

Death toll at 202 in sewer blasts

GUADALAJARA, Mexico — Alarmed by reports of new gas fumes, authorities Thursday evacuated a neighborhood near the working-class district wrecked a day earlier by sewerline blasts that killed at least 202 people.

Moving to prevent political damage, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari gave investigators 72 hours to identify the cause of Wednesday's explosions. The state governor said three officials would face criminal negligence charges for failing to order an evacuation.

Officials said the blasts were caused by an industrial chemical used by a cooking-oil company or by a gasoline spill into the sewer system.

Eziquiel Mendez of the Jalisco state attorney general's office said investigators were checking equipment at the La Central cooking-oil plant, and at installations of the national oil company, Pemex.

The government will carry "to its utmost circumstances the investigation of the causes of the tragedy and the circumstances that produced it," Salinas said before returning to Mexico City.

Weeping survivors thronged the streets of Guadalajara's La Reforma district, where the explosions destroyed 20 to 25 square city blocks, hurling cars and trucks into the air and blowing up adobe houses. At least 600 people were hurt and more than 15,000 others left homeless, officials said.

State spokesman Armando Morquecho said damage was estimated at \$300 million.

At a makeshift morgue at a sports stadium, relatives wailed as they looked at a list of names of the dead identified so far. Every few minutes, an announcement blared from a speaker, telling the bereaved that the government would pay for the funerals.

Residents demanded to know why the government had failed to act promptly on reports of the fumes, and what had caused the buildup of volatile gas in the sewer system.

"If authorities knew about this why didn't they tell us?" asked Ramon Guerra, 22, who had helped pull the bodies of his sister and his 6-year-old nephew from the ruins of their home. The governor identified those who



Earthquakes shake Southern California

LOS ANGELES — Hundreds of aftershocks sent ripples of anxiety through Southern California on Thursday, hours after a strong desert earthquake caused isolated damage and dozens of injuries.

Earthquake experts cautioned there was a slight chance Wednesday night's magnitude 6.1 tremor could be a precursor to the long-dreaded "Big One." "We're long overdue for one... so we're advising communities... to be on their toes," said Lt. Ben Nottingham, spokesman for the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management.

The state Office of Emergency Management advised authorities in six Southern California counties to be on alert even though the probability of a great earthquake decreased rapidly with each hour.

By Thursday, the U.S. Geological Survey said the chance of such a shaker had fallen to less than 1-in-20.

Hundreds of tiny aftershocks were felt Thursday near the epicenter. Only two registered more than 4.0 on the Richter scale, said Douglas Smith, a spokesman for the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena.

Wednesday night's shaker struck at 9:50 p.m. Wednesday and was centered about 110 miles east of Los Angeles near Palm Springs in Riverside County. A magnitude-4.6 quake shook the same area 2 1/2 hours earlier.

"It was like something hit the side of the wall," said Ed Bowlin, a 26-year-old security guard at the Hyatt Regency Suites in Palm Springs. "It was like, this is your Earth Day wake-up call."

The quake rocked buildings from San Diego to Santa Barbara, 200 miles up the coast. Residents as far away as Las Vegas and Phoenix reported feeling the tremor.



"I lived in San Francisco for 39 years and I never felt one this strong," said Vi Richardson, 62, who was lying in bed on the top floor of the Circus Hotel in Las Vegas when the quake struck. "I thought (it) never would stop shaking."

Back in California, 15 people were taken to Hi-Desert Medical Center in Yucca Valley with minor injuries. Ten were treated and released, and five were admitted with injuries ranging from a broken ankle to cuts and bruises, said Theresa Graham, a hospital spokeswoman. All were listed in good condition.

Desert Hospital in Palm Springs said it treated and released 10 people. Building inspectors from throughout the region were in the field Thursday assessing the quake's toll on property.

Eighteen buildings in the desert community of Joshua Tree were damaged, including a coffee shop and hair salon that were ordered condemned, said Jeff Mellinger, a San Bernardino County fire spokesman.

Reports show recovery continues

WASHINGTON — Applications for unemployment benefits fell to a six-month low this month, the government said Thursday. Factory orders for expensive, durable goods advanced moderately in March.

"The fruits of the recovery are now reaching American workers and their families," Labor Secretary Lynn

Martin said. Economists said the reports confirm that the recession has ended. They cautioned, however, that growth so far has been strong enough only to stem layoffs, not to put the unemployed back to work.

The number of Americans filing first-time unemployment insurance claims fell to 404,000 for the week ending April 11, down from 416,000 a week earlier and the lowest since

early October. It was the third consecutive weekly decline.

The Commerce Department said durable goods orders, for items such as trucks and turbines expected to last at least three years, rose 1.6 percent to \$122.6 billion last month, a slightly bigger gain than anticipated by analysts.

March was the third month without a decline.

De Klerk offers plan multi-racial government

CAPE TOWN, South Africa — In a plan that would guarantee South Africa its first black leader, President F.W. de Klerk proposed Thursday to hold multi-racial elections for an interim presidency.

Saying the plan contains "the backbone of democracy," de Klerk provided the greatest detail yet on how he envisions moving from white domination to power-sharing with the 30 million black majority.

He told Parliament each political party would be able to nominate one candidate for a ruling Executive Council.

The top three to five vote-getters in national elections would sit on the council, with the

chairman serving as state president. Chairmanship would rotate every six months, de Klerk said.

A multi-racial election would give the black majority voting rights for the first time and guarantee popular black leaders, such as Nelson Mandela, a seat on the council and thus the presidency.

There was no immediate comment from Mandela's African National Congress, the main black movement. The group's offices were closed for the day.

The ANC has traditionally opposed calls for a coalition government, saying a party that wins a majority should rule by itself.

The ANC and several other political groups negotiating with the government must agree before any transitional plan can go forward. Leading black and white parties have been working on a new constitution and plan to make a progress report next month.

De Klerk did not give a time frame for his proposal but has said an interim government should be installed within a few months.

"We do not wish to leave South Africa without a responsible government at any time during the process of democratization," he told Parliament.

Colin Eglon of the liberal Democratic Party said a rotating presidency would lead to a power struggle.

Police beating trial goes to jury

SIMI VALLEY, Calif. — The volatile case of four white policemen charged with beating a black motorist was placed in the hands of a jury Thursday after a judge instructed them in laws dealing with excessive force.

The judge rejected a last-minute mistrial motion by a defense lawyer who said he had been "slimed" by the prosecutor.

Superior Court Judge Stanley Weisberg spent more than an hour reading jurors 81 legal instructions, including specific rules involving the charge of assault under color of authority in the beating of motorist Rodney King.

During deliberations, the jurors were being sequestered at an unidentified hotel. He refused to grant a mistrial after attorney Michael Stone accused Deputy District Attorney Terry White of launching a personal attack on him in final arguments.

"I feel that I've been slimed and I think the slime has landed on my client," said Stone.

"He clearly accused me of misrepresenting the evidence," said Stone, who represents Officer Laurence Powell. "He did it with great drama at a time when he was very emotional. He said, 'Can any of the people associated with Larry Powell tell the truth?'"

"Such comments should play no role in how you decide the case," the judge said.

Weisberg noted that Stone was not seeking apologies from defense lawyer John Barnett, who accused co-counsel of soliciting lies against his client, Officer Theodore Briseno.

White observed: "Mr. Barnett came as close as possible to saying that (defense lawyers) suborned perjury, which is a lot more serious."

The March 3, 1991, beating, after King was stopped for speeding, was videotaped by a neighborhood resident and broadcast nationwide. It led to a review of police brutality nationwide and raised issues of racism. On trial were Briseno, 39; Powell, 29; Officer Timothy Wind, 31, and Sgt. Stacey Koon, 41.

On Wednesday, Barnett and White delivered their final arguments.

White stunned the courtroom when he left the podium and raced toward Powell.

"This is the man!" shouted White as he came within inches of Powell. "This man laughed! This man taunted! And he's denying it!"

Powell sat, stunned, but his lawyer leaped up and objected. The judge calmly told White to return to the podium.

White later apologized to jurors for the outburst and ended his argument abruptly.

Barnett had launched into a veritable tirade against the other officers on trial in his summation.

NASA finds how galaxies were created

LOS ANGELES — A spacecraft has discovered the largest and oldest structures in the universe, wispy clouds that show how creation's "big bang" led to formation of stars and galaxies, scientists said Thursday.

"If you're religious, it's like looking at God," said research team leader George Smoot, an astrophysicist at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory and the University of California, Berkeley.

The discovery was made by NASA's Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE) satellite during its \$400 million mission to study the universe's origins.

Researchers say more than 300 million measurements by the spacecraft answer a question that has long vexed scientists: How did matter that was uniformly spread out in the newborn universe start clumping together to produce stars, galaxies and clusters of galaxies?

"We have observed what we believe are the largest and most ancient structures in the universe, extremely thin clouds of matter starting to clump together in the newborn universe," Smoot said.

He said the clouds were formed only about 300,000 years after the big bang, the primordial blast scientists believe created the universe 15 billion years ago.

The largest clouds stretch across two-thirds of the known universe, or 59 billion trillion miles, Smoot said. That's roughly 120 million billion roundtrips between Earth and the moon.

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