

Rutskoi launches fresh move to oust Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Apr 5: Former Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi, freed from prison under a parliamentary amnesty, launched a new campaign today to remove President Boris Yeltsin and his government from office, reports Reuter.

In an interview in the Communist newspaper Pravda, Rutskoi fiercely attacked the president and ruled out any possibility of an end to confrontation as long as Yeltsin remained in office.

"There should be no illusions about the possibility of any changes for the better under this president and this government," he said.

"That is why it is necessary to stop playing with consensus or agreements and get down to work — to change the authorities by legal methods."

It was Rutskoi's toughest attack since he and other leaders of the armed revolt against Yeltsin last October were released from prison under a parliamentary amnesty in February.

Rutskoi, 46, said he was not

going to leave politics and was absolutely unrepentant over his role in the October bloodshed, laying all the blame on Yeltsin.

Rutskoi launched the uprising against what he said was an illegal dictatorship by calling on armed supporters to storm the Moscow Mayor's office and main television centre.

Yeltsin, some members of parliament and public groupings are working on a "memorandum on civic accord" in Russia which they hope will provide for a political ceasefire.

The lower house of parliament issued the amnesty as a gesture of conciliation. But the Russian leader has promised to send the freed men back to prison if they resort to physical confrontation again.

Rutskoi said Yeltsin and his team "have no future, their shameful and ignominious time is coming to an end."

Rutskoi, who is clearly positioning himself to run in the next presidential elections, said it was too late to introduce changes in the current reform process.

US to provide air support for UN troops in Gorazde

CLEVELAND, Ohio, April 5: President Clinton said Monday the United States was committed to providing air support for United Nations troops if they were to move into the predominantly Muslim City of Gorazde, which is under siege by Bosnian Serbs, reports Reuter.

"We are committed to provide air support to (UN) troops if they go in," the President told reporters in Cleveland, where he attended the Cleveland Indians' opening-day baseball game against the Seattle Mariners.

He denied that the Serbs were given a "green light" to overrun Gorazde, an eastern Bosnian city of 65,000, which the United Nations has designated "a safe haven."

The city has been under siege for a week and both Muslim and Serb media reported continued fighting around Gorazde Monday.

"We're looking at what our

options are there. But it really depends upon in part what the UN mission wants to do there," Clinton said.

"Whether we can recreate the conditions of Sarajevo anywhere else depends in part on the facts in each specific case," he told reporters during the baseball game.

A US-backed, NATO ultimatum forced the Serbs to remove heavy weapons from around Sarajevo earlier this year and has led to a ceasefire for the Bosnian capital.

Defence Secretary William Perry said Sunday the administration would not use military forces to prevent the Serbian forces from capturing the city. "We will not enter the war to stop that from happening," Perry told NBC television.

Perry said the United States would only send ground troops to enforce a peace agreement in Bosnia, despite an appeal from the British commander in Serbia, Lieutenant General

Sir Michael Rose, that the presence of American troops there would accelerate moves toward peace.

The president said further "I would discourage any of them from doing anything just for negotiating purposes."

"They ought to just go ahead and negotiate a peace and get it over with," Clinton said, adding that "I hope they will."

Another report from UN says: The United Nations plans to send additional observers immediately to the besieged Bosnian Muslim enclave of Gorazde and a battalion of about 1,000 Ukrainian U.N. troops within the next week or so, Security Council President Colin Keating said Monday.

Speaking informally with reporters after closed-door consultations, he expressed the council's concern over recent fighting around Gorazde.

one of the U.N.-proclaimed "safe areas," and about the situation in the northern town of Prijedor, where the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was planning to evacuate a large number of non-Serbs who had come under attack.

Keating of New Zealand said that, according to a report on Gorazde from the U.N. Protection Force in the former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR), "it would seem that fighting was actually initiated by patrols that were sent out by the Bosnian forces."

But he said this did not justify the kind of response that occurred including heavy shelling of a civilian area.

Keating said the confrontation line between Bosnian Serb and Bosnian government forces around the town was unchanged, after heavy fighting last Thursday and Friday and lower-level activity over the weekend.

VHP asks its followers to seize Babri Mosque site

NEW DELHI, Apr 5: Holy men aligned to an outlawed Hindu militant group on Monday called upon followers to seize the site of a mosque razed in Ayodhya two years ago and begin constructing a Hindu temple there, reports AFP.

The religious leaders said after a three-day meeting in the northern city of Haridwar that Hindus should gather in thousands in Ayodhya to raise a grand temple for Lord Rama on the rubble of the 16th-century Babri Mosque.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) said no date was announced, but quoted sources in the outlawed Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) World Hindu Council as saying that work on the proposed temple would begin in November.

The Indian government outlawed the VHP after thousands of Hindu zealots destroyed the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992, sparking an orgy of Hindu-Muslim violence which left some 2,000 people dead.

The Hindu fanatics also

raised a makeshift temple after razing the mosque. But the entire area has been taken over by the government and is now guarded by police and paramilitary forces.

PTI quoted a leader of the holy men, Swami Vamdev, as saying that the government had no right to hold the area in which the hurriedly-built temple was located.

A resolution adopted at the end of the VHP's religious parliament at Haridwar, 150 kilometers (93 miles) north-east of here, said "Hindu holy men would raise the masses" on the temple issue in October.

Another religious leader, Acharya Bharmendra, accused Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's government of trying to scuttle the construction of the temple at the site which many Hindus believe to be the birth-place of Rama.

"There can be no midway in this issue," PTI quoted VHP joint general secretary Girtraj Kishore as saying.

BRIEFLY

Australian PM leaves for Laos:

Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating left Canberra yesterday morning to start a nine-day trip to Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, Xinhua reports from Canberra.

Keating will visit Laos and Thailand before arriving in Hanoi for the first visit to Vietnam by an Australian Prime Minister since 1968.

Keating said shortly before his plane took off that he expects the visit to further consolidate Australia's links with regional partners.

Massive traffic accident in Lyon:

Violent storms provoked massive traffic accidents — including an 85-car pileup — as motorists headed home Monday after a long Easter weekend, AP reports from Lyon, France.

At least 60 people were hurt, but there were no initial reports of deaths.

The big pileups occurred on the main north-south highway just north of Lyon, 460 kilometers (285 miles) south of Paris, during the peak hour of holiday-makers returning to northern France.

Dutch plane crashes, 3 killed:

Three persons, including the pilot and a British woman passenger, were killed and 13 badly hurt when a KLM Royal Dutch airlines plane with 24 people aboard crashed near Amsterdam's Schiphol airport on Monday, KLM said, Reuter reports from Amsterdam.

The twin turbo-prop aircraft, on cityhopper flight KL 433 from Schiphol to Cardiff in Wales, crashed at about 3 pm (130 GMT) as it tried to land after developing engine trouble over the North Sea shortly after take-off.

The plane, a Swedish-built Saab 340B, came down in a muddy field near a motorway linking Amsterdam and the Hague, just yards short of the runway.

Keating to attend D-day ceremony:

Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating has accepted an invitation from French President Francois Mitterrand, to attend D-day commemorations in France on June 6, his spokesman said Tuesday, AFP reports from Canberra.

He will join 14 heads of state or government, including Mitterrand and Queen Elizabeth, to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1944 allied landings in Normandy which led to the end of the war in Europe 11 months later.

Blast claims 2 in Mexico:

An explosion tore through a bank in a town near this border state capital Monday, killing two employees and wounding 13 others, officials said, AP reports from Monterrey, Mexico.

A bank security guard and a cleaning woman were killed, said Alfonso Rodriguez, spokesman for the Nuevo Leon state civil defence agency. Thirteen other bank workers were injured, he said.

The blast apparently occurred in an electrical transformer at the Banco Mercantil del Norte branch in San Nicolas de los Garza, a suburb about six miles (10 kms) north of here, said Fernando Vallejos Cortez, another civil defence spokesman.

Samoa Observer gutted:

Fire has destroyed the building housing western Samoa's only daily newspaper, its editor Sano Malfia said Monday, AFP reports from Wellington.

The 12-year-old Samoa Observer, which has been a daily for the last year, was housed in a modern building in an industrial park near the capital, Apia.

Malfia said the fire swept out of control through the building Sunday night Samon time and it was being treated by local police as suspicious.

Pirates kill 7 in Philippines:

Pirates killed seven people on a motor launch Tuesday, police reported. Twenty-two crew members of the vessel were still missing, AP reports from Zamboanga, Philippines.

Piracy, kidnappings, robberies and extra-judicial killings are rampant in the southern Philippines, where several armed groups, including Muslim and Communist rebels and warlords operate.

Tuesday's boat massacre, a few kilometers (miles) east of here, was the latest of increasingly frequent piracy incidents. A police report said the victims may have been businessmen plying the batter trade between the Philippines and Malaysia.

UN plans to stop world population growth at 7.8b

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 5: The 184 members of the United Nations have begun discussions of a plan to stop world population growth at about 7.8 billion people by 2050 through increased funding for family planning programmes, reports AFP.

The plan, drawn up by the UN fund for population activities, would more than triple international financial aid for family planning in developing countries to some 13 billion dollars by the end of the century, said the funds executive director Nafis Sadik, who is also the conference's secretary general.

UN members began hammering out the details of the plan on Monday, she added, in preparation of an international conference on population and development to be held in Cairo on September 5-13.

The most optimistic projections are that the programme would stabilize world population at 7.8 billion by 2050, well below the 12.5 billion now predicted, Sadik told a press conference.

The current world population stands at 5.7 billion.

By the year 2015, Sadik said, the UN population fund should reach 17 billion dollars.

About one-third of the future financial aid will come from donors. At present, developing countries pay about three of the four billion dollars their population control programmes cost each year.

Japan said it was prepared to contribute three billion dollars to finance the population programmes. "It's quite a huge amount," Sadik said.

"The US itself announced that it would increase its commitment to population to 1.2 billion by the year 2000," she added.



Gaza children celebrate and make V-signs as an Israeli truck loaded with equipment leaves an Israeli police station in Gaza city on Monday. The preparation for a Gaza Strip pullout and Gaza autonomy continues everyday and the Palestinian police will arrive later this week. — AFP photo

DPRK offers to allow fresh nuclear inspections

SEOUL, Apr 5: North Korea has offered to allow new nuclear inspections if the United States drops its demand for an exchange of envoys between North and South Korea, the Yonhap news agency said Tuesday, reports AP.

Quoting a "responsible government official," the South Korean news agency said the

Communist North made the offer in a letter to the United States in late March.

The letter from North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju to US Assistant Secretary of State Robert Gallucci could bring a breakthrough in the current nuclear impasse on the Korean Peninsula, Yonhap said.

Armed forces of the two Koreas are on alert, and North Korea has warned that was could erupt if it is pushed too hard to accept full inspections of its nuclear facilities. Its refusals have deepened suspicions that it is developing nuclear arms, despite its denials.

Gallucci and Kang represented the two countries in a series of high-level talks last year aimed at resolving the nuclear dispute and improving Washington-Pyongyang relations.

Karens open talks with Myanmar junta

BANGKOK, Apr 5: Myanmar's oldest and most powerful guerrilla movement, the Karen National Union, will open talks today for the first time with the country's ruling military junta, the Nation newspaper in Bangkok reported Tuesday, says AFP.

The talks are described as "preliminary" and follow several months of secret dealings between representatives of the Karen — Myanmar's largest ethnic group — and the military in the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

There was no immediate independent confirmation of the newspaper report.

The Nation, citing informed sources, said the talks would take place in Karen-held territory in southeast Myanmar the village of Myabada.

The two sides have compromised over the meeting place. The KNU has apparently

abandoned its condition that talks should take place on neutral territory and in the presence of United Nations observers while the SLORC has dropped its insistence that the meeting take place in Yangon, the Myanmar capital.

The paper said the Myanmar regime's strongman, General Khin Nyunt, would take part in the talks.

By agreeing to the talks, the Karens, who have fought the authorities in Myanmar since independence in 1948, will join a process which has already seen 10 of the country's 12 guerrilla groups either sign or enter negotiations for ceasefires with the SLORC in the past two years.

The SLORC, which came to power in September 1988 after crushing a democratic movement, authorised general elections in 1990 which the national league for democracy won in a landslide.

An exchange of envoys between the Karens, along with full nuclear inspections, has been a precondition for those high level talks to continue.

But last month, the North refused to swap envoys with its southern capitalist rival and barred UN inspectors from a facility used to extract plutonium, which can be used to make nuclear weapons.

A scheduled US-North Korea meeting was then cancelled, and the issue went to the UN Security Council, where a non-binding statement was adopted last week urging North Korea to allow full inspections.

Yonhap said the new North Korean offer was extensively discussed in talks between South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-jo and Secretary of State Warren Christopher and other US officials in Washington last week.

Bashir Ahmad Butt acting chief of JKLF

ISLAMABAD, Apr 5: The militant Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) named an acting leader on Monday to head its fight for independence in the Indian-ruled section of the disputed region after its president was arrested, reports Reuter.

Bashir Ahmad Butt, a 40-year-old lawyer, would take over as acting president of the JKLF after previous acting President Javed Amed Mir was arrested by Indian troops last month. Chairman Amanullah Khan said in Islamabad.

The JKLF, whose President Mohammad Yassen Malik is in a New Delhi Jail, is among groups fighting for independence for the disputed Himalayan region, two thirds of which is ruled by India and the rest by Pakistan.

India accuses Pakistan of fuelling the four-year-old rebellion in Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, a charge Islamabad denies.

Since they became independent in 1947, India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over the mountainous region.

AMU states for speedy solution to Libyan crisis

TUNIS, Apr 5: Leaders of the Arab Maghreb states have pledged to continue working for a speedy solution to the existing crisis between Libya and some Western nations that would pave the way for easing the suffering of the Libyan people in accordance with international laws and conventions, reports QNA.

In a closing communique at the end of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) summit here Sunday evening, the leaders praised Libya's initiatives to find a fair and honourable solution to the crisis, expressing deep concern over the negative repression and losses sustained by the Libyan people as a result of the ongoing blockade.

The AMU summit condemned repeated Israeli aggressions on the Palestinian people especially the Ibrahim Mosque massacre and called for urgent measures to ensure protection for Palestinian civilians under occupation as envisaged by the Geneva Conventions and to end the Israeli settlement policy in the occupied Arab lands.

The Maghreb leaders called for dialogues to resolve inter-Arab differences, close Arab ranks and build firm Pan-Arab solidarity based on mutual respect for all Arab states.

China detains Wei for further investigation

BEIJING, Apr 5: China is detaining its top dissident, Wei Jingsheng, in order to investigate "suspected new criminal offences," the official Xinhua news agency said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The Beijing public security department has decided to investigate suspected new criminal offences by Wei Jingsheng," Xinhua quoted police sources as saying.

"Wei is being interrogated and placed under surveillance by the Beijing public security department in accordance with the law because he violated the law on many occasions and is suspected of having committed new crimes when he was deprived of his political rights and on parole," Xinhua said.

Wei, known as the father of China's democracy movement,

Off the Record

Desert gets a taste of alcohol

ABU DHABI: The desert was soaked with alcohol when authorities in the United Arab Emirates(UAE) used bulldozers to crush thousands of bottles of whiskey and cans of beer, police said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Bulldozers rumbled over more than 12,800 bottles of whiskey and 9,000 cans of beer piled up deep in the desert of the UAE Emirate of Sharjah late Monday.

They were seized in separate raids on houses, shops and cars over the past nine months as part of crackdown on alcohol in the Emirate.

Sharjah, the third biggest Emirate in the oil-rich Gulf country, banned liquor eight years ago but in some other Emirates non-Muslims have access to alcohol at authorised shops and hotels.

On Sunday, the northern UAE Emirate of Ras Al-Khaimah set ablaze more than 130 kilograms(286 pounds) of hashish and other drugs as well as pornographic items.

Vandalism spree!

SINGAPORE: A 15-year-old Malaysian boy involved with other foreign teenagers in a vandalism spree will be detained at the Singapore Boys Home, it was announced Tuesday, reports AP.

The youth, who cannot be named because of his age, pleaded guilty to one charge of vandalism involving spraying paint on cars and a charge of mischief for throwing eggs and a brick at another private car.

Four other vandalism charges were taken into account. There was no indication how long he will be detained.

The juvenile appeared as a prosecution witness at the vandalism trial of Shiu Chi Ho, 16, of Hong Kong, who faces the lash if found guilty. Shiu's trial resumes on April 14.

He is alleged to have spray-painted four cars last September in the company of others, including the Malaysian youth and American Michael P Fay, 18.

Fay lost his appeal against the sentence of six lashes, four months behind bars and a fine of 3,500 dollars(US dlr 2,215). He is in Queenstown Prison awaiting the outcome of a plea for clemency to President Ong Teng Cheong.

The incidents took place last September and nine youths between ages 15 and 19 were rounded up by mid-October after the police mounted late-night ambush patrols.

Police said they included three Americans, two Malaysians, an Australian, a Belgian, a Thai and a Hong Kong Chinese, all from well-off families.

The 17-year-old Australian, whose name has not been released, skipped bail to avoid a possible flogging.

Father kills 4 children by electrocution

TEHRAN: An Iranian man killed his four children aged between four and 12 by electrocution, Tehran newspapers reported Monday, reports Reuter.

Jabbar Khazraji, 41, was probably driven to kill his children because he was unemployed and had nervous problems, Kar Va Kargar newspaper quoted police officers who investigated the case as saying.

The children — girls aged four, six and eight and a boy of 12 — were killed in a village near the southwestern provincial capital of Ahvaz on March 30. The paper did not say what happened to Khazraji.

Boy survives cheetah attack

JACKSON, Mississippi: An escaped cheetah pounced on an 8-year-old boy at the Jackson Zoo, scratching and nipping him before taking off with his baseball cap, reports AP.

"It was wild, like it had just gone crazy," said the boy, Louis Bailey. "It climbed the fence and jumped. We didn't do nothing to it."

The third-grader had wandered into an off-limits service area Monday when the 80-pound(35-kg) cat scaled an 8-foot (2.5-meter) fence. The animal took off with the Atlanta Braves cap and was caught and sedated by zookeepers within 10 minutes.

Louis was treated at a hospital and released.

Zoo director Barbara Barrett said a higher fence will be erected to contain the zoo's six cheetahs, which have never caused problems before.

Chinese honour victims of Tiananmen Square

BEIJING, Apr 5: Chinese honoured their dead today, as police kept a close eye on families of pro-democracy demonstrators killed five years ago in the Tiananmen massacre, reports AFP.

Crows gathered at the large Baboashan cemetery, west of the capital, to celebrate Qing Ming, the festival of the dead.

Hundreds of thousands of Beijing residents went there to honour the memory of the deceased, in turn attracting hordes of flower and wreath sellers and funeral workers, who plied a lucrative trade.

There were also a number of police, both uniformed and in plain clothes, armed with still and video cameras, and portable telephones.

Access to Baboashan, as with other major cemeteries in the capital, was banned to foreigners, who were challenged before they could even



Egyptian policemen guard the car with the body of an Islamic militant killed in an exchange of fire with a special anti-terrorist squad in Cairo's Southern Munit district on Monday. It was the first time such a squad has been mentioned officially. — AFP photo

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