



Young Pakistani women dance to the beat of a drum during the colourful spring festival locally known as "Basant" in Lahore on Sunday. Thousands of kite lovers celebrated the famous and traditional Bassant Festival in Lahore by arranging parties and musical shows.

## Gold from sea water!

PTI, Chennai

Scientists are skeptical about claims by a Chennai based chemical engineer of having a technology to commercially extract gold from sea water and say such tall claims should have been scientifically examined before aired in public.

In various interviews, to the media, JP Agarwala had claimed that gold present in 10 parts per million (PPM) can be recovered using carrier mediated liquid membrane technology that he developed and tested while working as Assistant Professor at the Indian Institute on Technology in Karapur (IITK) during 1995-2001.

US 'forgets its friends' after victory: Mikhail Gorbachev

AFP, Moscow

Former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev has accused the United States of forgetting its friends after the victory against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the Russian news agency Interfax reported Sunday.

"Whenever it (the US) gains a victory, it falls into euphoria and starts forgetting its friends," Gorbachev was quoted as saying.

Gorbachev added his voice to growing criticism by western politicians who are concerned by the United States to widen the war against terrorism to include other countries.

Doctors await tests of plague in north India

AFP, New Delhi

Doctors in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh were awaiting definitive test results Monday from cases of a mystery disease that bears plague-like symptoms and has already killed four people.

Blood and sputum samples of victims have been sent to the New Delhi-based National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) from a remote village in the hilly state.

## 'US sees military links with India as vital'

AFP, New Delhi

The head of the US armed forces said Monday that warming military ties with India were vital in the fight against global terrorism and maintaining long-term stability in Asia.

General Richard Myers, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, told reporters he had stressed that message in all his meetings with key Indian officials, including Defence Minister George Fernandes and army chief General S. Padmanabhan.

KSA signals readiness to trade normalisation with Israel for pullout

AFP, Washington

Saudi Arabia would consider normalising relations with Israel and swaying the Arab League to do the same if Israel would carry out a full withdrawal from the occupied territories, The New York Times said Sunday, quoting the country's crown prince.

"Full withdrawal from all the occupied territories, in accord with UN resolutions, including in Jerusalem, for full normalisation of relations," Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz told New York Times reporter Thomas Friedman.

Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Abdul Aziz told Friedman he had written a speech along those lines to deliver before the 22-member Arab League in March, but shelved it when Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon took a harsher stance against the Palestinians.

"I changed my mind about delivering it when Sharon took the violence, and the oppression, to an unprecedented level," Friedman quoted the crown prince as saying.

The quotes came from an off-the-record dinner conversation, which Abdul Aziz later agreed could be placed on the record.

## Global warming to go on for next 100 years

AFP, Boston

Global warming will continue for the next 100 years even if fossil fuel consumption is dramatically reduced, a US climate expert warned Sunday.

Carbon dioxide or CO2 emissions from burning fossil fuels already present in the atmosphere will likely increase the temperature of the globe by between three and 10 degrees Fahrenheit this century, with sea levels increasing six inches

to nearly three feet (1 meter), a leading US climate expert said.

The changes are likely to result in "fairly large changes within the next generation," Professor Robert Dickinson of the Georgia Institute of Technology told the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) which is holding its annual meeting here this week.

"We're talking about people with houses on the beach having to move," he said in a statement.

## George is a monkey: Laura Bush

AFP, Tokyo

US First Lady Laura Bush, accompanying her husband on an Asian tour, visited an elementary school here Monday, reading a "Curious George" story to second graders.

Laura Bush visited the public Akashi Elementary School with 125 pupils in central Tokyo, while US President George W. Bush was having talks with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

"George is a monkey," the former school teacher told a class of 25 second graders aged eight-to-nine, while asking whether they had ever read "Curious George" stories.

She read the book to the children for about 10 minutes through an interpreter, Akashi school principal Iekado Chiba said.

Laura Bush, 55, was accompanied by Princess Hisako, wife of Prince Norihito, who is a cousin of Emperor Akihito.

The First Lady smiled as Hisako explained to the children: "George is the same name of the president, and the book is about a smart monkey."

"She is a very warm and gentle lady," Chiba said.

"She was a good reader, very good at catching children's attention," he told AFP, adding the children could tell how the story developed even though they did not understand English.

US First Lady Laura Bush reads "Curious George" book for second grade school children through an interpreter, (L, unidentified), at Akashi Elementary School in Tokyo on Monday. The First Lady is accompanying US President George Bush on a three-nation East Asian tour.

## UN HR envoy meets Suu Kyi

AFP, Yangon

United Nations human rights envoy Paulo Sergio Pinheiro met with Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi Monday at her lakeside residence where she has been detained for more than a year, witnesses said.

The Brazilian academic, who is on his third mission to Myanmar, also met with the Nobel peace laureate during his other visits to the military-run country over the past 10 months.

Myanmar's ruling junta last week released five members of pro-democracy parties including Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), in an apparent goodwill gesture timed to coincide with Pinheiro's visit.

Earlier Monday Pinheiro met with members of the Human Rights Commission headed by Home Minister Colonel Tin Hlaing, then had separate talks with Police Chief Soe Win.

On the weekend he held talks with officials in the prisons department, after returning to the capital Yangon from a side-trip to Kachin State where he inspected jails.

# 'All options' on table on Iraq, Iran, North Korea: Bush

## US dismisses critics of 'axis of evil' rhetoric

AFP, Tokyo

US President George W. Bush said Monday he told Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi he hopes to resolve differences with Iran, Iraq and North Korea "peacefully" but will keep "all options" on the table.

At a joint press conference, the visiting US leader told reporters: "I will keep all options on the table."

"We want to resolve all issues peacefully, whether it be Iraq, Iran or North Korea," said Bush, who has lumped those countries together in what he has termed the "axis of evil," language that has riled US allies.

Responding to a reporter's reminder that France's Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine had called Bush's phase "simplistic", Bush dismissed US allies' chilly reception to his rhetoric as an attack of the "vapors."

"I understand what happens in the international arena; people say things. But the leaders I've talked to understand, exactly, what needs to happen," Bush said.

"They understand that our commitment is no just in Afghanistan, that history has given us a unique opportunity to defend freedom ... I'm confident nations will come with us," he added.

Meanwhile, President George W. Bush said "nations will come with us" if the US-led war on terrorism moved beyond Afghanistan, as he dismissed critics of the "axis of evil" label he has stuck to Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

During a joint press conference with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro

Koizumi, Bush renewed his pledge to thwart terrorist groups who want to "mate up" with those regimes in hopes of acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

"People who love freedom understand that we cannot allow nations that aren't transparent, nations with a terrible history, nations that are so dictatorial they're willing to starve their people, we can't allow them to mate up with terrorist organisations," said the US leader.

Asked about French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine's criticism that the "axis" remark was "simplistic," Bush referred reporters to US Secretary of State Colin Powell's recent suggestion that the official was suffering from the "vapors."

"The Secretary of State had, I thought, an interesting reply to the French foreign minister. And you might want to ask him afterwards what he meant by vapors," the president said with a grin.

Powell, who was accompanying Bush on a week-long trip that will also take him to Seoul and Beijing, clarified that his message in a Financial Times interview last week had been: "Let's not swoon."

"People say things, but the leaders I've talked to fully understand exactly what needs to happen. They understand the resolve of the United States," Bush told reporters after a bilateral meeting with Koizumi.

"History has given us a unique opportunity to defend freedom. And we're going to seize the moment," he said. "I'm confident nations will come with us."

## 17 indicted in E Timor for crimes against humanity

AFP, Jakarta

International prosecutors in East Timor on Monday indicted nine Jakarta militiamen and eight Indonesian soldiers for crimes against humanity in the territory in April 1999.

"I am an Indonesian citizen and I have nothing to do with them (UN prosecutors)," he told AFP, speaking from Jakarta.

The indictments relate to a bloody attack on the home of pro-independence leader Mario Carrascalao, in which 13 people were killed and nine seriously injured.

(UNTAET) said in a statement.

Guterres, a member of a youth organisation linked to President Megawati Sukarnoputri's political party, said he would ignore the indictment.

"I am an Indonesian citizen and I have nothing to do with them (UN prosecutors)," he told AFP, speaking from Jakarta.

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## Saved from hangman's noose

AFP, Suva

Fiji coup leader George Speight was saved from the hangman's noose Monday when a death sentence for treason imposed hours earlier was commuted to life imprisonment by President Josefa Iloilo.

Speight pleaded guilty to treason and wept uncontrollably when he was ordered to hang but the sentence was commuted to maintain security in the small island nation.

The charges arose out of the coup in May 2000, when Speight and his henchmen kept the then prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry

and his cabinet hostage for 56 days in the parliament building.

"George Speight," said Justice Michael Scott, after placing a black silk cloth on his wig, "the sentence of the court upon you is that you be taken from this place to a lawful prison and thence to a place of execution and that you there suffer death by hanging and may the Lord have mercy upon your soul."

The sentence came just after midday at the High Court and by 4pm (0400 GMT) the Prerogative of Mercy Commission was recommending the sentence be commuted to life behind bars, Attorney

General Qoriniasi Bale said.

"We convened a special meeting of the Prerogative of Mercy Commission and we decided after considering all relevant considerations to advise the president to commute the death penalty against George Speight to one of life imprisonment," he said.

Among the considerations were the security of the nation, he said, amid fears that unrest may follow.

At the start of his treason hearing Monday, Speight told the court: "I'm guilty your worship."

## Crucial Indian state polls enter second phase

AFP, Lucknow

The second stage of elections in India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh got underway Monday, with pundits still divided over the probable result and its impact on the federal government in New Delhi.

Uttar Pradesh -- also known as India's "Hindu heartland" -- is far and away the most politically important state, and elections here are traditionally viewed as a popularity test for the federal government of the day.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee nationalist BJP party in New Delhi to start searching for greener political pastures.

The BJP had been expected to lose control of the state, but exit

polls from the first phase suggested that it had performed better than forecast.

Security was tight in all areas where polling was taking place, with more than 60,000 security personnel deployed to ensure free and fair voting. The first stage of polling witnessed no major incidents of violence.

Addressing a press conference in Lucknow, Home Minister L.K. Advani predicted that the BJP would emerge as the largest single party in Uttar Pradesh.

"We will form the government, I am confident of that," Advani said, while acknowledging that the party would have to form an alliance in order to command an overall majority in the 403-seat assembly.

Advani defended the BJP's

campaign platform which has largely ignored local issues in favour of the broader issue of terrorism and how the BJP is best-equipped to protect the country.

"Terrorism may not be a direct issue, but for any politically conscious person the BJP-led government in New Delhi and its determination on this issue will definitely influence him," Advani said.

The home minister also defended his usual anti-Pakistan diatribe which has been a staple of most campaign rallies at a time when hundreds of thousands of troops are locked in a tense military face-off on the Indo-Pakistan border.

Anti-TB funding for those coun-



An Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldier stands guard at a polling station in Jhajera village in Kakori, 30 km from Lucknow on Monday in Uttar Pradesh state. Uttar Pradesh is holding the second day of polling for the state assembly elections. Around 35 million people were eligible to vote in the second phase for 145 assembly seats from 28 districts.

## TB may kill 1 lakh Asians in 5-yr

AFP, Tokyo

Up to three million more people in East Asia could become infected with tuberculosis and 100,000 of them die over the next five years because of a lack of funding to control the disease, the World Health Organisation warned Monday.

"We have to strengthen funding and political commitment to stop TB (tuberculosis)," said Dr. Shigeru Omi, the WHO's regional director for the Western Pacific at a meeting of international tuberculosis experts in Osaka, some 400 kilometres west of

Tokyo.

"Otherwise, we could have a public health catastrophe on our hands," he said in a statement released by the WHO.

"The threat is to all of us -- if we don't control TB locally, then we jeopardise global control," he said.

The organisation cited China, Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, Mongolia, the Philippines and Vietnam as countries in the region hit hardest by the disease, and which may be on the verge of cutting back on their anti-TB spending.

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