

Major pledges to pressure China

By KATHY CHENAULT
Associated Press Writer

BEIJING — British Prime Minister John Major pledged yesterday to keep pressure on China to improve its treatment of dissidents, saying the global trend to increased political freedom could not be reversed.

"There is a movement across the world for democracy and economic and political freedom," Major said during a news conference. "And that, like the world's concern for human rights, is a movement that isn't going to go away."

Major, the first Western leader to visit China since the 1989 crackdown on the pro-democracy movement, said his visit marked the normalization of British-Sino relations.

While Chinese officials rebuffed Major on human rights, the British prime minister rejected claims that his trip bolstered the image of China's authoritarian Communist government.

"We have to live in the real world as it is. We have to deal with large countries like China," said Major. He said it was important to maintain dialogue with China "for the sake of a more peaceful world."

The British prime minister arrived Monday in the Chinese capital after a quick stop in Moscow to assess the political upheaval in the Soviet Union that has left China as the world's sole major Communist power. Major leaves Beijing today for an official visit to Hong Kong.

Major and Chinese Premier Li Peng signed an agreement on a \$16.2 billion airport and port project for Hong Kong. The agreement gives China the right to be consulted extensively on each stage of the airport project and on other major undertakings by the British colonial government.

Later, Major sought to defuse criticism that the agreement sold out the interests of Hong Kong residents. The capitalist enclave is



British Prime Minister John Major, left, lifts glasses with Chinese Premier Li Peng, right, along with British foreign minister Douglas Hurd and his Chinese

counterpart Qian Qichen following a signing ceremony at the Great Hall of People in Beijing yesterday afternoon.

scheduled to revert from British to Chinese rule in 1997.

"Without the airport, Hong Kong would have been hamstrung," he said.

During his meeting with Li, Major pressed for more information on several leading dissidents and activists who have been jailed for their

involvement in the 1989 democracy movement, including two men who began hunger strikes last month.

But Li rejected Major's comments as interference in China's internal affairs. He recalled how Western countries in the 19th and early 20th centuries encroached on

China and "bullied and humiliated" it.

"In this more than 100-year period, foreign powers totally disregarded the human rights of the Chinese people," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wu Jianmin quoted Li as saying. Major got another taste of dif-

ferences during a tour of the Forbidden City, the former home of Chinese emperors. A group of Chinese onlookers gathered there attracted Major's attention and he headed in their direction to greet them. But security officers swarmed around and pushed the onlookers away.

Clashes down EC plan

By NESHA STARCEVIC
Associated Press Writer

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia — A renewal of fierce fighting involving Yugoslav soldiers, Croatian forces and Serb militants threatened on yesterday to scuttle a new European Community peace plan in Yugoslavia.

The 12-nation EC called an urgent international peace conference on Yugoslavia in The Hague for Saturday. It named Lord Carrington, one of Britain's most widely respected statesmen, as its chief mediator.

Dozens of 200 cease-fire observers were leaving for Croatia.

The Croatian stronghold of Osijek and surrounding villages in the ethnically mixed Slavonia region saw some of the heaviest clashes yesterday. At least 16 people were killed.

The head of Yugoslavia's collective federal presidency, Stipe Mesic, appealed for peace late yesterday. "The country is facing great trials and very grave risks," Mesic, a Croat, said on TV.

He said the presidency was asking the federal army to immediately appoint officers to oversee the cease-fire jointly with Croatian officials and representatives of Serb insurgents.

In Zagreb, the Croatian government said it was instructing its Defense Ministry to implement a cease-fire, ban the movement of its troops without prior notification and demobilize reserve units.

More than 300 people have been killed in fighting in Croatia since it declared independence June 25. Many of Croatia's 600,000 Serbs, 12 percent of the republic's population, are unwilling to live in an independent Croatia.

AP photographer Franz Pammer reported that Osijek, 140 miles east of Zagreb, echoed with constant submachine-gun and light artillery fire yesterday. The army blocked a road to Vukovar, 18 miles to the southeast, he said.

He saw two air force planes dropping bombs on neighboring Bilje village, a last Croat stronghold in the Baranja area stretching north of Osijek toward Hungary.

In the town of Beli Manastir, Serbs claimed to have taken Bilje and Mece, the last two Croat-held villages in Baranja.

"Cease-fire, what cease-fire?" said Zdravko Mrdza, a Serbian defense force officer in Beli Manastir. "Our Baranja is definitely free."

Pammer said he saw the bodies of 10 people killed in Bilje being delivered to the Osijek hospital, and six more bodies of people killed in fighting in and around Osijek.

Pennsylvania teachers striking over contracts in nine districts

By ANNE MCGRAW
Associated Press Writer

The number of school strikes in Pennsylvania climbed to nine yesterday, as teachers in another 107 districts returned to work without contracts.

More than 22,000 students hoping to start the school year on time found themselves with an extended summer vacation as their teachers hit the picket lines over issues including salaries, benefits and working conditions.

Out of the 172 districts that began the year without contracts, 56, or about 33 percent, have settled. This time last year, almost 48 percent of the districts had reached agreement on contract disputes.

Strikes began in seven districts: East Pennsboro Area, Cumberland County; Central York and Dallastown Area in York County; Pequea Valley, Lancaster County; Holidaysburg Area, Blair County; Girard, Erie County and Peters

"You just can't blame the teachers."

— George Badner

Spokesman for Teachers' Union

Township, Washington County.

Teachers in four other districts resumed strikes begun last week. Those in the Deer Lakes School District, Allegheny County, walked off the job for the third school day. The longest-lasting strike, in Bellwood-Antis School District, Blair County, stretched into its fifth school day.

School board officials and teachers wrangled over the size of salary hikes, class size, health insurance payments, teacher responsibility, and other related issues.

In a related development, the Association of Catholic Teachers in the Archdiocese of Philadel-

phia ratified a new contract through 1994. Under the new agreement, each lay teacher will receive a salary increase of \$1,000 plus \$30 for each year of experience.

Subsequent years of the contract will bring increases of \$1,000 for each teacher plus \$35 and \$40 for each year of experience.

George Badner, spokesman for the Pennsylvania State Education Association, the state's largest teachers' union, said educators are not the only ones at fault in a strike.

"You just can't blame the teachers. The school board is the second party. Bargaining is a two-way street," Badner said.

Teachers are looking for salary parity with other professionals in their area who have advanced educational degrees and 20 years to 30 years experience, Badner said.

"Just because they've announced that now teachers are well paid doesn't make it so," Badner said, referring to school board officials.

Mother convicted for attempted hit

By SUSAN FAHLGREN
Associated Press Writer

HOUSTON — A jury yesterday convicted a woman of trying to hire a hitman to kill the mother of her daughter's cheerleading rival to further her own daughter's cheerleading career.

Wanda Holloway, 37, of Channelview, could face up to life in prison. Holloway was convicted of trying to hire someone to kill Verna Heath. In closing arguments earlier yesterday, prosecutors said Holloway believed Mrs. Heath's daughter, Amber, would be so distressed she would drop out of competition.

The defense had attacked the credibility of the state's star witness.

Holloway burst into tears after she was convicted on the solicitation of murder charge. Relatives and friends surrounded her, yelling at members of the media to stay away.

Holloway also faced an attempted aggravated kidnapping charge, but no verdict on that charge was announced. Attorneys on both sides

said they couldn't explain the circumstances of the jury's decision because of a judge's gag order.

Earlier yesterday, Prosecutor Casey O'Brien replayed several segments of tapes of conversations secretly recorded for police by Holloway's former brother-in-law, Terry Harper, the state's star witness.

"You listen to that tape. You don't hear fear in her voice. You hear hate. She's consumed with hate," O'Brien said.

On the tape, Harper asked Holloway: "If you don't want to do it, I'll understand."

"It's not that I don't want to do it. I just have to get the money," Holloway replied.

O'Brien said Holloway's contention that she was afraid of Harper or the hitman was ludicrous. The prosecutor said she was so intent on getting Harper to find a hitman she obtained such details about Mrs. Heath as the make of her car and license-plate numbers.

But defense attorney Stan Schneider told jurors the state did not prove its case against Holloway.

Famed director Capra dies; longtime friends reminisce

By JOHN HORN
AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES — Oscar-winning director Frank Capra, whose romantic idealism defined the American dream through such movie classics as "It's a Wonderful Life" and "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," died yesterday. He was 94.

Capra died in his sleep at 9:30 a.m. at his home in the desert city of La Quinta, said his son, Tom Capra, executive producer of NBC's "Today Show" in New York.

Capra "died of natural causes. He just didn't wake up," his son said. He said his father suffered a series of minor strokes several years ago and had been under 24-hour nursing care.

A Sicilian immigrant, Capra lived and celebrated his new country's spirit of opportunity. He came of age as a filmmaker during the Depression, and his populist work triumphed the little man over the system, hope over despair and an optimistic vision of country and place.

"The art of Frank Capra is very simple: It is the love of the people," he remarked when he accepted a Life Achievement Award from the American Film Institute in 1982.

"Frank Capra made old-fashioned American values and crying in

the movies a national pastime. He celebrated the noblest impulses of woman and man, showed all of us our dark side, and then pointed a flashlight at the way out," said director-producer Steven Spielberg.

While some called such films as "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" and "You Can't Take it With You" sentimental "Capra-corn," the director offered more than tidy cinematic escapes. His work was in fact uplifting and exhilarating, part showman, part moralist.

Capra won Academy Awards for "It Happened One Night," "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" and "You Can't Take It With You." "It Happened One Night" in 1934 was the first movie to win the top five Oscars.

Along with "Mr. Smith," his other films of the 1930s — "Lady for a Day," "Broadway Bill," "Lost Horizon" — depicted his deep-felt populism and his belief that the individual can prevail over big business and big government. They were embraced by Depression America.

Capra's most enduring post-war film, "It's a Wonderful Life," starring Jimmy Stewart, influenced Spielberg and a new generation of filmmakers and is seen by millions on television at Christmastime.

"Frank Capra will always have a very special place in my heart,"



Director Frank Capra, left, jokes with actor Jimmy Stewart at a 1985 luncheon. Capra died yesterday at his La Quinta, California home.

Stewart said yesterday. "I think this is true for the motion picture industry and true for the millions of people who saw his pictures."

Throughout his 38 years as a director, Capra also battled for the artistic freedom of the filmmaker. "I suppose, being a Sicilian, I took a dim view of authority of any kind," he once remarked. "I don't like anybody telling me what to do."

Frank Capra was born in a small village near Palermo on May 19, 1897,

the youngest of a farmer's seven children. The family emigrated to America when Capra was 6 and settled in Los Angeles, where his father, Salvatore, worked in nearby vineyards.

"I hated being poor," Capra wrote in his autobiography, "The Name Above the Title." "Hated being a peasant. Hated being a scrounging news kid trapped in a sleazy Sicilian ghetto of Los Angeles. My family couldn't read or write. I wanted out."

Explosion and fire kills 24 at N.C. processing plant

By PAUL NOWELL
Associated Press Writer

HAMLET, N.C. — Fire broke out yesterday at a chicken processing plant, killing 24 people and injuring more than 40, authorities said. Employees and witnesses said one exit was locked and one was temporarily blocked by a truck.

"They were screaming 'Let me out!'" said passer-by Sam Breeden. "They were beating on the door."

Witnesses said a fryer at the Imperial Food Products plant caught fire about 8:30 a.m. The company makes chicken nuggets and marinated chicken breasts sold at fast-food restaurants and grocery stores.

Renee Hoffman, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, said 24 were confirmed dead by mid-afternoon. Hospitals reported more than 40 were injured.

The interior of the building was gutted.

A woman who was in the canteen said people rushed in yelling, "Fire! Fire!" The door from the canteen to the outside was locked and a man had to break the door open so those inside could escape.

Carolyn Rainwater, a plant worker, said she heard people screaming and "I saw a big puff of black smoke and

I started running for the back door." The door was blocked by a delivery truck and the workers had to wait for it to be moved, she said.

"When I arrived, I didn't have hope for anybody coming out of here," said a police officer who would not give his name. "They're beating all the odds."

The officer was trying to control a growing crowd of worried relatives, friends and curiosity-seekers.

Several witnesses said employees couldn't escape because of locked doors.

O'Neil Patrick said he was walking near the plant and saw another man trying to help workers. He said only one door was open and that was in the front of the building.

He said he could hear people screaming on the other side of a locked door and inside the truck that was backed up to a loading dock door.

People were banging on the walls of the building and truck screaming, "Let me out!" he said.

Breeden was passing by the building when he saw his sister-in-law's head sticking out of a small window that wasn't big enough for her or others with her to get through.

He held her head so she could get air until workers broke down the door. She survived.