

US Senate body pleads for oil ban on Libya

UNDATED, Mar 31: The Senate Foreign Relations Committee March 30 unanimously approved a resolution urging President Clinton to ask the United Nations to begin an international oil embargo against Libya, reports UNB.

The action is necessary, the resolution states, because of Libya's refusal to comply with United Nations Security Council Resolutions 731 and 748 concerning the terrorist bombings of Pan Am Flight 103 in 1988 and of UTA Flight 772 in 1989.

The two resolutions, passed in 1992, ask Libya to provide all information in its possession regarding the bombings; to remand into American, British or French custody the suspected Libyan agents; to pay compensation to the families of the victims of both flights; and to cease support, training and the arming of terrorist groups and movements throughout the world.

Indo-Myanmar agreement to stop drug trafficking

BANGKOK, Mar 31: Myanmar and India signed an agreement to cooperate on the suppression of narcotics trafficking across their common border, state-run Radio Yangon reported late Tuesday, says AFP.

The radio, in a dispatch monitored here, said officials from India's Narcotics Control Board and Myanmar's central committee for drug abuse control signed the agreement in Yangon on Tuesday.

Myanmar signed similar agreement last year with its neighbours to the north and east — China, Laos and Thailand.

The Indian anti-narcotics officials were with an Indian Foreign Ministry delegation which arrived in the Myanmar capital earlier Tuesday, the radio said.

A senior Thai anti-narcotics

official said last month that heroin syndicates were expanding from Thailand to India and China as the main transit countries for smuggling heroin to the West from the notorious Golden Triangle — poppy growing area.

The (main) routes have changed to the Myanmar-China and Myanmar-India border, Narong Suwanaplam of Thailand's office of Narcotics control Board told a meeting of foreign journalists.

According to US State Department estimates the land under poppy cultivation in the Myanmar section of the Golden Triangle has increased from 92,300 hectares (230,750 acres) in 1987 to 161,012 hectares (402,530 acres) in 1991.

The Golden Triangle poppy growing region includes northern Thailand northeast-

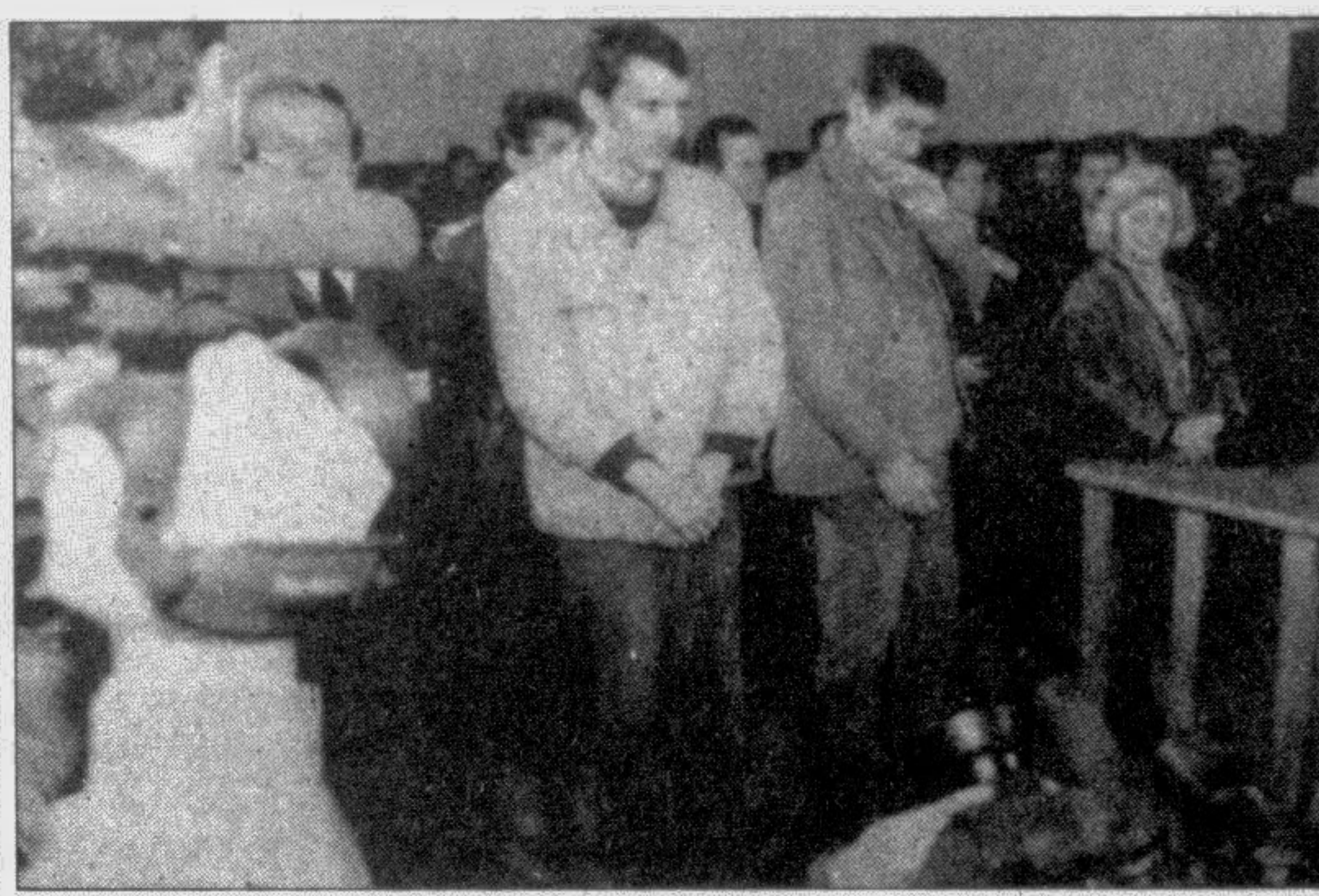
ern Myanmar and northwest-

ern Laos. The Indian Foreign Ministry delegation, invited to Yangon by the Myanmar Foreign Ministry, was scheduled to meet several Myanmar ministers during the visit, Radio Yangon said. The size of the Indian delegation and its length of stay were not given.

An Indian trade mission visited Yangon earlier this month, becoming the first Indian team to visit Myanmar since 1988.

Ties between India and Myanmar have been cool since a bloody 1988 crackdown by the Myanmar military on nationwide pro-democracy demonstrations.

India has called for the peaceful transition to democracy in Myanmar



SARAJEVO: Serb soldiers Borislav Herak (L), Stretko Damjanovic (C) and Nada Tomic (R) listen to the verdict in their military trial for "genocide" in the Serb strategy of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina Tuesday.

Second Indo-US naval exercise this year

NEW DELHI, Mar 31: The United States and India are to hold a second and bigger joint naval exercise in the Arabian Sea later this year, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported Tuesday, says AFP.

The exercises would be on a much larger scale than the (one) held in May last year, the news agency quoted Indian Defence Ministry sources as saying after a meeting here between Indian and US defence officials.

Admiral Charles Larson, Commander in Chief of the US Pacific Command, would discuss the exercise with his Indian counterparts before he ends his three-day visit Thursday, PTI said.

An Indian Defence Ministry spokesman said it was "premature" to say if the naval exercise would take place.

On Tuesday, Larson, accompanied by acting US ambassador Kenneth Brill, met Indian Defence Secretary NN Vohra

BRIEFLY

3 of an Indian family to die: An Indian court on Tuesday sentenced a man, his father and brother to death for murdering his wife for not including a buffalo in her marriage dowry, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, says AFP from New Delhi.

Judge SP Tyagi also sentenced the wife — killer's sister and mother to life imprisonment for abetting the murder in the northern Indian village of Shiarol two years ago, PTI said without naming the people involved.

The bride was burned in front of people because her father could not present a buffalo and a motorcycle in her dowry to the bridegroom, the judge said.

Fetching insufficient dowry or wedding gifts leads to hundreds of murders of women in India every year, but in most cases criminals go unpunished because of lack of evidence.

Vietnamese leader jailed: The leader of a Vietnamese opposition movement was jailed for 20 years for subversion by a Ho Chi Minh city court, the newspaper Nahon Dan reported Wednesday, AFP says from Hanoi.

Doan Viet Hoat, an intellectual arrested in November 1990, was sentenced Tuesday, the Communist Party paper said.

Doan Viet Hoat set up a reactionary organisation called the "free forum" in No Chi Minh city with the aim of dissolving the national assembly, abolishing the constitution, disbanding the army and over throwing the government, it said.

Another member of the group, Pham Duc Kham, an officer in the former south Vietnamese army, who was responsible for recruitment and propaganda, was jailed for 16 years while six other members were jailed for terms ranging between eight months and 16 years, the paper said.

Thai queen will visit Japan: Thai queen Sirikit Kittiyakara will pay a goodwill visit to Japan from April 7 to 20 to preside over an exhibition of Thai folk art products, it was announced Wednesday, reports Xinhua from Bangkok.

According to the Queen's Personal Affairs Division, the goodwill visit will propagate the products of the foundation for the promotion of supplementary occupations and related techniques (support) which was founded in 1976.

About 40 support members will accompany the queen on the trip.

During her stay in Japan, the queen will have an audience with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko.

11 Vietnamese crewmen missing: Eleven Vietnamese crewmen are missing off Hong Kong after a Chinese-crewed Panamanian cargo ship collided with a Vietnamese fishing boat early on Wednesday, Marine officials said, reports Reuter from Hong Kong.

Six of the 17 crew members aboard the Vietnamese-registered Hai Long were rescued after their fishing vessel sank, the Hong Kong Marine Department said. One was in hospital in fair condition.

An air and sea search was under way for those missing. Mainland Chinese crew from the Hing Son, the Panamanian-registered cargo ship which ran into the fishing boat off Waglan Island, were helping in the search.

Blast in Pyramid, 2 hurt: An explosion wounded two workers Tuesday inside one of the Giza pyramids, Egypt's most famous tourist attraction. Police arrested four men at the site but later said the blast was accidental, reports AP from Cairo.

The 8:45 am blast occurred inside Chephren, the middle of the three pyramids, where restorers have been working. Police said no tourists were hurt, though two Egyptians working on the monuments suffered undisclosed injuries.

Investigators said the explosion occurred when acetone, a flammable solvent being used to clean salt from the monument's inner walls, ignited from a spark.

But police, fearing another Muslim extremist attack, already had quickly arrested four men on Giza Plateau and more than 30 in Cairo, officers said.

Malaysian troops to join UN force: Malaysia will send two ships and up to 1,000 soldiers to Somalia in June as part of a 30,800-strong United Nations peace-keeping force, a Defence Ministry spokesman said on Wednesday, reports Reuter from Kuala Lumpur.

The soldiers will serve a minimum of a year, he said. The UN is due to take over command on May 1 from US-led forces.

Defence Minister Najib Razak was quoted by the National Bernama News Agency as saying the deployment was Malaysia's largest ever involving the army, navy and air force.

Tight seal on Gaza, West Bank

JERUSALEM, Mar 31: The army clamped a tight seal on the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, sent in more troops and loosened rules on opening fire and making arrests Wednesday after a series of attacks against Israelis, reports AP.

The crackdown was the harshest since the 1991 Gulf War and was likely to further erode support among Palestinians for the stalled peace talks with Israel.

The closure also was a blow to the shaky Palestinian economy, which depends on Arabs doing menial work in Israel.

Newspapers said the government may further cut the Palestinian work force in Israel once the closure is lifted.

The 1.8 million Palestinians living in the territories seized in the 1967 Mideast War will not be able to enter Israel during the closure.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin ordered the latest restrictions after two policemen were gunned down Tuesday in central Israel, bringing to 13 the number of Israelis killed by Palestinians in March.

During the same period, 26 Palestinians, including six children, were slain by Israelis.

The army said it beefed up forces in the occupied lands Wednesday but gave no figures. Soldiers were given permission to fire without warning at armed Palestinians, military officials said. In the past, troops had to shout warnings before opening fire at armed men.

Regular troops increased patrols and set up roadblocks and new rooftop observation posts, the army said. Undercover agents disguised as Palestinians stepped up raids, news reports said.

The army also has permission to make extensive arrests

and conduct house-to-house searches to find wanted people, the daily Haaretz said.

Dozens of army and police roadblocks were set up in the West Bank Wednesday, and security forces turned away hundreds of Palestinians trying to reach jobs in Israel despite the closure. Gaza has been closed since Monday because of an earlier killing of a Jewish settler.

At a roadblock near the West Bank town of Bethlehem, troops also turned away cars owned by the UN Relief and Works Agency and Palestinians with medical referrals.

China okays law to govern Macao

BEIJING, Mar 31: The national legislature on Wednesday approved a basic law by which China will govern the Portuguese colony of Macao after its return to Chinese rule in 1999, reports AP.

The congress then ended a 16-day session during which it appointed new state, government and military leaders and amended the constitution to enshrine senior leader Deng Xiaoping's market-style economic policies.

In its final meeting, the congress passed a resolution vowing to work for "peaceful reunification of the motherland," including regaining control over Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

Communist Party leader Jiang Zemin, acting in his new capacity as president, warned against any efforts by Taiwan to formally separate from the rest of China.



LOS ANGELES: Italian director Federico Fellini (C) is flanked by Italian actor Marcello Mastroianni (L) and actress Sophia Loren Monday shortly after he received a honorary award for lifetime achievement.

Balladur moves swiftly to take over

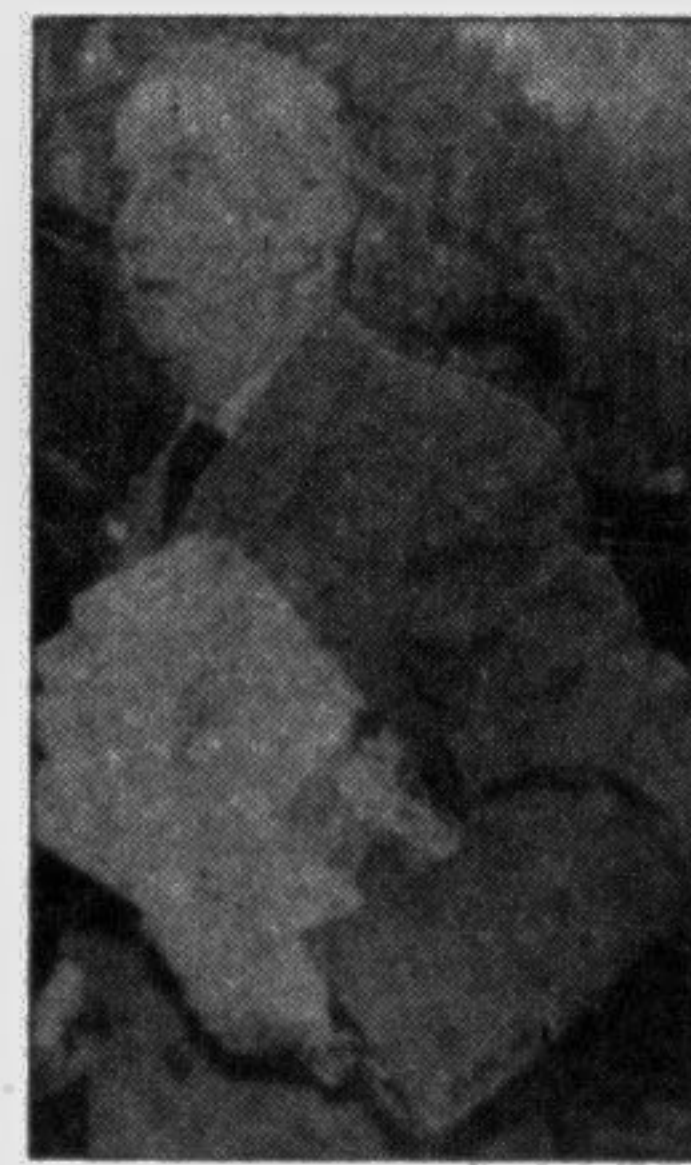
PARIS, Mar 31: French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, moving swiftly to take over the reins of power from the defeated socialist, meets his new cabinet today to start planning the next four years of conservative rule, reports Reuter.

Balladur, 63, on Tuesday announced a compact cabinet of 29 members, more than half of them first-time ministers, with a slight advantage to centrists over his own Gaullist Party.

The names represented a youthful pro-European team which could be expected to be tough on law-and-order but moderate on welfare and social affairs.

AFP adds: Balladur named 47-year-old Alain Juppe, Secretary General of the Gaullist Rally for the Republic (RPR) as foreign minister.

Economist Edmond Alphandery, 49, was made finance minister. He is a policy-maker in economic and socio-



Edouard Balladur

affairs for former President Valery Giscard d'Estaing's Union for French Democracy (UDF), the RPR's rival and ally

in parliament. Balladur carefully shared out portfolios roughly equally between former Prime Minister Jacques Chirac's RPR and the UDF.

Neither Chirac nor Giscard d'Estaing had portfolios, wishing to save themselves for 1995 presidential elections. The new government will share power or "cohabit" with Mitterrand for the remaining two years of his mandate.

The government list includes four senior ministers of state — also in charge of other portfolios — including 65-year-old former European Parliament President Simone Veil, a UDF member, as health minister, a portfolio she held in the 1970's.

The interior portfolio went to the RPR's Charles Pasqua and Francois Leotard, of the UDF, was named minister of defence.

Pasqua, 66, a colourful RPR baron, already held the inter-

rior portfolio for 1986 to 1988 during a previous cohabitation. In that period, Pasqua shocked opinion by organising charter flights for illegal Malian immigrants back to Bamako and staged a loud but ineffective campaign against pornography.

He is on the right of the RPR, and campaigned against the Maastricht Treaty on European Union.

Leotard, 51, a former culture minister who once trained as a Benedictine monk, was last year charged with corruption and influence — peddling in the French Riviera city of Frejus where he is Mayor, but the charges were dropped.

Balladur, a Finance Minister of the 1980's cohabitation government, spent the day in final consultations with potential ministers before showing the list to Mitterrand for approval.

Giscard d'Estaing had demanded the same number of key portfolios as those given to its senior partner of the RPR.

14 Kurds killed in clash with security forces

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey, Mar 31: Security forces killed 14 Kurdish insurgents in three clashes in Turkey, an official said Wednesday, reports AP.

The clashes Tuesday and Wednesday occurred despite a unilateral 25-day cease-fire announced by Kurdish rebel Abdullah Ocalan in a peace offer to the Turkish government. Several other minor clashes have erupted since the cease-fire began March 20.

Turkish officials welcomed the truce but ruled out talks with the rebels, who have been fighting for self-rule in south-eastern Turkey since 1984.

More than 6,000 people including security personnel, civilians and guerrillas have died in the fighting over the past nine years.

Russia can't guarantee safe operation of N-sub

LONDON, Mar 31: Russia can no longer guarantee the safe operation of its nuclear submarines because of a critical shortage of storage facilities for radioactive waste, according to a Russian government report released Tuesday by Greenpeace, reports AP.

The report, commissioned by Russian President Boris Yeltsin said the Russian navy is still dumping radioactive waste at sea and will continue to do so until land-based storage facilities are built. They are not scheduled to start operating until 1997.

The former Soviet Union dumped 18 reactors and 13,150 containers of radioactive waste in the Kara and Barents Seas in northern

Russia and the Sea of Japan between 1966 and 1991, the report said. At least six reactors contained radioactive fuel.

"Russia is staring at a radioactive waste nightmare, the deadly legacy of the Cold War," said John Sprange, Greenpeace's campaigner for nuclear-free seas.

The report said Russia's Northern and Pacific Fleets have stored the equivalent of 140 reactor cores from nuclear submarines, mainly on floating vessels, while waiting for permanent storage space on land.

The navy normally refuels 20 submarine reactors every year, but has storage space only for spent fuel from three reactors, it said.

"It is evident there is a critical situation (which prevents) further safe operation of the undersea fleet," the report concluded.

Sprange explained that if the spent nuclear fuel can't be stored safely, "you cannot take it out of the reactor."

"That means operational submarines cannot be refueled. So, in effect, the Russian navy is slowly grinding to a halt," he said.

At least 75 percent of former Soviet submarines that have been decommissioned still contain their spent nuclear fuel, the report said. Another 300 former Soviet reactors are to be decommissioned by the year 2000.



Madonna look-alike Ofra Shwisa from Israel, enjoys the company of Israeli soldiers during the promotion of a new tourist attraction near the Dead Sea Monday.

Sharif meets Kohl

BONN, Mar 31: Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif met Tuesday with Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and a Foreign Ministry official expressed concern about nuclear proliferation on the Indian subcontinent, reports AP.

Talks between Nawaz and the Chancellor focused on increasing economic ties between the two countries, said Kohl's spokesman, Dieter Vogel.

He noted that Nawaz would personally attend a seminar on Wednesday hosted by the German Association of Industry to promote investment in Pakistan.

Kohl also "strongly urged a peaceful and mutual solution to the unresolved questions between India and Pakistan," Vogel said in a statement.