

Arafat in Athens amid tight security

ATHENS, Nov 24: Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat arrived in Athens today for a formal one-day visit amid draconian security measures, reports Reuter.

Arafat, whose PLO signed a historic peace accord with Israel in September, will meet Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu and other Greek political leaders during his visit.

More than 2,000 police officers were called out to protect the Palestinian leader, causing traffic chaos in central Athens. Several prominent pro-Arafat figures have been killed by radical Arab groups since a peace accord was signed with Israel.

Arafat will meet Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Benazir rules out any cut in N-programme

ISLAMABAD, Nov 24: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto ruled out any curtailment of Pakistan's nuclear programme, accusing the United States on Tuesday of unfairly targeting her country in its bid to limit the global arms race, reports AP.

"It is about time America began reassessing its policy," Benazir said in an interview with The Associated Press at her official residence. "It's degrading and humiliating to expect Pakistan to roll back its nuclear programme."

However, Benazir, who returned to power following elections last month, said her top foreign policy aim is to re-

build relations with the United States. Relations have been strained over Pakistan's nuclear programme.

Benazir said Pakistan developed a nuclear capability to deter India, its arch-enemy. But she said Pakistan has shown restraint, stopping short of building a weapon.

"Pakistan should be rewarded for non-proliferation. Pakistan should not be punished," she said.

Under the Pressler amendment, US law bars American aid to Pakistan unless the US president can certify that Pakistan does not possess a nuclear device. Washing-

ton halted aid to Pakistan in 1990 after providing hundreds of millions of dollars in the 1980s.

"The application of the Pressler amendment against Pakistan is discriminatory" because it does not apply to India or other nations, Ms. Bhutto said. She urged the United States to review its policy.

Pakistan was strongly pro-Western and anti-communist during the Cold War and feels it has been treated unfairly by the United States in recent years.

The United States, however, regards the nuclear arms race in South Asia as one of the world's most volatile regional

conflicts. Pakistan and India have fought three wars since 1947 and continue to feud over the contested Himalayan state of Kashmir.

Pakistan will continue to provide moral and political support to Muslim militants in Kashmir who seek an end to Indian rule, Benazir said.

"It is our moral duty to raise our voice against human rights violations in Kashmir," she said.

Benazir again suggested the United States as a possible mediator in the Kashmir dispute and said she was willing to meet with Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao.

Benazir's liberal government appears much more stable than her previous administration.

Her rise to power in 1988 marked the restoration of democracy after more than a decade of military rule, but her government collapsed in 1990 after feuding constantly with a hostile president and the army.

This term Benazir's close ally in her Pakistan People's Party, Farooq Legari, has been chosen as president. The army remains a powerful force but is much less involved in political decision-making than it was several years ago.

Benazir said in the inter-

view that her top domestic priority is to strengthen the economy.

But her critics say she has moved slowly since taking office. She has yet to implement any major programmes to address Pakistan's crippling social problems, which include widespread poverty, a struggling economy and a severe shortage of schools and health care.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have agreed to give Pakistan 1.5 billion dollar over the next three years, but only if the country follows their spending guidelines.

Pak PM may visit Iran in Dec

TEHRAN, Nov 24: Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is expected to visit Iran on December 8 or 10, Iranian newspapers reported Wednesday, says AFP.

Bilateral ties, the situation in Kashmir and cooperation within the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) will be the main issues discussed during Bhutto's visit, they said.

ECO was founded in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, and was joined last year by all of the newly-independent Muslim states in central Asia and the Caucasus.

The Prime Minister is expected to leave Iran for Turkey.

Bhutto, re-elected as Prime Minister in October after she lost her post two years before, last visited Iran in 1990.

Lankan forces on full alert

COLOMBO, Nov 24: Sri Lankan security forces and police were placed on full alert amid reports of possible violence to mark the 39th birthday of the country's most wanted Tamil Tiger guerrilla leader, officials said today, reports AFP.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have declared a hero's week to commemorate their fighters who have died in the ongoing 21-year-old separatist struggle to coincide with the birthday celebration on Friday of their top leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

"Security forces are at a peak level of alertness across the country. Tigers could try to mark Prabhakaran's birth with a big attack on a military installation or a civilian target," a defence official said.

He said the military had observed fresh movements of LTTE cadres towards the island's east over the past week and suspected that it was probably to carry out attacks against security forces there.

The army ambushed one such group of suspected LTTE cadres and killed 27 men for the loss of one soldier at Verugal in Batticaloa district Sunday, the official said.

Joint police and military road blocks have been intensified in Colombo as an uneasy calm gripped the capital.

The LTTE has led the separatist struggle to establish an independent homeland called Eelam for the two million-strong Tamil minority concentrated in Sri Lanka's north-east.



President Bill Clinton (2nd-R) and his wife, Hillary (L) lead South Korean President Kim Young Sam (2nd-L) and his wife, Son Myong-sun, to the official White House dinner Tuesday. Kim was in Washington to discuss the issue of nuclear arms and North Korea. — AFP photo

US offers DPRK wider talks

WASHINGTON, Nov 24: The United States is offering North Korea a wider dialogue about its concerns if it resumes compliance with treaty obligations to curb the spread of nuclear weapons, reports AP.

The possibility that North Korea might secretly develop atomic bombs dominated White House talks Tuesday between President Clinton and visiting South Korean President Kim Young-Sam.

Clinton afterward described at a joint news conference what he called a "simple choice" facing the politically isolated and economically enfeebled communist government:

Abandon the nuclear weapons option and honour treaty commitments to permit outside inspection of its atomic programme and "the door will be open on a wide range of issues, not only with the United States but with the rest of the world."

Jordan may seek Egyptian help to ease US pressure

AMMAN, Nov 24: King Hussein left for Egypt on Wednesday in a bid to reconcile with the regionally powerful nation after falling out during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, reports AP.

Hussein, accompanied by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and senior advisers, was expected to meet President Hosni Mubarak and discuss progress on Jordan's peace negotiations with Israel.

A government minister, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the monarch would request that Mubarak ask the Americans to ease their

pressure on Jordan to sign a peace accord with Israel.

Jordanian officials have privately said Jordanians under fresh American pressure to sign an agreement with the Jewish state, particularly now that recent parliamentary elections have freed Hussein's hand.

The November 8 polls saw the emergence of a heavily pro-government parliament and a loss of clout that headline Muslim fundamentalists enjoyed in the previous legislature.

Hussein visited Syria on Sunday and assured President

Hafez Assad that Jordan would not cut a separate peace accord with Israel, but prodded him into making progress in the Syrian-Israeli track of negotiations, which are bogged down over conflicting demands over the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

King Hussein tried to mediate a diplomatic solution to the Gulf crisis, triggered by Iraq's August 2, 1990 invasion of Kuwait. But the Jordanian people's overwhelming popular support for Iraq overshadowed the King's endeavours and painted Jordan as pro-Iraqi.

Five Indians executed in UAE

BAHRAIN, Nov 24: Five Indian nationals convicted in three different murder cases were executed today by the firing squad in a Sharjah prison in the United Arab Emirates, reports PTI.

The execution was carried out in the early hours of today after their mercy plea was rejected by the UAE President Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. They were awarded death sentences in mid 80's by a lower court in the Emirates which were later confirmed by the Supreme Court.

Egypt for new category of UNSC membership

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 24: Egypt proposed Tuesday setting up a new intermediate category of Security Council membership, between the present five permanent members and the 10 non-permanent ones, reports Reuter.

A possible formula to address this issue would be to establish in each region one or more seats without veto power to rotate between the major powers of that region, Egyptian UN envoy Nabil Elaraby told the General Assembly.

Along with a number of other speakers, he proposed the establishment of an open ended working group of UN members to consider all aspects of the issue.

Elaraby was among a large number of envoys taking part in a debate on the thorny issue of reforming and enlarging the 15-member council, the UN organ responsible for international peace and security.

This has become a burning issue, partly because of the increase in the size of the United Nations, now 184-

strong compared with only 51 at its founding in 1945. The end of the Cold War has also greatly enhanced the role of the council, no longer paralysed by the threat of vetoes.

The council now consists of five permanent members, each with a veto — the United States, Russia, Britain, China and France. They were the main allied powers of World War II.

The 10 non-permanent council members are elected by the assembly on a regional basis and serve two-year terms. Meanwhile, the UN General Assembly has opened a debate on expanding the 15-member Security Council, in response to suggestions by Germany, Japan and some large developing nations who want permanent membership.

The discussions, begun here Tuesday among all UN members, focus on the creation of a working group that will make a series of recommendations on the issue next year, diplomatic sources said.



King Hussein of Jordan (L) shakes hands with Toujan Faysal, the first female member of parliament in the history of Jordan, during the opening of the new lower house on Tuesday. — AFP photo

Off the Record

Singapore women are pleased when people call them...

SINGAPORE: Singapore women like being told they are sexy and are among the first Asian women to start wearing brassieres, according to an eight-nation survey by Japanese undergarment manufacturer Wacoal, reports AFP.

"Fifty-four per cent (of 50 Singapore women surveyed) said they are somewhat pleased or very pleased when people say they are sexy," findings of the survey published Wednesday by the Straits Times daily showed.

Sexy women, the Singaporeans say, are those who have, in order of importance, slim waists, expressive eyes and long hair.

Japanese women, meanwhile, think sexy women are those who have expressive eyes, large busts and slender ankles, according to the survey by Wacoal's human studies research centre.

The centre interviewed 400 single women from Beijing, Shanghai, Tokyo, Taipei, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Jakarta and Singapore, in June to get their views on their bodies, love, marriage and work.

The survey found that for all the pleasure they derived from being told they are sexy, the Singapore woman preferred watching television or going shopping to dating, which ranked seventh in a list of things to do after work.

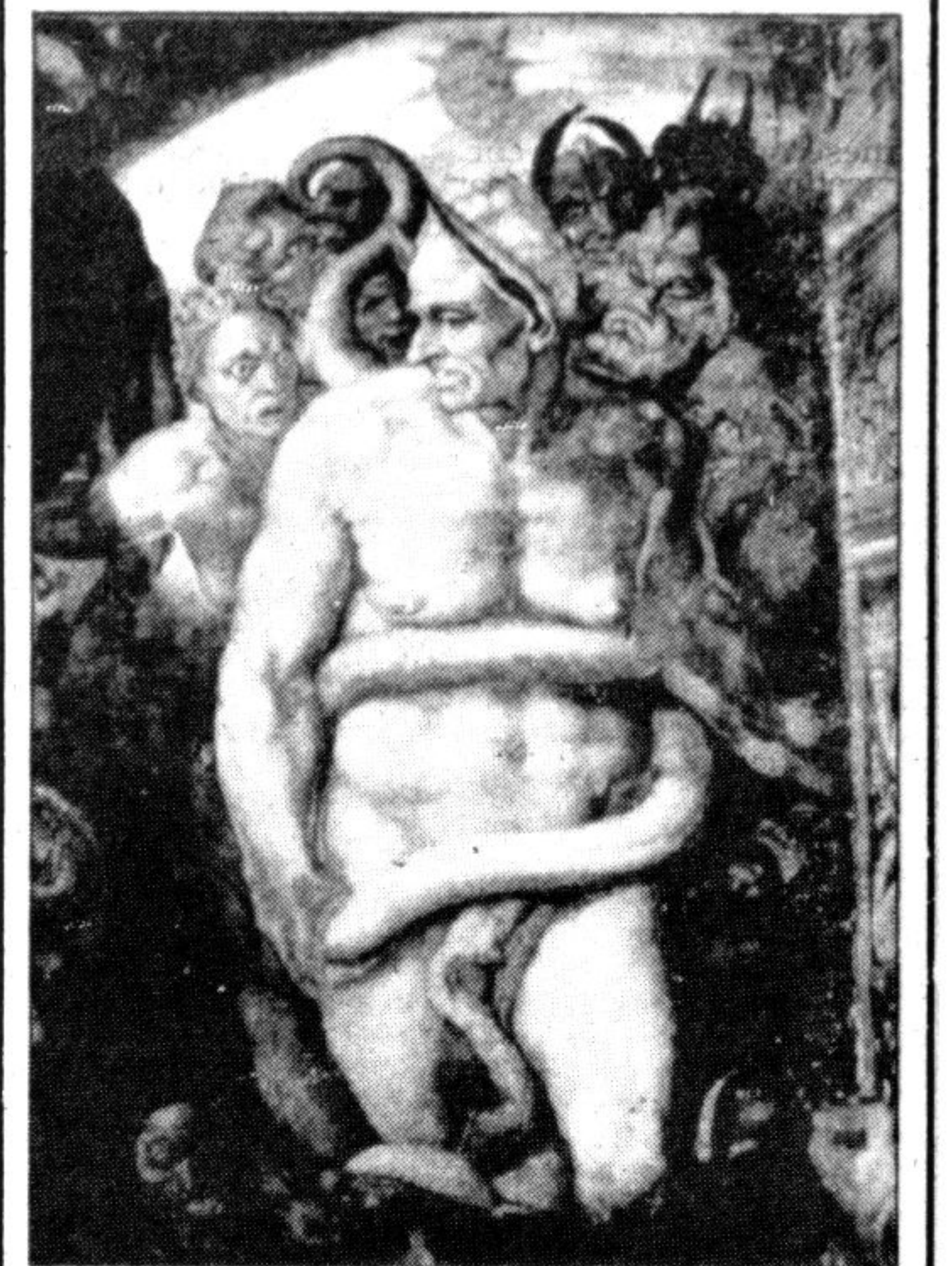
In Beijing, dating came in second after shopping.

Patriotic rats

MOSCOW: Russian customs officials on the Chinese border have been conducting some unusual taste tests with the aid of patriotic rats, reports AP.

Customs officers recently offered Russian rats samples of Russian potatoes and Chinese potatoes, the Itar-Tass news agency reported Wednesday. The rats ate the Russian potatoes, but refused the Chinese imports, it said.

The test and the rats' reaction was cited as justification for a Russian decision to ban imports of Chinese potatoes because they are saturated with chemicals from fertilisers, the report said.



A detail of Michelangelo's celebrated Sistine Chapel fresco, "The Last Judgement," glows after restoration in a press-viewing Tuesday. Conservationists are to remove some — but not all — of the drapes added by order of the ecclesiastical Council of Trent (1545-1563), which ruled the master's nude, muscled figures obscene. The oldest additions, painted by Michelangelo's student, Daniel da Volterra (nicknamed for history, "Le Braghettone," or "Pantsmaker"), will be retained on 38 of the figures. The fully restored 180-square-meter ceiling fresco is to be unveiled officially at Easter. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Imelda undergoes surgery:

Doctors removed an apple-sized mass of tissue from the upper left arm of former first lady Imelda Marcos during an operation Wednesday, her staff announced, AP reports from Manila.

The surgery at Metropolitan Hospital lasted more than an hour, the announcement said. An earlier announcement had said she was to undergo the operation at the Chinese General Hospital.

Doctors described the mass as a possible lipoma, a tumor made of fat tissue. A biopsy will be conducted later, the announcement said.

Filipino prosecutor shot:

Gunmen firing from a speeding car wounded one of the country's most prominent prosecutors Wednesday in an early morning ambush in suburban Quezon City, AP reports from Manila.

Aniano Disierto, a key figure in many highly publicised cases, was taken to the Philippine Heart Centre, officials said. His nephew and two women were also wounded.

Police said Disierto was driving to work when the attackers fired as he was slowing down to turn a corner. The gunman sped away.

117-yr-old Alaskan dead:

A 117-year-old Athabaskan Indian leader, the oldest known Alaskan, has died, Reuter reports from Anchorage.

Walter Northway, a tribal chief in the eastern part of Alaska's vast interior, died at his home Sunday night in the village near the Canadian border that bears his name.

The cause of death was congestive heart failure, relatives said.

Northway is survived by his 92-year-old wife and some 100 relatives.

Bus crash kills 23 in Chile:

A head-on collision between two buses early Tuesday killed at least 23 people including children and injured 76 others in northern Chile, police said, Reuter reports from Santiago.

They said the cause of the crash, which occurred some 185 miles (300 km) north of Santiago, had not been determined.

Passengers on one of the buses said the driver fell asleep at the wheel.

Telegraph reporter awarded:

A junior reporter on the Grimsby Evening Telegraph, a northeast England evening newspaper, beat the nation's best to win the London Press Club's 1993 scoop of the year award presented on Tuesday, Reuter reports from London.

Clare Henderson broke the news of the resignation of then Chancellor of the Exchequer Norman Lamont on May 27 with the front page headline: "I resign Lamont makes dramatic phone call to mother."

Henderson had kept in close touch with Lamont's mother for six months and interviewed her a number of times before landing a world exclusive keenly awaited by financial markets.

Cambodia inducts Khmer defectors into army

DEY ED (Cambodia), Nov 24: More than 500 Khmer Rouge defectors were inducted Wednesday into the Cambodian army, and government leaders urged the guerrilla group to accept an offer to make peace, reports AP.

First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Second Prime Minister Hun Sen pinned the military bars on the shoulders of the senior defectors in a solemn ceremony at a government training camp outside Phnom Penh.

"The gate is always open for members of the Khmer Rouge who will abide by the king's policy," Hun Sen told them.

The 539 defectors recited a royal oath while crouched down on one knee, pledging that if they turned against the government, "may the sacred water, the angel of the royal umbrella, kill us any time."

Kachin fighters' move a triumph for Myanmar military regime

BANGKOK, Nov 24: Myanmar's Kachin fighters are seeking peace with the central government, a move some analysts view as a triumph for that country's military regime and a near finale to one of the world's longest-lasting wars, reports AP.

The Kachin rebels are the strongest of a welter of ethnic minority groups, some of whom have battled the Yangon government since Myanmar gained independence from England in 1948.

Regarded as a civil war by many political scientists, the often savage fighting has swirled across at least a third of the country, stunted economic development and strengthened the hand of the Myanmar military.

In an interview with the Associated Press this week, Kachin spokesman Col Zau Seng said neither the ethnic combatants, pro-democracy groups nor international pres-

sure have failed to oust or even change the repressive Yangon regime.

"The present situation is a deadlock," Zau Seng said. "The first step to the ultimate goals of democracy, human rights and rights of the minority people is a nationwide cease-fire."

"For 40 years we've approached the problem by fighting until we had the rights in our hands," he said. "We can continue the struggle, but if there is another way to achieve the same objective is it not good to pursue it?"

Zau Seng, who heads the Kachin Independence Organisation office in Thailand, said no formal cease-fire agreement had yet been signed but an "informal understanding" existed in Kachin State between some 25,000 Myanmar troops and the 8,000 guerrillas of the Kachin Independence Army.

He stressed that the Kachin were pressing for a nationwide

cease-fire among all the warring sides, and were hopeful that those still fighting Yangon would join the Kachin.

The Kachin have long been allied to other ethnic rebel organisations which were joined in their zones of control by Myanmar students and others fleeing the military's brutal repression of a pro-democracy uprising in 1988.

The Karen National Union, the most powerful rebels still fighting Yangon, last month described the cease-fire as a "kind of surrender" and a successful effort by SLORC to

divide and conquer its opponents. The junta had earlier succeeded in forging peace pacts with insurgents among the Wa, Shan and Palaung minorities.

The much-weakened anti-Yangon coalition has set a number of conditions for an end to the conflict, including the abolition of military dictatorship, a SLORC approach to

all opposition groups and the release of all political prisoners including Nobel Peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

"Without the Kachins they are nothing. It will virtually be the end of the ethnic resistance as we have known it. It is a victory for SLORC," says Bertil Lintner, the author of several books on Myanmar.

"The Kachin have been pushed into a situation where

they have no choice at all," he said, noting that since 1987 the war-weary Kachin had suffered serious military defeats and wanted to preserve what remained.

Additionally, he said, they have been pressured to come to the negotiating table by neighbouring China, which has close ties with Yangon and also wants easier access to the natural resources of Kachin State.

Lintner predicted the KIO would probably disintegrate if a peace pact is finalised, thus ending a potent, well-organised insurgency which began in 1961.

The Kachin have long held a reputation as formidable warriors. British and American troops fighting with them behind Japanese lines during World War II spoke of their bravery and battlefield abilities in almost mythical terms. The Japanese feared them as silent, jungle killers.

The cease-fire has been in

Haitian PM meets Cedras today

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Nov 24: Haitian Prime Minister Robert Malval will meet army leader Lieutenant General Raoul Cedras Thursday for talks aimed at resolving the country's two-year-old crisis, a top aide said Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The aide said Malval was scheduled to meet Cedras and other members of the army's high command at the Prime Minister's home. It would be the first meeting between the two men in a month.

Relations between the army, which effectively controls Haiti, and Malval's constitutional government have been strained for months.

Under a UN-brokered agreement signed by both Aristide and Cedras, the overthrown leader was scheduled to reassume the presidency on October 30. But Cedras' refusal to resign as promised on October 15 scuppered the accord.