

700 activists of UPF arrested in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Aug 18: Nearly 700 rank and file activists from the extreme left United People's Front (UPF) were arrested before and during an all day nationwide strike called by the party on Wednesday, a party source said, reports AFP.

A police source confirmed only that 400 people had been arrested both before and during the dawn to dusk strike to prevent a planned UPF march late Tuesday and avoid trouble in the capital during the strike.

The UPF, headed by convener Babu Ram Bhattarai, called the strike to denounce the interim government of Prime Minister Gijrja Prasad Koirala and to protest the dissolution of Parliament by the King in July.

UPF Secretary General Purnima Bhusal was among those arrested on Tuesday while Bhattarai had gone into hiding to avoid arrest.

On Wednesday some 2,000 UPF supporters held a protest demonstration in Kathmandu shouting anti monarch and

anti-Koirala slogans.

The demonstration later turned into a public meeting.

State-run transport operated in the Nepalese capital guarded by security personnel but private cars, taxis and diplomatic vehicles were kept off the roads to avoid possible attacks during the strike.

Three-wheel rickshaws were also seen moving freely on the roads, witnesses said.

Shops in the main market centres were closed, but those in side streets kept their doors open.

Schools were also closed and many civil servants were forced to walk to work because of the lack of transport.

A senior police officer said there had been no reports of incidents in outlying districts of the capital until later in the day, adding Kathmandu City was peaceful.

Protests against the caretaker government and the Nepalese monarch began soon after the King dissolved the House of Representatives and announced mid-term polls for November, on Koirala's advice.

First extension of self-rule in West Bank

Israel will transfer education, cultural affairs to PLO Aug 29

ALEXANDRIA, Egypt, Aug 18: Israel and the PLO on Thursday set a date for the first time for giving Palestinians more control over their lives in most of the West Bank still under Israeli occupation, reports AP.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and chief PLO negotiator Nabil Shaath said education and cultural affairs will be turned over to the Palestinians on August 29.

The transfer of education and culture would be the first extension of self rule outside Gaza and Jericho. Israel and the PLO agreed to limited autonomy for Gaza and Jericho in their accord signed last May in Cairo.

But the two sides failed to issue an expected joint statement on terrorism, and a communiqué issued after more than nine hours of talks left many details open on how the Palestinians would be given

other responsibilities.

In lieu of a terrorism statement, Shaath told reporters the Palestinians were committed to the maintenance of peace and doing everything possible to stop violence.

In response, Peres said: "I take the declaration by Dr Nabil Shaath as a real commitment."

He added, "We never said that the Palestinian Authority would have 100 per cent success (in dealing with extremists) but we would like to see 100 per cent effort to do so as we are doing because this is very serious."

Peres' talks with Shaath followed a meeting Wednesday between him and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and a statement by Peres that saw progress in talks between Israel and Syria.

A three-page communiqué at the end of the meeting said

the two sides agreed on starting a promised "safe passage" for Palestinians to travel between the self-rule zones in Gaza and Jericho.

It noted that Palestinians, forbidden to enter Israel, would still be allowed to travel between the two zones in buses escorted by Israel soldiers.

On Wednesday, the two sides also said they would try to finish talks within a week on widening Palestinian authority, for health, tourism and taxation. And they set a deadline of September 1 for inviting some 400 volunteers from Canada, Finland, Turkey, Australia, Norway, and two unnamed EU countries to participate in an unarmed observer force in the autonomous areas.

Other points of agreement included: — The release of 249 Palestinian prisoners still held by Israel.

— The start of work by Palestinian liaison officers at border crossings from Egypt and Jordan, where Palestinians have complained of inordinately long delays.

— A joint effort to seek up to \$40 million from Western nations to help the Palestinian Authority until it is able to collect taxes to cover its expenses.

A major issue left unresolved was when the Palestinians will be allowed to hold elections to select a 100-person legislative council.

"We feel that elections should not be delayed because they are an expression of democracy," Shaath said. "They are the only way a real mandate from the people can be given."

The Palestinians earlier this week presented a paper to the Israelis calling for balloting no later than December.

Off the Record



Analou (R) models a tartan bra, skirt and red silk parka and Angani wears a red tartan dress on Wednesday during the launch of the C & A Autumn collection at London's Lanesborough Hotel. — AFP photo

Miracle cheque!

KANSAS CITY: A man who mistakenly received a government cheque for nearly \$370,000 dollars may have believed it was a miracle, but a jury didn't, reports AP.

William H Irvin III illegally cashed the \$369,391.19 dollars cheque in June 1992, a federal jury concluded Wednesday. It convicted him of knowingly spending government money, filing a false tax return and laundering some of it through cashier's cheque.

Irvin said he believed the money was a gift from God because it appeared after he prayed for self-sufficiency on a lonely road one night. He is an airport security officer who makes about 12,000 dollars a year.

The cheque was the result of a computer error. Irvin, a Persian Gulf War veteran was only entitled to 183.69 dollars from the government.

Irvin faces up to 43 years in prison and a 1.25 million dollars fine.

Liz was beaten by three of her seven husbands?

LOS ANGELES: The actress Elizabeth Taylor sued the NBC television network on Wednesday to block the broadcast of a mini-series based on a book that contends she was beaten by three of her seven husbands, reports AP.

The still unreleased book by C David Heymann also claims Taylor laboured to make current husband Larry Fortensky presentable in her upper-crust social circles. Taylor met the working-class Fortensky in a drug-rehabilitation programme.

The lawsuit contends the mini-series would invade Taylor's privacy, be inaccurate and hurt her financially. The show is planned to broadcast next season, although no date has been set.

Also named as defendants were Heymann, producer Lester Persky and screenwriter Gerald Ayres.

NBC spokesman Flody Suarez said network officials had not seen the lawsuit and would not comment.

He did say, another NBC mini-series based on a Heymann biography, "A Woman Named Jackie", won an Emmy Award two years ago.

Taylor's attorney, Neil Papiano, said Heymann's work was inaccurate in damaging ways.



BRIEFLY

Rao to visit Vietnam:

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao of India will make his first visit to Vietnam during the first week of September, the Foreign Ministry announced Thursday, AP reports from Hanoi.

India is one of the countries which has encouraged political, economic and trade relations with Vietnam and has always sympathised with and supported Vietnam, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Ho Thi Lan told a news conference.

Indian army chopper crashes, 3 die:

An army helicopter crashed in the northern Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh Thursday and at least three soldiers were killed, United News of India news agency said, AP reports from New Delhi.

Policemen found three bodies near the crash site, but it was not immediately known how many people the helicopter was carrying when it crashed.

Rocket attacks hurt 37 in Kabul:

Thirty-seven people were wounded when opponents of Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani rocketed residential areas of the capital Kabul on Wednesday, The official Kabul Radio said, Reuters reports from Islamabad.

The broadcast, monitored in Islamabad, said the anti-Rabbani forces led by Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum fired 52 rockets, which also damaged government buildings and private homes in the capital.

IRA bomb destroys pub in Belfast:

An IRA bomb destroyed a pub on Wednesday in a Protestant part of Belfast, while British army specialists defused a firebomb dumped in the doorway of a second pub, AP reports from Belfast.

No one was reported injured. A dozen customers were in the Grove Tavern when two men burst in, identified themselves as Irish Republican Army members and left behind a bomb in a gym bag. It exploded about 15 minutes after pubgoers fled, witnesses and police said.

14 die in ROK hostess bar fire:

Fourteen people were killed when fire swept through a hostess bar in Seoul late on Wednesday, police said, Reuters reports from Seoul.

Ten clients and four female employees were suffocated by smoke and toxic gas caused by burning carpets and furniture in the bar on the fourth floor of a five-storey building, they said.

Pakistan detains 22 Afghans:

Pakistani police detained 22 Afghans at Islamabad Airport on Wednesday when they arrived from Kabul on a Saudi diplomatic plane without visas, Interior Minister Nasirullah Babar said, Reuters reports from Islamabad.

He told reporters the Afghans had probably come to attend an opposition rally held in Islamabad on Wednesday to mark the sixth anniversary of the death of military ruler General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq. Their identities were not immediately known.

Chinese Gen meets Perry in US:

Defence Secretary William Perry met a top Chinese General on Wednesday in a sign of improvement in military relations frozen by Washington in 1989 after Beijing used the army to crush pro-democracy protests, Reuters reports from Washington.

Perry met General Xu Huiti, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the People's Liberation Army — a visit strongly criticised by a Republican Senator.

Palestinian boy shot dead:

Israeli troops on Wednesday shot dead a Palestinian teenager who tried to enter Egypt near the Rafah crossing point in the autonomous Gaza Strip, Palestinian and Israeli officials said, AFP reports from Gaza City.

Imad Ramen, 17, was from Rafah town. Palestinian members of the Joint Liaison Committee protested to Israeli military officials over the incident, Palestinian sources said.

Peres due in Gaza today:

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres will visit the Gaza Strip on Friday with his Norwegian counterpart, Bjorn Godeal, as a guest of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Wednesday, Reuters reports from Jerusalem.

Gunman kills Tajik TV official:

A Tajikistan state television executive was killed outside his home Thursday by a gunman who escaped, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported, AP says from Dushanbe.

Davlati Rakhmonaliev, 41, was on his way to work when he was attacked, police said. Rakhmonaliev, director of the republican television programme, had strongly advocated the restoration of a republican form of government in Tajikistan.

Nobel laureate Canetti dies:

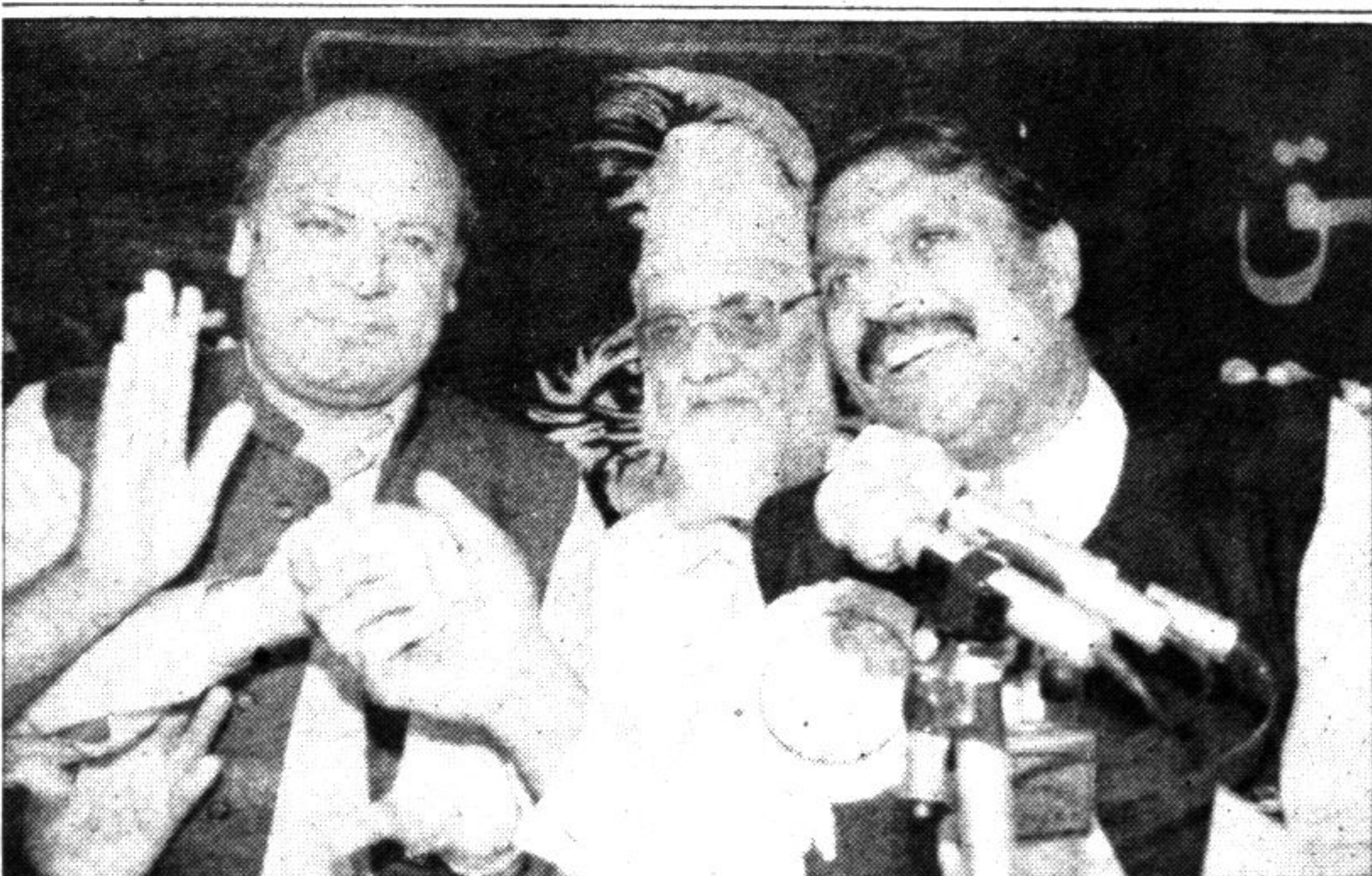
Elias Canetti, winner of the 1981 Nobel prize for literature, has died, a relative said Thursday. He was 89, AP reports from Zurich.

The writer — a Bulgarian-born British citizen who wrote in German — died last Sunday, said the relative, who asked not to be identified. The cause of death was not disclosed.

Quake shakes N Japan:

An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.4 struck off Japan's northernmost main island on Thursday, but no injuries or damage were immediately reported, AP says from Tokyo.

The quake struck at 1:43 pm (0443 GMT), the Central Meteorological Agency reported. It was centered about 300 miles (500 kilometres) east-northeast of Kushiro on Japan's northernmost main island of Hokkaido, and about 120 miles (200 kilometres) south of the Russian island Urup, part of the Kuril Chain.



Opposition leader Nawaz Sharif (L) shakes hands with Ejazul Haq (R) son of late President Zia-ul-Haq, in Islamabad, on Wednesday. The opposition celebrated the sixth anniversary of the death of General Zia-ul-Haq, Zia died in a military air crash in 1988. The Prime Minister of Pakistani held Kashmir, Abdul Qayyum, is in centre. — AFP photo

Sharif to launch campaign after Sept 11

Zia's followers swear to overthrow Benazir govt

ISLAMABAD, Aug 18: Followers of Pakistan's late military ruler General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq denounced Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto as a traitor on Wednesday and swore to overthrow what they called her corrupt government, reports Reuters.

"Resign by September 11 or we will throw you out", declared opposition leader Nawaz Sharif at a rally at Zia's grave to mark the sixth anniversary of his death in a plane crash.

Sharif, a Zia protégé replaced by Benazir after she won a general election in October, said he would launch a campaign to oust her and President Farooq Leghari if they did not quit.

The campaign will not end till we send them packing," he told a crowd of several thousand people outside Islamabad's giant Faisal Mosque

where Zia's remains are buried.

They chanted slogans praising Zia, who toppled Benazir's father, then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in a 1977 army coup and hanged him after a conspiracy-to-murder conviction.

Sharif accused both Leghari and Benazir of misrule, a charge denied by the government, which in turn accuses Sharif of pursuing a political offensive to divert attention from charges of corruption relating to his own 30 months in government.

"Let me warn you, people would not throw you in the Arabian Sea, which is far, but in Rawal Dam near here," Sharif told Benazir.

"Mard-i-Momin, Mard-i-Haq (true believer, man of

truth), Zia-ul-Haq, Zia-ul-Haq", the crowd shouted to punctuate the harshly-worded speeches by Sharif and Zia's elder son Ejaz-ul-Haq, a former minister in the Sharif government.

Sharif, who has refused repeated offers from Benazir for talks to soothe political acrimony, accused her of spoiling relations with neighbouring Afghanistan and being soft on Pakistan's arch-foe India.

"I say they are traitors who will destroy our country, but we will not let them do this," he said of the government.

Ejaz said his father was killed in a conspiracy whose authors would soon be exposed.

Zia's C-130 military transport crashed in the desert near the Punjab Province town of Bahawalpur on August 17,

Chandrika a veteran of political mayhem

COLOMBO, Aug 18: After her father and husband were assassinated and her family torn apart by political squabbles, many people were surprised when Chandrika Kumaratunga ran for office herself, reports AP.

But on Wednesday, she staked her claim to form a government "after her five-party alliance won the largest block of seats in Sri Lanka's parliament."

In 1959, when she was 14 years old, her father, Prime Minister Solomon Dias Bandaranaike, was assassinated by a Buddhist monk.

A few weeks later, her mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, became the first woman in the world to be elected as a national leader, and she served as prime minister twice: 1960-65 and 1970-77.

In 1972, Chandrika quit work on her doctorate on the economics of development at Sorbonne in Paris. She returned to Sri Lanka to help her mother fight a decree banning her from politics, and to help her husband — actor Vijaya Kumaratunga — campaign for a seat in Parliament.

In 1988, soon after Chandrika and Vijaya formed a socialist opposition party, a radical group assassinated him. Facing death threats herself, she fled to Britain with her two children. Chandrika returned to Sri Lanka in 1990. After a political party that she formed proved unsuccessful, she abandoned it and joined



Chandrika Kumaratunga raises her clasped hands in a traditional Sinhalese greeting to her supporters. — AFP photo

her mother's opposition Freedom Party.

But that led to another crisis.

She and her brother, Anura, both wanted to lead the party once their 76-year-old mother retired. Their feud ended last year when Anura abandoned his family and joined the ruling United National Party.

"In my family, it always has been politics at breakfast, politics at lunch and politics at dinner," Chandrika recently told a group of reporters. "So politics is in my blood, despite what happened to my father and my husband."

"I did not intend to be in politics at such a high level... I have been propelled to dizzying heights and I find it extremely uncomfortable because of all these restrictions."

Like her mother, Chandrika is charismatic. She often excited people during election rallies, and drew large crowds, by calling President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga a lunatic and his free-market economic policies "crony capitalism" that enrich the rich.

Some members of the island's Hindu Tamil minority see in her the possibility of a cease fire with Tamil rebels fighting an 11-year-old war for independence in northern and eastern Sri Lanka.

But many people in the nation's Buddhist Sinhalese majority also express fear that Chandrika could be as authoritarian and socialistic as her mother.

Manila to cut strong army by 25pc in 10yrs

MANILA, Aug 18: The ranks of the Philippines 120,000 strong military would be trimmed by about 25 per cent by 2004, military Chief General Arturo Enrile said here today, reports AFP.

Enrile said this would be done through a normal process of attrition.

He added that the civilian anti-insurgency militia force — the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) — would hopefully be completely disbanded by then as the communist insurgency it was created to fight would have ceased to be a major threat.

Vice Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Alfredo Filler said the CAFGU, which is based in the country's rural areas, number about 65,800 but would be reduced to about 58,450 by next year, with more reductions in the future. The cutback in forces in part of a military streamlining programme to redirect funds for external defence rather than counter-insurgency efforts which have long been the Philippine military's main concern.

The switch to external defence comes due to the closure of all US bases in this country in 1992 and the weakening of the local communist insurgency, which has declined from a high of 25,000 armed guerrillas in the mid-1980s to only about 8,000 currently.

The military is to transfer the bulk of its counter-insurgency responsibilities to the nationwide police force by next year.

Enrile said a joint military-police committee was looking at the various districts of the country to determine which areas are safe enough for the police to take over security duties.

Ramos orders probe into drug charges against 11 Indians

MANILA, Aug 18: President Fidel Ramos on Thursday ordered an investigation into the case of 11 Indians who were allowed to leave the country although capital drug charges were pending against them, reports AP.

The Indians were arrested July 4 for allegedly manufacturing an illegal drug called madrax in the Manila suburb of Pasay City. They were charged with drug offenses which carry the death penalty.

But last week, officials confirmed the 11 were allowed to leave the country under the "self-deportation" system.

On Wednesday, Sen. Ernesto Herrera claimed the Indians were part of an international drug ring which was using the Philippines as a transshipment point for narcotics headed for the United States and other countries.