

News Digest

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"I have an emptiness that will never be filled."

Caribbean family struggles with loss

POLO, Dominican Republic (AP) — Carlos Feliz tossed aside a rock piled atop many others in his brother's front yard, leaned against an orange tree and cried.

For four days, he had been digging through the mud and picking through the rocks that Hurricane Georges washed through this small town, and he had found only four of the six bodies he sought.

"We've been up and down the entire river, and we can't find them," he said. He pointed at his chest. "I have an emptiness that will never be filled."

It was Feliz, 39, who dug out the bodies of his older brother Julio, Julio's wife, Antonia, and their children Carolina, 7, and Paola, 3. Still missing are 18-year-old Brandy and 13-year-old Berenice.

"They're buried down there somewhere," Feliz said quietly, gesturing downstream. He held a handkerchief to his eyes.

Polo, a coffee- and avocado-farming town 120 miles west of the capital, Santo Domingo, was devastated by flooding that Georges unleashed Wednesday. Instant rivers carried rocks from the mountainside that crushed dozens of houses and buried many more.

At least 24 people died in Polo, a town of 14,000, and at least seven more are missing.

But without phone service, no one from outside the town could know about the destruction before Saturday, when officials patched collapsed bridges and bulldozers cleared mud and rocks from at least one lane of road.

The situation in Polo is now slightly better than that of hundreds of other towns; authorities have arrived with the first food, water and medicine. In many other towns, nobody has had contact with the rest of the world since Tuesday.

Because of this, almost everyone in the Dominican Republic believes most of Georges' victims have yet to be counted. The U.S. Agency for International Development on Saturday said the death toll in the Dominican Republic from Hurricane Georges, which at the time was officially 201, "is almost certain to exceed 500."

That will include the family of

Jose Feliz, a distant relative of Carlos.

Jose Feliz; his wife Lydia; their son Rafi and his wife, Drake; and Rafi and Drake's two children, 9-year-old Manguito and 4-year-old Joanna, all were washed away when mud and rocks poured through their humble wood-and-corrugated metal house.

Joselin Segura, Jose's 15-year-old nephew, waded through the muck on Saturday to return to the house, and he picked through the records lying next to a smashed and overturned Wurlitzer jukebox.

Joselin would slip over to his cousin Rafi's house at night to listen to boleros and merengues by singers such as Los Reyes del Este, Julio Morales y Su Trio and Fernandito Villalona.

Villalona was their favorite. Joselin sang his favorite song, "Mi Hermano, Mi Hermano," or "My Brother, My Brother," as he looked through the records he once listened to with the cousin he said treated him like a kid brother.

"I'm thinking about how it must have been" for the family during the hurricane, he said. "Trying to feel what it must have been like."

Five of the bodies were found the day after the hurricane about a mile downstream; neighbors still were looking for the body of little Joanna.

The survivors face hardship as they look for the dead. Residents walk a mile up the road to a trickle of water from a mountain stream they hope is clean. There is little food in the stores, and what's there is too expensive for most.

"We haven't eaten since the day of the hurricane," said Joselin's mother, Dalma. Joselin looked down at the muddy floor, as if ashamed.

But as family members continue to comb the riverbed for Joanna's body, they concede it may never turn up.

"I feel bad, but I have to take heart because I have my own family to protect," said Rafi's brother, Felipe. "I have to find them water and food."

As for the number of people Georges killed in the Dominican Republic, the best answer probably came from Victor Terrero, the country's undersecretary of health who lives 15 miles from Polo.

"I'll confess something to you," he said. "I have no idea."

Georges terrifies New Orleans

Some flee, some disregard the imminent hurricane

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Big Easy was decidedly uneasy Sunday, as New Orleans prepared for its worst nightmare hurricane — a massive storm that would sit overhead for days, driving Lake Pontchartrain's waters over the levees and submerging the city.

But thousands didn't wait for Hurricane Georges to arrive. They fled, turning Interstates 10 and 55 into bumper-to-bumper processions.

The storm, with sustained winds of 110 mph, was expected to smash the Gulf Coast late Sunday or early today. Its course wobbled a bit during the day, giving hope that a slight deviation to the east could spare New Orleans the worst of the devastation.

Forecasters said as many as 25 inches of rain would fall on New Orleans, coupled with a storm surge that could drive millions of gallons of water up the Mississippi River toward the city.

Tens of thousands flocked to the city's nine shelters, including the cavernous Louisiana Superdome and the sprawling Ernest Morial Convention Center. The city had capacity to shelter 100,000 of its 450,000 people, Mayor Marc Morial said.

But otherwise, gradually, the city shut down. All flights in and out were canceled; more than 1.4 million people had been told to evacuate, and police planned to close the interstate highways behind them; Morial urged all non-essential businesses to lock their doors.

In a city that truly never sleeps, they were turning out the lights: Morial ordered a 6 p.m. curfew, and surrounding areas followed suit.

In the French Quarter, most of the bars on Bourbon Street were closed and covered with plywood. Hotel workers rolled up awnings while stranded tourists and convention-goers strolled along the city's most famous street.

Carla Rivers, 25, of Los Angeles, swigged beer as she walked down Bourbon Street.

"We been at it all night. If we die, at least we'll die happy," she said. "Besides, if you're drunk enough, you aren't scared."

Some people carried plastic bags of junk food to the hotel rooms where they planned to hunker down in the storm. Jim Porter, of Ardmore, Okla., bought two bottles of water, three bags of potato chips and peanuts.

By 6 p.m., the hurricane's center was about 35 miles east of the mouth of the Mississippi River, or about 120 miles east-southeast of New Orleans. Wind blew around the eye at a sustained 110 mph, and forecasters said that might increase to 120 mph, making it a Category 3 storm.

Georges was moving toward the northwest at 8 mph but was expected to gradually slow, bringing its turbulent center near the coast sometime late in the day. But hurricane-force winds of at least 74 mph extended as much as 70 miles out from the center.

House says company paid workers to fund campaign

WASHINGTON (AP) — A major Democratic donor's company may have paid its employees to donate to Clinton's 1996 re-election campaign, according to House investigators.

Federal law prohibits the use of corporate funds to make donations directly to candidates, and outlaws using straw donors to disguise the real source of contributions.

Investigators for the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee have gathered payroll records suggesting employees of Future Tech International received \$1,000 bonus checks a few days before they wrote personal checks for the same amount to the Clinton/Gore campaign in 1995.

The Miami computer company is headed by Mark Jimenez, who regularly contributes to the Democrats.

In an affidavit, one former employee told investigators that Jimenez's assistant told her Jimenez wanted to raise \$20,000 from Future Tech employees for the Clinton campaign. She was asked to make a \$1,000 contribution for which she would be reimbursed.

"I agreed to make the contribu-

tion and gave a personal check in the amount of \$1,000 made payable to the Clinton/Gore campaign," wrote Daria Haycox, a former employee, in an affidavit signed Sept. 8. "Shortly after ... I received a bonus check from Future Tech in the amount of \$1,000."

Neither Jimenez nor his company has been charged with any wrongdoing.

A supporter of Bob Dole's 1996 campaign and several Democratic donors and fund-raisers have been charged or convicted for laundering contributions in others' names since the criminal investigation into 1996 fund-raising abuses began nearly two years ago.

Payroll records for Future Tech show on Sept. 8, 1995, Haycox and six other employees received \$1,000 bonuses. Five days later, the employees each gave the Clinton/Gore campaign a \$1,000 donation, Federal Election Commission records show.

Campaign records show that 22 Future Tech employees gave \$1,000 each to the Clinton campaign on that same day.

Perot condemns Clinton

ATLANTA (AP) — Breaking an uncharacteristic silence on the President Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair, Ross Perot offered a characteristically blunt opinion.

"Any man who would conduct himself in such an emotional, unstable manner and bring worldwide shame, first to his family, and then to a vulnerable young woman and finally to the United States of America is unfit to be president of this great country," Perot said.

"If he loves his country, he will go."

Perot called the president "mentally and emotionally unstable" in his comments Saturday to delegates of the Reform Party, which he founded before running for president in 1996.

Perot's speech was part of the party's second national convention, which began Friday and ended

Sunday with discussion about how the party should nominate candidates for the 2000 elections. Perot gave no indication whether he would seek the presidential nomination.

Perot's speech was criticized by Bob Dole, the Republican standard-bearer in 1996.

"Ross Perot says a lot of things that I think are beyond the pale, and he hasn't changed any," Dole said Sunday on CNN's "Late Edition."

"Again I think Ross Perot deals in overstatement a lot, and it doesn't serve any real purpose."

And Clinton adviser James Carville took a shot at Perot on NBC's "Meet the Press," calling him "a man that would sure be able to recognize mental and emotional instability. So I wouldn't pay much attention to what he said. He's about a half a quart low, to tell you the truth."



German election returns indicate Kohl era ending

BONN, Germany (AP) — Gerhard Schroeder and his Social Democrats won national elections Sunday, ushering in the first change of government Germany has seen after 16 years of conservative rule under Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the West's longest-serving leader.

"The Kohl era has come to an end," Schroeder proclaimed to the cheering party faithful. "Our task will be to thoroughly modernize our country and to unblock the backlog of reform."

Schroeder, 54, will be the first of his generation, rooted in the 1960s leftist movement, to lead Europe's biggest nation. Many voters have known no other chancellor than Kohl, and the prospect of change brought tears of joy.

Schroeder told the ARD television network he would begin talks today on building a coalition. His party won 41 percent of the vote, according to exit polls. The Christian Democrats, winning just 35 percent, lost its parliamentary majority.

Israel OK's U.S. plan in part

NEW YORK (AP) — Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's push for a partial West Bank accord cleared a major hurdle Sunday as Israel largely accepted a U.S. proposal for how much land to yield to Palestinians.

But Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Dore Gold, said, "If there's no security, there is no deal."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday on CNN that Israel's agreement with the United States was "almost complete about the amount of land that we would hand over. It is territory that is uninhabited by Palestinians but is very important for our security."

Netanyahu said the remaining issue was "to make sure that the land that we hand over to the Palestinians does not become a base for continued terrorist attacks against Israel."

On the Palestinian side, Yasser Arafat, who heads the Palestinian delegation to the United Nations, said reaching a final agreement was impossible now. He said Albright and her team were trying to reach agreements on several issues, and "we are not against that."

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