

International

Hamas, Islamic Jihad blamed for riots

Israel seals off Gaza Strip indefinitely

Taiwan to get US technology to produce F-16 components

TAIPEI, July 18: The US State Department has approved a major transfer of technology to Taiwan to produce components for 150 F-16 fighters Taipei ordered in 1992, a newspaper said today, reports AFP.

In the first such transfer authorised for the nationalist island, the components will be manufactured in Taiwan and sold here and in other countries using the F-16 Falcon, the United Daily News said.

Sixty Taiwanese firms are viewed as potential manufacturers for the components, which include F-16 air inlets, engine access doors, ventral fins, AIM-9 missile launchers and fuel pylons, the paper said.

The transfer is part of an offset arrangement under the 5.4-billion-US-dollar arms deal that incurred Chinese wrath and warnings to other countries not to follow suit.

The paper said some US firms, including Rosemount aerospace, MIT and Smith industries, plan to cooperate with Taiwan in component production. Two chief suppliers to Lockheed - Allied Signal and Hamilton Standard, are to come to Taiwan soon to look for suitable partners.

EREZ CROSSING, Gaza Strip, July 18: Israel closed the Gaza Strip indefinitely Monday and blamed Muslim militants for inciting riots that killed two Palestinians and wounded scores of Arabs and Israelis, reports AP.

In an attempted show of strength, the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups tried to enforce a two-day strike in Gaza to protest Sunday's bloodshed.

But most merchants opened their shops after Palestinian police removed roadblocks of burning tires and boulders set up by militants. The strike was observed in the West Bank, most of which is still occupied by Israel.

After Palestinian workers unable to get to their jobs in Israel rioted at the Erez border crossing Sunday, Palestinian police and Israeli troops exchanged fire for four hours. About 90 Palestinians were wounded, along with 23 Israeli soldiers and civilians, in the worst violence since Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho gained autonomy from Israel in mid-May.

The clash shook the fragile trust between Israel and the

PLO and threatened to undermine the peace accord.

But the agreement's resilience was underscored Monday when Israelis and Palestinians began scheduled talks in Cairo on extending Palestinian control in the West Bank. The talks are also intended to resolve lingering questions from the autonomy agreement signed in Cairo on May 4.

"We are trying to do business as usual," said Maj. Gen. Danny Rothschild, chief of the Israeli delegation.

"We hope that this massacre will not affect the talks and the peace process," said Zuhdi al-Qudra, the PLO's acting representative in Cairo.

In another unusual sign of cooperation, Palestinian and Israeli officials agreed that Palestinian police deserved much of the blame for Sunday's riots.

Palestinian police lost control completely when the riots erupted, Israeli police minister Moshe Shahal said Monday. He said Israel would give Palestinians a list of demands at an Israeli-PLO security committee meeting later Monday, including reorganisa-

tion of the Palestinian forces.

Until Palestinian police have met the demands, Israel will keep Gaza sealed, Shahal said.

Sufian Abu Zayde, a leading Palestinian official, agreed that

the Palestinian police were to blame, mainly because of incompetence.

The Israeli army said an investigation found that Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists directed angry workers to the

Erez Crossing. The probe found firebombs had been stockpiled near the riot scene, indicating violence was planned.

"The Hamas people on the scene played more than an in-

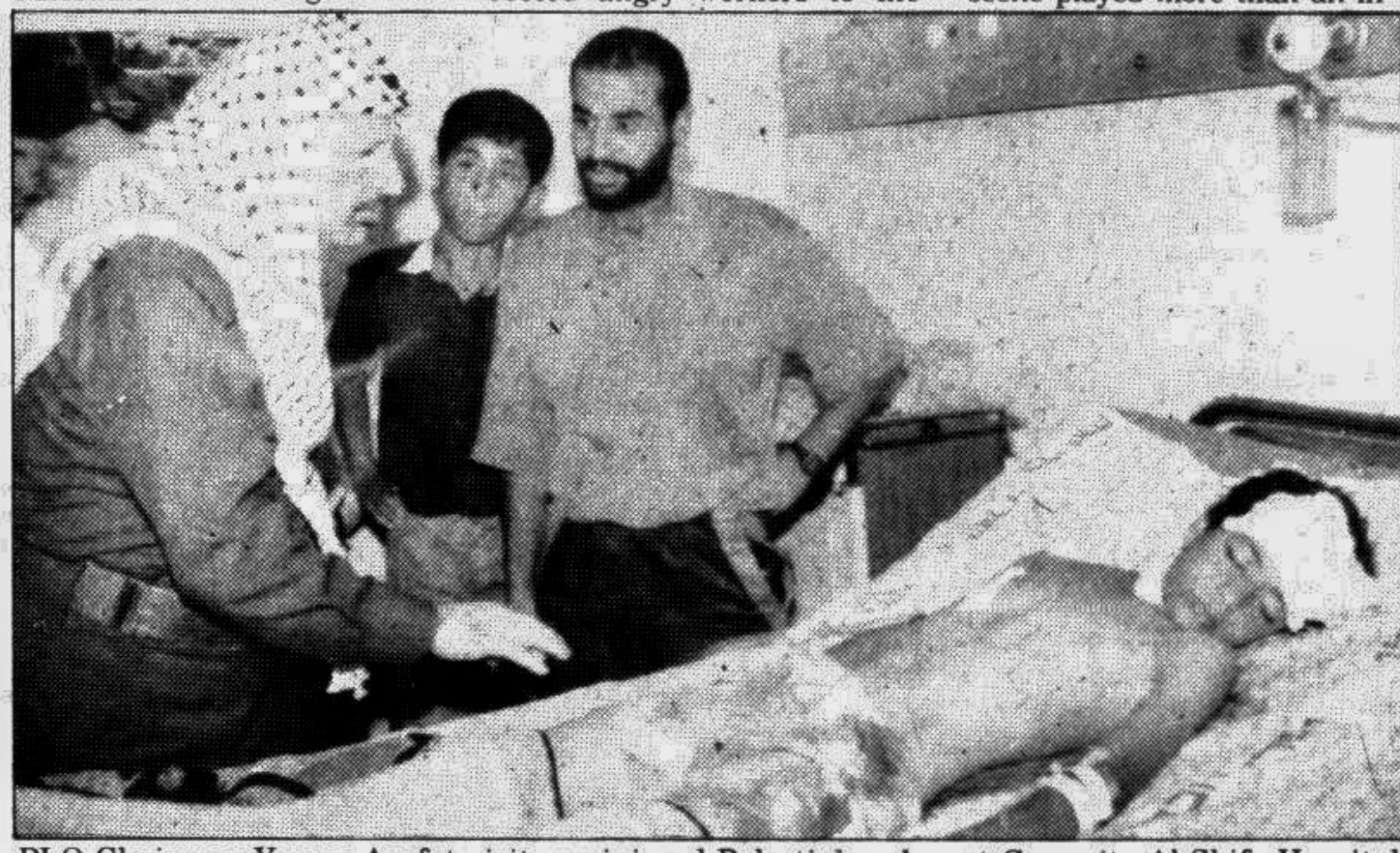
cidental role," he said Oded Ben-Ami, spokesman for Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. "They organised the huge numbers of youth who were mobilised to come to the crossing and create the intense pressure on our people there."

Unemployment in Gaza, which has a population of 850,000, is about 60 per cent. Israel has granted work permits to about 25,000 Gazans.

Those allowed to work must wait hours at the Erez Crossing, starting around 2 am, because of lengthy security checks. Palestinians are not allowed to stay in Israel overnight.

Under an agreement worked out after riots last week, PLO police are to keep anyone without a work permit for Israel away from the crossing. But Palestinian police have been lax checking travellers, waving most cars through roadblocks.

Abu Zayde demanded that Israel ease the security checks for workers to reduce waiting time and let anyone over age 30 pass through Erez unhindered. Most Gazans who have attacked Israelis are in their late teens or early 20s.



PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat visits an injured Palestinian boy at Gaza city Al Shifa Hospital on Sunday. The boy was shot during heavy riots at the Erez crossing point. - AFP photo

Bombay blast trial Pakistan slates Indian move

ISLAMABAD, July 18: Pakistan yesterday expressed concern about what it called crude attempts by Indian authorities to malign Pakistan in the Bombay bombing trial, reports AFP.

A Foreign Office spokesman said the trial that opened in India on Thursday showed the "clumsy antics of the prosecution to divert attention from the substance in a devious effort to pin the blame on agencies in Pakistan."

During the proceedings in Bombay on Thursday, the state prosecutor accused Pakistan of involvement in the bloody March 1993 bombings in Bombay which left more than 300 people dead.

Among the 189 people charged in connection with the string of bombings in India's financial and commercial capital are Hindi movie idol Sunjay Dutt and members of Bombay's Muslim underworld.

The concocted evidence of the so-called approvers could hardly stand in a respectable court of law," the Foreign Office spokesman said, adding "the special prosecutor's convoluted opening remarks confirm the earlier fears that the trial would be a complete farce.

Tibetans oppose Qian's India visit

NEW DELHI, July 18: Police prevented 300 Tibetan refugees from blocking the motorcade of Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen Monday as he began talks with Indian leaders, reports AP.

"We are holding the Tibetans so that they do not disrupt the visit of the Chinese dignitary," said police spokesman Baljeet Singh.

The Tibetans were kept at the Antar Mantar park, about one kilometre (half mile) from where Qian was meeting Indian officials. They were not arrested, but about 150 policemen kept a cordon around them.

India is the home of the exiled Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, and of 110,000 refugees. In his first meetings of his

three-day visit to India, Qian saw Commerce Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh to give the final touches to agreements on double taxation and banking.

He was scheduled to meet Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao Monday evening on improving ties and reducing tensions between the world's two most populous nations, whose troops have faced each other for decades along a disputed border.

India and China fought a brief war in 1962, and relations were frozen until 1988 when the late Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Beijing.

Joint working groups have met seven times to try to establish a border, open trad-

ing posts and disengage forces.

Foreign Secretary K Srinivasan, who returned earlier this month from the latest experts' meeting, said he expected to see a reduction of forces some time next year, but a solution of the complicated border question would take time.

Singh, the police spokesman said the Tibetans had planned to block Qian's motorcade to dramatise their demand for Tibet's independence from China, which sent its army to the Himalayan kingdom in 1950.

Demonstrator Karma Gyatso, who escaped the police cordon, said it was "disgraceful" that the police did not allow the Tibetans to stage their protest.

The Dalai Lama, winner of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, fled Tibet during a failed anti-China uprising in 1959. He now presides in India over a self-proclaimed government-in-exile that has not been recognised by any government, including India's.

The Dalai Lama gave up his demands for complete independence in 1988 when he proposed that China retain control of Tibet's foreign and defence matters. In exchange, Tibetans would elect their own government to deal with internal matters.

China has not accepted this proposal, and has demanded that the Dalai Lama admit China's historical claim to Tibet before it will discuss any other issue.

Floods claim 100 in China

BEIJING, July 18: Deadly torrential rains and floods that pounded South China have turned their fury to drought-stricken northern and central China, killing at least 100 people and injuring thousands, reports Reuters.

"The sudden downpours, which caught people in drought-affected regions by surprise, lasted more than 30 hours, causing rivers to overflow and floods to sweep nearby areas," the official China Daily said today.

Earlier waves of thunderstorms and floods this year killed more than 1,400 people

in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan, Jiangxi, Zhejiang and Fujian provinces, causing more than 6 billion US dollars in losses to homes, industry and agriculture, according to official estimates.

As is common as the annual flood season progresses, the torrents have begun shifting to northern China.

More than 60 people were killed by floods in parched Hebei province, which surrounds the capital Beijing, China Daily quoted local television as saying.

In central Hubei province, an 11-hour rainstorm last

week in Yanagxin and Daye counties killed 41 people, injured 1,300 and left 3,400 families homeless, the report said.

Intense rainfall in the northeast week put dangerous pressure on riverbanks and disrupted service on 12 railways, including the major Beijing-Shenyang and Jinzhou-Chende Links as trestles and railbeds were undermined.

Reports said all but the Siping-Qiqihar railway linking Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces were back in service by the weekend.

Lankan opposition launches election campaign

NITTAMBUWA, Sri Lanka, July 18: A coalition of opposition parties, pledging to abolish the executive presidency, launched its campaign Sunday in a bid to win next month's general election, reports AP.

The People's Alliance led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, hopes to end the 17-year rule of the governing United National Party.

Over 15,000 people had gathered at the rally in Nittambuwa, 35 kilometres (22 miles) northeast of Colombo.

But the alliance's rising star, Chandrika Kumaratunga, who was expected to attend the rally did not turn up. The organisers gave no reasons. Kumaratunga's mother Sirimavo Bandaranaike was elected prime minister twice in 1960-65 and 1970-77.

The alliance, which has accused the government of corruption, says it would establish a permanent commission to deal with the problems.

It promises to continue the free market policy while protecting the local industries. The alliance also plans to abolish the executive presidency and revert back to the West Minister system of government.

President Dingiri Band Wijetunga, who faces separate elections later this year, called an early parliamentary election for August 16, hoping that's clear victory would boost his own chances of staying in office.

When nominations closed, 13 recognised political parties and 26 independent groups were registered, fielding a total of 1,440 candidates to contest 196 parliamentary seats.

Thailand to cut stay period for many foreigners

BANGKOK, July 18: Thai immigration authorities will soon cut the three-month stay period for many foreign visitors to 30 days, according to 'The Bangkok Post' today, reports Xinhua.

Deputy police chief Pol Gen Pracha Promnok said the measures are aimed at preventing sabotage by foreigners.

A police department source said rules applying to visitors from Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran and Nepal would be even tighter.

They would be permitted to remain in the country no longer than seven days without an appropriate visa and they would not be allowed to stay overnight in Thailand if they are making a transit stop.

Immigration police would keep track of foreigners making long stays in the country for business and academic purposes.

50 Rwandan refugees trampled to death

GOMA, Zaire, July 18: Terrified by gunfire, Rwandan refugees stampeded across the border Sunday and up to 50 people most of them children, were trampled to death, witnesses said. Remnants of the Rwandan government army fleeing their last strongholds joined the exodus, reports AP.

As many as 1 million refugees had crossed into Zaire by the end of the day, ahead of advancing rebels who have captured virtually the entire country. Chaos and anarchy took over Goma, the border city.

Heavy machine-gun fire filled the air, and mortar shells exploded near Goma's tiny airport halting desperately needed aid flights.

Refugees were not being fired on, although many were robbed at gunpoint by Zairian soldiers.

Relief workers were unable to cope with what one called

"the exodus of a nation," with little food and a critical water shortage raising fears of epidemics and riots.

"Goma is out of control," said Panos Moutmtzis, a spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "We feel defeated and exhausted. It's a nightmare."

Three mortar shells landed near Goma's airport Sunday, one just off the runway. French military spokesman Col. Jacques Rousset said it was not clear who fired them.

The gunfire triggered the border stampede. Photographer Charles Caratini of the European photo agency Sygma, who was at the border shortly afterward, said he saw 30 to 50 bodies, most of them children.

More than half a million Rwandans fled earlier into Rwanda's other neighbours: Tanzania, Burundi and Uganda.

BRIEFLY

Anatoly Kopsov resigns: The prime minister of an autonomous republic in eastern Russia tendered his resignation Monday after a local television programme about his lavish villa, the ITAR-Tass news agency said, AP reports from Russia.

Prime Minister Anatoly Kopsov said his decision was "dictated by circumstances which do not let me perform my duties."

The documentary "Wondertown," aired last week, also featured the luxurious mansions with swimming pools and gyms that were built for other government officials.

Danish Queen operated upon: Danish Queen Margrethe had an operation for ovarian cancer yesterday and was recovering without complications, court sources said, Reuters reports from Copenhagen.

Margrethe, aged 54, "accessed" to the Danish throne in 1972. A court statement said the Queen had a total hysterectomy and that prospects for a swift recovery were very favourable.

The operation was conducted at the main hospital in Aarhus, Jutland, Denmark's second city, where the royal family was holidaying.

Woman-only hospital opens in Iran: A women-only hospital was opened in Tehran Sunday by Iranian President Ali Khamenei Hashemi Rafsanjani, Tehran Radio said, AFP reports from Tehran.

The ultra-modern, Shush Hospital, located in a poor and populous district of southern Tehran, is entirely staffed by women and caters for women only.

It specialises in gynaecology and childbirth. The first three births are free of charge but patients have to pay for their fourth labour, the radio said.

Floods claim 5 in Iran: Floods claimed lives of five people and 500 domestic animals in Iran's southeastern province of Sistanbaluchestan, according to an official report on Sunday, Xinhua reports from Tehran.

Mohammad-Reza Azarnia, Governor in Khash of the province, said that the recent floods also inflicted 900 million rials of damage in Khash.

The governor said that the floods triggered by torrential rain caused between 20 per cent and 80 per cent damage to 105 rural houses in nearby villages.

Missing Omani envoy safe: The Omani news agency said on Sunday the country's ambassador to Algeria, Hilal Bin Salem Asstiyabi, who had been missing since Friday, was "safe and sound and in good health," Reuters reports from Dubai.

The Omani envoy was reported missing along with Yemeni ambassador Kacem Askar Djibrane. The Omani news agency said it had learned from Algerian security sources that Asstiyabi was safe but it gave no word on his whereabouts.

Rainfall confce from Aug 1: Environment-conscious residents of Tokyo's Sumida Ward are to stage a six-day international rainfall conference beginning August 1 attracting delegates from about 20 countries, Xinhua reports from Tokyo.

Delegates will be briefed on examples of effective use of rainfall, the Kyoto News Service reported on Monday.

The organizers will also hold outdoor tea ceremonies to encourage as many citizens as possible to participate and recognise the importance of rainfall as a precious and free resource.

India's floods toll rises to 260: Flood toll rose to over 260 as six persons were killed Sunday in house collapse in Mehana and Bhavnagar districts of Gujarat taking the current flood toll to over 260 while in Karnataka and Orissa the situation worsened, PTI reports from New Delhi.

Army was called out in Mysore district of Karnataka to rescue the marooned with the entire cauvery basin facing the threat of wide-spread inundation.

A complement of air force helicopters in Orissa airdropped supply packets to the marooned Jagatsinghpur district. An army contingent with rubber motor boats was also pressed into service in the district.

Monk burns himself to death in Vietnam

HANOI, July 18: A dissident monk burned himself to death in southern Vinh Long Province and police arrested several of his fellows who were preparing to do the same, according to an opposition Buddhist Group, reports AFP.

The venerable Thich Hue Thau, 43, superior monk at the Ngoc Phat Pagoda, was apparently protesting against the authorities' refusal to guarantee religious freedom in Vietnam, and against high agricultural taxes imposed on the peasants of the Mekong Delta, a release received in Hanoi on Monday from the unified Buddhist church of Vietnam said.

'Kim Jong-Il has no choice but to follow father's policy'

SEOUL, July 18: With Kim Jong-Il set to take power in the world's first communist dynastic succession, speculation is rampant over how North Korea will tackle a host of explosive problems bequeathed by his autocratic father, reports AFP.

While thousands of weeping mourners pledge to follow Kim junior, in his fulfillment of Kim Il-Sung's "Juche" (revolution of self-reliance), cold outside assessment is divided on what direction the "dear leader" will take.

Most agree, however, that his policy choices are limited by the urgency of saving the economy from collapse and solidifying his position.

Kim Jong-Il has no choice but to follow the policy of his

father" said Kim Hak-Jun, a former South Korean presidential advisor and expert on the North.

While Pyongyang watchers here forecast the new leader will have to maintain the repressive rule of his father - the world's last Stalinist ruler - for the time being, they are less certain about the long-term.

But for now, they say, Kim Jong-Il, 52, has pledged to continue to talk with Washington on the nuclear bomb he might or might not have, and pursue plans for a summit with South Korea.

Incontestably he lacks the charisma of his father, who was able by sheer force of personality - and decades of bloody purges - to force his

people to endure economic hardships until his death last week.

That is why, analysts say, it is difficult to predict what course the hitherto retiring Kim - 30 years his father's junior and a reported CNN-TV addict, will take.

But his latest statements contain hints of following his father's socialist footsteps - at least in the short term.

The collapse of socialism is a temporary phenomenon, and socialism will necessarily gain victory," the younger Kim said on January 3, 1992.

In a parliamentary debate this week, South Korean legislators agreed that Kim would stay in power for the immediate future, despite his isolated country's economic difficulties.

Some forecast that he may feel compelled to purge many party functionaries and government officials to consolidate his grip on power.

Yet, many government officials here took an optimistic view - suggesting that the younger Kim, faced with acute food and energy shortages, may open up and seek financial support from outside for survival, with the support of China, which has reportedly already invited him for talks.

Leading the optimists is Unification Minister Lee Hong-Ku, who predicts Kim will be active in normalising ties with western countries to stabilise his regime.

In a recent survey, 58.3 per cent of South Koreans questioned said they believed Kim junior would pursue an open-

door policy, and strip his country of the label of being the world's last Stalinist state.

Some Pyongyang watchers here agreed with this view, pointing to Kim's personality and past conduct.

In the mid 1980s, he tried changing the life-styles of North Koreans, issuing guidelines advising men to wear suits instead of the ubiquitous Lenin-style uniform, and women to avoid black or military-coloured clothes, according to official northern documents kept here.

Such changes, considered unthinkable before, quickly spread to music, literature and other areas.

In the most recent sign of openness in late June, the heir apparent instructed eco-

French minister resigns

PARIS, July 18: French Communications Minister Alain Carignon resigned on Sunday after his name was linked to a corruption case involving contracts awarded by Grenoble, the Alpine City of which he is mayor, judicial sources said, reports Reuters.

A joint statement from the presidency and the office of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur announced the resignation.

It said Carignon submitted his resignation in order to be able to express himself freely in the case.

The case involves 6.8 million francs (1.28 million) paid by subsidiaries of the giant utility group Lyonnaise des Eaux Dumez to Dauphine News, a publication created to back Carignon's election campaign in 1989.

One of the subsidiaries Cogese was subsequently awarded the contract to supply water to Grenoble. Its managing director and three people connected with the newspaper were placed under investigation on suspicion of corruption.

Carignon, 45, told French television he was innocent but had resigned to avoid embarrassing the government as the case became public.

Have public funds been misappropriated? The answer is no. Has there been tax evasion or an attempt to conceal funds? The answer is again no, he said.

Lyonnaise des Eaux Dumes recently said it would sue an investigating magistrate for allegedly implying in a book that the firm was one of the two main corrupts of political personalities in France.

Turtle undergoes cataract surgery

BALTIMORE: A 42-kilo (93-pound) sea turtle that was nearly blind when it was picked up off the Virginia coast has a fighting chance of returning home after cataract surgery at the National Aquarium, reports AP.

The loggerhead turtle, believed to be about 15 years old, was an emaciated 35 kilos (78 pounds) when a fisherman found it floating helplessly in October, fish hooks caught in its neck and cataracts in both eyes.

"We've removed the cataracts because we feel that will provide the animal with its best shot for survival in the wild. It's got a good chance of making it," said Dr. Brent R. Whitaker, the aquarium's director of animal health.

An animal eye doctor and human eye doctor performed the surgery June 11, and the patient is doing fine. Aquarium officials said they believe it was the first time a sea turtle had undergone cataract surgery.

The turtle's sight remains cloudy, but if it keeps improving and the turtle regains its ability to catch food, it might be released off Virginia Beach later this month.

Mitterrand undergoes surgery

PARIS, July 18: French President Francois Mitterrand, suffering from prostate cancer, underwent surgery Monday and was reported in good condition, reports AP.

The operation was the second performed on the 77-year-old president since doctors diagnosed him with prostate cancer in the fall of 1992.

Mitterrand, whose term ends next spring, underwent surgery at Cochin Hospital, said a spokesman for the president's Elysee Palace, speaking on customary anonymity.

There was no immediate word on the type of operation, but Europe 1 radio reported Mitterrand was in good condition.