

More SARS deaths reported

By Christopher Bodeen
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

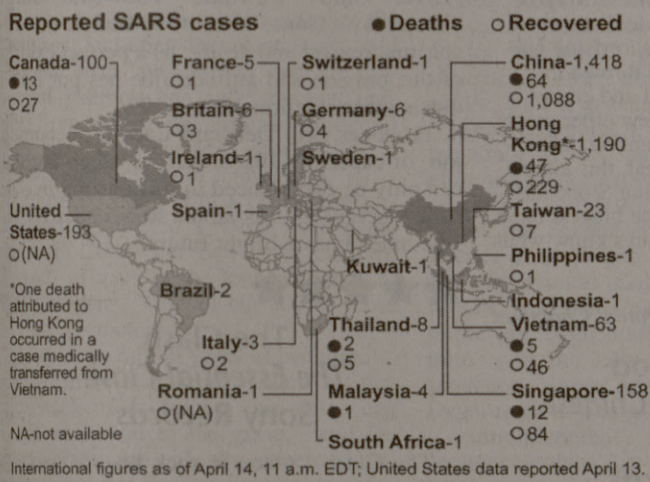
BEIJING — China's leaders expressed grave concerns over the deadly SARS outbreak for the first time Monday, following weeks of assurances that the flu-like disease was under control. In China and Hong Kong, another 11 deaths were reported in the global outbreak that has killed more than 140 people. Chinese President Hu Jintao was shown visiting hospitals in the southern province of Guangdong, the hard-hit region where severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, is believed to have originated.

"Since the discovery of the SARS cases, I feel very worried. I feel anxious for the masses," Hu was shown telling medical workers on state television. State media quoted Premier Wen Jiabao as saying the situation "remains grave" and warning that China's economy, international image and social stability could suffer. He called for airline and train passengers to be screened and quarantined if necessary, among the toughest measures suggested so far as China battles the disease which has killed 64 in the country and sickened more than 1,300. Four of those deaths were reported Monday, three in

Shanxi province and one in the Inner Mongolia region, the World Health Organization announced. Worldwide, there are more than 3,100 suspected cases of the disease and 144 deaths, mostly in Asia. Meanwhile, progress was reported on another front: Scientists in Canada and the United States have identified the genetic code of the virus suspected of causing SARS — a first step toward a better diagnostic test and possible vaccine. On Monday, Hong Kong reported seven new SARS deaths, for a total of 47. Many of the fatalities have been elderly people or patients suffering from other chronic health problems, although the deaths of six people ages 35 to 52 with no prior health problems were reported over the weekend.

Deadly SARS closer to containment

Scientists in Canada said they had identified the genetic code of the virus suspected of causing severe acute respiratory syndrome or SARS. Many of the 144 fatalities have been elderly people or patients suffering from other chronic health problems.



NEWS IN BRIEF

School shooter kills 1, injures 3

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A gunman with an AK-47 rifle opened fire in a high school gym Monday, killing a 15-year-old boy and wounding three teenage girls in a spray of more than 30 bullets that sent students scrambling for cover. Four suspects, ranging in age from 15 to 19, were arrested in a sweep of the neighborhood near John McDonogh High School. Police Chief Eddie Compass said he did not know if the suspects attended the school. Students said the shooting was apparently gang related and may have been retaliation for a previous fight. The gunman managed to slip out of the gym and the suspects were arrested about three blocks away. Two were in a getaway vehicle and two others were in a nearby house in the Mid-City neighborhood, about a mile north of the French Quarter. It was not immediately clear how the gun got through metal detectors and guards at the school. Students and school security officers said there was a hole in the fence near the gym. School board member Elliot Willard said students told him the boy was targeted and the girls were accidental victims.

Texas House budget debate expected to be long, heated

By April Castro
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — The \$58.6 billion state budget, the contentious focal point of the legislative session, is getting its eagerly awaited day in the sun. Lawmakers in the Texas House on Monday anticipated tense and emotional debate as they attempted to overcome a \$9.9 billion revenue shortfall. But before lawmakers even began to tackle appropriations for the next two years, they clashed on how to fill the \$1.8 billion budget gap for the remainder of the current fiscal year, which ends Aug. 31. The emergency appropriations bill for the current fiscal year included \$297 million from the state's Rainy Day Fund for a Texas Enterprise Fund requested by Gov. Rick Perry. Creation of the fund also would require passage of a separate bill. Perry had asked to use \$390 million from that \$1 billion Rainy Day Fund for an account the governor could use to help lure big businesses considering relocating to Texas. Democrats denounced allocating that money for the governor's use, saying it instead should be used for the needy, elderly, teachers and school children of Texas. "Is the need to create a fund that he cuts deals with? ... Does that

come before the needs of the people of the state of Texas when we have a cash problem?" said Rep. Gamet Coleman, D-Houston.

"I would put it in those places where it has value to the citizens of the state of Texas."

Coleman said the governor's economic development fund is not an emergency, but that the governor set it as a priority above needy people. Coleman called it a "deal-making slush fund." Within five minutes after Heflin began laying out budget legislation, Democrats hit the ground running, questioning parliamentary procedure and House rules compliance. Rep. Jim Dunnam, a Waco Democrat, immediately stalled proceedings by questioning House rules differentiating between a bill that makes changes in the current budget cycle and the budget for the 2004-05 biennium. Earlier, Rep. Pete Gallego, D-Alpine, interrogated Appropriations Committee Chairman Talmadge Heflin, R-Houston, on proposed swaps in the budget for the current budget cycle, known as supplemental appropriations, or House Bill 7.

Democrats spent much of the afternoon challenging a proposal to use money from the Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund for a \$26 million computer system for the Department of Human Services.

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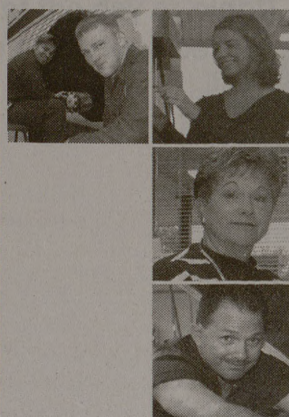
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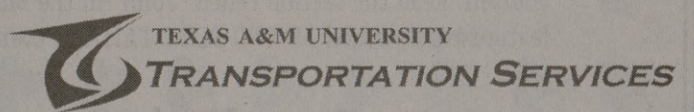


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