

PLO vows to implement Palestinian state in Sept

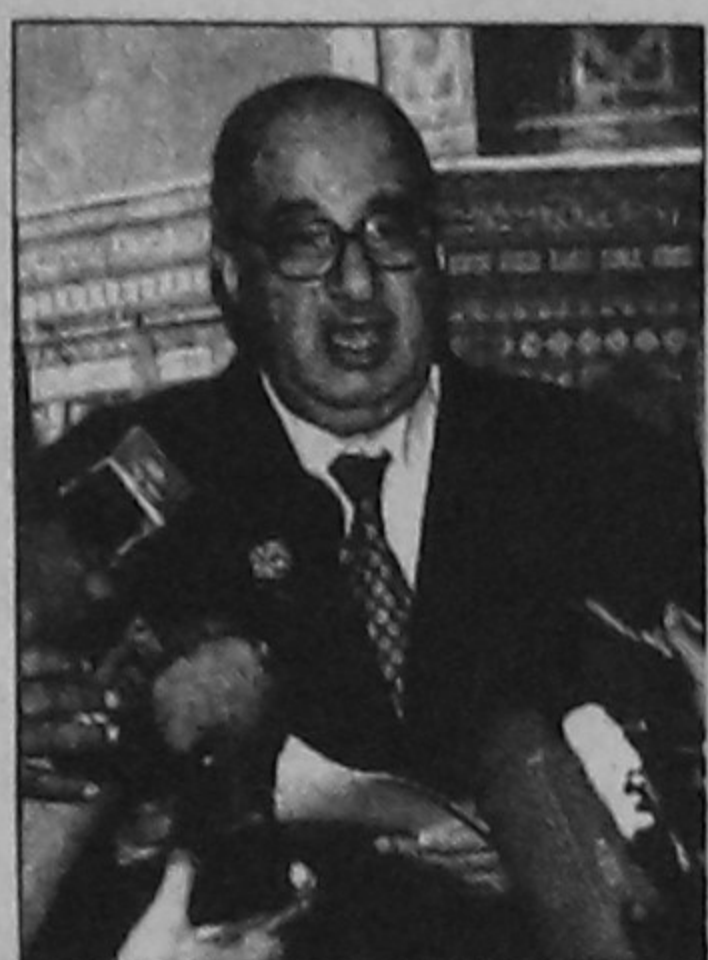
GAZA CITY, July 4: Bowing to pressure from a majority of Palestine Liberation Organisation members, the Palestinians vowed to implement an independent state on September 13, 2000, despite the risk of violent clashes with Israel, reports AFP.

The PLO's 129-strong Central Council, which concluded a two-day meeting in Gaza City around midnight Monday, promised to implement its control over all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip on September 13, the deadline for a final peace deal.

"The establishment and implementation of a Palestinian state on the territories occupied by Israel on June 4 1967 will happen on September 13," Salim Zuhair, head of the Central Council said, reading from the legislative body's final statement.

The Central Council, as we approach the end of the interim phase on the coming September 13, asks the PLO Executive Committee to take the necessary steps to implement an independent state and its sovereignty on the land of Palestine with its capital of holy Jerusalem during this period," Zuhair added.

Israel has warned that violent confrontations could erupt if the Palestinians announce statehood without an agreement and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said that the Jewish state would respond by



Head of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) central council Salim Zuhair reads the final statement adopted by the PLO's 129-member central council after two days of meetings in Gaza City yesterday. — AFP photo

annexing large chunks of the occupied territories.

The United States on Monday also reiterated its opposition to "unilateral actions."

Officials close to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had previously indicated during the closed-door PLO meeting that they favoured leaving the date for the statehood proclamation open in order to give more time for last ditch US efforts to or-

ganise a peace-saving summit in Washington.

Council members, however, stressed that an "absolute majority" of the PLO supported declaring statehood on September 13 regardless of the cost.

Barak has said that only a summit in Washington can achieve progress in the halted negotiations, but the Palestinians want more land and a new batch of prisoners to be released first.

Arafat did agree in a phone conversation with US President Bill Clinton late Monday, however, to hold "intensive contacts in the coming days," according to Arafat aide Nabil Abu Rudeina.

Senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat denied media reports that the United States had proposed new dates for a possible Arafat-Barak-Clinton summit.

Israel and the Palestinians agreed in Egypt last year to wrap up peace talks between them in September, but remain deeply divided over all of the key issues, including the size and shape of a future Palestinian state, control over Jerusalem and the fate of millions of Palestinian refugees.

The Palestinians currently control, either partially or completely, about 40 per cent of the West Bank and 65 per cent of the Gaza Strip and it is not clear exactly how they will try to impose their control over the rest on September 13.

Two Koreas prepare for Kim Jong-Il's visit to Seoul

SEOUL, July 4: North and South Korea will hold high-level talks this month to prepare for a visit to Seoul by North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Il, the South's unification minister said today, reports AFP.

"The high-level talks will open this month," Unification Minister Park Jae-Kyu told a group of lawmakers.

Park said the two sides had set two months to prepare South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung's visit to Pyongyang last month but the period was too short.

He noted Kim Jong-Il had promised to visit Seoul following Kim Dae-Jung's visit.

"I will go (to Seoul) myself after I send others to high-level talks once or twice," Park quoted Kim Jong-Il as having said.

The leaders of the two Koreas held a historic summit in Pyongyang last month and signed a declaration on ending decades of hostility and moving towards reconciliation and peace.

They also agreed the two sides should persist with a political dialogue.

Kim Dae-Jung told Kim Jong-Il that the development of weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear arms and missiles would not help maintain peace on the peninsula and hamper North Korea's efforts to attract foreign investment.

Kim Jong-Il appeared to seem merit in Kim Dae-Jung's proposition, saying, "That's right," according to the minister.

Five wounded in shootout between Fiji military and coup supporters

New government sworn in

SUVA, July 4: The Fiji army and supporters of coup leader George Speight were locked in a gunbattle around parliament today, leaving at least five people wounded within hours of an interim civilian cabinet being sworn in, the military said, reports AFP.

About 300 civilian supporters of coup leader George Speight were fired on as they fled parliament where Speight has been holding ethnic Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and 26 other MPs hostage for seven weeks, a radio reporter in parliament said.

Members of the Counter Revolutionary Warfare unit who helped Speight seize parliament in the name of indigenous Fijians, opened return fire to provide cover so the civilians could return to parliament, he said.

"There's blood all over the place," he added.

Army reports said at least four civilians and a soldier were wounded in the shooting, while the FijiLive.com web site said seven people were wounded, including two rebel soldiers.

One of the rebels inside parliament told state radio there were more wounded lying in a nearby paddock.

The five-minute battle erupted after Speight held a press conference to denounce the military-installed civilian cabinet describing them as "political opportunists."

Before the shooting, a military unit mutinied at a base on Fiji's second biggest island and were seen loading weapons onto two trucks.

Sources said 95 per cent of the soldiers on the base were loyal to Speight.

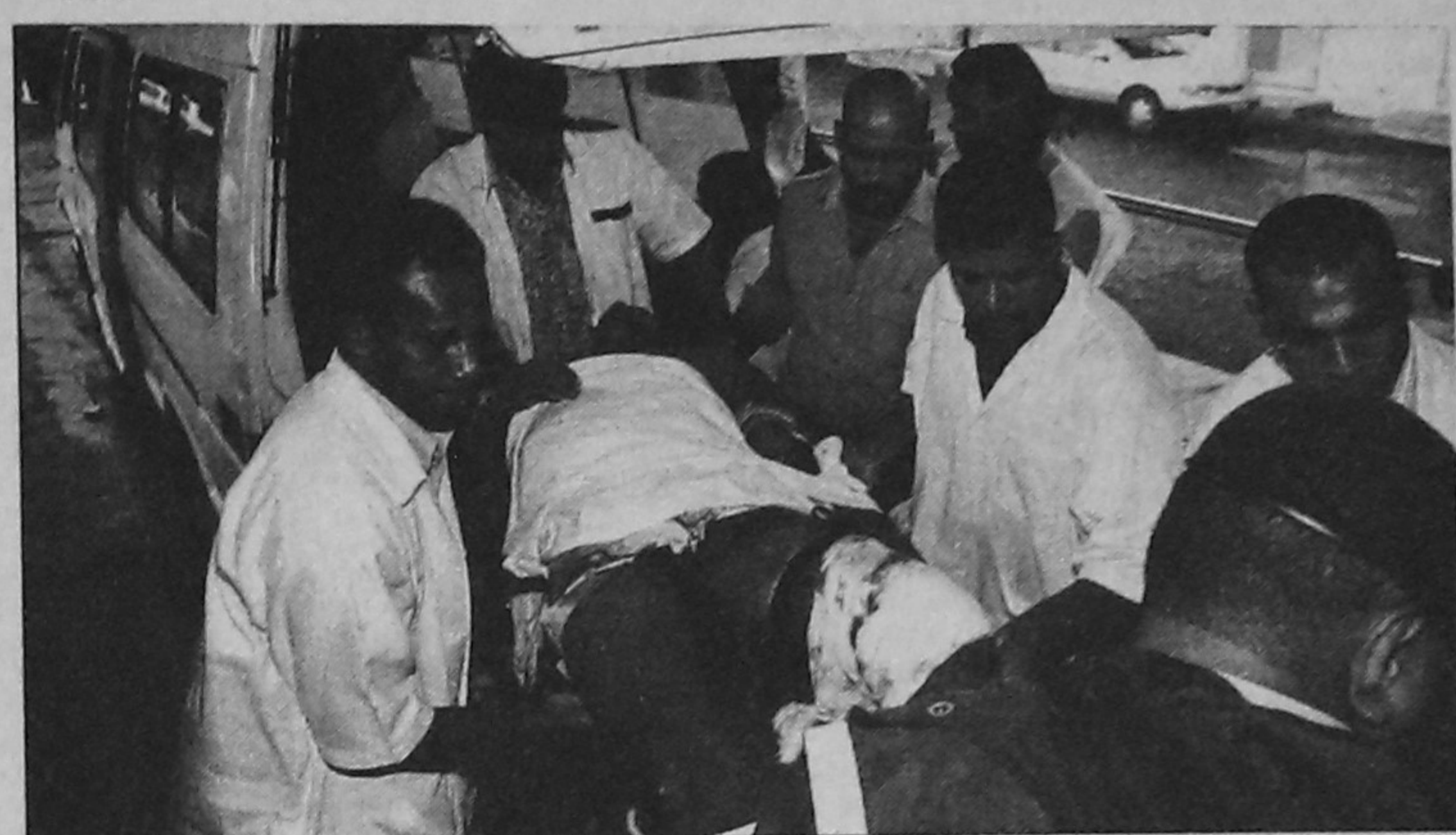
Earlier Tuesday, banking

executive Laisenia Qarase was sworn in as prime minister in an appointment that provoked the anger of the hostage takers, who had demanded a role in naming any new government.

In a speech after being sworn in, Qarase said he accepted the job as a "call for national

unity." He urged the gunmen to release the hostages immediately.

Qarase said his government will give priority to protecting indigenous Fijian rights, but that "no communities will be excluded ... in our multiracial and multicultural society."



Rescue workers carry a shooting victim after a gunfight between the military and rebels supporting George Speight in the parliament compound in Suva yesterday. At least four civilians and a soldier were wounded in a shootout as the country was expecting to return to normalcy with the swearing in of a civilian cabinet. — AFP photo

China, US to restart arms proliferation talks

BEIJING, July 4: China said today it would this week resume weapons proliferation talks with the United States that were suspended after NATO bombed the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia last year, reports AFP.

US Undersecretary of State John Holum will visit China on July 7 and 8 and hold talks with Vice Foreign Minister Wang Guangyao on national security and arms control issues," Foreign Ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi said at a routine briefing.

The talks will be the first since five US missiles slammed into the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in May 1999, killing three and injuring over 20 embassy personnel.

NATO and the United States

called the bombing a "tragic mistake," but Chinese officials still harbour suspicions that the guided missile attack resulted from Beijing's adamant opposition to NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, which was not sanctioned by the United Nations.

Sun declined further comments on the specifics and nature of the upcoming talks. In previous meetings Washington routinely expressed concerns over Chinese arms sales and weapons technology cooperation with Iran and Pakistan, while Beijing complained about US weapons sales to Taiwan.

The spokesman meanwhile dismissed reports that have recently appeared in the US press

that China is helping Pakistan develop long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

"Allegations that China exported missile technology to Pakistan are unfounded and based on ulterior motives," Sun said.

"We aren't helping any South Asian countries develop nuclear weapons or missiles that can carry nuclear weapons," he said.

The US press reports said that in a recent classified briefing at the US Congress, lawmakers were presented with evidence that China has continued to ship guidance and other systems to Pakistan, also offering technical expertise.



Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori casts his ballot during an election for next prime minister in the lower house of parliament yesterday. Mori was re-appointed by 284 votes in the 480-seat chamber. — AFP photo

Lanka clamps media censorship again

COLOMBO, July 4: Sri Lanka has reintroduced censorship on local and foreign media under a new set of regulations, days after the country's Supreme Court ruled that the previous censorship was illegal, reports Reuters.

The government in a gazette notification late on Monday re-appointed Ariya Rubasinghe as the competent authority, or chief censor.

The notification said that all war-related news and whatever else the government considered to be against national interests will be covered under the new censorship, according

to officials. It was not clear how the new censorship would be applied as a copy of the notification was not immediately available.

The earlier censorship was relaxed for Colombo-based foreign journalists last month when they were told they would not have to submit their copies to Rubasinghe.

Rubasinghe was not available for comment, but a local newspaper quoted him as saying that the new rules encouraged self-censorship.

"As far as I understand the new regulation, it is not com-

pulsory for a newspaper to send their news copies to me. Areas coming under censorship are specified, appointment of the censor is specified and penalties for violating the regulations are also specified. That's all," the Daily Mirror quoted Rubasinghe as saying.

The Supreme Court last Friday said censorship was illegal.

The government had imposed censorship in May after fighting between government troops and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels escalated in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

China denies sale of missile tech to Pakistan

BEIJING, July 4: China denied today it was selling missile technology to Pakistan, reports Reuters.

"I want to state clearly that there is no such thing as Chinese sales of missile technology to Pakistan," Foreign Ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi told a news conference in response to a report by the New York Times. "The report is totally groundless."

The newspaper said on Sunday that in a series of classified briefings in Congress, intelligence agencies described how China stepped up the shipment of specialty steels, guidance systems and technical expertise to Pakistan.

BRIEFLY

Mori to visit India, Pakistan

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori plans to visit India and Pakistan in August to urge them to sign a nuclear test ban treaty, a newspaper said Tuesday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Mori will "strongly urge the two countries to sign the CTBT (the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty)", outlawing nuclear tests, the Sankai Shimbun said quoting government and ruling alliance party sources. Japan's government says it cannot consider lifting its two-year-old sanctions against India and Pakistan while the two countries refuse to sign the treaty.

Taiwan mayor may visit China

The mayor of Taiwan's second-largest city accepted an invitation to visit the southeast Chinese city of Xiamen this month, the Taiwanese mayor's spokesman said Tuesday, AP reports from Taipei.

The invitation could be a new effort by China to rely more on visiting Taiwanese legislators and local officials to improve ties between the two sides, which split amid civil war 51 years ago. Frank Hsieh, mayor of the southern Taiwanese port city of Kaohsiung, accepted an invitation from Xiamen Mayor Zhu Yayan to visit the Chinese city, said Corey Chen, the mayor's special supervisor attaché.

5 killed in Ambon violence

Five people were killed in the latest outbreak of religious violence as security officers continue to confiscate illegal weapons from residents in this port city, the local military commander said Tuesday, AP reports from Ambon.

Col Made Yassa confirmed that five people died in fighting late Monday between gangs of Christians and Muslims in Ambon's Poka district about 12 kilometers from the city centre.

Quakes shake Japanese islands

Earthquakes peaking at 5.3 on the Richter scale jolted tiny Japanese islands in the Pacific on Tuesday near a rumbling volcano, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The epicentre of the quake, which struck at 3:53 p.m. (1253 BST), was 10 kilometres below the seabed off the islands of Niijima and Kozushima, said a meteorological agency official. The earthquakes followed an eruption warning June 26 in the nearby volcanic island of Miyakejima, which has since been lifted.

Kuwaiti court rejects women's right to vote

KUWAIT CITY, July 4: Kuwait's top court today rejected a plea by the emirate's disenfranchised women to enjoy the same political rights as their male counterparts and the right to vote, court sources said, reports AFP.

The constitutional court, whose verdicts are final, dismissed four cases filed by women arguing that the electoral law that barred females from voting was unconstitutional, the sources said.

"It is a very sad day in the history of Kuwaiti women. We were hoping for a positive decision but it seems the road is too long," a dejected Rula al-Dashti, a leading women's activist, told AFP.

Chinese FM to visit Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, July 4: Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan will visit Pakistan later this month, a Chinese embassy spokesman said today.

The spokesman told AFP no other details were available and the agenda for his trip here was "still being worked out with the Pakistani side."

It is likely to involve talks on nuclear energy, with a major nuclear plant built with Chinese help in central Punjab province due to begin full operations this year, possibly as early as this month.

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Japanese observers walk past pro-sanctuary protesters before the vote on the proposed South Pacific Whale Sanctuary at the IWC meeting in Adelaide yesterday. The whale sanctuary proposed by Australia and New Zealand failed to gain the required three-quarters majority of the commission after heavy lobbying of the Caribbean states by Japan and Norway. — AFP photo

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