

BRIEFLY

ROK students on hunger strike: Fifty South Korean students began a hunger strike yesterday demanding the government prosecute two former presidents over a bloody army crackdown on a civilian uprising 15 years ago.

Rifkind arrives in Sarajevo: British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind arrived in Sarajevo yesterday to meet Bosnian government officials and visit British troops operating in and around the besieged city.

195,000 Indonesians to perform Hajj: Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, will send 195,000 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia next year.

China opens Taklamakan highway: One of the world's longest desert highways has opened to traffic in China's northwest off-rich Xinjiang region.

Chechens kill Russian soldier: A Russian soldier was killed and eight wounded in fights in the Chechen capital Grozny and the Bamut region in the west of the republic.

Confce on saving Aral Sea opens: A Three-day international conference devoted to saving the Aral Sea in Central Asia opened in Uzbekistan on Monday.

Balladur fails to win by-polls: A disenchanted French electorate failed to elect former Premier Edouard Balladur and other members of his conservative government in the first round of legislative by-elections.

Ramos to seek clemency for maid: President Fidel Ramos will make a personal plea for clemency for a Filipina maid condemned to death in the United Arab Emirates if appeals to higher courts there fail.

France plans to increase aid to S Pacific nations

PORT MORESBY, Sept 18: France, under fire in the Pacific for its nuclear tests, plans to increase foreign aid to the region and will consider signing a regional Nuclear Free Zone Treaty.

India, Singapore, Ukraine offer to help salvage jet Lankan army ask for radar to pinpoint Tigers' mortars

COLOMBO, Sept 18: Sri Lanka's army is asking for radar to pinpoint rebel mortars as troops press operations to secure a key northern airbase, launch pad for a planned drive against the Tamil separatists.

had their legs amputated. The military operation, Condemned Operation Handshake-2, was launched to destroy the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels' mortar positions and secure the airbase from attacks.



Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama (R) and PLO leader Yasser Arafat walk together towards Arafat's office for talks in Gaza City Monday.

Murayama meets Arafat in Gaza

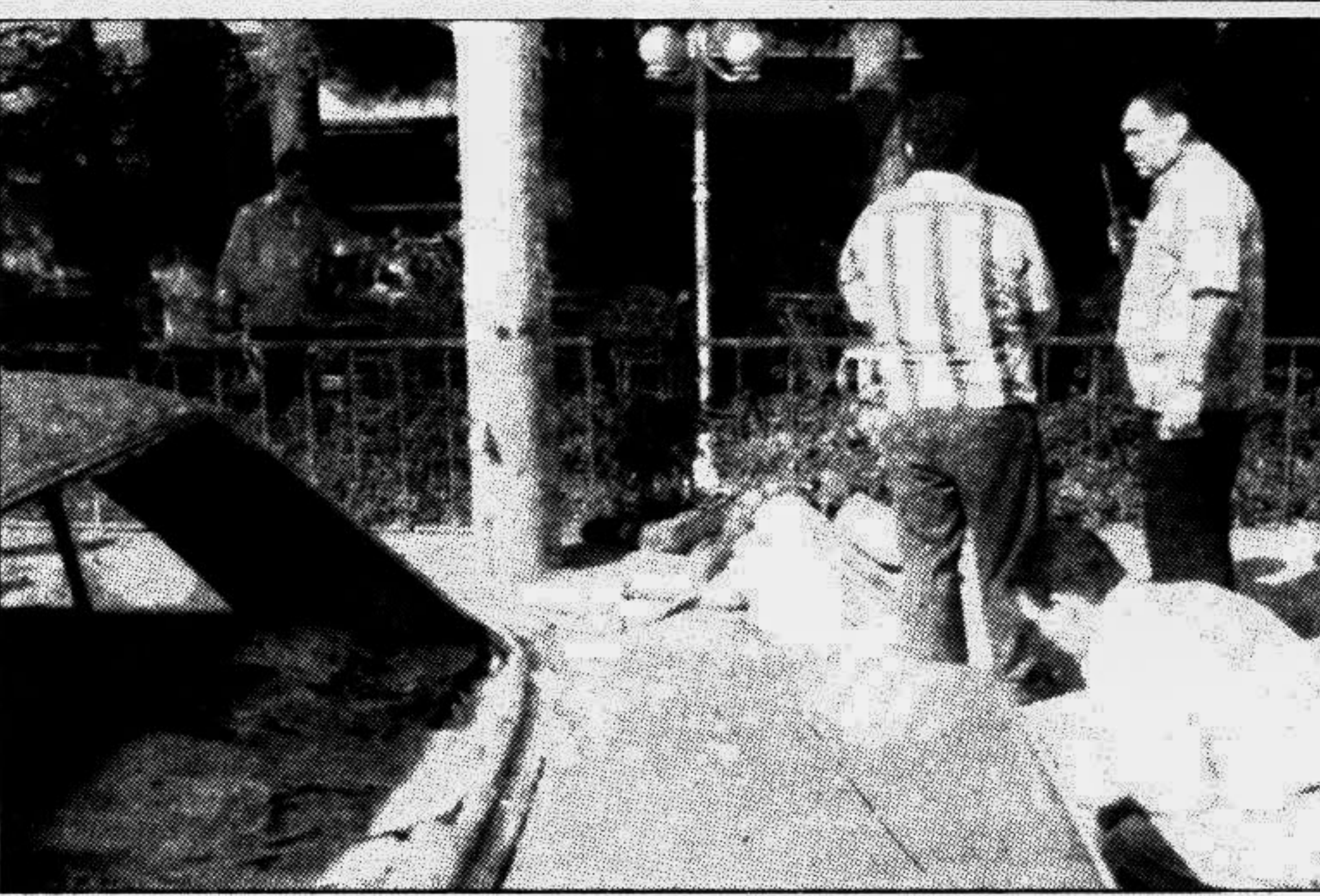
GAZA CITY, Sept 18: PLO chairman Yasser Arafat went into talks today with Tomiichi Murayama, the first Japanese Prime Minister to visit the autonomous Gaza Strip.

Blair for cooperation with Liberals to oust Tory

LONDON, Sept 18: Britain's main opposition Labour Party today opened up the prospect of cooperation with the minority Liberal Democrats to oust the ruling conservatives at the next general election.

Aidid captures Baidoa town

NAIROBI, Sept 18: Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aidid captured the inland town of Baidoa at the head of 600 men in a blitz Sunday and was holding 17 expatriate aid workers in "protective custody" there today.



A victim of a bomb blast in a department store cafe in the western Turkish town of Izmir is covered with a newspaper as police investigators seal off the site to secure evidence Sunday morning.

Clinton plans to visit Moscow next year

WASHINGTON, Sept 18: US President Bill Clinton plans to visit Moscow next year for a nuclear-safety summit with Russian and G-7 leaders to try to reach an international agreement on handling loose nuclear weapons.

Russia angry over NATO's 'bigger is better' ideas

BRUSSELS, Sept 18: NATO air strikes on Bosnian Serbs may rile the Russians, but the idea of enlarging the Western military alliance to include Moscow's former partners in Eastern Europe really has them steaming.

Off the Record

Crocodile story turned out to be hoax

BANGKOK: It was a crocodile story that turned out to be a crock, reports AP. Hundreds of police were mobilised, motorists were stopped and warned, and thousands of residents of Chonburi were holed up in their homes south of Bangkok Sunday night.

Sheep carcasses in treetops

WELLINGTON: At least five dead sheep, their feet bound with wire, were found Monday in the treetops of a pine forest, some as much as 100 feet (30 metres) above the ground.

Strange hobby

PARIS: A retired bookkeeper who has made a hobby of crashing high-security gates, getting photographed with French presidents and other luminaries, has shown up in the pages of a magazine with his exploits.

No country is safe from AIDS or HIV virus

CHIANG MAI, Thailand, Sept 18: No country is safe from AIDS or the HIV virus that leads to it, and governments are just beginning to mobilise their resources to fight it.

India has identified "high risk areas" such as the red light districts of its big cities and is "making a special effort" there, he said.

But Lawrence said Australia still has a problem with AIDS among its indigenous population, and warned that it may be difficult to duplicate its general success against AIDS in other countries where situations differ.

India accused of kidnapping US based group offers mediation with Al-Faran

ISLAMABAD, Sept 18: A US-based group for religious freedom offered Monday to mediate with Al-Faran group holding four Western hostages in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Ziang to meet Clinton in Oct

BEIJING, Sept 18: Chinese President Jiang Zemin will meet his US counterpart Bill Clinton in New York next month, barring any "unforeseen events" instigated by Washington.