

Wedding scam fools Dutchmen

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) — Five men hoping to tie the knot with a Thai woman discovered at the airport they were all waiting for the same bride — a suspected con artist who never showed up.

The jilted men were all victims of a Bangkok-based scam in which one woman placed personal advertisements in Dutch newspapers under dozens of different names, the daily De Telegraaf newspaper reported Thursday.

Claiming she wanted to marry a Dutchman, the woman sent photos and poured her heart out in letters to anybody who answered her ads, one victim said. As the long-distance romances blossomed, the woman's letters began to include requests for cash, including \$625 to cover the cost of a flight to Amsterdam.

With wedding bells ringing in their ears, the Dutch men didn't hear any alarm bells — until they ran into each other at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport and began comparing notes.

Acapulco victims await provisions

■ A water shortage from Hurricane Pauline has left thousands thirsty.

Mexico (AP) — Standing in huge, snaking lines along Acapulco's sweltering, dust-caked streets, thousands of people pleaded Thursday for one of life's most basic necessities: water.

The shortage of clean water has become critical since Hurricane Pauline tore through southern Mexico last week, killing at least 230 people. Officials are trucking in tens of thousands of gallons a day, but it is not enough to quench the thirst of an increasingly desperate population of 1.5 million.

Thousands of people lined up to pick up half-liter bottles of water at a distribution center in the Parque las Lajas neighborhood on Thursday. Some came as early as 3 a.m. To prevent unrest, a soldier with an automatic rifle stood guard at the front of the line.

Paula Tomatzin, a 27-year-old

taco vendor, made it to the front of the line but was turned away by a worker. She had an iodine mark on her right hand, showing that she had already picked up her daily ration.

"It's not enough for my whole family. I need more. I have three little children and they don't have enough to drink," she begged.

It didn't work. Tomatzin walked away, head hanging low.

The relief center's director, Juan Jose Alarcon, said it was tough to turn people away, but many hadn't gotten any water yet. He was supposed to stop handing out water at 5:30 every afternoon, but he kept the center open an extra couple of hours Wednesday because the lines were still long. Even then, he had to turn people away.

"Shamefully, most of Acapulco is without water," he said. "There is a great need."

The deadly flash floods unleashed by Hurricane Pauline on Oct. 9 mangled water pipes throughout the city and heavily damaged the two main aqueducts that carry river water to Acapulco's water purification plants.

The smaller of the aqueducts was

repaired Wednesday, and by Thursday, 30 percent of city residents had running water for at least part of the day, said Eleno Garcia Benavente, an official with the National Water Commission.

Crews delivered an extra 1.3 million gallons a day in bottles and tanker trucks. But in many neighborhoods, there simply wasn't any.

In the western suburbs, women piled up sacks of flood-muddied clothes and took hourlong bus rides to a river where they could bathe and do their washing. Downtown, people scooped water from an open, gurgling manhole.

On the banks of the fetid Camarones River, people dug holes in the mud, let the sediment sink and scooped up liquid from the top. Some were drinking it.

"It isn't good to drink, but we're thirsty," said Selene Toribio Abellanera, 21. "We adults can handle it, but children aren't as strong, and we have to look for bottled water for them."

She had waited five hours to get that bottled water — a ration of about

1½ quarts for her family of four.

Already, waterborne diseases have begun to appear. Officials said Thursday that Acapulco had eight confirmed cases of cholera, a bacterial infection that causes diarrhea, dehydration and sometimes death. Doctors warned of a possible epidemic.

Hundreds of water trucks stopped wherever lines of people, buckets in hand, had formed. Although officials forbid anyone to sell water, some people were hawking jugs of water for \$1 each; \$5 for those without an empty jug to trade in.

Juan Carlos Angel, driving a truck from Pepsico's Electropura drinking water subsidiary, unloaded three jugs for a man on the sidewalk who forked over \$3. A policeman looked on and did nothing.

"It's up to the company," said the officer, Marcos Rodriguez. "I don't know what arrangement they have with the government."

Garcia Benavente, the National Water Commission official, said the driver would be punished.

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