

US mulls DNA databank of terror suspects  
AFP, Washington

US authorities are considering creating a DNA databank of terrorism suspects by analysing blood samples from thousands of detainees being held in Afghanistan and Cuba, the New York Times reported Sunday.

The move is prompted by a frustration by US officials as they attempt to identify captured al-Qaida and Taliban fighters, federal authorities told the daily.

Officials told the newspaper that the DNA database could help in tracking terrorism suspects in the future and could also play a role in some current investigations.

The DNA database has been proposed by officials at the US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and is being reviewed at the Justice Department.

India bans PTV for fanning riots in Gujarat  
AFP, Ahmedabad

Indian authorities in the western state of Gujarat said Sunday they had banned Pakistan's PTV channel for broadcasting what they termed provocative reports of the sectarian violence which has claimed nearly 500 lives here.

"PTV has been banned from today (Sunday) and it will be banned until the situation improves," Gujarat Home Minister Gordhanbhai Zadaria said.

Accusing the PTV reportage of fanning the communal flames in Gujarat, Zadaria said, "Sometimes authorities have to take certain actions in the interests of society at large. Such telecasts have spread violence."

Cholera kills 400 in Congo  
AP, Kinshasa

More than 400 people have died from cholera in the southeastern province of Katanga in Congo since the beginning of the year, the head of a national crisis group said on Saturday.

Mampuni Mamiezi told The Associated Press that 4,876 other people were known to be suffering from the disease. He said he believed the number of victims could rise.

Katanga province is split in two, with the south controlled by the central African state's government and the north held by Rwandan-backed rebels. The region is regularly shaken by fighting.

"These figures only refer to the part (of the province) which is under government control," said Mamiezi, who is a doctor.

'No spies among Iraq arms inspectors'  
AFP, Dubai

There will be no spying for anyone if UN arms inspectors are allowed to return to Iraq, UN disarmament chief Hans Blix vowed in an interview published Sunday.

"We are determined not to be spies for anyone. We are inspectors for the UN Security Council, that's all," Blix, head of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), told Al-Hayat newspaper.

Iraq accused UNMOVIC's predecessor, the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM), of being riddled with spies and it was disbanded after inspectors fled Baghdad in December 1998 on the eve of a punitive US-British air campaign.

New solar telescope unveiled  
AP, Stockholm

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences on Saturday unveiled what it called the world's second largest optical solar telescope.

The telescope on the Spanish island of La Palma will allow scientists to explore magnetic fields in the sun's atmosphere and spots on its surface at a greater resolution than previously possible, academy spokesman Jonas Foerare said.

Foerare said viewing through the telescope will be "like taking a picture of a quarter from a distance of 50 kilometers (30 miles)."

The high resolution is made possible by a new type of mirror that corrects the blurring caused by the Earth's atmosphere, he said.

The telescope sits atop a 2,400-meter (7,900 feet) peak on La Palma, in the Canary Islands, a Spanish island group off the northwestern coast of Africa. The location was chosen because of its stable, thin air, which provides optimal viewing conditions, Foerare said.

"The scene is unfolding in Zimbabwe. It is not unfolding in Cooom." Mkapa told journalists.

China kicks off legislative session with call for unity  
AFP, Beijing

China kicked off its annual legislative session Sunday with a call for Communist Party unity ahead of a key generational leadership changes slated for later this year.

Over 2,000 delegates of China's nominal lower house, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), opened their annual meeting in the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing.

Ye Xuanping, CPPCC vice chairman, in his opening report to the session, stressed the importance of uniting under the theories and policies of Chinese President Jiang Zemin ahead of leadership changes that will take effect this fall.

Ye urged delegates to study Jiang's theories on reforming and "building" a party in the 21st century capable of responding to China's ever-changing needs.

Jiang, "the core of the third

generation" communist leadership is expected to give up his post as party boss this fall and step down from his position as state president during next year's legislative session.

His expected resignation will also usher in the retirements of other key party and state leaders including Premier Zhu Rongji and parliamentary head Li Peng, all of whom are well into their seventies.

Ye's call to support Jiang's policies appeared as an attempt to bolster the president's prestige as Jiang seeks to wield power and influence behind the scenes as former "core" leaders Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping did after they "officially" retired, analysts said.

The CPPCC is the lower branch of China's rubber stamp National People's Congress whose 3,000 delegates will open their annual two week session on Tuesday.

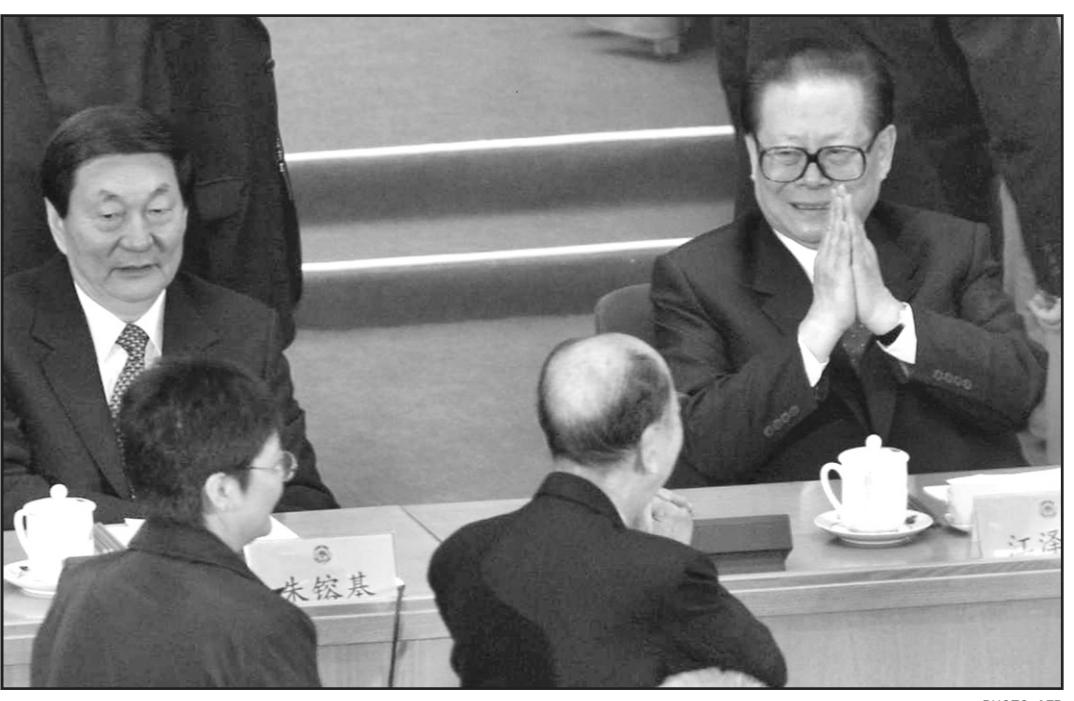
Although many of the CPPCC

and NPC delegates are not Communist Party members, the annual sessions work to emphasise the dominating role of the party in all affairs of state, including legislative affairs, the analysts said.

Ye further called on the CPPCC to continue to put forward official proposals to the government, especially in the areas of economic development, poverty alleviation, education, and state enterprise and financial reform.

He also urged the delegates to support government efforts to reunify Taiwan and to crackdown on ethnic and religious separatism in Tibet and Xinjiang, as well as a crackdown on the banned Falungong spiritual group.

"We must firmly uphold the banner of opposing ethnic splitting, religious extremism, violent terrorism and the organized destructive activities of the 'Falungong,'" Ye said.



Chinese President Jiang Zemin (R), together with Premier Zhu Rongji (L), greet delegates prior to the opening session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Sunday. China kicked off its annual legislative session with a call for Communist Party unity ahead of key leadership changes slated for later this year, as more than 2,000 delegates of China's nominal lower house, the CPPCC, opened their annual meeting in the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing.

Neutral Switzerland votes for joining UN  
AFP, Geneva

Swiss voters on Sunday cast the final ballots in a referendum to decide if their country should join the United Nations, with opponents warning the move would jeopardise the country's neutrality.

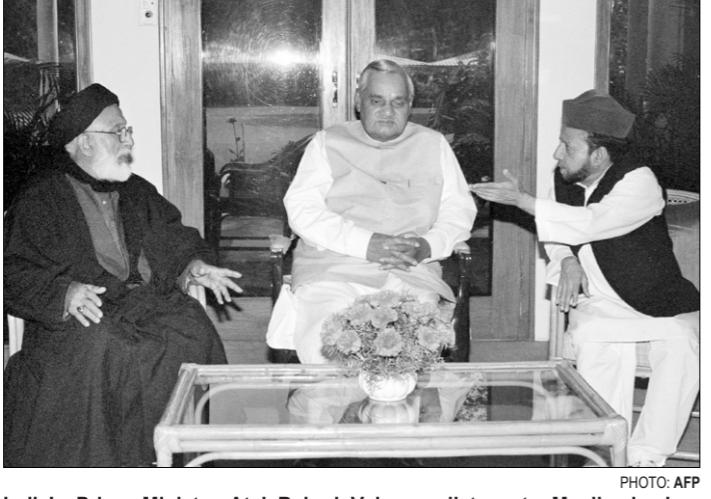
Polls officially close at noon (1100 GMT) across the country after opening at varying times since Wednesday in most of the country's 2,942 communes, and final results are expected by mid-afternoon.

Despite an emotional campaign by both sides, the outcome is still far from certain and a few thousand German-speaking Swiss are likely to swing the balance because of the country's complex referendum system.

"Except for the Vatican, Switzerland is the only state to not be part of the UN," the government said bluntly in the first line of its booklet outlining reasons why voters should support UN membership.

## Rioting deals a body blow to shaky Vajpayee

AFP, New Delhi



An eruption of Hindu-Muslim bloodletting in India has posed a major challenge to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, whose authority has already been weakened by a series of political setbacks.

The sectarian riots in Gujarat state, which were triggered by an attack Wednesday on a train carrying Hindu activists and claimed hundreds of lives, came just days after Vajpayee's BJP party was routed in crucial state elections.

To make matters worse, the government in Gujarat -- one of a handful of states still under BJP control -- was widely criticised for

failing to take swift and sufficient action to curb the violence.

Vajpayee described the riots as a "disgrace to the nation" but his own government has been accused of contributing to their outbreak.

The activists on the train that was attacked Wednesday were returning from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh state where thousands of right-wing Hindus have been gathering to build a temple in defiance of court orders on the site of a 16th century mosque razed in December 1992.

Prior to the attack, opposition parties had been demanding that Vajpayee clamp down on the temple construction drive on the grounds that it was fuelling communal ten-

sions to dangerous levels.

"The pressure on Vajpayee at the moment is enormous," said Kiran Saxena, a professor of political sciences in New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University.

With the violence in Gujarat on the wane, the problem remains of what to do about the Hindu activists in Ayodhya, who have threatened to start building their temple on March 15, even if it means a confrontation with the security forces.

"Vajpayee today is in no position to impose a solution. Neither is he in a position to contain hardline Hindu groups," said Saxena's colleague, Balveer Arora.

## Riots point dangers of extremism: Musharraf

AP, Islamabad

fire in the town of Godhra, south of Ahmedabad, sparking a retaliatory rampage by right-wing Hindus against Muslims.

"The attack on the railway train on 27 February which led to the loss of more than 50 lives was deplorable but it could not provide license for the reprehensible brutalities and violence against the Muslim community which has caused hundreds of deaths, destruction of property and desecration of Muslim religious places," Musharraf said.

"The measures taken by the government of India for the protection of its Muslim minority, which is the target of Hindu extremism and terrorism needs to be strengthened," he said. "The carnage must be brought to an end. All those responsible for the violence need to be arrested and punished."

## Playing prank with policing

AP, Ahmedabad

Aday after 7,000 Hindus rampaged through her neighborhood, Noorjahan Shaikh recalled how police slapped her mother and called her names when she pleaded with them for protection.

What's worse, she said, police stood by and watched as the mob hurled homemade bombs at shops and beat the Muslim residents with sticks.

"We pray to God to help us because we know the police won't," said the 16-year-old one of about a dozen Muslims who sheltered nervously Saturday under the awning of a small hardware store.

Muslims and Hindus have been stunned by three days of religious rioting that has claimed more than 400 lives in the western Indian state of Gujarat.

Many blamed the state and national police -- whose bosses belong to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu-nationalist party -- and said the federal

rampage that gripped Gujarat, with horror stories surfacing of Muslim families cornered and burned alive by Hindus.

Narendra Modi, Gujarat's top elected official, said police "are taking strict action to control the situation."

Modi was criticised for not containing the violence.

The state leader said his police were outnumbered and suggested that some Muslims brought the violence on themselves.

Other police officials insist they did the best they could.

"We are only 100 police here," said K Mysorewala, a police inspector in Naroda Patia, a town south of Ahmedabad where 66 Muslims were burned alive in a shantytown Friday morning.

"First they were beaten and then burned alive," Mysorewala said Saturday. "Three more died today... We tried to save as many as we could."

Hundreds of Hindu nationalists were returning from Ayodhya Wednesday when Muslims set fire to their train. Fifty-eight people were killed, including 14 children.

The train fire set off the retaliatory

## World faces ageing challenge

IPS, United Nations

In less than 50 years, the world's elderly will outnumber its children but disease and migration trends mean fewer of the aged will be able to enjoy their "twilight years," says the United Nations.

By 2050, one out of every five persons, two billion people, will be 60 years or older. The oldest of the old (80 years or older) will make up 21 per cent of the elderly and the centenarians (100 years or over) will increase 15 fold, from 210,000 in 2002 to 3.2 million persons.

The burden of looking after the aged will fall heavier on fewer young shoulders. The number of working

age (15-64) people per elderly individuals (65 and over) will drop from five to two in industrialised regions and from 12 to five in developing areas. Economic growth, taxation, pensions, and savings will all feel the pinch.

But the elderly in rural parts of developing areas may notice little change in their daily lives. "In developing countries, rural to urban migration and the HIV/AIDS problem causing deaths in the reproductive age groups raise the proportion of elderly persons in rural areas.

Countries must rethink their agricultural and rural development policies and incorporate the ageing factor into the development process," says Florence Chenoweth, of

Prince Edward, Sophie quit their jobs  
AFP, London

Britain's scandal-plagued royal couple Prince Edward and his wife Sophie announced Saturday they would quit their jobs to support Queen Elizabeth II during her jubilee year.

"It is quite obvious that in this year, the Golden Jubilee, we are required more than ever to support the Queen and to help my family shoulder some of the increasing responsibilities and workload into the future," said the prince.

A Buckingham Palace spokeswoman confirmed that the couple would not be returning to their respective businesses.

Shuttle captures Hubble space telescope  
AFP, Houston

The US Space Shuttle Columbia captured the Hubble space telescope early Sunday, NASA officials here announced, in advance of a planned mission to renovate and repair the orbiting telescope.

The Columbia's seven astronauts, under the command of Scott Altman, are scheduled to make five space walks to complete work on replacing solar panels on the Hubble and installing a new camera to increase tenfold the resolution of the telescope's images.

The rendezvous took place at 3:31 am local time (0931 GMT) some 565 kilometers (340 miles) over Australia. Astronaut Nancy Currie maneuvered Columbia's robotic arm to capture the 12.5 tonne Hubble.

US beefs up security against N-terror attack  
AFP, Washington

Washington has deployed hundreds of sophisticated sensors to US borders, overseas facilities and choke points around the US capital in recent months to protect against nuclear or radiological attack by terrorists, the Washington Post reported Sunday.

The new radiation sensors are imbedded around some fixed points and temporarily at designated "national security special events" such as last month's Olympic Games in Utah, the Post reported.

The federal government also has placed the Delta Force, the nation's elite commando unit, on a new standby alert to seize control of nuclear materials that the sensors may detect.

The Delta Force has been assigned the mission of killing or disabling anyone with a suspected nuclear device and turning it over to the scientists to be disarmed, according to the Post.



Sex workers perform a dance drama during a "Peace Meet" of sex workers in Kolkata on Sunday. Some 20,000 sex workers gathered from five Asian countries are taking part in the week-long carnival where they made an appeal to observe March 3 as "Sex Workers' Rights Day" globally.

## African leaders rally round Mugabe

AFP, Cooom

make an intelligent, rational decision, we should let the scene be played out there before we make a judgement.

"You are assuming that if the government wins, the election is fair -- let's wait and see how people vote."

His comments have been echoed by other African leaders, concerned that Britain is trying to railroad them into taking a hardline stand against their neighbour.

Mugabe has reportedly told British Prime Minister Tony Blair "to keep your pink nose out of our affairs," the Sun-Herald reported here Sunday.

"Go to hell," said Mugabe. "Our people have decided and that is what matters to us. It's not their (Britain's) right or responsibility to decide on our elections."

"The scene is unfolding in Zimbabwe. It is not unfolding in Cooom," Mkapa told journalists.

"And unless you are going to

## US jets pound al-Qaida's mountain stronghold

AFP, Kabul

US warplanes continued Sunday to bombard suspected al-Qaida hideouts in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan, where the United States said it had for the first time dropped a powerful bunker-busting thermobaric bomb.

But a witness said a US-led ground advancement by at least 1,000 Afghan troops has been held up by stiff resistance from the more than 2,000 al-Qaida militants in the Amra mountains.

"The ground advancement has been blocked and stopped," Gilani, the son of local warlord Padsha Khan, told AFP by telephone.