

China frees another dissident

BEIJING, May 14: China has released Chen Ziming, the second of two prominent intellectuals jailed as the "black hands" behind the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests, the official Xinhua news agency said today, reports Reuter.

"Chen Ziming, who had been in custody has been released on bail for medical treatment today with the permission of Chinese judicial authorities," Xinhua said in a report dated Friday but released early today.

The other "black hand," Wang Juntao, was released on April 23 and left immediately for the United States to receive medical treatment.

Diplomats said the latest release appeared timed to influence US President Bill Clinton's decision on extending China's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) trade status.

OIC forces ready to replace western peacekeepers in Bosnia

GENEVA, May 14: Islamic nations stand ready to provide peacekeeping troops to defend the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina if western UN forces are withdrawn, Pakistani Ambassador Hamad Kamal said Friday, reports AFP.

Kamal was speaking after representatives of the 51-state Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) met in urgent session in Geneva and expressed "deep concerns" at the state of peace negotiations in Bosnia.

The Islamic gathering came as West European, US and Russian foreign ministers also met in the city in a fresh effort to agree a workable peace amid threats to withdraw UN forces if no formula is found rapidly.

Kamal read an OIC statement noting "the threat of certain countries to withdraw

their peacekeeping contingents." France which has the biggest contingent has threatened withdrawal following a rapid solution.

The OIC statement warned against such action without analysis of its impact on the situation on the ground and the drafting in of replacement troops, "for which adequate offers already exist from several OIC member states."

The Pakistani ambassador added that while the OIC considered the lives of UN troops in Bosnia important, "We believe that the lives of the people in Bosnia-Herzegovina are even more important."

Kamal also said a Malaysian major killed in Bosnia Thursday had died "in defence of the principles the OIC upholds in Bosnia."

officer, Bosnian Ambassador Mohamed Sacirbey distinguished between countries which provided UN troops "mandated to defend civilians under attack" and those which "mandated soldiers to remain neutral."

Sacirbey interpreted Thursday's US Senate vote calling for lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia as a sign of concern at the "failure to provide balance to the military situation" and as a result, influence the negotiations.

"The Bosnians do not just have friends in the Islamic world. They have friends in the highest institutions that represent democracy in the US and the world in general," he told the OIC press conference.

In its statement the OIC, which has called for the lifting of the embargo on arms supplies to Bosnia, "regretted the

exclusion of OIC representatives" from the so-called "contact group" meeting on Bosnia in Geneva.

The statement reaffirmed the OIC representatives should participate on an equal footing with those of other countries in the peace efforts.

While maintaining their offer of active participation, it said "continued rejection of this offer could adversely impact upon the credibility and sustainability of any solutions worked out in their absence."

The OIC statement warned that a durable and just peace could not be achieved without ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the return of territories seized through aggression, ethnic cleansing or genocide.

Tories third in opinion polls

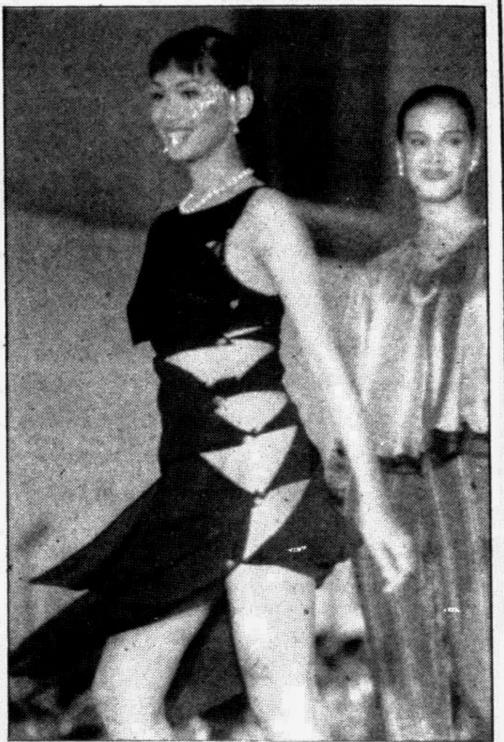
LONDON, May 14: The ruling Conservative Party has fallen to third place behind Labour and the Liberal Democrats in support among British voters, according to an opinion poll published today, reports Reuter.

In the Gallup poll, carried out for the Daily Telegraph newspaper before the death of Labour Party leader John Smith 1, 155 people from 100 districts across Britain were interviewed.

Asked which party they would vote for if there were a general election tomorrow, 45.5 per cent said they would choose Labour, 25 per cent the Liberals and 24.5 per cent the Conservatives.

It said the survey showed almost half the electorate, 49 per cent, expected Labour to win a general election in 1996 or 1997, while only 31 per cent believed the Conservatives would come back.

Off the Record



A Filipino model wears a geometric cut voile dress during a fashion show by a young French designer Pascal Banet in Manila on Friday. — AFP photo

Househusband deserves share of working wife's property

SINGAPORE: A man who does the housekeeping and takes care of the children for a working wife has the legal rights of a housewife if the marriage fails, Singapore's High Court has ruled, reports Reuter.

The Straits Times said on Saturday that the ruling, first of its kind in Singapore, gave a 55-year-old man a share of the family flat which had been paid for almost entirely by his now ex-wife.

The man, described as a freelance Christian pastor, took care of the home and cooked for the couple's three children while his wife worked as a school teacher.

The ex-wife, who now has the children, was ordered to pay her former husband Singapore 50,000 dollar (US 32,000 dollars) as his share of the flat. She also has to pay the outstanding mortgage of 84,000 dollar (64,000 US dollar) for him to give up his interest, the Straits Times said.

Judicial commissioner K S Rajah noted courts had previously ruled housewives deserved a share of property because their "indirect contribution" enabled husband to work and earn money.

"Indirect contributions can give a wife a share in the property. There is no reason to deny it to the husband," who had been "no layabout" and was conscientious in such household work as cooking, Rajah said.

Churchill's love letters on auction

LONDON: An American collector paid a record price on Friday for letters providing a rare glimpse of a broken-hearted, young Winston Churchill pleading his love to a beautiful society heiress who spurned him in the early 1900s, reports Reuter.

The collector, acting through a London dealer, paid 76,757 pounds (115,000 dollars) at an auction at Christie's for seven letters.

The letters record the struggle of Churchill — later to become Britain's leader in World War II — to win the hand of Muriel Wilson, the daughter of a shipping magnate, whom he met when he was in his late twenties.

Wilson rejected his offer of marriage in 1904, preferring to spend holidays in plush European resorts rather than dedicate her life to a hard-working junior politician, as Churchill then was.

Churchill later married another society beauty, Clementine Hozer, with whom he remained until his death. Wilson went on to marry an army officer she nursed during World War I and died in 1964, a year before Churchill.

"Of course if you don't care about me at all, you are quite right," Churchill wrote to Wilson after his proposal was refused. "But it is a sad pity and a scattering of treasure. I love you because you are good and beautiful," he added sadly.

Later his despair at the failure of his courtship grew more open. He wrote an eight-page plea to Wilson, urging her to read three poems by the Scottish poet Robert Burns that chimed with his feelings of despondency.

Woman pays high price for meeting Clinton

NEW ROCHELLE, NY: Meeting President Clinton was the most exciting day of Catherine Rosen's life. And now, she says, she's paying a price, reports AP.

Rosen says she was fired from her bookkeeping job Tuesday, a day after she discussed her health and insurance problems with Clinton.

"They found out I had a problem and fired me," she said Friday. The White House says it's investigating, and Clinton called Rosen on Friday to offer her his personal support.

Rosen's former employer, Peter Sharp and Co, said in a statement it had no knowledge of her medical condition or the substance of her meeting with Clinton when it decided to let her go. The Manhattan real estate company said she was fired for unspecified valid business reasons.

Rosen had written to Hillary Rodham Clinton in support of the president's health care reform efforts. She was one of three women invited to meet with Clinton after he gave a health care speech in Manhattan.

Briton flogged 50 times

LONDON: A Briton was flogged 50 times for breaking Muslim drinking laws in the Gulf state of Qatar, his father said Friday, reports AP.

The British Foreign Office confirmed it was looking into the case, which is thought to be the first time a Briton has been flogged in Qatar.

Computer technician Gavin Sherrard-Smith, 30, was lashed with three-foot canes in the jail where he is serving a six-month sentence.

The beating took place on May 3, but Sherrard-Smith's father learned it had taken place from a letter which arrived Friday.

BRIEFLY

Talks on HK to continue: The Sino-British talks on Hong Kong's future defence and public order continued in Hong Kong yesterday when both sides failed to reach an agreement after a four-day talk ending Friday, Xinhua reports from Hong Kong.

Sources said the talk would run into next week. Chen Zu'er, resident representative of the Chinese team of the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group (JLG) felt disappointed that an agreement was not reached Friday as expected.

2 drug traffickers killed: Soldiers seized 23.2 kilograms (51 pounds) of heroin after killing two traffickers in a firefight, a state-owned newspaper reported Saturday, AP reports from Yangon.

It was one of the biggest ever seizures in Muse town, on the China border about 800 (500 miles) northeast of Yangon, the New Light of Myanmar said.

The report said a military anti-drug squad that had information on the traffickers waited for them near a village in Muse. On May 8, they stopped a group of people carrying heavy bundles. One person in the group lobbed a grenade at the soldiers and shooting ensued.

2 Cubans seek asylum in Chile: A Cuban doctor and cook aboard a merchant marine ship have asked for political asylum in Chile after their vessel anchored in the southern port of Talcahuano, naval sources said Friday, Reuter reports from Santiago, Chile.

It was not clear where the Cuban ship, Primer Congreso Del Partido, was sailing from or where it was bound.

The sources said doctor Orlando Mayo Lopez and ship's cook Wilfredo Palero Escandon made their asylum request at a police station in the southern city of Concepcion.

Hong Kong film star dead: Hong Kong film star Helen Lee Mei, a leading lady of the 1950s and 60s, has died of cancer and pulmonary disease in a Portland hospital. She was 63, AP reports from Portland.

Miss Lee, born July 27, 1930, had top billing in all of her 37 feature films and, in 1990, became the first foreign actress to star in a play at Tokyo's famed all-women Takarazuka Theater. She died on Thursday.

She was the featured star of the Singapore-based Motion Picture and General Investment Corp, whose Hong Kong film studios ranked with the giant Shaw Brothers organisation as the leading moviemakers in East Asia.

Quake shakes Philippines: An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude reading of 5.6 rocked the southern Philippines Saturday, scientists said. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage, AP reports from Manila.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology centered the quake, which happened at 4:12 am (2012 GMT Friday), 6 kilometers (3.75 miles) under the Mindanao sea, about 790 kilometers (493 miles) south of Manila.

11 killed in E Java accident: A head-on collision between two intercity buses in Madura Island, East Java, killed 11 people and five others were seriously injured, the Antara news agency said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The accident occurred on a highway in Bangkalan Regency late Thursday as one of the buses tried to overtake a truck at high speed but instead crashed into the other, oncoming bus, Antara said.



A Palestinian police officer (L) argues with an Israeli borderguard during a joint patrol on the borders of the Jericho autonomous area on Friday. — AFP photo

North Yemenis capture a key town

SANAA, May 14: Northern Yemenis fighting a civil war with rival southerners advanced on their stronghold of Aden by capturing a key town on a main road to the strategic port, reports Reuter.

Northern officers told journalists at Dhalea 100 km (60 miles) north of Aden they had entered the town on Thursday evening only after southern forces decided for unknown reasons to retreat peacefully.

But the advance was one of the first successes of the North's 11-day-old campaign to topple Yemeni Vice President Ali Salem Al-Baidh, accused by the North of trying to lead a breakaway by the larger, less populous South.

Southern spokesman had said on Wednesday northern forces had made 10 failed attempts to take Dhalea since the war began.

In Aden itself, southern leaders, proposed an eight-point peace plan calling for the immediate end to the war and the formation of a national salvation government.

The southern peace proposals by Baidh's Yemen Socialist Party also called for the rival armies to return to the positions they held before the war.

The South has said it

favours dialogue as the only way to solve the conflict. But the statement was the first by the southerners since May 4 that publicly offered detailed ideas for ending it.

The war broke out on May 4 after months of feuding between President Ali Abdullah Saleh, a conservative northerner, and Baidh, a socialist, over the balance of power between North and South in a unified Yemen formed in 1990.

The two sides are struggling for control of the approaches to Aden, the country's second city and economic capital, on several fronts along an arc north of the city.

A northern official, speaking before the southern peace proposals were published, said Saleh would not stop fighting until Baidh was put on trial for rebellion.

Asked by Qatar's news agency if the north would work with the South if its leaders were changed, Sheikh Abdel-Majid Al-Zandani, a member of Saleh's presidential council, said: "We cannot put down our arms unless these rebels accept legitimacy ... and surrender the war criminal (Baidh) to the courts."

Northern spokesmen said fighting was raging at Anad, 60 km (37 miles) north of Aden.

UN, US disagree on shape of force in Rwanda

UNITED NATIONS, May 14: The United States and the United Nations Friday were in sharp disagreement on the shape and duties of a new 5,500-strong peacekeeping force to protect civilians in Rwanda's bloody civil war, reports Reuter.

U.N Security Council President Ibrahim Gambari of Nigeria, who had wanted a vote Friday, told reporters he hoped a resolution would be adopted Monday. But diplomats said Washington needed time to study the complicated

operation and could request major changes in the council's draft text.

A new report from Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali estimates the operation, aimed at protecting refugees and humanitarian workers, would cost about 115 million dollar for the first six months.

His report confirmed earlier U.N proposals to send troops straight into the capital, Kigali, to secure the airport and then fan out into the countryside.

But the United States has argued for a relatively small number of troops to set up protected zones for refugees in border area. About 200,000 people have been slaughtered in a brutal civil war, mainly between hardliners from the Hutu tribe and the minority Tutsis.

Washington, which is expected to help ferry African troops into Rwanda, will not send planes into Kigali as long as they are in danger of being shot down.

Clinton nominates judge Breyer to Supreme Court



WASHINGTON, May 14: President Clinton nominated federal appeals Judge Stephen G. Breyer to the Supreme Court on Friday, filling the second high court vacancy of his administration. In Breyer, Clinton chose a moderate consensus builder with deep Senate support, reports AP.

"Without dispute, he is one of the outstanding jurists of our age," Clinton said of the 55-year-old chief judge of the 1st Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston.

Clinton offered the lifetime appointment to Breyer in a telephone call about 5 p.m., just an hour before the announcement was made. Speaking to reporters in Boston, Breyer said his role on the court would be "to make the average person's ordinary life better. That's an incredible challenge, and I feel very humbled simply thinking about it."

A majority of the Senate must confirm the presidential appointment.

Haiti's new president yet to form govt

PORT-AU-PRINCE, May 14: Haiti's army-backed provisional president huddled in the national palace with advisors Friday, formulating policy and discussing names of potential ministers for his parish government, reports Reuter.

An aide to Emile Jonassaint said the octogenarian Supreme Court judge was deliberating over picking a prime minister and other cabinet positions but was unable to say when an announcement would be made.

"He's going to start to discuss the measures he needs to give priority," said Mireille Durocher Bertin, Jonassaint's Chief of Staff and a lawyer close to the Haitian military.

Lebanese PM in Syria to discuss power struggle

BEIRUT, May 14: Lebanon's prime minister travelled to Syria Saturday to enlist its help in resolving a power struggle that has paralysed his government, reports AP.

Prime Minister Rafik Hariri has been boycotting government functions since Sunday, pending a settlement of a dispute with President Elias Hrawi and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

His trip coincided with press reports that Hariri was about to declare an end to his self-imposed seclusion.

Hariri was expected to meet with Syrian President Hafez Assad and Vice President Abdul-Halim Khaddam.

Syria's top expert on Lebanese Affairs.

Assad sent his son, Bashar, to Beirut Thursday with message to the three leaders to band together at the expected crucial stage in the US-sponsored Mideast peace process.

Khaddam has been in constant telephone contact with Beirut in the last two days in an attempt to settle Lebanon's worst political crisis since the end of the 1975-90 civil war. The dispute is threatening reconstruction from the conflict.

Syria exerts enormous influence in Lebanon, where it has 40,000 troops operating as peacekeepers.

61 foreigners held in Japan

TOKYO, May 14: Forty-seven Asians were arrested on Friday, bringing to 61 the total number of foreigners who allegedly entered Japan illegally aboard an unnamed freighter, officials said, reports AP.

The 47 people were arrested aboard a 500-tonne freighter, which was stranded after fishing nets tangled in its propeller, in waters off Shimane prefecture in western Japan on Thursday.

Maritime safety agency officials said they were still searching for 33 people, who were believed to have fled after landing in Shimane.

Fourteen of a total 94 people reported to have been on board were arrested onshore Thursday.

Most of them were believed to be from China, officials said.

No-confidence motion against Hata likely

TOKYO, May 14: The leader of the Japan's main opposition said in an interview published today his party might introduce a motion of no-confidence against the minority government soon after the budget is passed, reports Reuter.

He said he would not necessarily try to force an immediate dissolution of parliament, but would wait until a new system of electoral districts is introduced.

"I think we will introduce a no-confidence motion," Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) president Yoshi Kono told the influential Asahi Shimbun.

"The reason is that this government has nothing to do with will of the people. Also, it has only 40 per cent of the

seats in the lower house."

"Passing the budget is essential from the point of view of the people's livelihood. We must carry on with the budget debate. But whether we introduce a motion of no-confidence after it has passed is separate question."

Motion to topple Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata's government, now just over two weeks old, would be a major step in the LDP's campaign to grab back power from the coalition that displaced it last summer from nearly four decades of unbroken rule.

If the chamber passed a no-confidence vote, Hata would face two choices — to call snap general elections or resign.

'DPRK refuelling N-reactor'

SEOUL, May 14: A South Korean news report on Saturday said North Korea has begun refuelling a nuclear reactor, despite indicating previously it would hold off until a dispute over sampling the spent fuel could be discussed, reports AP.

However, both a U.S. State Department source close to the talks and the U.N.-related international Atomic Energy Agency said they had no information that North Korea has begun unloading the fuel rods from the experimental reactor.

The South Korean news agency Yonhap cited a statement from North Korea's U.N mission in New York as saying the refuelling had begun.

Child marriage rampant in Rajasthan

NEW DELHI, May 14: The 6-year-old groom was dozing and the infant bride lay curled in her mother's lap as the Hindu priest read out the marriage vows, reports AP.

Defying laws against child marriage, hundreds of similar weddings were performed on Friday in Rajasthan, one of the most backward and tradition-bound states in India, United News of India (UNI) news agency reported Saturday.

Like the 6-year-old groom, who got married in Sangarner area, most of the newlyweds were below seven years of age, and many of them were infants, UNI said. It did not give details.

Still, a massive police crackdown and a government

campaign ensured that the number of such weddings were far less than the estimated 30,000 child marriages that used to be routinely performed until a few years ago.

No one knows how many children are married in India, but the centuries-old practice is most prevalent in the northern state of Rajasthan.

The children are pronounced man and wife on the first and second days of the full moon cycle in the month of May, considered auspicious by Hindus who are a majority in this nation of 880 million people.

This year, thousands of policemen patrolled the villages of Rajasthan to thwart the weddings.

Also for the first time, the government published full-page advertisement in newspapers, warning parents of fines and three months imprisonment under a law that makes it illegal for girls to marry before they are 18. The minimum age for boys is 21.

But there is no record of a single conviction in Rajasthan.

On Friday, many parents enacted secret marriages in remote villages, United News said.

To hoodwink the police, "dummy grooms", or adults masquerading as grooms, participated in wedding processions while the children were tying the nuptial knots in the houses, UNI said.

In one village, the headman