

# Central bankers meet to address financial crisis

HONG KONG, Jan 11 - Central bankers from 17 economies started a day of closed-door talks in Hong Kong on Monday to address both global and regional financial concerns.

The talks were the first governor-level meetings at the new Asia-Pacific regional offices of the Swiss-based Bank for International Settlements (BIS).

"The subject the governors will discuss is essentially whatever is on their minds," BIS general manager Andrew Crockett told reporters in a media briefing at the weekend.

"But we do expect to take a look at the world economic financial situation and at progress on strengthening financial systems, particularly in the emerging market economies," he said.

Crockett would hold a news briefing in the evening at around six p.m. (1000 GMT), BIS

said.

Joseph Yam, chief of Hong Kong's Monetary Authority, told reporters on Sunday he would raise the issue of a single Asian currency but the other central bankers declined to comment on points they might press.

Shortly before the meeting began, U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan met with Yam and Hong Kong leader Tung Chee-hwa for about an hour.

"We spoke about the U.S. economy, Japan's economy and various other issues," Yam told reporters.

He said they also discussed the world's economic situation and its prospects. Asked whether Greenspan discussed U.S. rates, Yam said such details were not discussed.

Most of the central bank governors, who began arriving

on Saturday, have been tight-lipped, keeping reporters at bay.

Indonesian central banker Syahri Sabirin discussed domestic issues with reporters, but when asked about the BIS meeting only said no policy proposals were expected. He said the important point was that the central bankers were exchanging views.

Of 17 central banks and monetary authorities attending, 11 were from the Asia-Pacific area:

Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, China, the Philippines, Thailand and host Hong Kong.

Also attending were central bank governors from Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Mexico and the Czech Republic. Wim Duisenberg, President of the European Central Bank also

joined Greenspan at the meeting.

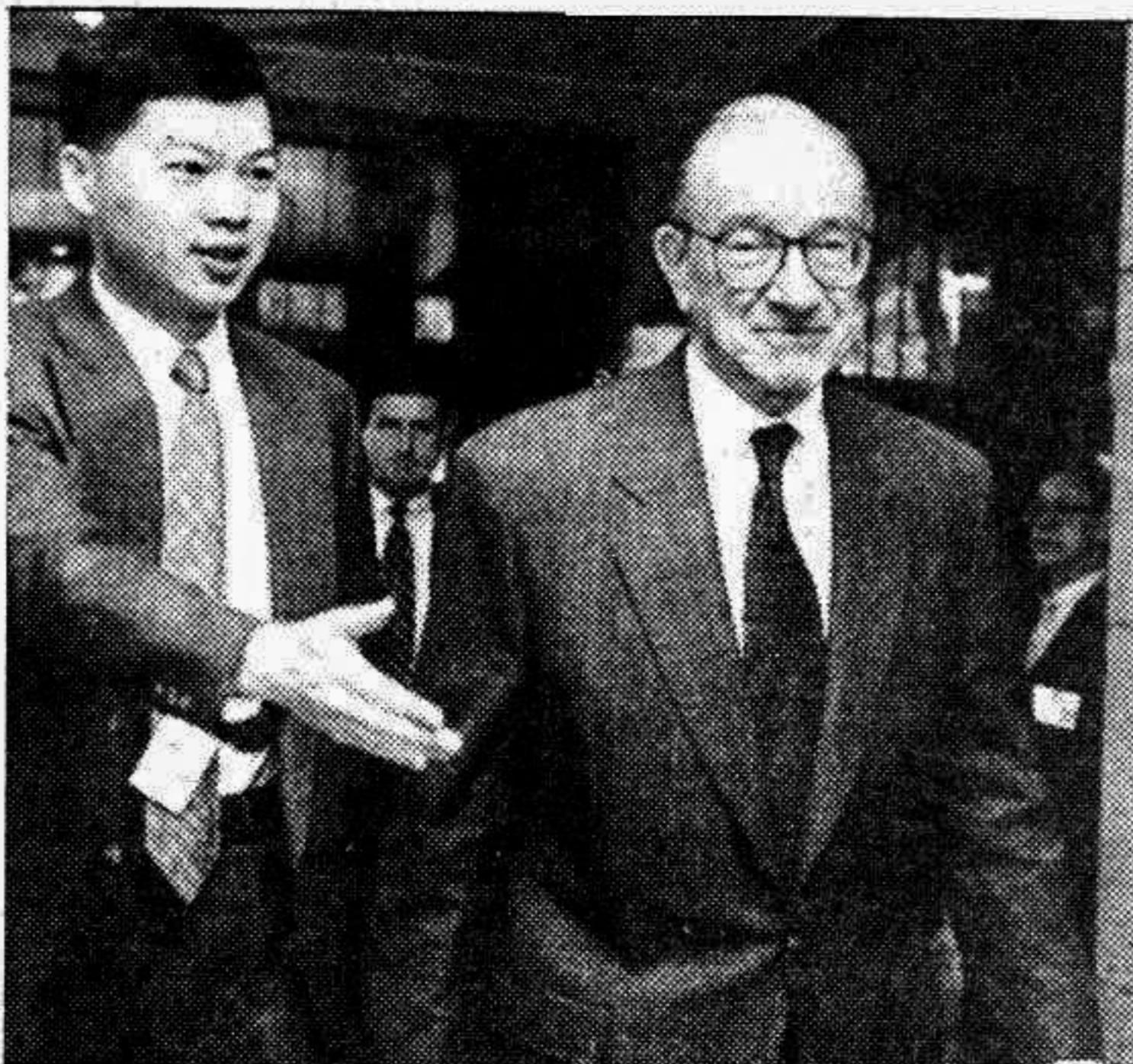
Crockett told reporters over the weekend that the meeting would be predominantly an Asian grouping to discuss issues that would be of direct concern to them.

At the same time, he said, any regional grouping could benefit from outside perspectives on how to deal with financial difficulties.

The European central banker and Mr Greenspan will be able, especially with the BOJ (Bank of Japan), to represent the three main industrial country groupings...to provide the overall global context," he said.

On Tuesday, Greenspan will go to Beijing to meet again with People's Bank of China governor Dai Xianglong, who is attending the BIS meeting.

-- Reuter Internet



US Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan (R) is escorted by an unidentified official into a meeting with Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa in Hong Kong Monday. After the meeting, Greenspan was scheduled to attend a meeting with international central bankers to discuss the global economy, and in particular financial developments in Asia.

-- UNB/AP photo

## Many European firms not ready to cope with euro: Study

Most European stock market analysts believe that Europe's new single currency, the euro, will improve the business environment in the European Union.

But according to a survey compiled by Deloitte Consulting, the professional company watchers warn that many companies are not yet ready to cope with the new currency.

Hans Christian Iversen, partner at Deloitte Consulting, said: "Analysts are clear that the medium and long term benefits for the business of being 'in' (the euro) are substantial, but they are showing some signs of being concerned that companies have not resolved all the strategic, IT and organisational issues that will allow them to benefit from the euro."

According to the survey more than 70% of UK-based an-

alysts believe that the euro will boost the medium- and long-term prospects of the EU economy.

However, they are convinced that the transition to the euro will involve substantial costs too.

### Profit margins

One cost factor is the technical preparations for the euro, for example getting computer systems ready and changing marketing material.

Of greater worry, though, is the erosion of profit margins in some industries. A clear majority of stock market analysts says that many companies are not prepared for this change.

The problem are competition and pricing levels in different countries in the euro-zone. The euro makes such price

differences more obvious and will intensify the competition. Goods that until now could be sold at high prices in some countries will have to become cheaper.

But more than 80% of stock market analysts warn that many companies have not come to grips with this new reality.

The fans of the single currency hope that the pricing pressures will soon filter through to consumer goods. Not everybody is so sure about this. Nearly a third of UK analysts believe that shoppers will not benefit much.

### Euro communications

Another charge levelled against Euroland companies is that they have failed to communicate effectively their euro strategies.

This is a bitter read for many businesses as it could have a direct impact on their share prices.

Equity analysts now monitor closely whether companies are 'euro-ready'. To them it is an important indicator of a firm's performance and potential. If they fail the euro test, a "buy" recommendation can quickly be downgraded to "hold" or "sell".

Deloitte Consulting polled 47 UK-based analysts and 53 French, German and Italian experts for its survey.

On Friday the consultancy had published a survey highlighting the heavy costs of the euro transition, but said a majority of analysts believed that the long term benefits would ultimately outweigh the costs.

-- BBC Internet

## Asian stock markets close lower

HONG KONG, Jan 11: Asian stock markets closed generally lower Monday, with share prices falling in Tokyo for a second consecutive session, reports AP.

Tokyo's benchmark 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average shed 23.33 points, or 0.17 per cent, to close at 13,368.48. On Friday, the average fell 144.75 points, or 1.07 per cent.

Share prices fell on lingering concern about the yen's recent rally against the dollar.

A stronger yen is viewed as bearish for shares of export-oriented companies as it makes Japanese exports more expensive abroad and reduces the value of dollar-denominated profits made overseas.

The dollar was quoted at 110.22 yen in late afternoon trading, down 1.20 yen from late Friday in Tokyo and also below its late New York level of 110.93 yen Friday.

Share prices in Hong Kong closed lower after four straight sessions of gains.

The Hang Seng Index, the Hong Kong market's key indicator of blue chips, fell 88.43 points, or 0.8 per cent, to 10,634.27. Brokers said investors took profits following sharp gains last week.

News that the investment arm of one of China's wealthiest provinces has filed for bankruptcy, leaving debts worth \$4.3 billion, also dampened market sentiment.

Officials from Guangdong International Trust and Investment Corp. announced the losses after a meeting of a committee overseeing the company's liquidation Sunday.

Friday's record rally on Wall Street had little impact in Asia, traders said. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 105.56 points to 9643.32, closing above the 9600 level for the first time.

However, South Korean shares closed sharply higher on expectations of a recovery in the country's sluggish economy this year.

The South Korean central bank has said that it expects the

economy to shift to a growth of 3.2 per cent this year from a contraction of about six per cent for 1998.

The Korea Composite Stock Price Index rose 14.62 points, or 2.3 per cent, to 640.95.

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian share prices closed higher, with investors signaling their approval to a Cabinet reshuffle Friday when Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was appointed deputy prime minister. The benchmark Composite Index rose 6.76 points, or 1.1 per cent, to 598.46.

TAIPEI: Share prices closed lower on profit-taking. The market's key Weighted Stock Price Index fell 14.76 points, or 0.2 per cent, to 6,406.99.

WELLINGTON: New Zealand share prices closed higher, with brokers saying arise by market heavyweight Telecom Corp. of New Zealand Ltd. buoyed sentiment. The NZSE-40 Capital Index rose 6.76 points, or 0.4 per cent, to 2,169.40.

MANILA: Share prices closed slightly lower on profit-taking. The 30-company Philippine Stock Exchange slipped 1 point, or 0.05 per cent, to 2,139.64.

SYDNEY: Australian share prices closed mixed after profit-taking in blue chip industrial stocks countered a resource sector boosted by higher metals prices. The All Ordinaries Index fell 6.90 points, or 0.2 per cent, to 2,849.4.

SINGAPORE: Share prices closed lower as profit-taking eroded the market's early gains, dealers said. The Straits Times Index fell 2.10 points, or 0.1 per cent, to 1,543.05.

JAKARTA: Share prices closed lower on continued profit-taking in shares that rallied last week. The Composite Index fell 2,198 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 437.29.

BANGKOK: Thai share prices closed mixed, with the benchmark index slipping marginally lower on profit-taking. The Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) index slipped 0.23 point to 399.20.

## Exchange Rates

American Express Bank Ltd foreign exchange rates (indicative) against the taka to clients.

Currency	Selling TT & OD	Selling BC	Buying TT Clean	Buying OD Sight Export Bill	Buying OD
US Dollar	48.7050	48.7450	48.3100	48.1570	48.0850
Pound Stg	80.1489	80.2148	79.0110	78.7608	78.6430
Deutsche Mark	26.2056	29.2296	28.2030	28.1137	28.0717
Swiss Franc	35.0951	35.1239	34.5367	34.4274	34.3759
Japanese Yen	0.4433	0.4437	0.4353	0.4340	0.4333
Dutch Guilder	25.9205	25.9418	25.0307	24.9514	24.9141
Danish Kroner	7.6351	7.6414	7.4528	7.4292	7.4181
Australians	31.3904	31.4162	30.1454	30.0500	30.0050
Belgian Franc	1.4160	1.4172	1.3674	1.3631	1.3610
Canadians	32.5568	32.5836	31.6372	31.5370	31.4989
French Franc	8.7078	8.7150	8.4089	8.3823	8.3697
Hong Kong	6.2983	6.3035	6.2223	6.2026	6.1933
Italian Lira	0.0295	0.0295	0.285	0.284	0.2824
Norway Krone	6.6167	6.6222	6.5013	6.4807	6.4710
Singapore	29.4432	29.4674	28.4981	28.4079	28.3654
Saudi Riyal	13.0227	13.0334	12.8464	12.8057	12.7865
UAE Dirham	13.2976	13.3085	13.1167	13.0751	13.0566
Swedish Krona	6.1735	6.1785	6.0926	6.0733	6.0642
Qatar Riyal	13.4174	13.4284	13.3230	13.1901	13.1704
Kuwait Dinar	166.9695	167.1066	164.9391	154.4484	154.2174
Thai Baht	1.3416	1.3427	1.3277	1.3235	1.3216
Euro	57.1212	57.1681	55.1604	54.9875	54.9035

Bill buying rates:

TT Doc	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
48.2112	47.9074	47.5048	47.1023	46.6667	45.8945

USD/London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR)

Buying	Selling	Currency	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	12 Months
48.0850	48.7050	USD	5.00	5.03	5.06	5.08	5.09
48.0850	48.7050	GBP	6.12	5.9375	5.625	5.50	5.4375

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollars

Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Malaysian Ringgit	Indonesian Rupiah	Korean Won
42.5074/42.5127	51.0051/20	36.23/36.29	3.7998/3.8002</		