forest was razed at a

rate of 13 football fields an hour.

Today, just 3 per cent of the original forest remains nationwide. In Rio Grande do Sul, a breadbasket built on cattle ranching and farming, just 2.3 per cent is left.

Paradoxically, the more the Atlantic Forest disappears, the more scientists discover how biologically rich it is.

In November, botanists in Bahia state discovered 476 types of trees in a 2.5 acre (one hectare) plot—a record for biodiversity.

A federal law was passed several years ago prohibiting logging of the forest, but enforcement was spotty and money was always short.

Then in 1995, the World Bank made 65 million dollars available for ecological programmes in Brazil. This time, it asked the federal government to

solicit project ideas from Brazil's 26 states.

To qualify for funds, each state was required to show it had environmental laws, an enforcement arm to punish offenders and a budget that was increasing outlays for ecological protection.

Starting in March, biologists will test each batch of seeds for 10 months before germinating them, said Alan Cirino Rodrigues, director of the centre.

This year, 18 species will be stored at the bank, including coveted trees like the grandi-uvu, guapuruvu, acota-cavalo, canjerana, ipe-amarelo and inga-feijao.

The project expects to produce at least 180,000 saplings the first year and triple that by 1999, Rodrigues said.

Off the Record

Farrah Fawcett ending tie

LOS ANGELES: Farrah Fawcett and Ryan O'Neal are ending their 15-year relationship, reports AP.

A terse statement Saturday from the couple's publicist said the decision was mutual and added, "The two remain committed and will jointly participate in the upbringing of their (12-year-old) son, Redmond."

"The couple ask that this part of their private life be respected," the statement said.

Although their relationship lasted longer than many marriages, the couple never got married. In May 1994, Fawcett, 51, told TV Guide that the relationship had not always been perfect but that she would be devastated if it ended.

The former star of the "Charlie's Angels" television series divorced actor Lee Majors in 1977. She has since starred in the acclaimed movie "Extremities" and the TV film "The Burning Bed".

O'Neal, 55, starred in "Love Story" and "Paper Moon." He also is the father of actress Tatum O'Neal, who co-starred in "Paper Moon."

Scientists clone adult mammal for first time

NEW YORK: Researchers have cloned an adult mammal for the first time, an astonishing scientific landmark that raises the unsettling possibility of making copies of people, reports AP.

Scientists slipped genes from a 6-year-old ewe into unfertilised eggs and used them to try to create pregnancies in other sheep. The result: A lamb named Dolly, born in July, that is a genetic copy of the ewe.

The feat opens the door to cloning prized farm animals such as cattle, and should make it much easier to add or modify genes in livestock, experts said.

It's also scientifically stunning. Researchers used DNA from the ewe's udder cells, proving that mature mammal cells specialised for something other than reproduction could be used to regenerate an entire animal.

Because it had no teeth

SYDNEY: A game handler at a tourist wildlife park survived being bitten by a 3/4 ton crocodile, saying "I'm bloody glad he's got no teeth" as she was pulled from the beast's jaws, reports AP.

Karla Bredl, 21, suffered a broken left thigh and deep lacerations in the attack on Friday, which happened moments after she fed a saltwater croc named Solomon in front of tourists.

She was still heavily sedated in serious condition Sunday at the Mackay Base Hospital just south of the site of the attack, Barefoot Bushman's Wildlife Park at Cannonvale near the Whitsunday Islands in tropical northeast Australia.

Her uncle, Rob Bredl, told the Sunday Telegraph newspaper of Sydney that when the attack came, "Karla's dad, Joe, jumped on the crock's back and stuck his thumbs in its eyes to make it let go."

Peru govt, rebel representatives hold talks

LIMA, Feb 25: Government and rebel representatives held a new round of talks Monday on the fate of 72 hostages held at gunpoint by Marxist guerrillas demanding that their jailed comrades be freed, reports AP.

Mediator Archbishop Juan Luis Cipriani said that "the talks were held in a cordial atmosphere" and that "substantive issues" were discussed.

The next round of a talks was set for today.

Nestor Cerpa and Rolli Rojas, leaders of the Tupac Amaru (MRTA) rebel unit that seized the Japanese embassy residence here 69 days ago and took the prominent captives, met for two and a half hours with government negotiator Domingo Palermo in the presence of a four-member mediating team.