

China's communists changing their mission

By the Associated Press
INTERNATIONAL

BEIJING — Facing an era of galloping change, China's communists stepped into a new age today, sending President Jiang Zemin toward retirement, pushing a younger generation of leaders forward and changing their mission to welcome the emerging capitalist class.

Hu Jintao, the man expected to replace Jiang in the monumental task of running China in an era of rapid change, became the only top politician re-elected to the party's ruling elite.

It was the most solid sign yet of his ascent to the top of Asia's largest, fastest-growing country.

The 59-year-old vice president is the odds-on favorite to succeed Jiang as head of the party — and as president in March — in the first truly orderly transfer of authority since the communists took China in 1949.

Today, though, the message of the party of Mao Zedong is not revolution but prosperity — and continued relevance in the eyes of an increasingly sophisticated citizenry.

LONDON — Soldiers with antiquated equipment battled fires across Britain today, struggling to fill the gap created by firefighters on a 48-hour strike.

Three elderly people died following house fires during the first night of the walkout.

Crews of soldiers driving 1950s-era

around the world

military trucks known as Green Goddesses to blazes around the country provided only basic emergency protection. The government admitted the coverage was far less than that usually provided by members of the Fire Brigades Union, who are demanding \$49,600 a year, a 40 percent pay increase.

The soldiers began work at 6 p.m. Wednesday, when the firefighters started the first of a series of threatened strikes.

Union members crossed picket lines to help soldiers at some fires where lives were in danger.

It was difficult to know whether any fire deaths resulted directly from the strike, but Britain's news media gave intense coverage to the first three deaths.

NATIONAL

LOS ANGELES — Jewish Defense League leader Irv Rubin, who made a career out of confronting those he considers enemies of Israel and the Jewish people, died in a hospital after attempting to commit suicide in jail last week, authorities said.

Rubin, 57, had been in a medically induced coma since Nov. 4 but died at about 11:45 p.m. Wednesday, said Adelaida De La Cerda, a spokeswoman at Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center.

Federal officials said Ruben slashed his neck with a prison-issued razor blade on Nov. 4 and tumbled 18 feet over a railing at the federal Metropolitan Detention Center.

The apparent suicide attempt occurred just hours before Rubin was to make a court appearance on charges he allegedly plotted to bomb a Southern California mosque and the office of Rep. Darrell E. Issa, R-Calif., who is the grandson of Lebanese immigrants. Fellow JDL member Earl Krugel was also arrested in connection with the alleged scheme.

His wife, Shelley Rubin, has called for a further investigation in the suicide attempt, believing Rubin would not try and kill himself.

But authorities said interviews with witnesses — including officers and inmates — left no doubt about the cause of Rubin's injuries.

YORK, Pa. — Six white men apologized in court for the slaying of a young black woman during a 1969 race riot, but neither their remorse nor their prison terms soothed the grief and outrage of the victim's kin.

"I feel like it's a slap in my face and my children's face," said Hattie Dickson, 56, who was driving the family car the night her sister was ambushed by white gang members.

The six suspects were given sentences of up to three years in prison Wednesday in the shooting death of Lillie Belle Allen during 10 days of racial violence in York.

During the riots, a white police officer, Henry Schaad, was also killed, more than 60 people were injured and 100 were arrested.

The violence haunted the city for years, but the case was dormant until prosecutors opened it again in 1999. They eventually brought charges against 10 white men in the slaying of Allen, 27.

A jury acquitted former Mayor Charlie Robertson, a police officer at the time of the riots who had been accused of handing out ammunition and encouraging white gang members to shoot blacks.

Two other suspects will be sentenced next month, and the 10th defendant is awaiting trial.

PHILADELPHIA — The Federal Communications Commission's decision to allow the merger of Comcast and AT&T Broadband creates the largest cable company in the nation — a behemoth that will have nearly twice as many customers as its nearest competitor.

The commission's 3-1 vote Wednesday marked one of the final steps toward completing the \$29.2 billion merger, which comes amid a wave of consolidation in the cable business.

The FCC dismissed consumer

groups' concerns about potential dominance by the new AT&T Comcast, which would control 29 percent of the market with 27 million subscribers, nearly twice as many as No. 2 AOL Time Warner Inc.

"The benefits of this transaction are considerable, the potential harms negligible," FCC Chairman Michael Powell said.

Following the FCC announcement, the Justice Department's antitrust division said it wouldn't challenge the merger.

Gene Kimmelman, the lead lobbyist in Washington for Consumers Union, which publishes Consumer Reports magazine, called the merger "dangerous."

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON — A new Homeland Security Department moved closer to becoming reality after the House easily passed a bill calling for the largest overhaul of the government in more than 50 years.

The Senate appeared ready to follow suit as Democrats, despite their reservations over labor issues, no longer could stop a government reorganization that President Bush has cited as a priority response to the Sept. 11 attacks.

The House voted 299-121 Wednesday night to establish the 170,000-member department.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., said the bill "will enable our nation to have the tools it needs to monitor,

track and prevent future terrorist acts from happening again."

The Senate, which began debating the measure Wednesday, was expected to act in the next few days, and Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle said he expected the bill to pass.

The Cabinet-level agency would combine 22 different agencies, including the Coast Guard, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Secret Service.

WASHINGTON — The Senate has used one of the first votes of its lame-duck session to accept a pay raise for the fourth consecutive year.

The Senate, without debate, used its second vote on Wednesday to reject 58-36 a measure by Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., that would have denied the congressional pay raise.

With the slumping economy and financial markets, job layoffs and federal budget deficits, "this is the wrong time for Congress to give itself a pay hike," Feingold said in a statement.

The House cleared the way for the raise in July.

With the 3.1 percent pay raise, senators and representatives will make \$154,700 next year instead of the \$150,000 earned this year.

Lawmakers' salaries have gone up \$18,000 since the end of 1999.

Under a 1989 law, congressional cost-of-living pay raises pegged to inflation go into effect automatically unless lawmakers vote to block them.

Little guy left alone on farm

DOG, from Page 1

the farm, she said, and sat still while people combed knots and picked stickers out of his hair.

"He just went along with everything," she said.

Al Ryan, Norma's brother, said he suggested his sister get a dog after her husband died because he didn't like her living on the farm alone. Norma decided she would try-out Curly for 30 days, Ryan said, and if he was too loud or didn't warn her about strangers, she'd give him back.

Norma knew Curly was a good watchdog, he said, when one night the dog startled her with loud barking and was outside growling and circling a man looking for help because his car had broken down. When the 30 days was up, Ryan said, there was no question whether Curly would stay.

"By that time she'd pretty much fallen in love with him," he said.

Ryan said Curly would sit outside the kitchen window

and watch Norma working inside. Norma would open the window to talk to the dog, he said, and throw him treats.

After Norma died, Ryan said, he'd still see Curly sitting outside the kitchen window looking up at it.

"That was sad," he said. "It was kind of hard to take."

Ryan said Curly is curious and protects his territory well.

"If there was any movement on that farm he was well aware of it," he said.

Rodgers said Curly gets along fine with other dogs, but she hasn't seen his reaction to cats.

"He seems to be a really good-natured guy," she said, noting that she's sure he can be trained to live in a home.

The animal shelter is hoping to find Curly an owner who will bond with him the same way Norma did.

"He was such a joy to Norma," Rodgers said. "I mean she loved him."

For information call the animal shelter at (785) 899-6464.

Sebelius forms groups to fix budget

SEBELIUS, from Page 1

While she said she would include recommendations from the teams in her budget proposals for the state's 2004 fiscal year, Sebelius again said she will leave budget problems in the current year to outgoing Gov. Bill Graves.

Those problems include a projected deficit of \$310 million on June 30, which probably will require cuts in the state's \$4.4 billion budget.

Graves already trimmed \$41 million in spending, even after legislators approved \$252 million in tax increases in May.

"The governor is working on that,"

she said. "I will continue to work with the governor. My focus is on '04. His focus is on '03."

Sebelius was to have a Thursday afternoon news conference to announce a toll-free telephone hot line and e-mail address that residents can use to contact the teams.

During her gubernatorial campaign, Sebelius promised the top-to-bottom review of government when asked how she would handle the state's budget problems. Some legislators, particularly Republicans, who have majorities in both legislative houses, were skeptical that the effort would result in significant savings.

Outgoing Lt. Gov. Gary Sherrer, a

Republican, said he applauds Sebelius for having a review but noted that education and social services consume 85 percent of the budget.

"The problem is, with 85 percent of the budget tied up in education or human services, that's where you're going to have to find efficiencies to make it work," Sherrer said. "Those are areas that haven't been overfunded."

Sebelius said her review is modeled after one in Texas. During her campaign she also cited similar efforts in Colorado, Illinois and the city of Memphis.

"Until we have some results, people will just have to stay tuned to the process," she said.



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