

News Digest

By The Associated Press

131 feared dead in ferry accident

MONTROUIS, Haiti — Relatives of the passengers on a crowded ferry boat that sank off La Gonave island gathered on the beach here Wednesday to await word of their kin. At least 131 people drowned or were missing and feared dead, officials said.

The ferry, the 50-foot-long wooden Oque Lele, sank shortly before noon Tuesday about a mile from the wharf in Anse-a-Galets on La Gonave.

Tuesday was market day on La Gonave. Most of the passengers on the ferry, which shuttles between Mont-

rouis on the mainland and La Gonave, were on their way home with goods they had bought to sell on the island.

"We think it (the ferry) was overcrowded, Anais Chavenet, a spokeswoman for the Information Ministry, said in Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital. It was not immediately known how many people the privately owned ferry was authorized to take on.

Chavenet said the cause of the accident was not known.

The Coast Guard recovered 20 bodies and 111 people were missing and pre-

sumed dead, said Christian Theodore, director of the National Disaster Relief Agency in Port-au-Prince. Nineteen people survived, he said.

Isnel Angrand, a government official on La Gonave, said there was not enough equipment to conduct a proper search and rescue operation.

The only helicopters in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, belong to the army, and their use is restricted. No charter planes or boats were available for hire Wednesday morning.



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In Brief

Company unveils space station simulator

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. — Martin Marietta Corp., an aerospace company competing for NASA's space station contract, Wednesday unveiled a full-scale functional model of an orbiting crew module.

The 43-foot-long cylinder-shaped compartment is equipped with 18 computers, crew work stations, and environmental control and communications systems.

Officials said the computers can simulate events that could occur in space, such as equipment malfunctions, and allow engineers to test design concepts that will be proposed for NASA's space station.

Officials discuss Swiss chemical spill

ZURICH, Switzerland — Switzerland conceded Wednesday to top officials from countries along the Rhine that a misunderstanding delayed an international alert for 24 hours after a disastrous toxic spill from a chemical plant fire.

Swiss President Alphonse Egli told the meeting that Switzerland was ready to discuss damage claims by countries affected and that he hoped they could be settled without legal action, said a West German delegation spokesman.

About 30 tons of agricultural chemicals — insecticides, herbicides and mercury-containing fungicides — washed into the Rhine on Nov. 1 when firefighters doused a blaze at a Sandoz chemical plant warehouse near Basel, Switzerland, and caused an environmental crisis.

A 25-mile-long slick of chemicals drifted downstream along the 820-mile Rhine, killing an estimated 500,000 fish and eels, harming other aquatic life and endangering drinking water.

The Swiss statement about the alert delay was distributed at a closed-door meeting called by Switzerland in response to strong criticism for

its handling of the emergency.

Attending were environment ministers from France, West Germany and the Netherlands. Luxembourg and the Common Market also sent representatives.

Major topics on the table were requests for further information from Switzerland and ways to tighten cooperation in future emergencies.

Basel authorities said the international Rhine pollution emergency center at Mannheim, West Germany, assured them it was aware of the spill hours before actually sounding an alarm. The statement did not explain the misunderstanding.

Dutch Waterways Minister Neelie Smit-Kroes reportedly told the meeting her government's administrative costs alone for dealing with the disaster totaled about \$300,000.

Sandoz spokesman Edgar Fasel was quoted Wednesday as dismissing a report cited by the Greens, the West German environmentalist party, which said a Swiss insurance company warned Sandoz management five years ago of safety lapses at the plant.

Study: Non-Hispanic whites could become minority by 2080

WASHINGTON — If changes in U.S. immigration laws fail to stem the current flow of aliens, a population group said Wednesday, Hispanics, Asians and blacks could account for more than half of all Americans a century from now.

"If illegal immigration remains high and annual immigration averages 1 million, the non-Hispanic white population would drop to just under 50 percent in 2080," said the new study by the private, non-profit Population Reference Bureau.

The report, "Immigration to the U.S.: The Unfinished Story," was written by Leon F. Bouvier, a population researcher who is a former vice president of the bureau, and Robert W. Gardner, a research associate at the East-West Population Institute in Honolulu. "The nation must once again redefine itself," Bouvier and Gardner said.

The 1980 Census counted 226.5 million Americans, of which 79.9 percent were whites other than Hispanics. The Census said 11.7 percent of Americans were black, 6.4 percent were Hispanic and 2.0 percent were Asians and others.

At current high immigration rates, totaling 1 million annually counting both legal and illegal aliens, the non-Hispanic whites could shrink to 49.8 percent of the population by the year 2080 — becoming "the largest minority in a nation without any ethnic majority population."

At that time Hispanics would make up 23.4 percent of the nation, having surpassed blacks as the second largest group in 2010. Blacks would be 14.7 percent of the population and Asians and others 12.1 percent.

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Researcher: Alzheimer's drug effective

BOSTON — An experimental drug for Alzheimer's disease significantly improved the memories of 16 of 17 senile people treated in a study, and may be the first effective therapy for this devastating illness of old age, a researcher says.

The drug is not available for routine use. Until researchers learn more about it, the medicine will be given only to small numbers of people enrolled in carefully controlled studies, said Dr. William K. Summers, who directed the study.

Summers said that his findings are encouraging but still preliminary, and he stressed that the drug does not cure Alzheimer's disease. Instead, it eases the symptoms of the disease, such as insulin controls diabetes or L-dopa relieves Parkinson's disease.

The results were published in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine.

The experimental drug, called tetrahydroaminoacrine, or THA, was discovered in 1909 and first given to Alzheimer's victims in a pilot study by Summers eight years ago.

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