

BRIEFLY

Chinese dissident Wang freed:

China has released jailed dissident Wang Juntao and he has left the country for medical treatment, Xinhua news agency said yesterday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

Wang was sentenced to 13 years in jail for his part in the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, accused of being a mastermind of the pro-democracy movement crushed by the army of June 4, 1989. "Wang Juntao, who has been in custody, has left for medical treatment abroad after the Chinese judicial authorities released him on bail according to law on account of the conditions of his illness," a spokesman for the ministry of justice said, Xinhua reported.

Khmers ambush train, 5 killed:

Khmer Rouge guerrillas are thought to have ambushed a train killing at least five people and wounding 25, a senior Cambodian railway official said yesterday. Reuter reports from Phnom Penh.

The attack occurred on Thursday 140 km (85 miles) northwest of Phnom Penh, said Prom Nan, Director of the Cambodian State Railways. "The unidentified gunmen, who were believed to be Khmer Rouge guerrillas, detonated six mines planted on the railroad and opened fire at the train, killing five people on the spot and wounding 25," Nan said.

Myanmar frees 37 detainees:

Myanmar's military government released 33 political prisoners from jail in Friday under an amnesty for detainees deemed no longer a national threat, state-run radio Yangon reported. Reuter reports from Bangkok.

The 33, all men, were freed from prison in Myaungmya, 150 km (100 miles) southwest of Yangon. The radio did not identify them or give details about their offences but said their sentences had been commuted under the 1992 amnesty order.

Bomb attack on mosque in Lahore:

About 25 persons including four children were injured in a bomb attack on a mosque in Lahore, capital of Pakistan's Punjab province, Friday. Xinhua reports from Islamabad.

According to press reports, the incident happened when two unidentified motorcyclists threw to hand-grenades into a crowd offering prayers in the yard of the mosque Friday evening.

Three of the injured are in critical conditions.

2 killed in Thai rly station blast:

Two people were killed and 28 injured when a bomb exploded just afternoon Saturday at a railway station in the southern Thai city of Nakhon Sri Thammarat, police said, AP reports from Bangkok.

Police are looking for a man who left a parcel which may have contained the bomb in front of a noodle shop in the station, a city police officer told the Associated Press by telephone. News reports said police also found an unexploded M-26 grenade at the scene.

National police chief Pratin Santiprapop has flown to the scene to confer with senior colleagues, said the officer.

Israeli woman stabbed in Gaza:

Two Palestinians stabbed and seriously injured an Israeli woman near Khan Yunis in the occupied Gaza Strip yesterday military and Palestinian sources said, AFP reports from Gaza Strip.

The women, from the Neve Dkalim settlement in the strip, was rushed to hospital as security forces launched a hunt for the assailants.

On Wednesday two Israeli settlers were shot and wounded in the Gaza Strip in an attack claimed by the Islamic resistance movement Hamas.

Talks with Arafat have cleared the way: Peres

BUCHAREST, Apr 23: Talks with PLO chairman Yasser Arafat have cleared the way for wrapping up six months of negotiations on implementing Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Friday, reports AP.

"I think we cleared the air about lots of misunderstandings that existed," Peres said early Friday after meeting with the Palestine Liberation Organization. Both men were in Romania for an economic meeting.

"We are very close," said Peres. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin will meet with Arafat at the beginning of May to wind up negotiations and

Cambodian govt. rebels to join peace talks

PHNOM PENH, Apr 23: Leaders of the Cambodian government and the nominal head of the Khmer Rouge guerrillas have agreed to King Norodom Sihanouk's proposal for peace talks, a government official said Saturday, reports AFP.

The talks, are to be held in the royal place here next month, the official said.

"Both sides have agreed to the King's proposal," the official said, adding, "This is the last chance for peace."

King Sihanouk offered Friday to host a five day round table for peace and national reconciliation, in May, between the head of the Khmer Rouge, Khieu Samphan, the co-prime ministers Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen, and National Assembly Chairman Chea Sim.

1.3m infected with HIV positive in Thailand

BANGKOK, Apr 23: More than one million people in Thailand are now believed to be HIV positive, according to a just released statistics of the Public Health Ministry reports Xinhua.

Interior Ministry spokesman Jitakorn Sesavej today quoted the statistics as saying that up to February, there are as many as 1.3 million people infected with HIV, a virus which leads to AIDS.

International

Serbs agree to ceasefire around Gorazde

BELGRADE, Apr 23: Bosnian Serbs, facing a NATO ultimatum to withdraw or be bombed, agreed Friday to a ceasefire around the embattled Bosnian town of Gorazde, reports AP.

Yasushi Akashi, the senior UN official in former Yugoslavia, said the cease-fire was to take effect at noon local time (1000 GMT) Saturday.

This was the first of several attempts to arrange cease-fires that had the backing of all the major players on the Serb and Bosnian Serb sides, so it stood a better chance of success.

Akashi reached the agreement in the Yugoslav capital Belgrade with President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his military commander, Gen Ratko Mladic.

Akashi said Bosnian Serbs who have been pounding the town also agreed to withdraw their heavy weapons to a range that cannot threaten the town.

"They will withdraw their weapons to a distance which will make these weapons impossible to use," he said.

He said they also agreed on full restoration of normal relations with the United Nations. Serbs had broken off contacts with the United Nations and restricted movements of some

of its troops after NATO planes bombed Bosnian Serb positions around Gorazde April 10-11.

"We have positively responded to the initiatives of full cessation of hostilities," Karadzic said. He said Bosnian Serbs and the United Nations were "back on the track of full understanding."

The Bosnian Serbs also agreed to allow immediate medical evacuations and free movement of UN soldiers and aid workers in the enclave, Akashi said. The terms seemed to meet the demands issued by NATO hours earlier after prodding by President Clinton.

Karadzic said the same pattern that was used to quell fighting around Sarajevo would be employed at Gorazde. That indicated this cease-fire might stick, but that the siege of the town would not necessarily end.

Fighting mostly stopped around Sarajevo about two months ago after a similar

ultimatum but Bosnian Serb forces still surround the Bosnian capital.

Akashi said the two sides also discussed a general ceasefire for Bosnia and political settlement, which would be negotiated after the dispute over Gorazde is defused.

Reuter adds: More than 200 aircraft are in position to launch NATO air strikes around the besieged Bosnian town of Gorazde, senior US Defence Department officials said Friday.

These aircraft, based at nine installations in Italy, other bases elsewhere in Europe and on the USS Saratoga, will target some 60 heavy artillery pieces known to be in firing positions within 12 miles (20 km) of Gorazde, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The US aircraft that could be involved include eight F-15 attack jets, 12 F-16c fighter jets, 8 F/A-18a fighters and 12 O/A-10 attack aircraft, all taking off from Aviano Air Base in northern Italy, the officials said.

This isn't going to be easy and it is not going to be without danger, but we have sufficient force and reconnaissance capability to make the Serbs pay a heavy price for continuing the attacks on Gorazde," one of the officials said.

Residents blamed the attack at the St. Bernard's Mission near Richmond, 80 kilometers west of Durban, on a man who fled the area during tribal fighting in 1990.

He had vowed at the time to return to take revenge, the residents said.

Police investigations are underway.

The accident happened at

Bantul beach, 110 miles (175km) north of Cairo at the northern tip of the Nile river delta.

arrested later.

A survivor, schoolbus driver Mohammed Bseisni, told Tishrin that he had screamed at the captain to slow the boat down because it was filling with water. He said the boat then capsized.

Bseisni said he was among the drowned.

In the Egyptian accident, police suspected the victims may have drowned killed by waves churned up in the Mediterranean by high seasonal winds. None of the bodies were recovered, but authorities said searches would continue.

The accident happened at

Bantul beach, 110 miles (175km) north of Cairo at the northern tip of the Nile river delta.

6 killed near Durban

DURBAN, Apr 23: Six people were shot and killed and five wounded in an outbreak of tribal fighting, near Durban overnight, state radio said Saturday.

Residents blamed the attack at the St. Bernard's Mission near Richmond, 80 kilometers west of Durban, on a man who fled the area during tribal fighting in 1990.

He had vowed at the time to return to take revenge, the residents said.

Police investigations are underway.

51 schoolchildren drown in the Mediterranean

DAMASCUS, Apr 23: Thirty-six children and five teachers drowned when their overloaded boat sank in the Mediterranean sea during a school outing, the newspaper Tishrin reported Saturday.

In another accident in the Mediterranean Friday, 15 Egyptian elementary students and their chaperone apparently drowned when they went for a luncheon, swim, police said.

Sea patrols Saturday searched for people still listed as missing after the Syrian tragedy, which occurred during a school excursion off the coast of Latakia.

Nineteen people were rescued and were listed in good condition, said Khalid Dawoud, director-general of the National Hospital in Latakia city.

The state-run Syrian newspaper said more than 60 people, most of them children aged between 6 and 12 years old, were aboard the fishing boat. It normally carried no more than 15 people.

The victims were among a group of 180 people from the school in the village of Kilmakha. They were having a picnic aboard the craft on Friday, the Islamic sabbath when schools are closed.

The newspaper said the ship's captain, who survived, had "run away." It did not elaborate, but an official in Latakia, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the man was

Off the Record

Minister calls fast food as 'junk food'

JAKARTA: Two ministers have lashed out at western fast food — one called it "junk food" — and said it should be stopped from making further inroad, in Indonesia, a report said Saturday, reports AFP.

Those foods, besides harming health because they encourage over-nutrition, also accelerate the disorder process due to the degeneration of the functions of body organs," Antara news agency quoted coordinating minister for people's welfare Azwar Anas as saying.

Calling some of the fast-food "junk food," Anas said the rapid spread of western fast-food outlets in Indonesia was new challenge that required a response.

The report did not say if the ministers, speaking at a food conference Friday, were planning to introduce legislation at the national level, adding that their anti-fast-food call appeared aimed at regional officials.

No fast-food chains were named, but both Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonalds have grown rapidly in Indonesia in recent years.

Antara quoted Food Affairs minister Ibrahim Hasan as saying the rapid growth of fast-food businesses in the country resulted from the prevailing tendency to follow foreign trends.

It is indeed a mistake if we think that a region without fast-food restaurants is a backward region. Efforts should be made to prevent the entry of fast food in all regions," Hasan said.

Both ministers said efforts should be made to encourage traditional food in order to combat the increasing consumption of fast food.

Pizza man goes door-to-door naked

INDIANAPOLIS: A man claiming to be a pizza deliveryman wore nothing more than a baseball cap as he went door-to-door at an apartment complex, reports AP.

Chad Abrams, 21, was arrested and jailed on charges of public indecency and public intoxication Thursday.

Abrams injured himself in the groin while jumping over a fence as he allegedly tried to flee from sheriff's deputies.

Sheriff's officials said he was not a pizza deliveryman. They were uncertain whether he was actually carrying a pizza.

"Spring always brings this stuff out," dispatch supervisor Linda Wyland said. "You always get these guys trying to show off what they have."

Amnesty urges Israel to stop torture in custody

LONDON, Apr 23: Amnesty International urged Israel on Friday to stop what it said was the systematic torture of thousands of people it holds in custody each year, reports Reuters.

The London-based Human Rights group said it was worried about guidelines for the main internal intelligence agency (General Security Service) that seemed to endorse torture.

"We believe that either the official guidelines for interrogation ultimately endorse torture or ill-treatment, or Israeli officials have extensively violated such guidelines with impunity," the group said in a statement.

It said the army, QSS and police used methods like beatings to the genitals, sleep deprivation and hooding on most detainees — with the apparent

cooperation of medical staff.

Another method used was so-called position abuse in which officials made people stand handcuffed to the wall or bound them to a child-size chair for prolonged periods, the statement said.

The statement said adult political detainees in GAZA and the West Bank were at most risk, as they were normally held without access to a judge for the maximum 18 days for serious offences, and were denied contact with family and lawyers for even longer.

Police and Ministry of Justice investigations into the GSS security service, which reports directly to the prime minister, were slow and secretive and breached the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Amnesty said.

They will be able to cast ballots Tuesday, April 26, at 21 polling stations in 17 cities across the United States.

One of three voting stations in New York city will be on the grounds at United Nations headquarters.

Nixon was an ambitious, enigmatic political figure

WASHINGTON, Apr 23: Richard M. Nixon was the 37th president of the United States and the only one ever to resign. An ambitious and enigmatic political figure, he flouted relations with the Communist world but could never escape the stain of the Watergate scandal that drove him from office, reports AP.

Nixon was president from January 20, 1969, to August 9, 1974, when he quit to avoid certain impeachment. His farewell salute as he left Washington would be one of the enduring images of the century.

Interior Ministry spokesman Jitakorn Sesavej today quoted the statistics as saying that up to February, there are as many as 1.3 million people infected with HIV, a virus which leads to AIDS.

For nearly half a century, Nixon aroused strong passions as a congressman, senator, vice president and president, and even in his forced retirement.

To the end, he sought influence in world affairs through extensive travel, books, articles and speeches. World leaders welcomed him as an elder statesman but Nixon himself conceded he would forever be known at home as the disgraced former president.

"It was a price that was inevitable," he said. "I accepted the fact that it had to be paid."

Early on, he established a reputation as a communist hunter and political guttler. And yet he evolved into the president who forged links with China, pursued detente with the Soviet Union, and began the US withdrawal from the Vietnam War.

"I was born in the year 1913, so I have lived through, as far as America is concerned, four wars: World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam," Nixon said in an 80th birthday interview. "My major goal throughout my political career was to make a contribution to policies which would make the 21st century a century of peace."

A brooding and combative president, Nixon left behind a core of loyalists who insisted he did nothing other presidents hadn't and detractors who recited at the mention of his name.

To those, he was always the dark-visaged "Tricky Dick" who planted microphones around the Oval Office to record conversations, who ordered taps on the telephones of suspected leakers, who formulated enemies' lists and did not hesitate to use a collection of official misdeeds.

While I was not involved in the decision to conduct the break-in, I should have set a higher standard for the conduct of the people who participated in my campaign and administration," Nixon wrote in one of his last books, "In the Arena."

"I should have established a moral tone that would have made such actions unthinkable, I did not."

That was as close as he would permit himself to come to confessing wrongdoing.

They will be able to cast ballots Tuesday, April 26, at 21 polling stations in 17 cities across the United States.