

Cholera kills in South America Food being inspected

WASHINGTON - Government and industry inspectors are testing tons of imported fruits, vegetables and fish for possible contamination by the cholera that has killed thousands in South America.

So far, no cholera has been found on food brought in from the region and officials said Wednesday they see no threat to American consumers.

The focus is on fresh and frozen fish and shellfish that may have been pulled from cholera-infested waters off Peru and Ecuador, and produce that may have been washed in contaminated water.

The food can be purified if it's rinsed with a chlorine solution, which U.S. officials said packers in South America routinely use.

"If someone got sick from food we imported, you can imagine the flap that would cause," said Joseph Maden, acting director of the office of

microbiology at the Food and Drug Administration.

Less than 6 percent of the produce consumed in the United States is imported from the countries where cholera has broken out.

After months of testing samples of every produce shipment from Peru, where the epidemic is the worst, FDA officials said they were satisfied that fruits and vegetables from that country posed no threat.

But samples are still being tested from every shipment of Peruvian seafood, which is more vulnerable to the disease, said Linda Wisniowski, FDA consumer safety officer. Last year, Peru shipped about 32 million pounds of seafood to the United States.

The cholera epidemic broke out in Peru in January and soon swept to Ecuador. More than 1,300 people have died from the disease.

Research satellite problems delay Discovery experiments

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. - Discovery's astronauts encountered trouble Wednesday after a "Star Wars" research satellite was released and got stuck in the wrong position, delaying a critical experiment.

Twice commands were sent to the satellite to correct its alignment, and twice the spacecraft moved the wrong way. NASA blamed one error on ground operators and said it was mystified by the other.

The third attempt succeeded, and the seven astronauts quickly got ready to observe engine exhaust plumes of the shuttle. The crew also planned to observe the plume of smaller steering firing

jets as part of a missile-detecting experiment for the Pentagon.

The first observation of a maneuvering engine burn was rescheduled for Wednesday evening, when two other burns were also planned. Two other burns are scheduled for Thursday.

"I do not anticipate this is going to cost us any plume burns," NASA flight director Bob Castle said.

The satellite trouble began a few hours after the crew successfully released the \$94 million spacecraft 161 miles above Earth. Deployment had been delayed a day so the crew could make more observations of the aurora, or atmospheric light, with an instrument

running low on coolant.

The astronauts turned on a sensor to protect the satellite's instruments from the sun. Suddenly, without notice, the spacecraft's position six miles ahead of Discovery changed drastically, apparently because the sensor detected a bright object, Castle said.

Ground controllers devised a series of computer commands for the astronauts to send to the 4,200-pound spacecraft to fix its alignment, but it contained errors. A second set of commands also contained errors.

"We're really not sure what happened when we computed it the second time, Castle said.

Bangladesh toll reaches 25,000

MANPURA, Bangladesh - As many as 25,000 people may have died in a devastating cyclone that rampaged across the southeastern coast of this impoverished nation, a news agency reported Wednesday.

The government said it knew of only about 3,000 deaths in Tuesday's eight-hour storm, but acknowledged its reports were incomplete due to severe communications problems. Many of the affected islands were still under water.

United News of Bangladesh, quoting radio reports received in Dhaka, said 25,000 people died. Tens of thou-

sands of people were missing, the news agency said.

The government began an operation to provide essentials to the millions of survivors, officials said. At least 12 helicopters dispatched from Dhaka flew in and out of the affected area, dropping packets of food, bottles of water and clothing, they said.

Relief Secretary Hashimuddin Ahmed said the government could confirm only 2,977 deaths from the storm, which at its height included wind-whipped 20-foot waves sweeping over the low-lying coastal islands. Most of the toll was gathered from

officials on the mainland, he said.

An official with the Red Crescent, the Muslim equivalent of the Red Cross, also said the death toll could be as high as 25,000.

"Based on the reports from our officials, it's possible so many people have died," said the official, who asked his name not be used.

State Information Minister Nurul Huda said he was not in a position to deny the news agency's report, but that the government would maintain its toll for now.

Ahmed, the relief official, said at least 10 million people, about one-

tenth the country's population, lived in the area that bore the brunt of the storm. Many of them were rendered homeless, their mud and straw huts blown away by winds that reached up to 145 mph, he said.

Communications to much of the area remained cut off Wednesday, 36 hours after the storm subsided.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said the damage from the cyclone was about \$1 billion.

Ahmed said Bangladesh's salt manufacturing industry and shrimp farms were almost totally devastated.

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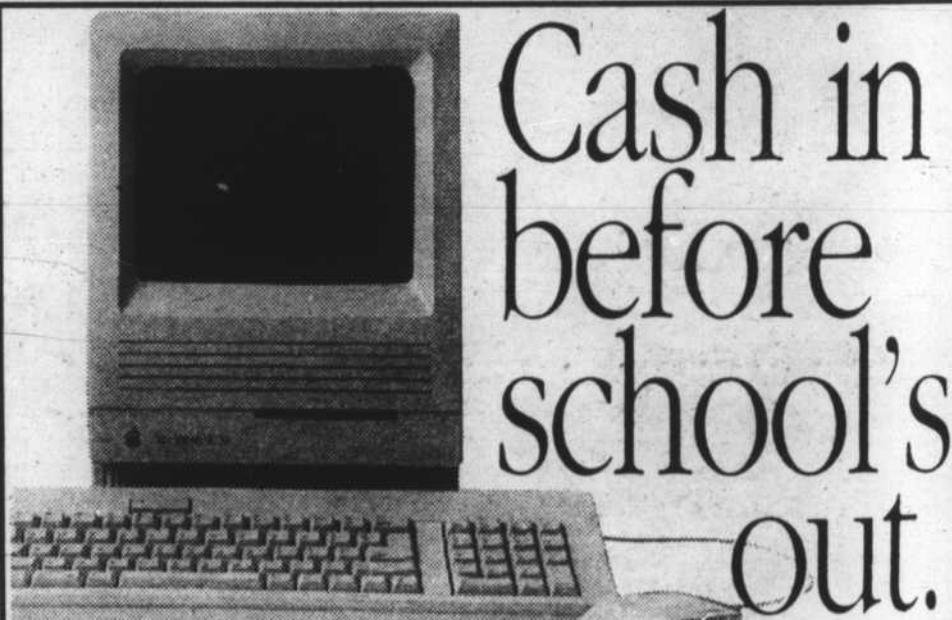
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