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CHINA WARNS NORTH KOREAN DICTATOR

April 21, 2004 The London Daily Telegraph reported: AChina bluntly told the North Korean dictator Kim Jong-il yesterday that he must end his dangerous and eccentric policies.

The paramount leaders of China gave Kim a series of lectures during his visit to Beijing which, in line with his reclusive habits, remains an official secret. China's three most powerful men told him to compromise in talks on the fate of his covert nuclear weapons arsenal and to embrace capitalism or face deeper isolation.

According to leaks, they also told him to take a realistic view of US foreign policy, and to follow China and South Korea in pursuing capitalism.

Kim is likely to be taken on a guided tour of Beijing's high-tech business zone before being put back on his official train to Pyongyang.

Kim arrived on the unannounced visit on Monday, his first trip abroad for three years. China has been North Korea's main ally, but now looks upon its impoverished neighbour with some embarrassment.≡

IMF PREDICTS HIGHEST GLOBAL ECONOMIC GROWTH SINCE 2000

April 21, 2004 The Voice of America reported: AThe International Monetary Fund (IMF) Wednesday released an updated global economic forecast that foresees the most significant output gains since the boom year of 2000.

In its semi-annual forecast the IMF sees a pick-up in growth to 4.6 percent this year. That's nearly two percentage points above the modest three percent growth of 2003. The best performing big economies are China 8.5 percent and the United States 4.6 percent. Continuing its recent trend that benefits from higher oil and gas prices, the Russian economy is projected to grow by six percent while India is advancing to 8.8 percent growth.

The new IMF chief economist, Raghuram Rajan, said that Western Europe continues to be a laggard with only 1.8 percent growth predicted for this year.

"In the euro area I think the issue, things aren't looking that bright so far," he said. "And the latest indicators are that they don't look that good. And if that continues there might be further opportunities for interest rate cuts by the ECB [European Central Bank]."

Concerning China Mr. Rajan is worried that rapid economic growth may be putting too much strain on the weak financial system. He is only lukewarm to the idea that the Chinese currency should rise against the dollar.

"I think the idea that if China adopts a more flexible exchange rate it will solve all China's problems, I think, is misguided," he said. "It will help, but also China has other issues in the financial system that it has to deal with separately. And those are an important part of what it has to do."

The IMF is projecting a 10 percent decline in oil prices in 2005. Oil prices were up 16 percent last year and have risen further this year mainly due to increased demand in China and the United States. The IMF foresees a generalized decline in commodity prices, which have risen sharply over the past 18 months.≡

BLAIR STAKES HIS FUTURE ON BRITAIN=S PLACE IN EU

April 21, 2004 The London Daily Telegraph reported: ATony Blair took the biggest gamble of his premiership yesterday by turning the proposed referendum on a European Union constitution into a vote on whether Britain should remain a leading player in Europe. Defeat next year would undermine the central thrust of Labour policy and call his future into question.

Mr Blair faced ridicule in the Commons when he executed the biggest and most humiliating about-turn of his career by confirming that the public would have the "final say" on the proposed constitutional treaty. During probably the most uncomfortable hour he has spent addressing MPs, he acknowledged that pro-Europeans were losing the battle for public opinion.

He said it was time to resolve "once and for all" whether Britain wanted to be at the heart of European decision-making or on the margins of the EU.

Michael Howard, in his most forceful Commons performance since becoming Conservative leader, mocked Mr Blair for not being able to let the word "referendum" pass his lips during his statement announcing the U-turn. Recalling the Prime Minister's previous unequivocal rejection of Conservative demands for a referendum, he said that Mr Blair had told the Labour Party conference "with lip-quivering intensity" six months ago that he had no reverse gear.

"Today we could hear the gears grinding as he came before us once again, lips quivering. Who will ever trust him again?" Mr Blair was also attacked by pro-European MPs he will need to rely on for a cross-party campaign for a 'Yes' vote. They pressed unsuccessfully for him to explain the reasons for his change of heart.

David Curry, a Europhile Tory, accused him of abandoning everything he had always said about the EU constitution. He said that Mr Blair deserved the same taunts of weakness that, as opposition leader, he had hurled at his Tory predecessor, John Major, over Europe.

Although Mr Blair promised that the referendum would be on a specific question about the constitutional treaty, he confirmed that he would seek to broaden the campaign into a wider debate about Britain's future in Europe...≡

U.S. MARINES IN SILENT WAR WITH SYRIA

April 19, 2004 The Middle East Newsline reported: AThe United States has been fighting what officials term a silent war with Syria. U.S. officials said U.S. Marines have deployed along the Syrian border to stop the flow of insurgents and equipment to Iraq. They said marines have engaged with both Sunni insurgents as well as some Syrian security personnel along the border in clashes that have intensified over the last few weeks.

The U.S. military presence -- increased by more than a third over the last two months -- was said to be focused on the western Iraqi towns of Al Qaim and Qusaybah, regarded as key points in the smuggling of insurgents and weapons from Syria to Iraq. Officials acknowledged that at least five soldiers of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, who replaced the 82nd Airborne Division, were killed in battle with 150 insurgents in Husaybah over the weekend.

"The marines did suffer some casualties there," Maj. Gen. John Sattler, director of operations for U.S. Central Command, said. "But in the end, they were able to go ahead and calm that area down. I would say the last six, seven, eight days, we've had some sporadic fighting up in that area, but very limited casualties on the part of the marines."

SUPER-ANTIBODIES BREAK THE CELL BARRIER

April 19, 2004 New Scientist.com reported: ASuper-antibodies that can bind to targets within cells, rather than on their surface, could lead to a new range of treatments for diseases, a biotech company claims.

"Most good targets for diseases are inside cells," says Charles Morgan, president of InNexus Biotechnology of Vancouver, Canada, which has developed the super-antibody technology.

Super-antibodies could be used to target bacteria and viruses (including HIV) inside cells, for instance, or abnormal proteins that turn cells cancerous. In theory, they could do everything that the small molecules of most conventional drugs do, and more.

The beauty of a cell-penetrating super-antibody is that it would be highly discriminating. Because antibodies can be far more specific than small-molecule drugs, and because they are not inherently toxic, they should have fewer side effects. The big disadvantage is that antibodies have to be injected as they do not survive in the stomach.≡

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