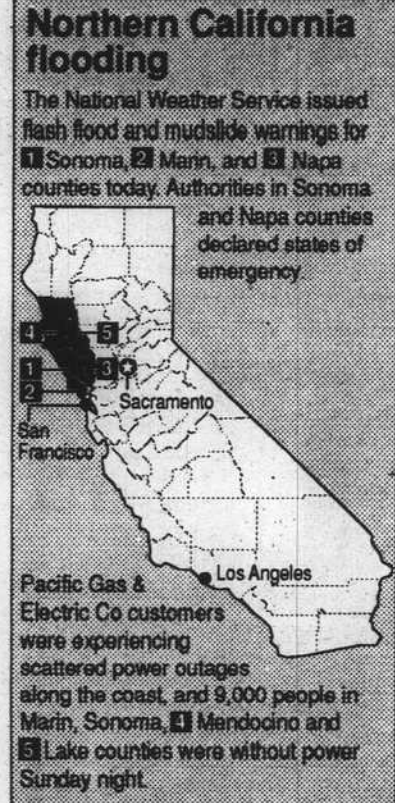


Flooding evacuates California residents

FORESTVILLE, Calif. — Giant redwood trees toppled and people fled resort communities Monday in the hills north of San Francisco as seven days of rain caused the region's worst flooding in nearly a decade.



Thousands of people were evacuated and power was knocked out to tens of thousands of homes as the water washed over sections of California's wine country.

A garbage collector was killed Monday in Monterey County when a tree toppled onto his truck, crushing the cab.

"This has the potential to be a full-blown natural disaster," said meteorologist Steve Newman.

Rainfall slowed over much of the northern half of the state as the storm moved toward Southern California, where flooding last week caused millions in damage. However, more storms were on the way off the Pacific, and forecasters said they saw no real break in the rain all week.

It was the worst flooding in the hilly, wooded region since the Valentine's Day flood of 1986, which followed nine days of rain. Some 50,000 people were driven from their homes by that deluge.

From a rooftop in Forestville, about 55 miles north of San Francisco, 21-year-old Greg Stocker and his dog Max ate ice cream as they watched the Russian River rise up past the first floor of their house.

"Been through it once in '86," he said. "I guess we can do it again."

Two helicopters were used to evacuate dozens of people living in the flooded areas along the Russian River, said Jim Cook, a search and

rescue volunteer with the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department.

Streams also flooded around the Napa Valley, but the region's vineyards are mostly on slopes away from streams, and grapevines are dormant at this time of year. "They've gone through this before," said Kate Jones, spokeswoman for the Napa Valley Vintners Association.

The Russian, Napa, Petaluma, Eel, Smith, Van Duzen and Sacramento rivers were all near or past flood stage Monday.

The Russian River reached 45 feet at Guerneville, 11 feet over flood stage. The record at the summer vacation community was 48.8 feet in 1986.

As a young man in shorts and a football jersey cruised by on a motorized surfboard, a huge redwood crashed into the water, snapping power lines. Nearby, military trucks took evacuees to shelters.

All roads into Guerneville, about 60 miles north of San Francisco, were cut off with only emergency vehicles allowed in and out.

The Red Cross had 14 shelters open across the region; officials said more than 2,650 families in six counties were forced from their homes or were in immediate danger of being forced out. But that figure didn't take into account those who fled their homes for motels or to stay with friends and relatives.

Trial begins for Muslims accused of terrorist acts

NEW YORK — The trial of a blind Egyptian cleric and 11 other Muslims accused of plotting bombings and assassinations in a "war of urban terrorism" got under way in a heavily guarded courthouse Monday with prospective jurors asked about race, religion and their feelings about Arabs.

U.S. District Judge Michael Mukasey outlined the case to 100 potential jurors who were crammed into the courtroom so tightly that 11 had to stand. At least a dozen marshals lined the courtroom and nearby hallways, and a bomb-sniffing dog with its own photo ID checked the courtroom.

The defendants, charged with seditious conspiracy, are accused of plotting the 1993 World Trade Center blast as well as planning to bomb the United Nations and two tunnels and a bridge connecting New York City to New Jersey.

They also are accused of plotting to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and kidnap or kill American politicians or judges.

If convicted the defendants face life in prison.

The Trade Center bombing was the only act of terrorism actually carried out; the alleged plot was broken up with the help of an informant. Four men were convicted last year in the Trade Center blast,

which killed six people and injured more than 1,000.

Prosecutors allege Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman was the mastermind of what they call "a war of urban terrorism against the United States." The 56-year-old blind cleric turned toward the would-be jurors and smiled when introduced.

The potential jurors were not permitted to see handcuffs on the defendants, all of whom were wearing suits.

The judge summarized the indictment as describing a conspiracy to commit violent acts "as a way of opposing the United States and United States policy in the Middle East."

Prosecutors have videotapes and secretly recorded conversations obtained with the help of an informant.

The defense maintains the men on trial were unwittingly enlisted to perform seemingly innocent tasks that contributed to alleged crimes, or were entrapped by an overzealous informant.

Potential jurors were given 19 pages of questions designed to weed out bias in the search for 12 jurors and six alternates, who will remain anonymous through what is expected to be a six- to nine-month trial.

Mukasey said he wants the jury seated by Jan. 30.

News... in a Minute

Gingrich fires new House historian

WASHINGTON — Speaker Newt Gingrich fired his new House historian Monday night after learning she chaired a 1986 review panel that complained a Holocaust course failed to present Nazi and Ku Klux Klan views.

Gingrich acted swiftly after learning about the background of Dr. Christina Jeffrey - who successfully recommended that the Department of Education decline a federal grant for the course.

"(Gingrich) learned about the matter six years ago earlier this evening," Gingrich spokesman Tony Blankley said Monday night. "As soon as he corroborated those facts, he asked for her resignation, effective this evening. He still holds her in high esteem."

Ailing child's parents get car stolen

OMAHA, Neb. — Watching their 10-month-old son, Christopher, struggle in the aftermath of transplant surgery, Carla and Ken Woolum of Booneville, Miss., had their car stolen Saturday night from Omaha's Ronald McDonald House, where the out-of-town relatives of ailing children can stay.

Ken traveled from Booneville to Omaha to join his wife at their child's side in the intensive care unit at the Medical Center after the child took a turn for the worse. Christopher had received a liver and small bowel transplant at the center in November.

"We're just in shock," said Mrs. Woolum. "We couldn't believe someone would go so low."

She said she and her husband haven't had time to fret over their car. "I think we can deal with the car," Mrs. Woolum said. "It's just our baby we want to get better."

Family gathers for a frigid picnic

OMAHA — An Omaha family never has to worry about pesky ants crashing their annual picnic - although frostbite could be a concern. An estimated 150 relatives and friends joined Jim and Patty Suiter in 20-degree weather Sunday for their 20th annual January picnic, held this year at Lake Manawa in Iowa.

"It just started as something fun to do, but now it's really a tradition," Mrs. Suiter said.

Adding a little charity to the event, the family began to collect clothing five years ago for the Siena and Francis House, a homeless shelter in Omaha.

Mrs. Suiter said the picnic has never been postponed due to weather, and that her family and friends look forward each year to eating chili, sipping hot chocolate and playing winter games in the snow.

"It's not very cold and the wind is kind today," she said. "It's just a beautiful day for a picnic."

Japan, U.S. officials optimistic, conflict avoided before summit

WASHINGTON — U.S. and Japanese officials went out of their way Monday to minimize serious trade frictions as President Clinton prepared for a summit likely to stand in stark contrast to his meeting with Japan's prime minister a year ago.

Despite the fact that America's trade deficit with Japan hit a record last year - an estimated \$62 billion - top administration officials played down trade tensions and said economic issues would only be one of the items on the agenda when Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama meets with Clinton on Wednesday.

Officials said optimistically that negotiators would be able to strike one trade deal, involving financial services, in time for it to be announced when the two leaders meet.

However, that was expected to be the only trade breakthrough and even it was not assured.

Despite this lack of progress, the talk leading up to this summit has been remarkably low key compared to U.S. rhetoric a year ago when Clinton met with then-Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa.

That summit ended in failure as the Japanese refused to agree to

American demands for measurable targets for opening Japan's markets. Clinton said it was better to let the talks collapse rather than accept "an empty agreement."

The fight was over the so-called framework accord reached between the two countries in July 1993. Under that deal, Japan was supposed to reach market opening agreements by February 1994 in four priority areas - autos and auto parts, insurance, and government purchases of telecommunications and medical products.

Deals were reached in October, eight months behind schedule, in the areas of government procurement and insurance. But both countries remain far apart on the biggest dispute, the auto sector, which accounts for 60 percent of America's deficit with Japan.

That issue, however, was effectively removed from the agenda of the summit meeting by a decision last week to restart the stalled auto talks later this month at a lower level.

U.S. officials, who last year talked about the absolute need to pry Japan's markets open, were taking a much softer approach this time around.

Walter Mondale, America's am-

bassador to Japan, told reporters Monday that there was a concern on the part of the United States that the trade frictions with Japan were overshadowing all other aspects of relations between the two countries.

"These trade frictions tend to get all the news," he said. "If you are not careful, the other good, solid things going on get lost."

Mondale hailed the market-opening deals that have been reached. He noted that U.S.-grown apples went on sale in Japan for the first time on Monday, ending 24 years of negotiations on the subject.

Takakazu Kuriyama, Japan's ambassador to the United States, told reporters at a separate briefing that this week's summit would not have any "divisive or contentious" issue on the agenda, but instead would set the stage for a state visit by Clinton to Japan next fall.

Trade analysts said the administration had abandoned its hardline approach with Japan because it was not working and was upsetting global currency markets, who pushed the dollar to record lows last year against the yen.

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