

China frees dissident Wei after 24 hours

BEIJING, Mar 5: China released today after his detention, for more than 24 hours, threatened to scuttle a key visit to Beijing by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, reports Reuters.

Wei Jingsheng, the father of China's fledgling democracy movement, called an associate today from a county north of Beijing to say he was now free and expected to be home late in the day.

President Bill Clinton has expressed strong disapproval over Wei's detention, part of a nationwide sweep against dissidents in advance of Christopher's visit which begins on March 11.

Clinton has warned he will not renew China's key Most Favoured National (MFN) trading privilege in June unless Beijing improves its human

rights record, threatening billions of dollars in trade.

Christopher's visit is seen as a last-ditch attempt to force the Chinese to make concessions that will let Clinton extend MFN.

"We strongly disapprove of what was done, and it obviously is not helpful to our relations," Clinton told reporters at the White House, adding that "We have sent a very stern statement" to Chinese authorities.

Christopher, who left Washington on his Asia trip Friday, said he still wanted to press ahead with his visit to China despite the arrests.

"These events only underscore the importance of being able to make human rights points at the highest level. That's been a major purpose of my trip and I intend to do that," he told reporters aboard his plane.

In addition to Wei, at least four other dissidents in Beijing have been arrested or are missing from their homes. Half a dozen activists in Shanghai were rounded up to keep them from talking to Clinton's top human rights official, who was in China to prepare for the Christopher visit, dissidents said.

Wei, who became a potent symbol of China's lack of freedom of expression during 14 years in prison, had bluntly told Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs John Shattuck the United States had to be tough on China to get progress.

At a news briefing, State Department spokesman Christine Shelly praised Wei's personal courage and commitment to the "non-violent expression of political views."

China's action is not unprecedented. Authorities also detained dissidents when the last US Secretary of state to visit Beijing, James Baker, came in November 1991.

UN commander in Bosnia steps up campaign for more troops

SARAJEVO, Mar 5: The United Nations commander in Bosnia has stepped up a campaign to persuade the world community that he needs more peacekeeping troops to prevent the country sliding back to all-out war, reports Rueter.

In interview after interview, Sir Michael Rose, the British general in charge of UN troops in Bosnia, argued that his men were too thinly spread to enforce ceasefire agreements which have reduced fighting to its lowest ebb since civil war erupted almost two years ago.

Rose and other UN commanders say failure to strengthen the UN's military clout in Bosnia could wreck multiple diplomatic efforts now underway to end the three-sided Bosnian conflict.

"The people are now prepared to go back to war," Rose

told reporters on Friday. "We are already stretched and things will get more difficult as we go ahead."

As if to underline his assessment, UN officers in Sarajevo said they had discovered six Serb 122mm Howitzers inside the 20-km (12 miles) exclusion zone for heavy weapons around the Serb-besieged Bosnian capital.

All artillery pieces, tanks, mortars and rocket launchers should have been withdrawn from the exclusion zone or placed under UN control by February 21. NATO threatened to launch air strikes if the combatants failed to comply.

UN officials said the Howitzers were found on the edge of the exclusion zone and the Serbs insisted they were outside the line.

Negotiations to solve the dispute were expected to con-

tinue on Saturday as French UN troops kept watch over the guns, identified as D-30s Howitzers with a range of 17 km (11 miles).

The tenuous situation of UN peacekeeping troops was also highlighted when a British military base in central Bosnia came under mortar attack for the second day running. The base was damaged but there were no casualties.

Its commander, major Patrick Darling, was quoted as saying that he would call in air strikes if his unit came under fire again.

Britain and France provide the bulk of the UN peacekeeping force in Bosnia, with 2,500 and 6,000 soldiers respectively. Other countries provide the rest of the total of some 11,000.

Yasushi Akashi, the special UN envoy for former Yugos-

lavia, said on Thursday another 10,650 troops were needed. Unless the world acted quickly, he said, the fragile ceasefires now in force could collapse.

Jean Cot, the French general in overall command of peace troops in former Yugoslavia, has criticised the United States for failing to contribute ground forces to the peacekeeping effort.

But Washington said it would not send troops to Bosnia until there was an "enforceable peace agreement, signed by all three sides in the war, Croats, Serbs and Muslims".

Such an accord appears a long way off despite a US-brokered agreement between Bosnia's Muslim and Croats to form a loose confederation and stop fighting for territory.



A one-armed Bosnian takes water at an improvised water supply in the centre of Sarajevo March 4. This point is still the main water station for the inhabitants of Sarajevo. — AFP photo

Fires kill 4 in Karnataka

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: At least four children were killed and over 1,600 homes razed in two separate fires in the southern state of Karnataka, the Press Trust of India said, reports AFP.

At least four children died and some 800 huts were destroyed in the major blaze which broke out after a cooking accident at a crowded Shantytown on the outskirts of the Karnataka state capital Bangalore, officials said.

Fire tenders and policemen put out the fire and rescued many trapped children.

Another blaze in Sindhanoor town in Raichur district razed 800 homes and seriously injured at least four people, the news agency said. Firefighters were still struggling to douse the flames late Friday.

Koirala in stable condition

KATHMANDU, Mar 5: Nepal's Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, was in stable condition Saturday, a day after he was hospitalized when he collapsed during a speech in Parliament, his doctors said, reports AP.

The 69-year-old prime minister ate his meals, which were brought from his home, hospital sources said on condition of anonymity. Koirala said he wants to go home, but doctors have asked him to stay in the hospital for a few more days.

Koirala who is reported to be a diabetic, crumpled to the floor Friday after speaking for 70 minutes on a motion of no-confidence against his Nepali Congress government.

He was admitted in the intensive care unit of Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital with complaints of giddiness, headache and nausea.

Voting on the communist-sponsored motion against Koirala's 32-month-old government originally was to be held on Friday, but it has now been moved to Monday.



Britain's Princess Anne looks at Nguyen Van Hung, 28, a drug addict suffering from AIDS during her visit of Binh Trieu Drug Treatment Centre in Ho Chi Minh City March 5. The Princess is on a five-day official visit. — AFP photo

Off the Record

Cat blacks out Ho Chi Minh city's TV programme

HANOI: A cat blacked out Ho Chi Minh city's television programmes for 10 minutes when it jumped onto a mains power switch and short-circuited the station's electricity supply, the trade union newspaper Lao Dong reported on Saturday, says Reuters.

The cat's fate in Thursday night's incident was not known.

\$1m reward demanded for "The Scream"

OSLO: A man has offered to arrange the return of Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream," stolen last month, for a reward of more than one million dollars, an Oslo newspaper said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The unidentified man had contacted a lawyer and requested a reward of eight million crowns (1.08 million dollars), saying he could obtain the painting, according to the newspaper Dagbladet.

Norway has offered a reward of 200,000 crowns (27,000 dollars) for information leading to the return of the famous work, stolen from Norway's national gallery in Oslo.

Reporter stripped in Tamil Nadu

MADRAS: A reporter investigating alleged kickbacks to a politician in a southern state in India was hospitalised after he was stripped to his clothes and beaten at a bus station, his editor said Saturday, reports AP.

The assault comes at a time of strained relations between journalists and the government of Tamil Nadu state, whose chief minister had at one time filed more than 100 libel suits against journalists critical of her administration.

A US State Department report on human rights abuses worldwide had said this year that freedom of the press in the state was under threat because of the numerous attacks on journalists and media organisations.

The Tamil Nadu Union of Journalists, a professional body of newspaper reporters and editors, on Saturday condemned what it called the systematic attack on journalists in the state.

Plot to kill Bush: Trial of 14 resumes in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Mar 5: The trial resumed here today of 11 Iraqis and three Kuwaitis accused of trying to assassinate former US President George Bush during a visit to Kuwait, reports AFP.

Kuwait's state security court began the session after defence lawyers were given time to examine statements made by the main prosecution witness, Kuwaiti intelligence officer Abdel Samed al-Shatti, on December 25.

The verdict in the trial, which opened on June 5, was due to have been issued at the December session after having already been postponed from the end of October.

Of the 14 defendants only two Iraqis — Raad Abdel-Amir al-Assadi and Wali Abdel Hadi al-Ghazali — have acknowledged links with the Iraqi Intelligence Service.

Another defendant confessed to having transported explosives into Kuwait territory, but said he did not know about any plot to assassinate Bush.

The human rights group, Amnesty International, has said the trial was unfair, accusing the court of not meeting international standards.

Three defendants have said confessions were extracted by police beatings.

After a US investigation into the plot, Washington launched a cruise missile attack on the Iraqi intelligence headquarters in Baghdad on June 27. Iraq said six people were killed in the attack.

During the Bush administration US-led multinational coalition forces drove Iraqi troops out of Kuwait after a seven-month occupation, in February 1991.

Dalai Lama named for Roosevelt Freedoms Award

MIDDELBURG, (Netherlands), Mar 5: Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, has been named this year's winner of the Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award, reports AP.

The Roosevelt Foundation said Friday that the Buddhist monk had been a "beacon of hope, not only to the people of his own occupied country, but to oppressed peoples everywhere."

The Dalai Lama fled Chinese-occupied Tibet for India in 1959 and has since lived in exile while seeking freedom for his Himalayan nation.

BRIEFLY

Mahathir arrives in ROK: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad arrived in South Korea Saturday on a three-day private visit, airport officials said, AFP reports from Seoul.

During his unannounced visit at the invitation of the Hyundai conglomerate, Mahathir will inspect the group's auto plant and shipyard in the southeastern port of Ulsan, Hyundai group officials said.

He will also tour Kyongju, an ancient Korean capital and tourist attraction. Hyundai plans to set up a joint venture plant to produce 100,000 trucks a year in Malaysia, the Hyundai officials said.

Blasts leave 22 hurt in Myanmar:

Twenty-two people were injured in a grenade attack by Mon ethnic minority insurgents in southeast Myanmar, Myanmar's state-run television reported, Reuters says from Bangkok.

The television, in a news broadcast monitored here late on Friday, said Mon insurgents threw two grenades into a car park at a temple fair in the town of Ye on February 26.

Twelve men and ten women wounded in the blasts, the broadcast said.

UNHRC creates new watchdog job:

The UN Human Rights Commission created a new watchdog job to report on violence against women, a commission source said Friday, AFP reports from Geneva.

The commission, expressing alarm at "the marked increase in acts of sexual violence", called for a "particularly effective response" to wartime violations such as murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancies — an indirect reference to crimes reported from former Yugoslavia.

The resolution, proposed by 44 countries, calls for the end to sexual violence within the family and society, and to "all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation."

UN discovers 6 Serb Howitzers:

The United Nations has discovered six Serb 122 mm Howitzers inside a NATO-mandated exclusion zone around Sarajevo and ordered their withdrawal or surrender, a UN spokesman said on Friday, Reuters reports from Sarajevo.

All Serb heavy weapons were supposed to have been pulled out of a 20-km zone around Sarajevo by February 9 under threat of NATO air strikes if Serb forces failed to comply.

We found the Howitzers about 600 metres inside the northwest part of the exclusion zone late on Thursday, Major Jose Labandeira of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), told Reuters.

15 more executed in China:

The authorities in the southwestern Chinese province of Sichuan have executed 15 people for crimes ranging from rape and fraud to murder, according to a local report here today, reports AFP from Beijing.

The criminals were executed following a mass rally on Monday, the Sichuan daily said in its February 15 edition.

Somali gunmen attack Pak, Egyptian peacekeepers

MOGADISHU, Mar 5: Somali gunmen firing rocket-propelled grenades and one mortar round staged a series of overnight attacks on Egyptian and Pakistani peacekeeping troops in south Mogadishu, reports AP.

UN military spokesman Maj. Christopher Budge said one Pakistani soldier suffered a minor leg wound from mortar shrapnel and one Somali was wounded in the attacks late Friday and early Saturday.

An American soldier who could hear the fighting from his position said hundreds of rounds were exchanged in fighting around an Egyptian strong point that flared and waned for almost four hours.

Budge said neither the United Nations nor the Egyptians knew the motive for the seemingly organised attacks. He said they also did not

know if the same groups attacked both the Pakistanis and the Egyptians.

The attacks come at a time of an anti-Egypt campaign on the streets of south Mogadishu. Gen Mohamed Farrah Aided's Somali National Alliance have portrayed rival warlord Ali Mahdi Mohamed's ongoing talks in Cairo as an Egyptian attempt to sabotage Aided's reconciliation efforts in Nairobi.

Leaflets accusing the Egyptians of trying to colonize Somalia have been circulated in recent days in south Mogadishu, which is controlled by Aided's SNA militia.

Budge said the UN had no indication other than the location of the attacks in south Mogadishu that any particular group might be behind the raids.

Budge said the attacks be-

gan with a mortar round that wounded the Pakistani soldier at about 11 pm (2000 GMT). The Pakistani position is near Thuban strong point.

About a half hour later, Budge said two pickup trucks loaded with armed Somalis opened fire on the Egyptian strong point close to the intersection of the Oct. 21 and Medina roads.

Somalis attacked the Egyptian position again at about midnight (2100 GMT) with small arms, homemade grenades and three rocket-propelled grenades, said Budge.

An hour later, Somali gunmen fired on the position again with small arms. The fighting continued off and on until about 3 am (0000 GMT), when Somali gunmen got to within 100 meters of the position.



This 1989 file photo shows Canadian actor John Candy (C) surrounded by members of the cast of the hit movie, "Uncle Buck". Candy died of a heart attack March 4 while filming the movie, "Wagons East" in Durango, Mexico. From left to right: Macauley Culkin, Jean Kelly, Candy and Gaby Hoffman. — AFP photo

Comedian Candy dead

LOS ANGELES, Mar 5: John Candy, the rotund comedian who starred in "Uncle Buck" and "Planes, Trains and Automobiles," died on a Mexican movie location. He was 43, reports AP.

Candy was making the movie "Wagons East" with Richard Lewis near Durango, Mexico, when he died, Stephanie Pond Smith, a spokeswoman for Carolco Pictures in Los Angeles, said today.

Smith did not know when Candy died or the cause of death.

Candy co-starred in last year's box-office hit "Cool Runnings" about the Jamaican bobsled team and in the 1990 comic blockbuster "Home Alone."

Afghans kidnap Pak official

QUESTTA, Pakistan, Mar 5: Afghans kidnapped a Pakistani official from the remote southwestern province of Baluchistan on Friday and took him into neighbouring Afghanistan, the provincial government said, reports Reuters.

The armed men held up the jeep of Ata Mohammad, Deputy Commissioner of Ziarat district, as he was driving to the provincial capital, Quetta.

The government said Mohammad, the most senior official of the district, was taken into Afghanistan's western Zabul province. No demands for his release had yet been received.

Buthelezi, Viljoen register at last moment to fight polls

JOHANNESBURG, Mar 5: Conservative Zulu Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and white right-winger Constand Viljoen registered at the last moment on Friday to fight South Africa's first all-race elections, reports Reuters.

But both leaders said they would contest the April 26-28 poll only if key constitutional demands met through negotiation or international mediation.

Viljoen, retired head of the South African defence force and leader of the white-separatist Afrikaner People's Front (APF), arrived to register 15 minutes before a midnight deadline, in electoral official said.

"This decision leaves the Afrikaner nation with the option to prove substantial support and only if there are sufficient concessions which indeed make our ultimate goal of an Afrikaner Volkstaat (homeland) attainable," Viljoen said in a statement.

African National Congress spokeswoman Gil Marcus told Reuters she expected the ANC to be talking with Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party on Monday about arrangements for international mediation.

ANC President Nelson Mandela said in rural Transkei before the Afrikaner decision to register that he would never sanction a white homeland.

"There will never be such a

thing as a Volkstaat while I am still alive," he told a campaign rally.

An official said the number of parties likely to compete in the elections rose to 26 with the last minute registration of marginal federalist, green and Muslim parties.

Inkatha chairman Frank Madlalo arrived to register his party three hours before the deadline.

Inkatha, the Zulu-based rival of Nelson Mandela's ANC, set several conditions for actual participation but its registration was the first crack in a proposed electoral boycott by black and white right-wingers.

"We will actively start campaigning as of this minute,"

Madlalo told reporters at the offices of the Independent electoral commission in Johannesburg where he registered.

South African President FW de Klerk welcomed the move, but said: "I would have preferred them to register full stop."

The central committee of Inkatha, a member of the freedom alliance of conservative which had said it would boycott the poll, agreed in the Zulu capital of Ulundi earlier to register.

But it said actual participation in the election would depend on its outstanding demands and other condition in-

cluding postponement of the poll date.

The ANC welcomed Inkatha's move. "It is a very important decision," Marcus said. "We feel that we can certainly achieve an all-inclusive solution to our problems through mediation and negotiation."

But she said the timing of the poll, marking the transition from white minority rule to multi-racial democracy, was irreversible. "The election date won't be changed," she said.

De Klerk told supporters of his national party in Durban that Inkatha had done nothing constructive for the transition process for a year, but he added: "They have an impor-

tant contribution to make in this Natal province and nationally."

Freedom alliance chairman Rowan Cronje said the approved of Inkatha's move. "Yes, I welcome their decision. Anything that could lead to an all-inclusive settlement is welcome," he said.

Cronje said the Bophuthatswana black homeland, an alliance member, would not register for the election on Friday, but might reconsider if the deadline were extended.

The participation of chief Buthelezi's Inkatha is regarded as crucial if the elections are to be held in relatively peaceful circumstances.