

NEWS DIGEST

FRIDAY, AUGUST 27, 1999

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Questions on Waco linger

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Janet Reno pledged Thursday to “get to the bottom” of why it took the FBI six years to admit its agents may have fired potentially flammable tear gas canisters on the final day of their standoff with the Branch Davidian cult near Waco, Texas.

A senior Pentagon official said the military's advice was sought on how to end the standoff and that three military observers were on the scene the day of the raid.

But the military had “no operational involvement,” said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Reno told reporters, “I have no reason at this point to believe the FBI is responsible for the deaths of those people.”

But she told her weekly news conference she was “very, very frustrated” that news reports surfaced about the possible use of flammable devices six years after categorical denials by the FBI.

Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh ordered a fresh investigation of what transpired on April 19, 1993, at the Branch Davidian compound. The standoff ended with the death of David Koresh and about 80 followers during a fire that erupted after the tear gas assault on their wooden headquarters.

Earlier, Reno and Freeh ordered 40 FBI agents, led by an FBI inspector, to re-interview everyone

who was at the Waco scene. FBI spokesman John Collingwood said Wednesday night the agents will report “within weeks” about the use of military-type tear gas and why it took so long to be admitted publicly.

Reno said she had gone over in her mind many times the events of that fiery day, asking herself how the government might have handled it differently.

Had no stand been taken that day, she said, “We don't know if (cult leader) David Koresh would have done it two weeks later on his own, without any provocation, and the federal government would have been blamed for not acting sooner.”

The chairman of the Texas Department of Public Safety told The Dallas Morning News that federal officials should explain why members of the Army's secret Delta Force anti-terrorism squad were at the scene the day the compound burned.

“Everyone involved knows they were there. If there is an issue, it was what was their role at the time,” said Chairman James B. Francis of Dallas.

“Some of the evidence that I have reviewed and been made aware of is very problematical as to the role of Delta Force at the siege.”

Asked whether the new FBI investigation would address questions about the Delta Force, Reno replied: “We will pursue any issue in ques-

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JANET RENO
attorney general

tion.” Republicans in Congress made clear they would reopen hearings into the 51-day siege.

Reno said she planned to discuss the issue with Freeh by phone later Thursday and likely would discuss whether an outside investigation should begin.

Asked if she thought the reversal of position had harmed her credibility, Reno replied, “I don't think it's very good for my credibility, and that's why I am going to pursue it until I get to the truth.”

Later, she said, “I'm not embarrassed. I'm very, very upset. ... If anybody says they've never relied on information that proves to be inaccurate, I'd like to meet them.”

Blood shortage fear changes donor policy

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government is taking the first small steps to address fears that serious, nationwide blood shortages could hit as early as next year.

Certain blood banks will be allowed to use blood from people with a genetic disease called hemochromatosis that causes them to build up too much iron, the Food and Drug Administration said Thursday.

Giving blood regularly alleviates iron buildup. That blood is healthy, but today it's thrown away because it's a medical treatment patients pay for — donations must be altruistic.

The FDA said any blood bank that offers free bleeds to hemochromatosis patients can apply for exemptions from federal regulations forbidding use of hemochromatosis blood. Under the exemption, hemochromatosis patients would be treated like any other blood donor.

Experts have estimated the change could provide up to 300,000 more pints of blood a year.

Also, the National Institutes of Health is beginning a program to monitor how much blood the nation has on hand each month, something not currently tracked. Experts hope the program could offer better information about pending shortages.

The steps, announced at a federal blood meeting Thursday, come amid increasing worries that blood donations are steadily dropping. The National Blood Data Resource Center predicts that next year, Americans will donate just under 11.7 million units of blood — but that hospitals will need 11.9 million units.

Concern increased last week, when the FDA banned donations by people who lived or traveled frequently to Britain during that nation's “mad cow disease” crisis, a ban estimated to cut the blood supply another 2.2 percent.

Turkey to raise taxes, rebuild

■ Some Turks worry that new funds will be mishandled by officials; investors dump shares

ISTANBUL, Turkey (AP) — Turkish lawmakers have approved new taxes to help pay for the earthquake that ravaged the country's industrial heartland.

But some Turks worried Thursday that the funds will be siphoned off by corrupt builders and officials.

Worried investors dumped shares in Turkish companies on Thursday, sending the stock market index plummeting about 10 percent on its first day of trading since the Aug. 17 earthquake.

Such falls, however, are not unusual during major crises in Turkey and experts expect shares to recover.

The death toll in the quake rose to 13,040 dead and 26,630 injured Thursday.

Thousands are believed still buried underneath the rubble.

A small quake of 3.7 magnitude hit the ravaged town of Adapazari Thursday evening, followed 14 minutes later by another with a 4.1 magnitude, the Anatolia news agency said.

There were no reports of injuries or damage.

In the same town, an argument between two families over whether a quake-damaged building should be torn down led to a shootout that left two people dead, Anatolia said.

Desperate for cash, the government proposed a 5 percent tax hike on corporations, the self-employed and the wealthy late Wednesday, as well as a 25 percent monthly surcharge on cellular telephones. Some experts estimate the measures could raise \$20 billion a year.

The proposal would also give the government the authority to increase taxes on gasoline, tobacco and alco-

hol, but does not immediately call for such increases.

The proposals have been passed by a parliamentary committee and are widely expected to be approved by the full assembly. The government holds a strong majority.

The new taxes were immediately met with suspicion.

Although Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit is widely considered to be honest, many previous Turkish governments were plagued by allegations of corruption.

“Take Your Hands Off,” the pro-Islamic Yeni Safak newspaper said in a front-page editorial. “Levy your taxes not on the people, but on those who swindle the state.”

“The people do not trust the state on the issue of the new taxes,” the paper added.

Financial experts said they expect the new taxes to help the recovery effort.

They noted that Turkey also approved a controversial measure to boost the retirement age from 45 to 58 for women and 50 to 60 for men, a belt-tightening move considered crucial for securing loans from the International Monetary Fund.

“Taxes are always an ugly issue,” said Tefvik Aksoy, chief economist at Istanbul's Bank Ekspres. But he added that the taxes would mostly hurt the wealthy and would help pave the way for an IMF deal.

Taking recovery efforts into their own hands, Turkey's main media groups opened their “Lay a Brick Yourself” campaign Thursday to raise money.

Five media conglomerates kicked off the campaign by donating \$500,000 each.

The pop star popularly known as Tarkan donated \$60,000, the Hurriyet newspaper said.

The money will be used to build schools and hospitals, papers said. They promised to disclose how the money is spent to avoid corruption charges that have plagued other aid campaigns.

World and Nation

Datelines

■ India

Dozens drown after bus plunges into bathing pool

UCHANGIDURGA, India (AP) — A crowded bus plunged into a pool near a temple Thursday in the southern state of Karnataka, and dozens of people drowned, police said.

The exact number of victims was not immediately known, as there were no records kept of passengers on board the private bus. Police said at least 45 people were on board the bus, based on the number of seats.

Witnesses said the bus could have been carrying 80 to 100 people, as it was crowded and there were many people sitting on the roof. They said the victims were pilgrims leaving a Hindu religious festival celebrated at a nearby hilltop temple. The pool is used for ritual bathing.

■ Britain

Bubonic plague vaccine to be tested on humans

LONDON (AP) — British government scientists said Thursday they have developed a vaccine against bubonic plague to help protect military troops from biological warfare.

The vaccine is in a “particularly advanced stage” of development and is ready to be tested on humans, Rick Hall, technical director at the government's military research center, said in a British Broadcasting Corp. interview.

“Of course once it is licensed — through exactly the same process as any other medicine — it will not only provide increased protection for Britain and its armed forces, but it will also be available to help protect civilians in parts of the world where plague occurs naturally,” Hall said.

■ Washington

Ape skeleton may be link in human evolution path

WASHINGTON (AP) — A baboon-sized ape that lived in East Africa about 15 million years ago may have been among the first primates to leave the treetops and live on the ground, a key step in the evolutionary path that, theoretically, eventually led to humans.

The fossilized partial skeleton of the animal is distinctly different from other ancient apes, prompting researchers to identify it as the only member of a new ape genus, Equatorius.

■ Northern Ireland

Britain governor takes no punitive action against IRA

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) — Britain's governor for Northern Ireland took no punitive action Thursday against the Irish Republican Army, even though she said the outlawed group had been involved in a recent killing and arms smuggling.

Mo Mowlam issued her verdict after weeks of pressure from leaders of Northern Ireland's pro-British Protestant majority to impose punitive sanctions on the IRA and its allied Sinn Fein party, most specifically to halt the ongoing accelerated paroles of imprisoned IRA members.

The province's police commander, Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan, said his detectives had “no doubt” that the IRA kidnapped, tortured and killed a Belfast man last month in apparent violation of the group's July 1997 cease-fire.

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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 20, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year, weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board. Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.

Subscriptions are \$60 for one year.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 20, 1400 R St., Lincoln NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

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THE DAILY NEBRASKAN