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## China's former security tsar in corruption probe

### Graft campaign

China's leaders have endorsed a corruption investigation into a former security tsar who was until recently one of the country's most powerful politicians, a Hong Kong newspaper said yesterday, in what would make him the most senior official accused of graft in recent decades.

Rumours about an investigation into Zhou Yongkang began swirling as early as April of last year because of his close association with disgraced politician Bo Xilai, who became embroiled in a scandal over his wife's murder of a British businessman and who stood trial last week for corruption and abuse of power.

The English-language South China Morning Post, quoting sources familiar with the leadership's thinking, said China's current and retired leaders reached the decision this month to investigate Mr Zhou, who oversaw China's massive

state security apparatus and served on the Politburo standing committee.

The report said the investigation would focus on oil-field and property deals that have benefited Mr Zhou and his family.

Requests for comment on the article from government officials went unanswered.

It has been several decades since a Politburo standing committee member has been prosecuted by China's judiciary. The reported investigation into Mr Zhou, 76, may illustrate the new leadership's determination to exempt nobody in its fight against endemic corruption.

However, in a political system in which graft is rampant, just a few corruption probes into senior officials have often carried political overtones. "I think that the anti-corruption effort is just a political weapon used to take down whoever they want to take down," said Zhang Lifan, a Beijing historian.

AP, Beijing

## Berlusconi allies hit out over lifetime senator snub

### Italian politics

Silvio Berlusconi's allies reacted angrily yesterday after Giorgio Napolitano, Italy's president, left the centre-right leader, who risks being ejected from parliament after a tax fraud conviction, off a list of new lifetime senators.

Mr Napolitano had been pressed by members of Mr Berlusconi's People of Liberty party (PDL) to grant their leader the honour bestowed on former heads of state and personalities in the arts and sciences.

But in a move that sends a clear political message to

Mr Berlusconi that he will receive no special treatment, Mr Napolitano kept him off a list of four life senators named just a week before voting starts on whether to strip Mr Berlusconi of his parliamentary seat under a law passed last year.

The appointees enjoy the full powers and privileges of being a lawmaker for life - including some legal immunity - meaning he could continue to wield influence after being found guilty and sentenced to four years of house arrest or public service that was commuted to one year.

The parliamentary committee begins deliberations on September 9 but the decision has to be approved by a vote in the full chamber. Mr Berlusconi and his allies have threatened to bring down the government they support along with prime minister Enrico Letta's centre-left Democratic Party if the PD votes to oust him, as it has said it will.

Reuters, Rome



Silvio Berlusconi threatens to withdraw support of PD

## Japanese inflation rate at highest level for five years

### Consumer prices

Consumer price inflation in Japan rose to an annual rate of 0.7 per cent in July, its highest level for almost five years, as the effects of a weaker yen pushed up the cost of fuel and electricity.

The headline figure is likely to be viewed with some satisfaction by policy makers trying to overturn more than a decade of deflation, which they say has sapped companies' willingness to invest and curbed household consumption.

The Bank of Japan, under

0.7%

Increase in nation's annual CPI rate in July

0.1%

Fall in consumer prices, excluding energy and food

the firm direction of Shinzo Abe, prime minister, is aiming to keep monetary policy loose enough to achieve an inflation rate of 2 per cent by March 2015. Mr Abe has adopted a more flexible approach to fiscal spending while pushing for structural reforms to make Japan more alluring to investors.

However, the figures showed that while resource-poor Japan was paying more for mineral fuels, a broader, demand-driven recovery had yet to take hold. The yearly CPI figure, excluding energy and food costs, fell 0.1 per cent.

Other data released yesterday were positive. The jobless rate dropped to 3.8 per cent, from 3.9 per cent in June, while industrial production rose by 1.6 per cent on a yearly basis and 3.2 per cent on the previous month. Household spending edged up 0.1 per cent from a year earlier, after a 0.4 per cent fall in June.

Ben McLannahan, Tokyo

## Rebels declare ceasefire in eastern Congo conflict

### M23 retreat

Rebels entrenched in the hills above one of eastern Congo's largest cities declared a unilateral ceasefire yesterday and began retreating from the front line, the first indication that a joint UN and Congolese offensive might be gaining the upper hand.

The M23 rebels said that they had begun pulling back from Kanwaruchinya village, which has been in the crosshairs of the fighting that erupted on August 21. On Twitter, they said they were doing so in order to allow UN inspectors a chance to investigate the shelling of nearby towns.

Reached by telephone, Bertrand Bisimwa, M23 president, said that beyond the investigation, his group was declaring the ceasefire in order "to give peace a chance".

"We have decided to decree a unilateral ceasefire

and we have started pulling our forces out of Kanwaruchinya in order to allow the investigation into the shelling," he told The Associated Press.

The declaration marks a significant change in tone for the M23 rebels. As recently as Wednesday, Mr Bisimwa maintained that the rebels had the advantage and that UN and Congolese troops had been forced to retreat.

Colonel Olivier Hasumi, Congolese military spokesman, said yesterday that in addition to Kanwaruchinya, Congolese and UN forces had succeeded in retreating the M23 from Kibati, a village they had controlled, and combat was ongoing in Kibumba, about 30km from Goma.

Created in 2012, the M23 rebels succeeded in seizing and briefly holding Goma last year. That prompted the UN to create a special intervention brigade.

AP, Kinshasa

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