



Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji delivers his government's work report to the National People's Congress (NPC) which opened an 11-day annual session, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. - AFP photo

# Chinese PM warns Taiwan, talks tough on corruption

National People's Congress session opens

BEIJING, Mar 5: China will not "sit idly by" and accept Taiwan going its own way but hopes the island will accept peaceful reunification. Prime Minister Zhu Rongji said Sunday in a nationally televised speech, reports AP.

Zhu, in his annual address at the opening session of Parliament, also demanded a tougher fight against corruption and warned that efforts so far "fall far short of what the people expect of us."

Overshadowing this year's 11-day session of the National People's Congress are corruption investigations in two wealthy coastal provinces that go as high as the governing State Council and Communist Party Politburo.

Rampant graft has undermined popular support for the Communists, who hold a monopoly on political power.

In addition, a former vice chairman of the legislature is under investigation for economic crimes, and a former deputy governor of Jiangxi province, Hu Changqing, has been sentenced to death for

bribe-taking.

While Zhu did not mention the scandals, the devoted much of his speech to anti-corruption themes and warned that all major corruption cases would be investigated and corrupt officials would be severely punished.

In his appeal to Taiwan, Zhu did not specifically repeat the government's latest threat, made in February, to use force if Taiwan puts off reunification talks indefinitely.

The premier said Beijing would not "sit idly by" at what any serious separatist activity aimed at undermining China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, such as those advocating the two-state theory or the independence of Taiwan. Zhu said. But he stressed a conciliatory approach.

"We place our hopes on the Taiwan authorities and even more on the people of Taiwan," he said. "We are willing to continue working with the vast numbers of our Taiwan compatriots in developing cross-strait relations and achieving peaceful reunification of the

motherland."

The mainland and the island of Taiwan have been ruled separately since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949. China claims Taiwan as a province that must be reunited eventually.

Zhu, who has guided China's economic development, said Beijing would push ahead with measures to reform debt-ridden state enterprises, develop infrastructure and stimulate domestic demand.

He also called for tougher police work, including prosecution of members of "evil cults." The government's crackdown on the multimillion-member Falun Gong was one of China's "great victories" of the past year, he said.

As about 5,000 of China's political elite — top leaders, legislative deputies and members of an advisory group — gathered in the Great Hall of the People at Tiananmen Square, police at the nearby Gate of Heavenly Peace detained at least 16 people suspected of being followers of Falun Gong and checked bags and questioned

many others. The banned spiritual movement draws on ideas of Buddhism, Taoism and its founder, a former government clerk who lives in exile in New York.

Police several days ago rounded up 68 Falun Gong followers in Beijing and were holding them in the Huangshandian Drug Rehabilitation Centre to prevent them from making trouble during the legislative meeting, a Falun Gong follower said Sunday, speaking on condition of anonymity. The 68 were on a hunger strike, some in their third day, he said.

The largely powerless National People's Congress meets annually to approve decisions made by Communist Party leaders and discuss national issues.

Its agenda includes reforming inefficient state-run enterprises and intensifying a government campaign to develop China's impoverished but resource-rich western regions. Such issue have a strong bearing on the ability of the Communist Party to maintain control after 50 years in power.

# Australia may accept more immigrants

SYDNEY, Mar 5: Australia was considering accepting more migrants as demand for skilled workers grows. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said today, reports Reuters.

Increasing the current intake of 80,000 migrants a year was one of a number of options that could be put to cabinet in coming months after comprehensive consultations around the country on immigration policy. Ruddock told Channel 7 television.

"We look at the pipelines, at the number of people who are applying to enter Australia, and the one positive which may give us some scope for growth (in overall migrant numbers) is that the pipeline for skilled migration is at the moment growing," Ruddock told Channel 7 television.

Ruddock said the size of the intake would be driven by demand for skilled migrants, who are now allocated about half of the migrant vacancies in Australia. Other spots are allocated for reuniting families and refugees.

"You can carry additional family reunion, additional refugee numbers, but you can only do it in a positive way economically if the skilled categories are there," Ruddock said. Prime Minister John Howard

has called for a comprehensive debate on immigration as businesses press his government to allow more skilled workers in. The Australian newspaper said on Saturday.

"I think we need a comprehensive debate about population and immigration," Howard said in an interview with the newspaper. "If I could be persuaded there are immediate-term dividends for a lift in the immigration target, well I'd be in favour of it."

Howard's conservative Liberal/National party coalition government cut the country's migrant intake by about 9,000 to 74,000 in its first year in office in 1996/97.

But Australia has a relatively small population of 19 million and the business sector is leading a push for higher immigration. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the government should allow 123,000 migrants a year.

Ruddock said a contingency reserve of 5,000 places for skilled workers had not been used by business this year, suggesting companies were opting to bring in temporary staff.

A reduction in the number of migrants was unlikely to be one of the options put to cabinet, he said.

# Commissions were paid in Bofors gun deal: VP Singh

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: Former prime minister V P Singh, in his statement to CBI, has alleged that Rajiv Gandhi misled the country by saying that no commissions were paid in the Rs 1437 crore Bofors gun deal when it was actually paid, reports PTI.

I had reiterated that commissions were paid in the Bofors gun deal and payments were made even after the Bofors deal and Rajiv Gandhi kept the country in dark, Singh said.

Singh, who had resigned as defence minister from Gandhi's cabinet in 1987 following differences over controversial defence deals, said commissions were taken through a bogus and front company named Svenska.

I had released the details of three transactions credited to A/C No. 99921-71 of the said company with Swiss Bank Corporation, 2 rue de la confederation, Geneva, Switzerland, he

said in the statement which forms part of the CBI Chargesheet in the case filed on October 22, last year.

Regarding Ottavio Guattrocchi's links with Rajiv Gandhi, he cited an instance where he was asked by the then prime minister to meet the Italian businessman.

When I became the finance minister, Guattrocchi wanted to meet me on several occasions but as he was not holding any official position, I did not give any appointment. Singh told the CBI.

The former prime minister said one day Rajiv Gandhi asked me to meet Guattrocchi and accordingly I had an appointment, and added that the Italian businessman gave him a memorandum on the HBJ Pipeline which was rejected by his ministry after processing. Subsequently, one day Rajiv

Gandhi personally called me and asked me to examine the whole (HBJ Pipeline) contracts in the light of certain suggestions and dictated me those points.

Those points happened to be the same as Guattrocchi had represented in his memorandum given to me earlier, he said, adding that "I got the whole thing examined but the Italian offer was much costlier, and therefore, as finance minister I refused to clear it."

According to Singh's statement recorded by CBI at 1, Rajaji Marg, New Delhi on September 4, 1998, Rajiv Gandhi had even asked him to meet the then Swedish Prime Minister, Olof Palme, on the Bofors gun deal issue, when he (Singh) had gone to Sweden to attend a discussion as finance minister prior to Uruguay Round of GATT.

# Bank looted, 2 policemen kidnapped in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Mar 5: An army of 300 extreme left-wing Maoist guerrillas attacked a police checkpoint, wounding four guards and taking two junior officers hostage, police sources said today, reports AFP.

The same group looted a nearby commercial bank a short time later of valuables worth almost 175,000 dollars, they said.

The attack on the police post at Binayakasthan in Achham district, 290 kilometres west of Kathmandu, started late Friday night and lasted until early Saturday, they said.

There were only six police guards including two junior officers when the Maoists made a sudden attack, they said.

Both the junior police officers were taken into custody by the Maoists and detained at an unknown destination, the sources said.

# India to maintain nuclear deterrent

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: India will maintain a nuclear deterrent as long as weapons of mass destruction remain a threat to its national security, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said today, reports AFP.

The United News of India quoted Vajpayee as saying in the southern town of Kaiga that New Delhi was committed to comprehensive global disarmament.

"But till all weapons of mass destruction are dismantled, we will continue to be guided by the imperative of the country's strategic autonomy and the need to maintain a credible minimum nuclear deterrent," he said.

Vajpayee on Saturday reiterated that India would not be pressured into signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) or other non-proliferation pacts which it considers discriminatory against emerging nuclear powers.

Since conducting a series of shock nuclear tests in May 1998, India has come under intense pressure to sign the CTBT, especially from the United States.

Non-proliferation issues are expected to figure high on the agenda when President Bill Clinton visits India later this month.

"Over the years, we followed a policy of restraint in the area of nuclear weapons," Vajpayee said Sunday.

"Finally, in May 1998 we were compelled to exercise the nuclear option due to deterioration of the regional security environment."

Vajpayee recalled that at the time of the tests he had pledged India would follow a "no first use" policy.

This showed our confidence in our nuclear strength. It also revealed our desire that weapons of mass destruction should not be used by anybody,"

# BRIEFLY

**Fresh fighting kills 21 Tigers:** At least 21 Tamil Tiger guerrillas have been shot dead by government forces in renewed clashes in northern Sri Lanka. The defence ministry said on Sunday. AFP reports from Colombo.

Security forces killed 10 members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Wel Oya region Saturday while the others were killed on the Jaffna peninsula, the ministry said.

**Polish envoy freed in Yemen:** The Polish ambassador to Yemen, who was kidnapped by armed tribesmen several days ago, was freed Saturday, a police official said. AFP reports from Sanaa.

Krzysztof Suprowicz was "safe and sound and was accompanied to Sanaa by tribal dignitaries who had mediated with the kidnappers and by police," the official, who asked not to be identified, said. Suprowicz was released after the authorities issued an ultimatum to the kidnappers, ordering them to free him before midnight (0300 BST) the official said.

**3 Aceh rebels killed:** Indonesian troops have killed three alleged separatist rebels, including a man they identified as a rebel commander, in a shootout in the troubled province of Aceh, a report said Sunday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Indonesian security forces exchanged fire with rebels at two separate locations on Saturday, in South Aceh and in West Aceh, the Antara news agency said.

# Buddhists oppose peace efforts in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Mar 5: Sri Lanka's influential Buddhist clergy is planning to launch a campaign to prevent the government from introducing far-reaching constitutional reforms aimed at ending the long ethnic war, local media said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

The independent Sunday Times said that the clergy were also opposed to Norway's efforts to facilitate peace talks between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels.

The LTTE has been fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in Sinhala Buddhist majority Sri Lanka's north and east since 1983.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government has proposed giving wide autonomy to regional councils, including

one administered by Tamils, to go some way towards meeting the LTTE's demand for a homeland.

Kumaratunga is to meet the Ranil Wickremesinghe, leader of the main opposition United National Party (UNP), this week to trash out a consensus between Sri Lanka's two biggest political parties over the proposed reforms before taking them to the LTTE.

The Sunday Times said that the chief priests of two of the main Buddhist schools in Sri Lanka and leaders of other Buddhist organisations had recently met to discuss the government plans for peace, which they said were detrimental to the Sinhala cause.

Almost 70 per cent of the population is Buddhist.



Protesters clash with police during a march outside the presidential palace of La Moneda in Santiago, Chile, on Saturday. Local citizens are protesting the return of ex-dictator General Augusto Pinochet to Chile after he was released by the British government. - AFP photo

# New suit filed against Pinochet

SANTIAGO, Mar 5: Lawyers Saturday filed a new lawsuit against Augusto Pinochet and protesters demanded his prosecution, while the ex-dictator cheered by supporters, rested at home following his release from Britain, reports AFP.

Pinochet, 84, who had been found unfit to face trial in Spain, showed no signs of ill health as he appeared on two occasions at the door of his Santiago home waving with both hands to some 200 supporters.

Pinochet spent the day resting and surrounded by his family, said Marco Antonio Pinochet, one of his sons.

Human rights groups say the ex-strongman's evidently robust health when he stepped off the plane that flew him home on Friday ridiculed claims he

could not face trial.

It appears that Pinochet is in a perfectly good condition physically and mentally to be prosecuted," said lawmaker Isidoro Allende, daughter of President Salvador Allende, who committed suicide during the September 1973 military coup that brought Pinochet to power.

The deputy was among an estimated 4,000 people who participated in a protest to demand that Pinochet be put on trial in Chile.

Police used batons and water cannons to disperse protesters who hurled stones at them. Three people were injured, including a press photographer, and six others were detained, a police said.

At the same time, lawyers filed a new lawsuit, the 61st such claim issued against Pinochet in Chile, where his 17-

year dictatorship has been blamed for more than 3,000 deaths and many more cases of torture.

Human rights lawyers had earlier requested the lifting of the immunity Pinochet enjoys as a senator for life.

"Of course his immunity must be lifted," said Fabiola Levener, as she and another attorney filed a lawsuit Saturday on behalf of relatives of two students believed to have been executed by Pinochet's political police in 1974.

"We will do everything we can so that the thousands of victims can obtain truth and justice," said Letelier, whose brother Orlando Letelier, a former minister and leading opponent of the dictatorship was killed by Pinochet's political police in Washington in September 1976.

# Di's bodyguard wishes he had died instead of her

LONDON, Mar 5: The sole survivor of the auto crash that killed Princess Diana says he wishes he had died instead of her, reports AP.

Trevor Rees-Jones said in an interview with The Daily Telegraph, published Saturday, that he feels haunted by the accident on Aug 30, 1997. Diana, her boyfriend Dodi Fayed and driver Henri Paul were killed, and Rees-Jones was severely injured.

Tests showed that Paul's blood alcohol level was more than three times the legal limit, and he also was taken prescription drugs including the antidepressant Prozac.

"If I could have died and those three survived, I would have done it," Rees-Jones said. "I could have done something ... I go mad thinking about it only."

The Daily Telegraph will serialize excerpts from Rees-Jones' new book, "The Bodyguard's Story."

In the book, Rees-Jones takes issue with his former employer, Mohammed Al Fayed, who has said he believed his son and the princess were the victims of a conspiracy. He has accused Prince Philip, the queen's husband, of being part of that conspiracy.

"I still sympathize with him for losing his son. But I can't sympathize with him for accusing Prince Philip of murdering Dodi and the Princess or me of not doing my job properly," The Daily Telegraph quoted Rees-Jones as saying.

"It's ridiculous. What happened happened. I think everyone's trying to get on with life now, but Fayed, who's never going to be happy until his version of events is taken as the truth. Which it won't be. No one wanted to believe she'd gone because of someone drinking and



Princess Diana speeding in some horrible Paris underpass, did they? People put her on this pedestal and it didn't seem a fitting end.

Al Fayed issued a statement Saturday saying he believes that Rees-Jones' story was being used to "reinforce an Establishment cover up."

"I shall not rest until all the facts are exposed," Al Fayed said. Before the crash, Rees-Jones said he had complained that Dodi Fayed had made his job more difficult by failing to disclose where he and the princess were going. He said he had intended to confront Fayed once Diana had departed.

"I was going to say to Dodi, 'You've got to give us more information or get someone else in to do the job.'"

Criticisms of Dodi Fayed in the new interview had only been raised to "deflect from Trevor's own part in what happened," Al Fayed responded. "His interview and his book will do nothing to aid the process of investigation, nor will it change perceptions of his part in events."

# Russian troops will stay in Chechnya 'for decades'

MOSCOW, Mar 5: Russian troops will remain in Chechnya "for decades" in their bid to maintain control over the rebel province, according to Duma parliamentary Speaker Gennady Seleznev, reports AFP.

Chechens are not the kind of people who admit their defeat. Guerilla warfare will continue for a long time after military units have left," Seleznev warned Saturday, the Itar-Tass news agency reported.

The presence of Russian troops in Chechnya will last for decades," he added.

Seleznev's comments came amid increasingly fierce resistance from Chechen rebel fighters.

The latest fighting raged

Saturday in the southern Argun Gorge, an area which Moscow had earlier reported to be under its control. Reports from the region spoke of heavy losses from both sides.

Earlier in the day a news report state 75 federal soldiers had been killed in another ambush Friday night. Russian authorities denied the claim.

Acting President Vladimir Putin summoned Defence Minister Igor Sergeev to the Kremlin to discuss the situation in Chechnya, following the destruction in Grozny of a special police column by rebels on Thursday.

At least 20 elite OMON troops died in the attack in Staropromyslovsky district of

Grozny, which had been reported cleared of all insurgents last month.

Putin questioned the competence of the commanders in charge of the unit that was ambushed.

The rebels last used such attacks in the 1994-96 Chechen war which culminated in Russia's defeat and withdrawal.

In Cairo on Saturday, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov invited a team of Arab League observers to the north Caucasus "to investigate the facts and find out what's really happening."

A UN special envoy will arrive in Moscow on Sunday to discuss humanitarian aid for Chechnya.

# Thai Senate polls hailed

BANGKOK, Mar 5: Thailand's first Senate election was hailed Sunday as a major advance towards full-fledged democracy, despite rampant vote-buying and victories by wives of cabinet ministers, provincial godfathers and suspected underworld figures, reports AP.

Observers praised the unprecedented voter turnout — at least 70 per cent by the Election Commission's unofficial count — and wins by independently-minded social workers, human rights activists and technocrats with sterling reputations.

The commission was double-checking figures and said officials results would be announced late Sunday.

"A new chapter of Thai politics has just been opened," said former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun.

# World's population is getting fatter

WASHINGTON, Mar 5: The world's population is growing at the waist. For the first time in history, there may be as many people overweight, 1.1 billion, as underfed, researchers report, says AP.

Just because people are gaining weight does not mean the world is better fed or healthier than it was two decades ago when millions more were starving, the environmental research group Worldwatch Institute said in a report released Sunday. In fact, the report says being obese and underweight of ten results from the same problem, malnutrition.

In some countries there is a growing "weight gap." Well-off minorities in India, China, Brazil and some other developing nations are growing fat as the poor go hungry. America and other wealthier

countries have the opposite problem: The richer and better educated tend to eat right, while the poor often balloon from a diet of cheap and fatty fast foods.

"Often, nations simply have traded hunger for obesity, and diseases of poverty for diseases of excess," said Worldwatch researcher Brian Halweil, who wrote the report with fellow researcher Gary Gardner.

In the United States, 55 per cent of the population is overweight, with one in four adults considered obese, according to the most recent surveys cited in the report.

Despite overall progress in feeding the world, this led to sharp reductions of underweight children in Asia and Latin America since 1980, the number of underfed children continues to grow in the poorest countries, in sub-Saharan Africa.

Both the overweight and the underweight live in worlds of sickness, disability, shortened life expectancy and lower productivity levels, Halweil said.

This is not based on some fashion magazine's notion of proper weight or the standard set by the latest sitcom star, but on a widely accepted international standard, Halweil said.

The conclusions are based on the body mass index, or BMI, with 19-25 considered normal. "We have the coexistence of a sizable and growing population

of overweight people with a persistent population of underweight people in poorer countries," Halweil said. Both groups suffer from malnutrition, he said a condition of nutritional deficiency often associated only with those who have too little to eat.

Worldwatch cites nutrition programs in Cuba and Kerala state in India as significantly reducing the number of underweight people by focusing on vulnerable women and children. In Singapore, a school programme called the Trim and Fit Scheme has cut obesity among children by up to 50 per cent.

The Worldwatch report also proposes a tax on foods based on nutritional value per calorie, with fast food items getting the highest tax and fresh fruits and vegetable possibly sold tax-free.



A model presents a mottled fawn ensemble by Spanish designer Adolfo Dominguez during the Autumn-Winter 2000/2001 ready-to-wear collections in Paris on Saturday. - AFP photo