

...Round the world...

HONG KONG

Landlord's reward
THE VALUE of land in Hong Kong was dramatically illustrated when the 26-storey Hilton Hotel was closed on April 30. Was there something wrong with the building? No. Two years earlier the building received a US\$15m refit. Hilton Hotels had 20 years to go with its management contract.

Nonetheless, Mr Li Ka-shing paid Hilton US\$125m to tear up its contract and quit the building, so that he could demolish it. Why? The site's value could not be fully tapped without demolishing the building and replacing it with an office building.

SHANGHAI

Sinking feeling

The property boom in China is weighing heavily on the land of the city of Shanghai. Experts report that the city is sinking under the weight of property development — classed as the most intense building boom on earth. Xinhua news agency reports. The city has sunk by an annual average of 0.4 inches since 1991, almost double the annual average in the preceding five years.

LONDON

Tory Rescue

PROPERTY developers who made their fortunes during the boom years of Thatcher's Britain have come to the rescue of the Tory Party. The 1992 election was the first in which the Conservatives borrowed to pay for their £11m campaign. The economic recession of the 1990s saw a large number

of donors deserting the party. But now land developers, like the Richardson brothers of Dudley, in the West Midlands, have started pouring hundreds of thousands of pounds into the party coffers.

BRUSSELS

Subsidies

BRITAIN'S rural land values have reached a three-year high, thanks to subsidies from the European Community budget. According to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, buyers can't get enough farmland, which — with vacant possession — has reached £4,859 a hectare. The acreage subsidies are part of the "reform" of the Common Agricultural Policy. Highest values were in the West Midlands, which are linked to the value of milk quotas which are now traded among "farmers".

PRETORIA

Land restitution

SOUTH African President Nelson Mandela launched what he calls a "land reform" programme in Northern Natal. A land restitution commission has been established to deal with the land claims from people who were dispossessed during the apartheid era.

WASHINGTON

Whitewater

BILL Clinton faced embarrassment after the decision by the Senate to hold televised public hearings into the Whitewater land deal, which could further paralyse the president

after the Republicans captured Capitol Hill.

LONDON

Revolutionary!

BRITAIN'S farmland owners heralded as "revolutionary" the new Agricultural Tenancies Act which will increase farmland values by reducing the legal rights of tenant farmers. The law will encourage landlords to increase the tenanted sector, which is predicted to boost competition for land and raise rents. "The new act is not a mere tinkering with the legislation: it is revolutionary. And wonderful," the Country Landowners Association's chief legal adviser, Ms Angela Sydenham, reports.

LACOCK

Lover's price

PRINCE CHARLES'S lover, Camilla Parker Bowles, has bought an £850,000 mansion in the Wiltshire village of Lacock. The house is 16 miles from Highgrove, the prince's country residence. Not all of Lacock's residents were thrilled by the news that the notorious Mrs Parker Bowles had bought the eight-bedroom Regency manor, but one of the benefits to the landowning villagers did not escape attention. One of the residential property owners predicted: "The fact that she has moved to Lacock may send our house prices rocketing through the roof."

MOSCOW

Poverty

RUSSIAN Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin, born in 1938 to a Cossack family in the Urals, likes to recount the answer from his father when he asked why some Russians were poor when there was so much land. His

father replied: "They're idle."

TEL AVIV

Land grab deal (1)

THE ISRAELI government has backed down from its plan to appropriate 130 acres of Arab-owned land to develop homes for Israeli citizens in Jerusalem. The city has been intersected by "safe roads" that bypass densely populated Arab centres, as part of the strategy to populate the biblical city with Jewish immigrants. The land appropriation plan, however, led to an unprecedented level of hostility among Arab world leaders.

WELLINGTON

Land grab deal (2)

NEW ZEALAND'S government took the first step in a NZ\$1bn "full and final settlement" land deal with Maoris when it signed an agreement with the Tainui tribe on May 23. The Tainui settlement was for \$170m (£71m), but the occasion was met with disruptive action elsewhere in New Zealand from Maoris who objected to the terms of the offer. Radical Maoris say the money was too little, and that it ought to go to sub-tribes and families who lost land, rather than to the main tribal group.

The 500,000 hectares of land seized from the Maoris is estimated to be worth about \$5bn today. The government is returning to the Tainui tribe thousands of hectares still under its control, but land sold to settlers is excluded. All rents, worth \$4m a year, will be received by the new Maori owners, which tribal leaders say they will use, in part, to buy back more land from private landowners.

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