

## China frees dissident Wei after 24 hours

BEIJING, Mar 5: China released its most famous dissident 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 Reuter.

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

## 759700 prisoners in Russian jails

MOSCOW, Mar 5: Russian jails hold a total of 759,700 prisoners, tens of thousands of whom are housed in deplorable conditions amounting to torture, the interior ministry said in a report released Friday, says AFP.

The report said the worst off were among the 234,000 people awaiting trial in the 164 'detention centres for investigation'.

These centres had room for only 167,800 people, and more than 35,000 inmates had no permanent beds and were forced to sleep in shifts, the report said. In some cases each prisoner only had an average of one square metre (11 square feet) of space and there was a lack of fresh air.

The report said Foreign Ministry had warned the Interior Ministry that United Nations human rights officials had stated their intention to visit the detention centres.

## 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, Reuter 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. Reuter 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.

## 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 Reuter.

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.

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 Reuter.

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

"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 Madlalose 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 planned electoral boycott by black and white right-wingers.

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

Madlalose 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 Umlazi earlier to register.

But it said actual participation in the election would depend on international mediation on its outstanding demands and other conditions 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 will not be changed," she said.

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