

The Israeli parliament roundly rejected yesterday a bill that would have set up committees to investigate human rights groups accused of anti-Israel activity — AFP

**Sanctions on Myanmar stay put**

THE US House of Representatives yesterday approved renewal of sanctions on Myanmar first passed in 2003 in response to alleged rights violations and failure to adopt democratic reforms. Lawmakers adopted the measure by voice vote. The annual legislation, which has passed easily in Congress in the past, bans the import of goods from Myanmar, including lucrative gems, and restricts visas issued to government officials in the country earlier known as Burma. — AFP

**End of US shuttle programme**

ATLANTIS made its final laps around the Earth yesterday as

■ WASHINGTON

# Michelle hits 'food deserts'

Major retailers agree to expand health shops

US First Lady Michelle Obama yesterday teamed up with major food retailers to launch an attack on "food deserts" as a key part of the US battle to bring down childhood obesity. "We can give people all the information and advice in the world about healthy eating and exercise, but if parents can't buy the food they need to prepare those meals because their only options for groceries are the gas station or the local minimart, then all that is just talk," Obama said. Many US inner cities are "food deserts", or areas where shops selling healthful foods are rare or expensive, and residents, many of them poor, live on cheap processed meals and sugary drinks, which pile on the pounds while providing scant nutritional benefits.

Yesterday, major food retailers including Wal-Mart, Supervalu

real choices about the food their kids are eating.



**FIT:** Michelle Obama greets attendees after announcing nationwide commitments to provide access to healthy, affordable food in underserved communities. — AFPpic

■ ROME: AIDS FORUM

**Circumcision campaign in Africa touted**

A CAMPAIGN to encourage African men to get circumcised to prevent infection by HIV gained a powerful boost yesterday by three new studies unveiled at the world AIDS forum in Rome.

New cases of HIV among men fell by an astonishing 76 per cent after a circumcision programme was launched in a South African township, researchers reported.

Had no circumcisions been carried out, the tally of new infections among the overall population, men and women combined, would have been 58 per cent higher.

"This study is a fantastic result for a simple intervention which costs €40 (RM170) takes 20 minutes and has to be done only once in a lifetime," said David Lewis, of the Society for Family Health in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Advocates call it "surgical vaccine", describing it as a cheap, yet effective form of prevention. — AFP