

Talks on independence of E Timor Indonesia, Portugal at odds over settlement

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 9: Indonesia and Portugal disagreed Monday on a consultative mechanism that would enable the East Timorese to eventually gain independence, reports AFP.

Speaking at a news conference after two days of UN sponsored talks here, Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas and his Portuguese counterpart Jaime Gama also disagreed on the need for a UN presence in the former Portuguese territory at this stage.

UN special representative Jamashed Marker meanwhile announced that the ministers would meet here again on March 10 following a senior officials meeting on the previous day.

Indonesia is proposing that the East Timorese be consulted on draft UN autonomy proposals that the ministers hope to complete by the end of March. These proposals would be submitted as a final solution to the East Timorese.

If rejected Indonesia says the Portugal, which is still the administering power in its former colony, and the United Nations

would be responsible for the territory which could then move towards independence.

On Monday Alatas said the two ministers were searching with UN help for a mechanism that would enable the East Timorese to express their views in an "effective manner, but without a vote and in a consultation short of a referendum."

But "we have an open mind as to what kind of methodology may be realised."

We must find a methodology that is acceptable to all, he said. His remarks contradicted comments by Gama on Sunday who told reporters that Alatas had for the first time at the closed door talks accepted the idea of a "popular consultation" that would be a referendum in all but name.

Gama stressed Monday that Portugal believed the East Timorese should be consulted in a democratic way on their fate.

Marker said his team was looking at options but "there are no short cuts to democracy, much less the question of short circuiting the democratic process that is out that cannot be done."

Anwar accuses Mahathir aides of conspiring to destroy him

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 9: Jailed politician Anwar Ibrahim on Tuesday accused close aides of his former boss Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of masterminding a campaign to destroy him, reports AP.

According to top police officials, hate mail directed at him was part of a scheme in which Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin and Consumer Affairs Minister Megat Junid were involved. Anwar told the court in the most direct accusations so far against his former colleagues.

Anwar was arrested Sept 20, two weeks after his firing by Mahathir sparked massive anti-government protests. Mahathir claimed his handpicked successor was morally unfit to lead this predominantly Muslim Southeast Asian nation.

Anwar claims he is a victim of a political conspiracy and says the 10 corruption and sex charges against him are based on false allegations in a letter written to Mahathir.

Anwar began testifying in his defence Monday on the first four corruption charges, he

faces an additional corruption and five sex charges at another trial.

The police "came up with this grand design of some political personalities out to finish me," Anwar said from the witness box in the colonial brick courthouse beneath a Moorish clock tower.

"They alerted me on the seriousness and the dimensions of these allegations and the political campaign against me," he said.

The warnings about a plot came during regular briefings he received from Mohamed Said Awang, then the head of the country's top police intelligence unit, the Special Branch.

Investigations into hate mail sent to him in 1997 revealed that powerful politicians loyal to Mahathir were key actors in the political plot, Anwar testified.

Mahathir, Daim and Megat Junid are among the witnesses defence lawyers plan to call during the trial, now in its fourth month.

When the trial opened in November, Mohamed Said tes-

tified that police, acting on Anwar's orders, had coerced retractions from two people who had made allegations of sodomy and adultery against Anwar.

Ummi Hafida Ali, in a letter addressed to Mahathir, alleged that Anwar was sleeping with her sister-in-law, the wife of Anwar's private secretary.

Ummi also encouraged Aziz Abu Bakar, a former chauffeur in Anwar's household, to make the allegation that he was repeatedly sodomized by Anwar.

Anwar said he had asked the police to probe the hate mail, but was startled by their finding that top politicians were involved.

"They pressed upon me that the involvement of Daim, Megat Junid and Aziz Shamsuddin — who are known to be confidants of the prime minister — would certainly complicate their investigation," Anwar testified.

Aziz Shamsuddin is Mahathir's political secretary. Anwar said that police also named a powerful governing party politician who was forced to resign from a state chief minister's office after being accused of statutory rape.

"Police informed me of the collusion of Rahim Tamby Chik," Anwar said, Rahim resigned as the chief minister of Malacca state following allegations that were highlighted by opposition politicians in 1995.

He was never prosecuted but an opposition lawmaker was sentenced to 18 months in jail for printing a pamphlet that questioned that lack of prosecution. Anwar has openly expressed sympathy for the jailed member of Parliament, Lim Guan Eng.

Anwar said that during the probe into Ummi's letter, police never suggested that one day Anwar himself could be prosecuted on the basis of those allegations.

"The question of criminal action was never, ever contemplated or considered," he said. "I was the complainant and the victim."

Under Pakistani law, a prisoner facing trial is granted statutory bail if his or her case shows no substantive progress within two years of arrest, lawyers said.

In the Murtaza Bhutto murder case, only 12 out of 223 prosecution witnesses have testified since the trial began in early 1997. All the jailed men have spent two years in jail.

The key accused, Benazir's husband Asif Ali Zardari, was granted bail, on medical grounds recently, but remains in prison facing several other

Murtaza Bhutto murder case

14 accused freed on bail

KARACHI, Feb 9: Fourteen Pakistani police officers facing trial over the murder of former premier Benazir Bhutto's brother Mir Murtaza Bhutto were released on bail on Monday, lawyers said, reports AP.

Judge Yasmin Abbasi granted bail to 14 of the 17 jailed officers after there was no substantive progress in the case over the past two years, they said.

Three officers, including the ex-chief of intelligence bureau Masood Sharif and police officers Masood Wajid Durrani and Rai Tahir, were denied bail. The reasons for the rejection were they could appeal to superior courts.

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criminal and corruption charges. Former Karachi police chief Shoab Suddle was granted bail in the same case in December 1996.

Two other police officers and former Sindh chief minister Abdullah Shah are listed as fugitives in the case that rocked the Benazir government.

Murtaza and seven of his political colleagues were killed in a police shootout near his seaside Clifton residence in September 1996.

Social worker gunned down in Karachi

KARACHI, Feb 9: An elderly female social worker was gunned down by unidentified assailants today in Pakistan's troubled port city of Karachi, police and family sources said, reports AP.

Naheed Farzana, 50, was shot dead at her home in the city's Lhazatabad district, police said, describing it as "targeted" killing.

The assailants sprayed her with bullets from outside after she refused to open the gate, a family member said.

House prosecutors bring case to close Justice Dept to probe Starr's handling of Lewinsky affair

WASHINGTON, Feb 9: The US Justice Department has advised Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr that it intends to investigate his handling of the Lewinsky affair, officials said Monday, reports AP.

The department's internal watchdog agency, the Office of Professional Responsibility, recently wrote Starr of its plan to begin an investigation of several matters, but the office is awaiting Starr's response before starting the inquiry, according to officials who spoke on condition of anonymity.

One topic for the impending investigation is the Jan. 16, 1998 offer by Starr's deputies to former White House intern Monica Lewinsky of an immunity deal conditioned on her not discussing it with her lawyer, Frank Carter.

Justice Department rules prohibit government prosecutors from discussing immunity deals with defendants outside the presence of their lawyers.

Starr's office is required to follow these rules unless doing so would undermine the purpose of his investigation.

Starr has denied any impropriety in his office's dealings with Ms. Lewinsky.

The other topics of investigation could not be learned immediately. The letter to Starr was first reported in Monday's edition of Newsweek.

Last November, the department inched to the brink of investigating Starr over the handling of the immunity deal and other matters, but he protested in a visit with top Justice officials.

Another report adds: Urging senators, "Don't be fooled by the president's excuses," House prosecutors Monday brought their impeachment case against President Bill Clinton to a close with a final plea for his removal from office. The chief White House lawyer accused lawmakers of hurting the country by "wanting to win too much."

White House Counsel Charles Ruff said "We know the pain the president has caused."

America with his effort to conceal his affair with Monica Lewinsky. But he urged senators to set aside politics and conclude that Clinton's transgressions don't rise to the level of impeachable offenses as the House charged.

"You have heard the managers' vision... But I believe their vision to be too dark, a vision too little attuned to the needs of the people, too little sensitive to the needs of our democracy," Ruff said in his most direct attack on the 13 Republican House lawmakers who have prosecuted Clinton.

The presidential lawyer said the House impeachment case was "more focused on retribution, more designed to achieve partisan ends" than on the high standards the Founding Fathers had set for removing a president from office.

Off the Record

Is a free computer worth your personal life?

PASADENA: An electronic commerce company offered Monday to give free computers to as many as one million people in exchange for details about their personal lives, including where they go and what they buy on the Internet, reports AP.

Users must be willing to look at an incessant barrage of advertisements that will appear on-screen whenever the computer is turned on.

On Monday, plenty of people seemed willing to make the trade with Free-PC.com. Access to the company's Web site was clogged. Phone lines were busy, and some people even showed up at the company's offices looking for free computers.

Initially, Free-PC.com will give 10,000 new Compaq Presario computers to applicants willing to provide information such as their age, income and hobbies. If there's enough demand, the number of free computers could rise to 1 million, the company said.

Consumer advocates warned applicants to carefully consider whether a new computer is worth their personal information. The application asks consumers how much money they make, what kinds of cars they own, what hobbies and interests they pursue and to which magazines they subscribe. Once a person is accepted into the system, the company also will track which Internet sites they visit and which ads they click onto.

"For those people that care about their privacy, or might care about their privacy in the future, I urge them to think long and hard because you have to provide information about your history to this company," said Evan Hendricks, editor of the newsletter Privacy Times. "They're going to start collecting information about you, your finances and your personal tastes."

LaVigne said Free-PC.com will use the information only to build a demographic profile to determine which ads should appear on the user's screen. Companies that advertise through Free-PC will never see personal information about participants, he vowed.

"We're going to have to build a trust level with people," he said. "People give their personal information for a lot of things. They don't like giving it if they don't get anything in return. All we're saying is we're going to give you something in return."



Pop group All Saints, (L-R): Natalie Appleton, Shaznay Lewis, Nicole Appleton and Melanie Blatt, appeared together for the first time in months during a press conference in London Monday to end the split rumours and add five dates to their summer tour. — AFP photo

US, ROK, Japan begin talks on DPRK's suspected N-facility

SEOUL, Feb 9: Senior officials of the United States, South Korea and Japan began talks here today on an underground facility in communist North Korea suspected of being used for nuclear purposes, reports AP.

The US delegation is headed by Charles Kartman, Special Envoy for Korean Affairs, while the head of the US Bureau at the foreign ministry here, Kwon Jong Rak leads the South Korean team.

Japan's top official for North Korean relations, Terusuke Terada, heads the Japanese delegation.

The talks will concentrate on North Korea's suspected nuclear site and its missile programme, a ministry official said.

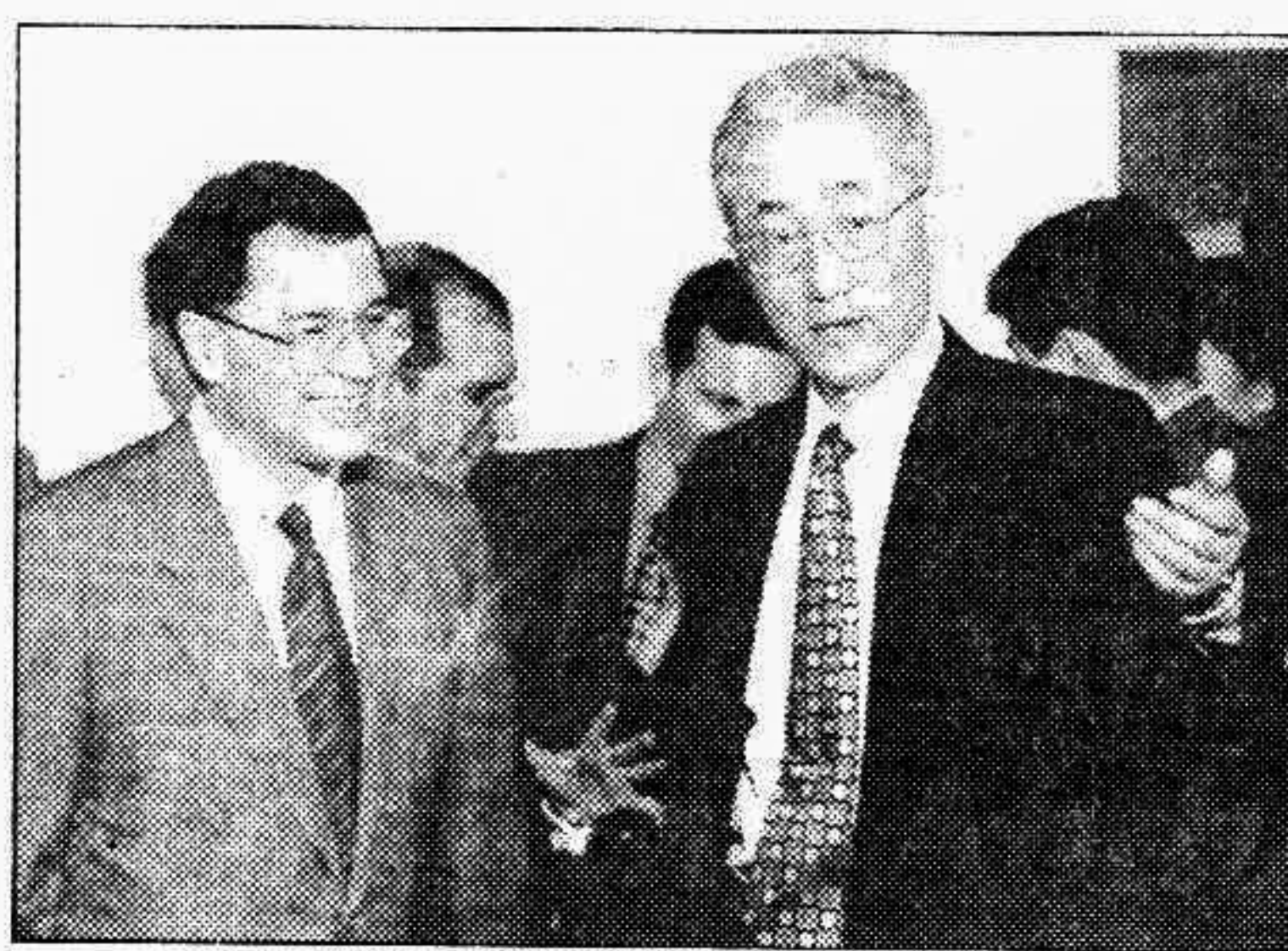
The United States and North Korea reportedly made significant progress in their negotiations about the site last month in Geneva.

At those talks, the North reportedly agreed to allow Washington's two time inspection of the underground facility which is suspected of being used to revive the unpredictable Stalinist nation's nuclear ambitions.

In return the United States will provide the famine stricken nation with food aid, reports have said.

Cash strapped North Korea had initially refused access of the site and then demanded 300 million dollars in compensation for a one time inspection of the Kumchangni complex.

Under a US-North Korean



South Korean senior official Kwon Jong-Rak (R) ushers the US special envoy for Korean Affairs Charles Kartman (L) to a seat before the start of a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Seoul yesterday. Senior officials from the US, South Korea and Japan met for the talks aimed to clear suspicions over North Korea's underground facility suspected of being used for nuclear purposes. — AFP photo

agreement in Geneva in 1994, the North agreed to shut down its graphite moderated nuclear reactors, which were suspected of covertly producing plutonium for nuclear weapons.

In return a consortium grouping the European Union, Japan, South Korea and the United States agreed to supply North Korea with two new safe nuclear reactors and provide it with 500,000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil annually until they are completed.

Meanwhile, Japan's Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura will visit South Korea on Wednesday for talks focused on North Korea's suspected nuclear site and its missile development.



(L-R): Crown Prince Hamzah, Prince Ali, Prince Faysal, King Abdullah, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Prince Hassan and Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh at the namaj-e-janaza of King Hussein in Amman Monday. Kings, presidents, sheikhs and sultans from around the world attended the state funeral of the 63-year-old Hashemite monarch, who died Sunday in Amman after a seven-month battle against cancer. — AFP photo

Western leaders voice their approval of King Abdullah II

AMMAN, Feb 9: US President Bill Clinton gave Jordan's new King Abdullah his seal of approval Monday and pressed him to carry on his father's peacemaking legacy with Israel and the Palestinians, report agencies.

"I have great confidence in the young King of Jordan, he clearly understands his mission," Clinton told US embassy workers here following King Hussein's funeral.

Clinton reminisced about the late king during his brief talks with the 37-year old monarch who told the US president he and his siblings had been instructed all their lives about their duties to the Jordanians and to the Mideast peace process.

Clinton said the new king told him "We know what we are supposed to do and we will do it."

The President told King Abdullah that the United States is ready to do "whatever will be most helpful," according to US national security advisory Sandy Berger, who said the two

had also discussed Jordan's financial troubles.

"This is a very, very impressive man who has the deft touch of his father but will certainly put his own stamp on it," Berger concluded.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright also says she has assurances from King Abdullah of Jordan that he will "carry his father's flag" in pursuing peace in the Middle East.

Promising to help the new monarch, Albright cautioned Iraq against any intimidation of its smaller, pro-Western neighbour.

"We have made it clear to Saddam Hussein that were he to threaten any of his neighbours it would be a grave mistake and we would be prepared to act," Albright told The Associated Press on Monday. "And that goes for Jordan."

In looking at the Middle East, the death of King Hussein and prospects for a successful succession in Jordan were mostly on her mind.

Two weeks ago, Albright

made an unscheduled stop in Amman to size up Abdullah, who had been named Crown Prince by his dying father, and to offer him financial and other assistance.

"I think we know quite a lot about him," Albright said. "He is somebody who has been really dedicated in terms of fulfilling his father's wishes. What I was very impressed with was that he made it very clear — the phrase he used is 'I am going to carry my father's flag' — and that was in relationship to continuity in foreign policy and his dedication to the peace process."

Clearly impressed with the 37-year-old monarch, and the network he already is building with Arab leaders of his generation, Albright still withheld judgement, at least so far as whether he could emulate his father.

"You don't step into the shoes of a great father and a great leader and not realise that there is some space in the toes," Albright said.

King Abdullah II also won

praise from both British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac here Monday on the day of his father's state funeral.

"King Abdullah has many of the same characteristics as his father," said Blair, who was among an impressive array of world leaders to attend the funeral.

He said the 37-year-old monarch was "a man of considerable personal intelligence and ability and energy, and that, I think, is of great comfort to Jordan and indeed to the world at this time."

The French President who met the king after the funeral voiced confidence that Jordan, a lynchpin of the crisis-hit Middle East peace process, would keep on the same course of moderation.

"The king has broad shoulders and certainly he will ensure the continuity of the actions of his father. I'm convinced of that," Chirac told reporters.

"He's a man in whom you can place your confidence," he said.

BRIEFLY

Hun Sen begins visit to China:

Prime Minister Hun Sen left Cambodia yesterday for a four-day visit to Beijing as speculation swirled over whether China will block international efforts to prosecute Khmer Rouge leaders. AP reports from Phnom Penh.

Hun Sen and Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji are expected to sign agreements on extradition, tourism, cultural cooperation and future loans, according to a Cambodian government statement.

US begins AIDS vaccine test:

The first test of a human AIDS vaccine in Africa has begun in Uganda, says the US National Institutes of Health, which is funding the study, AP says from Washington.

Monday's announcement was pegged as an important step toward developing a vaccine for countries hardest hit by the epidemic. AIDS has devastated Africa.

UN approves hajj flights for Libyans:

The United Nations approved flights for Libyans to travel to Saudi Arabia for the annual pilgrimage to the Muslim holy sites of Makkah and Medina, AP says from United Nations.

The United Nations has banned air travel in or out of Libya since 1992 to force it to turn over two suspects in the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am jetliner over Lockerbie, Scotland. But the Security Council's sanctions committee on Libya has made an exception for the pilgrimage, or hajj.

Ex-Indian army chief dies:

General Krishnaswamy Sundarji, 69, a former Indian army chief whose military exercises almost sparked a war with Pakistan in 1986 has died following a prolonged illness, newspapers reported yesterday, AP says from New Delhi.

In late 1986 he conducted India's largest military exercise, codenamed "Operation Brasstacks," near the winding Pakistan border. Sundarji also headed troops which stormed the Golden Temple, Sikhdom's holiest shrine, in Amritsar city in June 1984 to flush out Sikh separatist guerrillas.

Novelist Irish Murdoch dead:

Dame Iris Murdoch, the Irish-born writer who became one of Britain's most critically-acclaimed novelists, died on Monday aged 79, her family announced, AP says from London.

The novelist and philosopher had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease for the past five years. Dublin-born dame Irish Murdoch's works were idyllic studies of the human condition which never bowed to literary fads. Her works The Sea won the 1976 Booker Prize and The Sacred and Profane Love Machine won the Whitbread Prize in 1974.



Queen Noor, King Hussein's widow, mourns the loss of her husband. — AFP photo

A quiet farewell from his queen

AMMAN, Feb 9: Queen Noor watched her husband's burial from afar, reports AP.

The American-born wife of King Hussein hugged the monarch's sister in a courtyard about 30 metres from the grave. Muslim tradition prohibits women — even wives — from attending burial rites.

The scene was a profound summary of Noor's life since becoming Hussein's fourth wife in 1978: an Ivy League-educated architect who adopted and adhered to the customs of her husband's desert kingdom.

Noor paid her last respects to Hussein in a private room at the Bab al-Salam, or Door of Peace, palace on the outskirts of Amman. Noor, 47, then emerged with puffy and tear-clouded eyes, looking pale and wan in a long black skirt and jacket. Her hair was covered with a white scarf in a sign of traditional mourning.

She stood in the palace's doorway with her two daughters and watched Hussein's body carried away for a 15-kilometre procession through Amman to the Raghdan Palace compound, where he was buried next to his father and grandfather.

Noor was later driven to Raghdan and waited with her daughters, Nara, 15, and Raya, who turns 13 on Tuesday. They went to a second-floor room after world leaders and other mourners filed past the coffin and the body was moved to a nearby mosque to begin the burial rites, said palace sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Media coverage in the palace was banned.

The queen walked with her hands crossed and often bowed to salute soldiers greeting her at the entrance of Raghdan, where her husband began his reign in 1952 at the age of 17.

Golkar likely to nominate Habibie for Nov polls

JAKARTA, Feb 9: Indonesia's ruling party Golkar is likely to nominate President BJ Habibie as its candidate in November polls, a newspaper reported today, says Reuters.

The Bisnis Indonesia newspaper quoted Golkar chairman Akbar Tandjung as saying that Habibie was Golkar's best candidate for the November presidential election, which will follow the June 7 parliamentary election.

"Certainly he is the best candidate that Golkar could nominate," Tandjung was quoted as saying.

But Tandjung said Golkar may nominate other candidates and the party had not officially settled on Habibie.

Habibie is a close friend and protégé of disgraced former President Suharto. He replaced Suharto in May after the former general quit amid widespread rioting and the country's worst social and economic crisis in three decades.

Opinion polls show he is deeply unpopular with Indonesians, trailing well behind opposition leaders Megawati Sukarnoputri and Aniem Rais.

'US needs a leader to inspire trust'

MANCHESTER, New Hampshire, Feb 9: Elizabeth Dole, at the brink of launching a presidential campaign, said Monday night that the presidency has been tarnished under Bill Clinton and America needs a leader "with the integrity to inspire trust," reports AP.

"If I run, this will be an important reason why. Because the United States of America deserves a government worthy of her people," the former American Red Cross president told 1,200 people at a local Chamber of Commerce event.

As the Senate heard closing arguments in Clinton's impeachment trial, Dole was in this first-in-the-nation primary state telling voters that "confidence in our leaders is shaky." She declared: "If our leaders are not worthy, we have the power to elect leaders who are."

Though she did not mention the president by name, a senior adviser said the speech drew a clear contrast between Clinton's character and what Dole thinks Americans should expect of their next president.