

UN fact-finding mission due in Liberia today

UNITED NATIONS Aug 17: Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali expressed concern Tuesday about the deteriorating situation in civil war-torn Liberia and said he was sending a fact-finding mission to advise him on what he should recommend to the Security Council, reports Reuter.

The mission, due to arrive in Liberia Thursday, will be headed by former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi, who served as the secretary general's peace envoy during the recent civil war in Yemen.

Three warring Liberian groups signed an agreement in Cotonou, Benin, in July 1993 to end a conflict that broke out in 1990 and is estimated to have taken more than 150,000 lives. But implementation of the accord is running well behind schedule and elections, due to have been held earlier

this year and postponed until September, will almost certainly be delayed again.

Only about 3,500 of an estimated 60,000 combatants have so been disarmed, as required under the agreement.

"The secretary-general is increasingly concerned about the deteriorating situation in Liberia and the uncertain prospects for the UNOMIL and ECOMOG operations there," a UN spokesman said, referring to the 360-member UN Observer Mission in Liberia and a much larger force fielded by the economic community of West African states.

"The secretary-general has accordingly decided to dispatch to Liberia fact-finding mission which, in consultation with his special representative Trevor Gordon-Somers of Jamaica and the Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG), will review the situation in the country

Muslims regain territory from Serbs in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Aug 17: Bosnia's mainly Muslim government army is pushing back rebel Serbs in a shift from defensive to offensive operations its top general says, reports Reuter.

Government forces have wrested back dozens of square miles of territory in central and northern Bosnia against a foe militarily superior in all respects but motivation and tactical planning, according to its commander, General Rasim Delic.

"We are slowly moving from the phase where we solely defended ourselves to the offensive phase of territorial liberation in this war," the Muslim supreme commander told state television on Tuesday night.

"We are like a snowball get-

ting bigger as it rolls down from the top of a hill. If things continue as they are, the process of liberation will accelerate."

Bosnian Serb forces overran 70 per cent of Bosnia in 1992-93 in a revolt against a majority Muslim and Croat vote for independence from Yugoslavia.

The Serbs have rejected a final international peace plan requiring them to cede a third of their domain and awarding 51 per cent of Bosnia to a new Muslim-Croat federal entity.

To avoid tougher sanctions, Serbian led Yugoslavia two weeks ago severed all political and economic ties with its Bosnian Serb proteges for their refusal to yield land.

Yugoslavia's abandonment of the Bosnian Serbs, apparently cutting off their main source of

arms and fuel, lent extra impetus to Muslim counter-offensives that unfolded in the weeks leading up to Belgrade's shock decision.

The Bosnian government's will to fight on has also been stiffened by a US move to have the Muslims exempted from the 1991 UN arms embargo on old Yugoslavia if Bosnian Serbs have not accepted the peace plan by October 15.

Analysts say even if the embargo goes — no sure thing in the light of resistance by America's European allies with peacekeeping troops in Bosnia — it will take the Muslims at least two years to acquire heavy artillery, tanks and military acumen on a par with the Yugoslav army-trained Serbs.

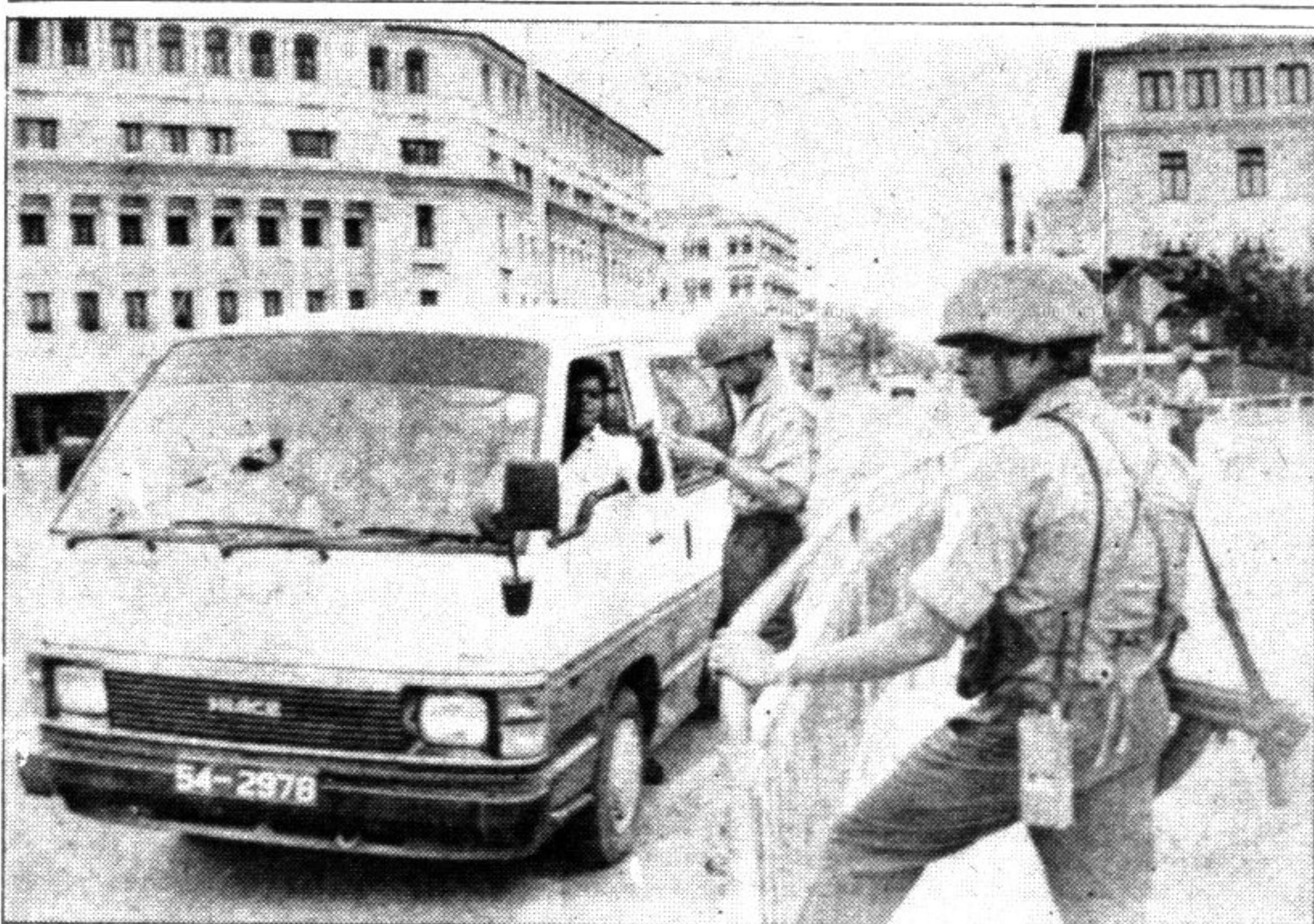
Officers in the UN protection force in Bosnia have also

warned it will be withdrawn if the arms ban is rescinded, exposing UN-protected Muslim enclaves to Serb onslaught.

But many and Western diplomats also believe the Bosnian Serbs' deepening isolation will gradually shift the strategic sands in the Muslims' favour, although not without much more bloodshed and civilian misery.

Delic said his troops had captured the important Nisic Heights in a southward thrust from Vares in central Bosnia to the verge of the main road between Sarajevo and the north-eastern Muslim city of Tuzla.

Government forces had also driven back Serbs on Mount Vlasica overlooking the central government town of Travnik.



Military personnel checks curfew pass yesterday of a motorist at Colombo's main Galle Road. Sri Lanka was brought under a state of emergency to prevent post-election violence. — AFP photo

Ethnic violence claims 7 more in Karachi

Benazir leading country toward civil strife: sharif

ISLAMABAD, Aug 17: Pakistan's opposition leader, Nawaz Sharif, accused Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto Tuesday of leading the country towards civil strife and economic collapse, reports AFP.

Addressing a press conference at the Parliament Building, former Prime Minister Sharif branded Benazir's 10-month-old government as "incompetent, corrupt and anti-national."

"If this regime continues, the future of Pakistan will be endangered," Sharif said, two days after setting a deadline for her to resign or be ready to face the "wrath" of the masses.

Addressing a large public meeting in Karachi on Sunday, Sharif threatened to launch a jihad (holy war) against Benazir if she did not resign by September 11 to pave the way for fresh elections.

Sharif's bitter attack came ahead of a planned opposition rally in Islamabad Wednesday to observe the sixth anniversary of the death of military ruler General Mohammad Zia

Ul Haq.

Zia persecuted Benazir and her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) during more than a decade of rule after seizing power in a 1977 military coup. The coup toppled Benazir's father, former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was executed two years later.

All reports: Gunmen shot and killed seven people, including a police officer in the latest outbreak of ethnic-

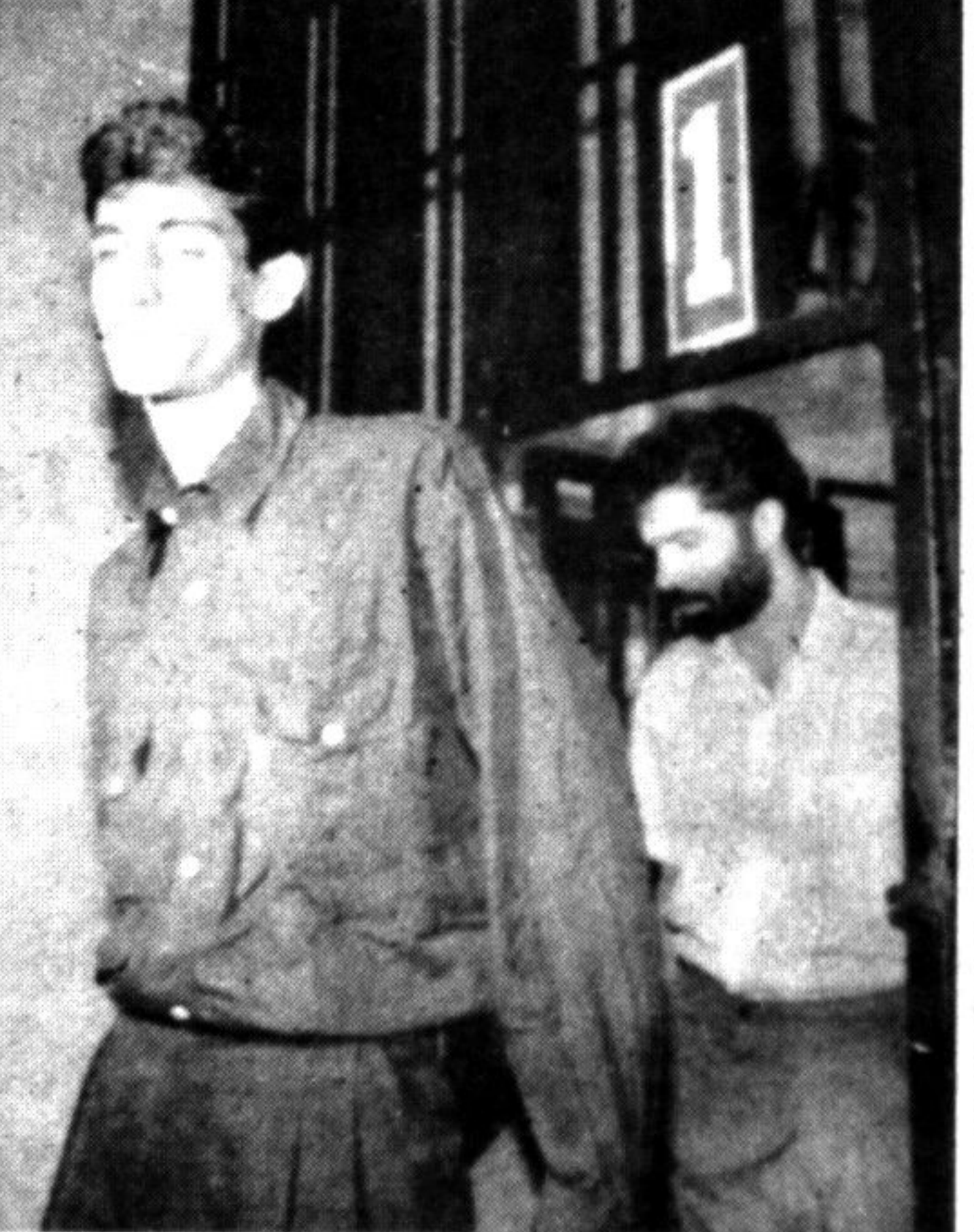
ally motivated violence, authorities said Wednesday.

Police blamed Tuesday's killings on rival members of the Mohajir Qami Movement or People's Refugee Movement, a militant group representing Indian Muslims who moved to Pakistan when the subcontinent was partitioned in 1947.

Hundreds of people have been killed since the Refugee Movement split over a leadership dispute two years ago.

Police said the bullet-riddled bodies of the first two victims were found Tuesday afternoon. They had been kidnapped from their home in a western suburb of Karachi earlier in the day, according to police.

On Tuesday, more than 80,000 left-wing activists were detained briefly by police for blocking roads nationwide on the first day of their three-week "civil disobedience movement" against Rao's economic policies, which have opened India to foreign investment.



Iranians Babak Taheri (L) and Basr Kagemi leave Bangkok Special Prison on Tuesday. Both men were arrested on June 3 in connection with the attempted truck-bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Bangkok, but released for lack of evidence. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

New chief for UN forces in Cyprus:

Brigadier-General Ahti Toimi Paavali Vartiainen of Finland has been appointed the new commander of the UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) the United Nations announced Tuesday, Reuter reports from United Nations.

UNFICYP has been stationed on the Mediterranean island since 1964 to help keep peace between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities.

Dominican president re-elected:

Joaquin Balaguer assumed the presidency of the Dominican Republic on Tuesday for the seventh time despite strong protests from the opposition and the United States, AP reports from Santo Domingo.

Balaguer blinded by glaucoma and crippled by phlebitis, said he would head a government of transition. He turns 88 in two weeks.

Rwanda appoints envoy to UN:

Rwanda's new government has named an ambassador to the United Nations and said that its delegate will not serve as head of the Security Council in September as planned, AP reports from United Nations.

Manzi Bakurumutsa arrived in New York last week and will officially take office as ambassador at the end of this month said Claude Dusaidi, a spokesman for Rwanda's new government.

Liberian polls may be delayed:

Only 3500 of the estimated 60,000 combatants in Liberia have been disarmed and elections scheduled for September will almost certainly have to be postponed, a UN spokesman said Tuesday, AP reports from United Nations.

A UN fact-finding mission will arrive in Liberia on Thursday to try to implement a peace agreement between the government and rebel forces said Fred Eckhard, a spokesman for Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Ex-spy heads Polish intelligence:

Former Communist spy Marian Zacharski who was sentenced to life imprisonment in the United States in 1981 for spying has been appointed Poland's head of civilian intelligence security, officials said Tuesday, AFP reports from Warsaw.

Zacharski, 43, served four years of his sentence in the United States before being exchanged along with three other Communist Bloc spies in 1985 for 25 Western agents held in Eastern Europe.

Algerian TV employee slain:

An employee for state-run television was murdered Tuesday on the western outskirts of Algiers while the Islamic Salvation Army freed the director of a magazine kidnapped three days earlier, AP reports from Algiers.

Six miners killed in S Africa:

Six miners were killed on Tuesday when they fell down a gold mine shaft in South Africa's northern Transvaal province, a mine spokesman said, Reuter reports from Johannesburg.

He told reporters the cause of the accident at Eersteling gold mine near Petersburg was being investigated.

12 die in Chinese train blast:

At least 12 people were killed and nearly 50 people injured in a train explosion in Southern China's Guangxi province, a newspaper reported yesterday, AFP says from Hong Kong.

The explosion occurred Saturday on a train bound for the scenic tourist centre of Guilin from Zhanjiang on the southern tip of Guangdong province, the Sing Tao daily said.

Two kidnapped in Philippines:

The wife of a provincial environment officer and her driver have been kidnapped in the southern Philippines, police said Wednesday, AP reports from General Santos Philippines.

Linda Catodan, 52, was seized at gunpoint by armed men including two of her family's tenants who barged into her bedroom at 1:15 am Tuesday (2115 GMT Monday) in Tacurong Sultan Kudarat province, police said.

British soldier killed in Bosnia:

A British soldier was killed by a mine in central Bosnia yesterday, the United Nations said, Reuter reports from Zagreb.

At 1025 (local) this morning a British army engineer was killed while supervising a clearing of an HVO (Croatian Defence Council) minefield north of Gornji Vakuf, UN spokesman Paul Risley told a news conference in Zagreb.

US-DPRK technical talks Sept 4:

The United States and North Korea will hold technical talks on September 4 to follow through on Pyongyang's recent pledge to halt its nuclear programme, a State Department official said Tuesday, AFP reports from Washington.

OAU abolishes liberation body:

The Organisation of African Unity on Monday abolished its Liberation Committee, saying it is no longer needed now that the continent is under indigenous rule, AP reports from Dar Es Salaam.

"Africa is free," said Hasham Mbita of Tanzania and the committee's last chairman. "We have accomplished our mission."

The committee was formed at OAU's inception in 1963 as one of 12 specialized agencies.

7.9 b world population by 2014:

The world population will increase by at least 90 million every year for the next 20 years, reports Xinhua from Dagos.

According to a document made available to the News Agency of Nigeria, the world population, standing at 5.5 billion at present, would reach 7.9 billion by the year 2014.

Hashish seized in Pakistan:

The Pakistan coast guard seized 68 tonnes of hashish after gunbattles with smugglers in what officials said yesterday was the country's biggest haul of the drug, Reuter reports from Quetta.

Off the Record



The cover of this week's issue of Hello magazine published in London on Tuesday, featuring the first posed photographs of signer Michael Jackson and his wife Lisa Marie Presley. — AFP photo

Stepfather of alleged victim sues Jackson

SANTA MONICA, California: The stepfather of a boy who accused Michael Jackson of molestation is suing Jackson, claiming he broke up the family by plying the boy and his mother with thousands of dollars worth of gifts, reports AP.

The lawsuit was filed Tuesday on behalf of the stepfather, who lives in Santa Monica, and his 6-year-old daughter. It claims that in order to gain access to the boy, Jackson took him, his sister and his mother on no-limit shopping sprees and trips to Florida, Las Vegas and Jackson's Neverland Ranch.

The "classic paedophilic strategy" disrupted and split the family, said the stepfather's lawyer, Danny Davis.

The stepfather and his wife learned of the 13-year-old boy's molestation claim in August 1993, then separated in October or November after eight years of marriage, Davis said.

The boy now lives with his biological father and uses his last name.

Jackson lawyer Howard Weitzman said the entertainer has maintained that he did nothing inappropriate. "This lawsuit is an attempt to take advantage of his fame and notoriety in order to get money," he said.

Cult leader raped 200 women as part of infertility cure

NEW DELHI: Indian police have arrested a Hindu cult leader for allegedly killing eight women and young girls and raping 200 others as part of a cure he prescribed for infertility, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The news agency quoted the head of the Delhi police crime branch as saying they arrested Ram Prasad after his sister, with whom he had sex for 16 years, claimed he raped and killed a 10-year-old girl in September, 1993.

Prasad's sister had helped him lure the girl named Laxmi to the New Delhi region. After murdering the girl he fled the capital to offer his 'cure' in neighbouring districts, PTI said.

It quoted police official Maxwell Pereira as saying Prasad used to lure women by giving them a supposed charmed talisman to cure their sexual problems, including infertility.

He later raped them as part of his professed cure.

'Oestrogen doesn't cause additional breast tumours'

CHICAGO: Breast-cancer patients who take oestrogen do not appear to increase their risk of additional tumours, say doctor who reviewed studies on the subject, reports AP.

Most women diagnosed with breast cancer get chemotherapy, which hastens menopause. But doctors commonly withhold oestrogen, which could ease the discomfort of menopause, for fear the hormone could reactivate the cancer.

However, a review of studies on the subject found no evidence that oestrogen promotes additional breast tumours, and any possible risk may be outweighed by oestrogen's benefits, said Dr Melody Cobleigh, director of the Comprehensive Breast Center at Rush-Presbyterian-St Luke's Medical Center in Chicago.

Sudan defends decision to extradite Carlos

KHARTOUM, Sudan, Aug 17: A top Sudanese official defended his government's decision to hand over Carlos to France, saying Khartoum felt no outside pressure to extradite the accused terrorist, reports AP.

Ghazi Salah Eddin, minister of state for the presidency, also said at a news conference that Carlos' transfer to the French on Monday did not represent a policy reversal by Sudan's Muslim fundamentalist government.

Salah Eddin's statements Tuesday were in response to speculation that Sudan had made a deal with France and that it had acted to counter its reputation as a supporter of international terrorism.

"We did not do what we have done under any regional or international pressure," Salah Eddin said. "But we have done it in observance of the international conventions."

Carlos born Ilich Ramirez Sanchez was arrested Sunday in Khartoum after being in the country about six months. Sudanese officials maintain he was under surveillance because he had a false passport but his identity was not known until France demanded his arrest.

Mourad Oussedi, attorney for the Venezuelan-born Carlos, said his client was bound and drugged during his

PLO urges Hamas not to fall into Israeli 'trap'

CAIRO, Aug 17: The PLO representative to the Arab League on Tuesday urged Hamas militants not to fall into an Israeli 'trap' that would ensure the failure of Palestinian self-rule, reports AP.

"Hamas's attacks against Israeli settlers in the Gaza Strip at this time brings up many questions, particularly since the Palestinian authority is trying to fix its feet in the ground," Mohammed Sebeih told the Egyptian Middle East news agency.

Troops kill 23 rebels in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, Aug 17: A soldier and 23 rebels were killed Monday during an anti-insurgency offensive by government troops in south eastern Sierra Leone, the Defence Ministry said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The army had targeted three strongholds of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in the diamond mining district of Kenema 240 kilometers (145 miles) east of Freetown. Captain Dominic Sewa told AFP without saying if the offensive had succeeded.

He said the RUF rebels had been exploiting the diamonds in the area "to generate funds for their terrorist activities."

At the end of July, the RUF besieged Kenema a major industrial town, for several days. Two European engineers were injured when they fell into a rebel ambush.

The RUF rebellion erupted in May 1991 under the leadership of corporal Foday Sankoh. The rebels occupied the east and south of the country before being driven back to a few enclaves along the Liberian border.

However, since the beginning of this year, the rebels have staged several raids far from their bases even pushing into central Sierra Leone.