

President moves to secure his place in history

By the Associated Press
INTERNATIONAL

BEIJING — His retirement at hand, President Jiang Zemin moved to cement his legacy at a historic party congress today, outlining a sweeping blueprint for tomorrow's China that he says will offer its people a more comfortable life in a blended system of socialism and the profit motive.

As the Communist Party Congress convened amid tight security, 2,114 delegates met in the Great Hall of the People.

"Our party must stand firm in the forefront of the times," Jiang said during his 90-minute address, aimed at both inspiring party delegates and securing his place alongside Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping in China's history books.

"We must move forward, or we will fall behind," said Jiang, whose notion of change is a novel one for the workers' party — he has invited capitalist entrepreneurs to join. The congress is expected to take up that issue as well in coming days.

Most expect Jiang, 76, to be succeeded as Communist Party chief by Hu Jintao, 59, who is widely assumed to also be replacing Jiang as president next year.

JAKARTA, Indonesia — The top suspect in the Bali bombings has admitted that he knows the two alleged leaders of an al-Qaida linked terror network and has confessed to taking part in a string of terror attacks in Indonesia, officials said today.

After the arrest of an Indonesian man identified as Amrozi — the first major breakthrough in the inquiry — police said today they expected to capture more of his accomplices soon.

Police spokesman Brig. Gen. Edward Aritonang said Amrozi, 40, admitted that he knows two Muslim clerics: Riduan Isamudin — also known as Hambali — and Abu Bakar Bashir, said to be the leaders of Jemaah Islamiyah. The Muslim militant group has been linked by investigators to al-Qaida, and has emerged as the prime suspect in the Oct. 12 Bali nightclub bombings that killed nearly 200 people.

The developments signaled that the investigation was gaining momentum and lent credence to the assertion that al-Qaida was involved in the bombings.

NATIONAL
MANASSAS, Va. — The federal government has stepped into the tussle

around the world

over which state should get first crack at the sniper suspects, deciding Virginia had the "best law, the best facts, and the best range of availability penalties."

Attorney General John Ashcroft on Thursday sent John Allen Muhammad, 41, and John Lee Malvo, 17, to stand trial in two different Virginia jurisdictions on murder charges that could bring the death penalty.

Even as Ashcroft announced his decision, yet another crime was allegedly connected to the pair — a Sept. 21 killing in Atlanta. That brought to 18 the number of shootings linked so far to Muhammad and Malvo by police across the country. Thirteen people were killed.

Ashcroft said he sent the pair to Virginia in part because its laws allow the best opportunities to obtain the death penalty: the state allows execution of 17-year-olds and has put to death 86 people since capital punishment was reinstated in 1976, more than any state except Texas.

"It is appropriate — it is imperative — that the ultimate sanction be available for those convicted of these crimes," Ashcroft said. "We believe that the first prosecutions should occur in those jurisdictions that provide the best law, the best facts, and the best range of availability penalties."

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Four graying, middle-aged former members of the Symbionese Liberation Army pleaded guilty to the killing of a bank customer to escape a time warp that has trapped them for a quarter-century, they and their attorneys said.

"It's the end of a whole thing that happened in the 1970s," said attorney Stuart Hanlon, whose client, Emily Montague, admitted pulling the trigger. "Emily and the others have accepted what they've done, they've lived with it for this long and it really hurt them — and it's over."

Montague, William Harris, Michael Bortin and Sara Jane Olson pleaded guilty to murder Thursday in the shotgun slaying of Myrna Opsahl on April 21, 1975, during a robbery of the Crocker National Bank in suburban Sacramento.

After the guilty pleas, Bortin said he and the other former members of the revolutionary group wanted closure

for themselves, for Opsahl's family and for a generation that tried to change the world.

The four face sentencing Feb. 14. Montague will be sentenced to eight years in prison, and Harris, her former husband, will get seven years for leading the group and keeping an armed watch outside the bank. Bortin and Sara Jane Olson each face six years in prison.

BOULDER, Colo. — Former Democratic Sen. Gary Hart, whose 1988 presidential campaign was derailed in a sex scandal, has ruled out another run for the White House in 2004.

"I don't want to run for office, but I want to make a contribution," he said during a lecture on national security to University of Colorado students Thursday.

Earlier this week, the 65-year-old former two-term senator who practices international law in Denver said he was considering a bid.

On Thursday, Hart criticized his own party for its performance during Tuesday's elections, in which Republicans reclaimed control of the U.S. Senate and gained seats in the House.

Democrats "didn't offer alternatives, they didn't offer any ideas on how to make the economy grow, about America's role in the world, (or) a defense policy that was not just militarism," Hart said. "We got what we deserved."

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON — President Bush summoned GOP congressional leaders today to press for swift passage of his proposed Department of Homeland Security, trying to erase doubts by incoming Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott that this month's "lame-duck" session can accomplish anything.

The Democratic-run Senate had refused to embrace the proposal because of concerns over union protections for the new agency's workers. "They got a few days to get some big things done, and the most important thing to get done, I want to emphasize, is to get a Department of Homeland Security finished," Bush said at a news conference. "It doesn't matter how long it takes, they need to get it done."

Lott said Thursday he is "not an advocate of lame-duck sessions." He is eager to end the session within a few

days.

Lott said after Bush's remarks Thursday that if he has any power during the lame-duck, "it would be a big leap, but I'll make a huge effort to get it done." Lott doesn't take over as majority leader until the next Congress, in January.

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is sending an estimated 1,000 more Americans to help track down al-Qaida around the Horn of Africa, where the yearlong war on terrorism has produced few visible results so far.

Defense officials said Thursday that the amphibious command ship USS Mount Whitney — to be used as a floating headquarters off the coast of Djibouti — will leave its Norfolk, Va., homeport Tuesday with Marines who

will coordinate future military operations in the region.

"This is ... focused on looking for al-Qaida, looking for terrorist cells and dealing with them expeditiously, and directly," Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James Jones said.

The Mount Whitney has a Navy crew of some 560, and members of the 2nd Marine Division who will set up the command center in Djibouti probably will number about 400, officials said.

The Americans will join a multinational force of thousands already in Africa — including some who have been trying to catch terrorists there since al-Qaida began fleeing Afghanistan a year ago. There are 700 to 800 Americans at a French military base in Djibouti.

WASHINGTON — In the race to pick a new leader for House Democrats, the campaign pitches are personal, the electorate tiny, the campaign short.

So short that Reps. Nancy Pelosi of California and Martin Frost of Texas have only a week to round up the votes needed to take over as leader of a minority party struggling to come to grips with the loss of seats in midterm elections.

Meanwhile, a third lawmaker, Rep. Harold Ford Jr. of Tennessee, said he would announce today that he's entering the race to lead House Democrats.

The race began officially Wednesday night when longtime party leader Dick Gephardt informed party leaders he would not seek a new term.

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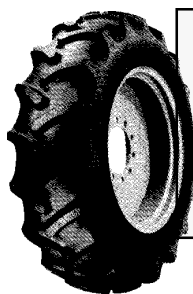


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