Hawala scam may hit Congress

## Li admits confidence crisis in Hong Kong

HONG KONG, Feb 5: Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng has admitted there is a confidence crisis in Hong Kong in the run-up to China's takeover of the territory next year, it was reported today, says AFP.

Li said in a recent exclusive interview with three of Hong Kong's China-backed newspapers that Beijing did not rule out the possibility of people leaving Hong Kong ahead of 1997, but "by maintaining Hong Kong's position as an economic centre.... those who have left will come

He noted that people would not leave Hong Kong if the territory provides a "good investment environment" after 1997 under "one country, two systems" in which Hong Kong will be allowed to keep its capitalist system for 50 years after 1997.

Li was quoted as saying.

"of course, we have considered the problem" of people leaving Hong Kong before 1997, but "in analysing it, we think it is not that serious as is being played up, there is no need for such exaggera-

"There is a possibility that Hong Kong compatriots did not understand the policy of the central government. That's why all these suspicions and worries."

Li's remarks were an apparent response to Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten's warning earlier of a fresh exodus of residents before

Patten had said: "if people start to doubt whether Hong Kong really will have a high degree of independence after 1997, then they may decide to go abroad," adding that there was little London could do to reassure people about the future.

hard in upcoming polls: Pranab NEW DELHI, Feb 5: An Italian-style bribery scandal.

which has stung almost all political parties and embittered ties between leaders. may hurt India's ruling Congress (I) in upcoming polls, a cabinet minister said on Sunday, reports AFP. External Affairs Minister

Pranab Mukherjee admitted candidly that the fallout over a financial scandal involving payments to politicians and bureaucrats could effect his party but added he was confident Congress would return to power after parliamentary elections this year.

"This (the scandal) may have some impact." Mukherjee said in reply to questions on the impact of the multimillion-dollar racket on the fortunes of the ruling party in the polls, to be held by May

Three members from and 1991.

Prime Minster PV Narasimha Rao's cabinet facing corruption charges have quit and the premier faces growing demands for his resignation in connection with the scandal.

Lal Krishna Advani, leader of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP. Indian People's Party), and an MP from the centrist Janata Party quit parliament last month as another opposition leader surrendered his post.

Only the leftist parties have been left untouched by the scandal. Estimated to involve 110 million dollars in shady transactions. The scandal stems from

the seizure of secret diaries of a businessman named Surendra Kumar Jain four years ago in which he is said to have documented in code payments to 115 politicians and bureaucrats between 1988

Opposition leaders say Rao himself accepted almost one million dollars from Jain, an allegation the beleaguered Congress government has ve-

Foreign Minister Mukherjee said it was difficult to assess immediately the damage to the Congress and other parties done by the negative tions. publicity generated by the scandal

hemently denied.

"The case has more than one dimension. It would be too simplistic to say this party has lost and that party has won (from the scandal)," the senior cabinet minister told the Press Trust of India news agency in an interview.

"It would take time to assess the adverse impact of the case," Mukherjee added.

BJP leader Advani, a respected politician, on Sunday said he would surrender his political career if the corrup-

tion charges against him were proved in court.

"The charges levelled against me do not have an iota of truth, but if they are proved them I would give up my pub-lic life," the BJP leader said, adding that his party would launch an anti-corruption campaign ahead of the elec-

Indian President Shankar Dayal Sharma has appealed to the scam-tained leaders and bureaucrats to set a "salutary example of rectitude, with high standards of personal conduct and accountability."

The Supreme Court last week ordered the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to widen its probe into the scandal and look into "every accusation against each and every persons irrespective of position and status.

### Iraqi defector abandons campaign to oust Saddam

KUWAIT. Feb 5: Iraqi defector Lt Gen. Hussein Kamel al-Majid has decided to quit politics because of the lack of support for his efforts to overthrow Saddam Hussein, a Kuwaiti newspaper reported

on Sunday, reports AP. The daily Al-Qabas quoted unidentified Iraqi sources as saying Al-Majid told members of his inner circle on Wednesday that he was disappointed by the indifference of lragis in exile.

The report implied that Al-Majid was abandoning his self-declared effort to oust Saddam, his father-in-law, because he has not won enough support since he defected to Jordan in August.

Al-Majid, who remains in Jordan, refused to talk to The Associated Press about the report. But one of his close aides, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told the AP that Al-Majid "Did not make such remarks at all."

The newspaper quoted its

Iraqi sources as saying that Al-Majid had already halted efforts to unite Iraq's fragmented opposition groups in the common cause of toppling Saddam.

It also said Al-Majid had complained that "two Arab states" had refused to receive him and that "international parties" he counted on for support had let him down.

The newspaper did not identify the countries or the parties. But one is believed to be Syria, which has been seeking to muster an alternative Iraqi opposition to give it a political stake in Iraq if Saddam is ever ousted or assassinated.

Al-Majid, the former director of Saddam's clandestine weapons programme fled to Jordan, with his brother, who was deputy commander of Saddam's personal security apparatus, and their wives, both daughters of Sacklam.

Christopher's ME trip begins: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived Sunday from the former Yugoslavia to begin a Middle East visit that will continue through Friday, an official source said, AFP reports from Tel Aviv.

His trip is seen as a follow up to peace talks between Israel and Syria which have been taking place at Wye plantation, near Washington, which ended their latest round on Wednesday. Christopher's schedule included a meeting today with Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

US actress Audrey Meadows dies: Actress Audrey Meadows best known for her role as Jackie Gleason's caustic wife in the 1950s US television comedy "The Honeymooners" has died after a battle with cancer. She was 71, Reuter reports from Los Angeles.

Daily variety columnist Army Archerd a long time family friend told Reuters Meadows died on Saturday night at Cedears. Sinai Mediac Centre after lapsing into a coma.

### Landslides kill 4 in Indonesia:

Four people were killed, two others were missing and eight were injured in Landslides in the north Sulawesi province, police in the province's capital of Manado said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Sergeant Franki Makausi of Manado police contacted by phone Monday said that two Landslides one Sunday around midday and another at dawn Monday, buried houses in the foothils of Manado.

### 3 newsmen to face trial in Egypt:

Three opposition journalists will go on trial for publishing articles accusing a former minister of cheating during parliamentary elections last year. Egyptian newspapers reported Monday. AP reports from Cairo.

The trial of Magdy Ahmed Hussein, Mustafa Bakry, and Mahmoud Bakry, all editors of Islamic-oriented newspapers, will be the latest against journalists under a controversial press law that increases punishments for publishing false information or inflammatory stories against state officials and institutions.

### 3 rebels killed in Philippines: Three rebels were slain and 300 Muslim residents fled their homes when two rival Muslim groups clashed in the

southern Philippine town of Buluan, the military said yesterday. AFP reports from Cotabato. A member of the Muslim insurgent group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and two rebels from a breakaway faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

(MILF) died in the clash Saturday, said army spokesman lieutenant Noel Detuvato. 17 die in Chinese bus mishap:

An overloaded bus collided with a tractor killing 17 people and injuring 30 in central Anhui province on Saturday, a newspaper reported yesterday, AFP says from Shanghai. The Ximmin Evening News reported that the bus, which had started out from Hangzhou in eastern Zhejiang province, collided with the tractor in Lingbi county, Abhui. The bus, which has a capacity of 32 passengers, was loaded with 94 people, investigations showed.

### Bid to calm rioting soldiers

### Guinean president takes over as defence minister CONAKRY, Guinea, Feb 5:

The Guinean president took over as defence minister on Sunday in an effort to calm rioting soldiers who killed at least 30 people over the weekend, reports AP. State radio in the West African country said Presi-

dent Lansana Conte made the announcement while meeting with army representatives at a military barracks Sımday morning. In his speech read on

Guinean radio, Conte told the soldiers they would get a pay raise in March and promised them better food rations.

About 2,000 of Guinea's soldiers went on the rampage in the capital on Friday, demanding back pay and the firing of the defence minister, whom they accused of blocking pay raises and promotions.

Conte responded Friday by

firing the defence minister. But soldiers continued to attack the presidential palace with cannon and gunfire throughout the night - setting it on fire and forcing Conte to flee into a bunker.

The soldiers ended their mutiny on Saturday after Conte agreed to meet with them. They handed in their weapons before gathering at the Samory military camp Sunday morning.

Radio France International reported at least 30 people were dead and 100 injured. "I am going to solve your problems," Conte was quoted as saying by Guinean radio,

monitored by the BBC "Meanwhile, if some shops still have rice, we will see whether we can buy this rice for distribution to you before a final solution is found to the supply problem.

### Lord Buddha's birth chamber found in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Feb 5: Archaeologists have discovered the birth chamber of Lord Buddha under an ancient temple in southwestern Nepal, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said, reports Reuter.

An international team of scientists reported finding relics five metres (15 feet) under the Mayadevi temple in Lumbini, 350 km (200 miles) west of the Himalayan Kingdom's capital Kathmandu.

"The discovery proves that Lord Buddha was born at this sacred place," Deuba told tourism developers later on Sunday in Kathmandu.

Archaeologists from Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Japan said they made the discovery nine months ago but the Nepali government delayed making an announcement until it had finished consulting experts.

### Colombian plane crash kills 23

ASUNCION, Paraguay, Feb 5: A Colombian cargo plane exploded in the air shortly after takeoff, killing at least 23 people, including seven children who had been playing volleyball on the ground,

reports AP. The children, who included five brothers, had been playing Sunday afternoon in the streets of the Juan Sinforiano Bogarin neighborhood, 2.5 miles (4.0 kilometre) northwest of the airport and nine miles (14 kilometres) north of the cap-

The plane's three-person crew and one passenger died in the crash. All were Colombians. The civil aviation office said firefighters found the aircraft's flight recorder in the smoldering debris.

Local reporter Julio Cesar Lezcano, who visited the crash site, described how a hot, mid-summer afternoon in the tranquil, working-class neighbourhood was transformed into a scene of devas-

#### Strike cripples Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, Feb 5: A strike called to express solidarity with the people of the northern Himalayan state of Kashmir brought life to standstill in Pakistan today. witnesses and officials said, reports AFP.

Markets, shopping centres and factories were shut and there was little traffic on the roads. Banks, government offices and educational institutions were also closed, witnesses said. The government declared February 5 a public holiday, as it has done similar occasions in the past, to demonstrate solidarity with Muslim separatist groups fighting against Indian Rule

in Kashmir. Rållies have been planned in big cities and towns across Pakistan and in the Pakistaniadministered northern third of divided Kashmir state to protest what are termed + atrocities + in the Indiancontrolled zone of Kashmir.



South Korean Foreign Minister Gong Ro-Myung (R) greets US National Security advisor Anthony Lake (L) before high-level talks on aid to famine and flood ravaged North Korea at Seoul's Foreign Office Monday. - AFP/UNB photo

## ROK unhappy with US moves to improve ties with DPRK

SEOUL, Feb 5: South Korea on Monday asked the United States not to improve ties with North Korea unless the Stalinist country changes its hard-line policy, government officials said on Monday, reports AP.

South Korean officials made the request when they met with White House national security adviser Anthony Lake, who came here on Saturday for three days of consultations on US-North Korea affairs.

"We conveyed our objection to US plans to further ease economic sanctions with North Korea," an officials said after a meeting between Lake and South Korean Foreign Minister Gong-Ro-myung.

The Foreign Ministry official did not say what response Lake showed to the South Korean request. The official spoke on condition of

anonymity. Lake also was to hear a similar request from his South Korean counterpart.

Yoo Chong-ha, and Unification Minister Kwon O-kie before leaving for Japan later in the day.

Lake's trip comes amid reports that the United States has informed South Korea of its timetable to improve ties with North Korea under a 1994 nuclear agreement between the two coun-

Under the agreement. North Korea has frozen its suspected nuclear weapons two safer Western-made nuclear reactors worth 4.5 billion dollars plus economic and diplomatic benefits.

The benefits include an exchange of liaison offices and an easing of decades-old US economic sanctions. The two countries have been adversaries since the United States fought on Seoul's side in the 1950-53 Korean War.

A few months after the nuclear accord was signed. the United States took some symbolic measures to im-

prove ties with North Korea. such as allowing a direct telephone link between the two countries.

Apparently frustrated by the slow pace of improvement in its relations with the United States, North Korea has recently warned that the nuclear accord could be at risk unless Washington does more.

South Korean news media. quoting unidentified Foreign Ministry officials, reported programme in exchange for that additional US measures would include allowing smallscale direct US investment, defreezing North Korean assets in the United States and increasing the amount of money to be remitted to the

> South Korean officials worry that the new US moves would further encourage North Korea to shun dialogue with Seoul. Pyongyang has been trying to improve ties with Washington while refusing to talk with Seoul. which it regards as a US puppet.

# Off the Record

### The reason behind committing suicide

LONDON: British scientists say they have discovered a gene that makes certain people more likely to commit suicide, the Sunday, Telegraph reported, reports AFP. Researches at Bristol University, in the southwest of Enginad, analysed blood from people who had attempted

suicide. Doctor Janathan Evans and professor David Nutt were led to their discovery by research showing people who committed suicide seemed deficient in a brain chemical called 5-ht.

The enzyme that regulates 5-ht is generated by the sus-A genetic link between suicide and depression has long

been suspected. The researchers stressed, however, that those carrying the gene would not inevitably try to kill themselves, while how much greater the suicide risk is has yet to be determined.

"There are many other influences on suicide risk such as drink psychology disturbances and life stress." Nutt told the Sunday Telegraph. The scientists said a genetic test could save lives and the next step was to investigate drugs to boost production of 5-ht.

#### Overweight persons on rise in USA

NEW YORK: America's waistband is expanding. Seventyfour per cent of Americans 25 and older report being overweight, up from 71 per cent a year ago, 69 per cent in 1994, 66 per cent in 1992 and only 59 per cent 10 years

ago, according to a Harris Poll, reports AP. The poll released Sunday asked 1,005 randomly selected adults about their weight and compared the responses to recommended weight ranges for various heights and body sizes. The company has been doing this regularly since 1983, using Metropolitan Life insurance

tables from that year. For example, the insurance table recommends that a medium-framed 5-foot-7 man weigh 140 to 152 pounds; a woman, 133 to 147.

The survey, conducted January 18-22 by Louis Harris and Associates, indicates that 24 per cent of adults are over their recommended weight range by 20 per cent or more.

"That's generally agreed to be the definition of obesity, although there has been some controversy in recent years about whether or not the old Metropolitan Life tables were too strict

#### Indecently dressed, unlawfully punished

NAIROBI: An angry crowd of male street vendors in Nairobi stripped a woman naked after accusing her of being indecently dressed. The Sunday Nation newspaper reported. says AFP.

The crowd pounced on the miniskirted shopper, beat her and tore off her skirt, blouse and underwear on Saturday, saying they were "teaching the prostitute a lesson."

The woman, who later told a reporter she sustained injuries to her genitals during the scuffle, was rescued from the mob's wrath by another group of men who gave her a sheet to cover her naked body and drove her away.

### China to begin war games against Taiwan this week

HONG KONG, Feb 5: China has mustered 400,000 troops along its coast facing Taiwan and will begin month-long war games this week, a Hong Kong newspaper said Monday, reports AP.

The report in Sing Tao quoted an unnamed source and could not be independently verified, but was in line with previous such stories in the Hong Kong press. which are seen as China's way of scaring Taiwan away from pursuing separate diplomatic China claims sovereignty

over Taiwan.

The Sing Tao report made Taiwan's main stock index lose 94.22 points, or 1.97 per cent, in early trading, but it recovered two-thirds of the loss following a report that inflation was falling.

The troop buildup in Fujian Province, about 160 kilometers (100 miles) from the island of Taiwan, is part - AFP/UNB photo | of the second phase of what

is called a "Military Action." Sing Tao said.

The exercise will be larger in scale and more integrated among army, navy and air force than the war games of 1995, the Chineselanguage daily said.

More than 20 of China's finest land units will take part, along with more than 300 warplanes, plus submarines, missile boats and attack vessels, the source was quoted as saying.

Last summer China testfired missiles off Taiwanese waters following President Lee Teng-hui's visit to the United States.

China regards Taiwan as a renegade province whose leaders have no right to make overseas visits. It believes Lee's visit was part of a move to dump the ideology of reunification with China and make the island an indepen-

### Rebels rocket Kabul: 2 killed

KABUL, Feb 5: Rebels fired rockets at the besieged Afghan capital Kabul on Saturday night and on Sunday. killing two people and wounding eight, the official Kabul Radio said, reports Reuter.

Seven artillery rounds hit a residential area of the city, wounding two people, witnesses said.

Two rounds landed inside the compound of the presidential palace that houses the Defence Ministry, destroying a section of the perimetre Wall, they said. Five shells hit homes in the diplomatic district of Wazir Akbar Khan,

causing limited damage. The government usually blames such attacks on the opposition Taliban militia. which has blockaded the capital since last October.

# Maya Indians no longer hide ancient faith behind Catholicism

in the region concerning mass-graves in the area.

SAN ANDRES ITZAPA, Guatemala, Feb 5: Maya Indians cross themselves in Roman Catholic fashion after walking miles to visit San Simon, a wooden idol seated in a chair, his fat cigar jutting

from beneath a big hat, re-

ports AP. The shrine, 20 miles (30 kilometres) west of Guatemala City, is filled with smoke from multi-coloured candles - each signifying a prayer for the icon, whose origins are unclear. Photographs crowd the back wall.

Such shrines to pagan saints are common throughout Latin America, where many Catholic priests have long tolerated the mixing of Christian and native rituals. They are especially prevalent in Guatemala, where about 60 per cent of the population of 10.7 million is Maya.

When Pope John Paul II arrives here on Monday, he will find a Maya population that more openly practices the animist beliefs long veiled by the cloak of Catholi-

cism. For the first time since Christianity arrived here five centuries ago. Guatemalan Indians are increasingly rejecting Christian worship in favour of ancestral rites, anthropologists and Maya ac-

tivists say. "Many are returning to the practice the Maya theology."

their ancestors' faith despite

Catholicism's centuries-old

hold and a recent wave of

Protestant evangelism, said

Maya faith," said Vitalino Si-molox, a Presbyterian minister. "I personally know three Catholic priests who privately As many as a fifth of Guatemala's Indians practice

anthropologist German Curuchiche of the private Centre of Maya Cultural Studies. There are now at least 5,000 native priests publicly practicing Maya rituals and thousands of others who wor-

ship clandestinely, said Maya priest Eduardo Pacay Vide. "Something important is happening," said Pacay, a school-teacher who worships at an outdoor altar in the capital, his head wrapped in a traditional red scarf.

Maya belief holds that a life force resides in every object, animate or inanimate. Ceremonies are celebrated according to sophisticated calendars and often revolve around corn, a food staple the Maya consider sacred. Since the Spanish con-

quest, and the accompanying

Roman Catholic evangelisa-

tion, Mayas have blended

their beliefs with those of Christianity. Every year during Easter

Three Serb girls walk by the ruins of a mosque in central Srebrenica on Sunday.

The UN special envoy for human rights, Elisabeth Rehn, visited the former UN

enclave that was overrun by Serbs last summer. Rehn held talks with Serb officials

Week processions in the lake side community of Santiago Atitlan, an idol similar to San Simon joins Jesus and Mary. Catholics often make offerings of sugar cane and fruit liquors to saintly images in brightly woven Maya costumes.

The trend toward emphasising the Maya beliefs has launched a debate among Catholic leaders about how much native worship the church can tolerate and still call itself Christian.

Some Catholic leaders worry that if they don't address the question they could lose more of their parishioners to the resurgent native faith. Already, Protestant groups claim about 30 per cent of Guatemala's popula-

"It is the great dilemma facing the church," acknowledged Roman Catholic Brother Benjamin Rivas, president of the Guatemalan Religious Conference.

As the church competes with other religions to win the faith of people who hold strong ties to traditional beliefs in places as diverse as Africa and South America. the Vatican has been forced to take up the issue. In September, the Pope himself said he would study it.

In Guatemala, the Maya faith is linked with a 35 year old guerilla war against the government for greater rights of the poor and Indians. More than 120,000 people have been killed.

Last March, a peace ac cord recognised the sanctity of animist Maya rituals. Maya Pope

priests built a bonfire outside the capital's National Cathedral and prayed to the forces of nature to make the accord successful.

The Roman Catholic church has spoken out in favour of greater rights for Indians in Guatemala. In 1992 - the 500th anniver sary of the Spanish conquest of Guatemala - the Guatemalan Catholic Church issued a public apology for abuses committed against the Indians during its evangelisa tion of Guatemala

During the visit, the Pope plans to meet with Indian activist Rigoberta Menchu. winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize

Maya priests, although they increasingly reject Catholic dogma ray mey look forward to the visit of the

#### resumption of peace talks GROZNY, Feb 5. Thou

Chechens demand

dent state.

sands of people rallied in the centre of Chechnya's capital on Sunday, demanding the resumption of peace talks and Russian troops with drawal from the mountainous republic, reports AP.

The protesters carried

posters of rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudavev, chanted slogans urging a Russian pull out and danced the traditional zikr dance news reports said. Many wore the green headbands popular among Muslim fighters Similar demenstrations

against the 14 mouth old war. have been held to the towns of Shall and Argon but Son days was by far the largest anti Russian rally in recent days