

NEWS DIGEST

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Mexico mudslides kill at least 300

TEZIUTLAN, Mexico (AP) — The rain had been pounding for three days when Dario Padilla left his house and made the sodden trek to a shop to buy tortillas.

He was on his way back, with about 100 yards to go, when he saw the hillside above his neighborhood collapse in an avalanche of mud. Within seconds his house, the houses of two relatives and about 25 other neighbors' homes were buried.

His wife, his stepchildren and several grandchildren were among those killed.

"It took all my family in one blow," said the 55-year-old retired postal worker, his voice breaking as he watched ambulances carry victims to the morgue and a series of funeral processions trudge into the cemetery next door.

"I went in, but I sank in the mud. Some neighbors pulled me out," he said.

More than 300 people are known to have died in Mexico's mudslides and flooding over the past week, and hundreds more are still missing.

By Sunday morning, rescue workers had pulled the corpses of 15 people from the ruins of Padilla's house and his relatives' two homes.

The victims included his wife, Lucia Ceballos, five of his stepchildren and several grandchildren and in-laws. Also killed was an elderly

couple that his stepdaughter, Adela — a rural health worker — had brought to town so the husband could have an operation.

Still missing was Padilla's stepson, Marcos.

Another stepson and two stepdaughters who lived in a nearby village survived, but Padilla's entire household apparently was wiped out.

As rain continued to fall Sunday, the full scale of the disaster was only slowly becoming apparent.

A series of weather fronts, capped by a tropical depression in the Gulf of Mexico, dumped heavy rain on much of eastern, southern and central Mexico for a week or more. Bridges and roads were washed out in hundreds of places, isolating scores of communities.

Landslides destroyed or damaged houses in dozens of towns and villages. People were carried away by floodwaters.

Even large cities like the Tabasco, state capital of Villahermosa, flooded so badly that streets became canals for boats ferrying furniture out of inundated houses.

Rain fell for 60 hours without a break on Teziutlan, bringing nearly 10 inches on the peak day. The weather forced the closure of schools and of most of the 480 clothing factories that make blue jeans and other goods

“
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MARIA ESTER FERNANDEZ
Mexico resident

for U.S. stores.

And that meant the residents of La Aurora neighborhood, where Padilla's family lived, were huddled at home rather than at work or school when the mudslide rolled over their houses.

It happened so fast that "nobody realized anything," said Maria Ester Fernandez, Padilla's neighbor. "Everybody was at home. Whole families were lost."

Mayor Jose Sanchez Tinoco said the city and outlying parts of the municipality suffered 70 landslides Tuesday.

At least 18 people died in suburban Huehuetimico, and slides in other parts of the municipality also added to a toll that officially neared 100 on Sunday.

The mayor's office said 200 people remained unaccounted for.

The deadliest slide, however, was the one that wiped out part of La Aurora, where Padilla and his family

lived.

Five days later, hundreds of soldiers, policemen, firefighters and body-detecting dogs were still slogging through mud made even more sodden by Sunday's heavy rain. They scraped mud away from toppled concrete walls, then attacked the walls with clanging picks and sledgehammers until the sick-sweet smell of decaying flesh told them they were close to yet another victim.

Padilla was waiting Sunday with his surviving stepson, Herman Ramos Ceballos, for news of Marcos.

As rain fell on Teziutlan's main square, a friend of the Ramos family taped small posters with Marcos' picture beside the doors of the city's 250-year-old cathedral, where Marcos sang in the choir.

Inside, Monsignor Lorenzo Cardenas Aregullin, the regional bishop, led a Mass of prayer for the victims and read a message of condolence from Pope John Paul II.



■ Minnesota Ventura: Suicide comment was not all-encompassing

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura says he would want the option of assisted suicide if he were terminally ill — an exception, he says, to his comments in Playboy magazine that he has "no respect for anyone who would kill himself."

Another exception he makes: if someone were so mentally ill he couldn't judge what he was doing.

Otherwise, suicide makes no sense because if someone is at the point of considering suicide, "it can only get better," Ventura said.

■ Puerto Rico Nicaragua's leader vows to support democracy in Cuba

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Nicaragua's president Arnoldo Aleman has predicted that Fidel Castro's regime will fall soon and reasserted his country's support to help restore democracy in Cuba.

Aleman was the main speaker Friday in a fund-raiser of the Puerto Rican chapter of the National Cuban-American Foundation.

"In any forum, international, wherever the liberty of Cuba has to be discussed, you will have the podium and the unconditional support of the people and the government of Nicaragua, to denounce the (crimes) and murders committed by the dictator Fidel Castro," Aleman said.

He urged Cuban exiles to maintain their faith and predicted that "the last dictatorship in America" will fall soon.

Aleman has close ties with the community of Cuban exiles in Miami.

■ East Timor Peacekeepers, armed men clash near Timor border

DILI, East Timor (AP) — International peacekeepers clashed with a contingent of armed men Sunday, exchanging fire in a town that straddles the border between East Timor and Indonesian-controlled West Timor.

A senior Australian army officer said two militia members may have been wounded. But an Indonesian security official accused peacekeepers of killing an Indonesian policeman in the exchange and wounding two others.

If Indonesian police were involved, it would be the first direct clash between international troops and Indonesian forces since the deployment of foreign peacekeepers to East Timor on Sept. 20.

■ New York Radiation therapy causes cardinal to miss Mass

NEW YORK (AP) — Radiation therapy left Cardinal John O'Connor, spiritual leader of New York's 2.2 million Catholics for the past 15 years, too weak to celebrate Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Sunday.

It was the first service he had missed since having a brain tumor removed last month.

The cardinal, who has said he does not have cancer, has been receiving radiation treatment since the surgery. He has said he plans to retire when turns 80 in January.

Six students killed on way to greek party

COLLEGE STATION, Texas (AP) — Six college students getting out of their cars or walking along a highway on their way to a fraternity party were killed Sunday by a pickup truck whose driver had fallen asleep, police said.

The accident happened just after midnight about two miles west of the Texas A&M University main campus, said police Maj. Mike Patterson.

The victims — four students from Baylor University, one from Texas A&M and one from Southwest Texas State — were among a group of people who were going to a party at the Tau Kappa Epsilon Fraternity house along a four-lane highway. Some had just parked on the road shoulder, and the pickup sideswiped two parked cars and struck a third.

Witnesses said parties at the fraternity often draw large crowds of people who must park on the shoulder of the

highway, which has a 65-mph speed limit.

The man driving the pickup, also a Texas A&M student, was returning to campus when he fell asleep and veered off the road, Patterson said.

The driver, 18-year-old Texas A&M student Brandon Kallmeyer, was not injured and apparently had not been drinking, police said.

Patterson said investigators will present evidence to prosecutors without recommending charges.

The victims were identified as Emily Hollister, 18, Tricia Calp, 18, Dolan Wastel, 22, and Erika Lanham, age unknown, all Baylor students; William Flores, 22, of Southwest Texas, and Ted Bruton, 21, of Texas A&M.

Two other people were hospitalized, but their injuries did not appear to be life-threatening.

White House seeks delay on treaty vote

■ Cabinet members worked Sunday to put off voting on nuclear test ban measure to prevent a defeat.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House dispatched Cabinet members Sunday to press the Senate to put off voting on a nuclear test ban treaty headed for rejection, saying a defeat would endanger nonproliferation efforts.

One Republican opponent, Sen. Jon Kyl of Arizona, voicing widespread GOP concerns about verification, said he welcomed a chance "to go back to the drawing board." He predicted certain defeat of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty if the expected vote Tuesday goes forward.

Three Cabinet members and the president's top military officer, pleading the administration's case on Sunday talk shows, said rejecting the treaty would prevent the United States from taking the lead in halting the global spread of nuclear weapons.

"We are in a situation right now where we're about to send a signal to the rest of the world that we are not as serious about controlling the spread of nuclear weapons as we should be," Defense Secretary William Cohen said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said on ABC's "This Week" that the United States needs "a tool that will prevent the other countries from testing. We believe that we have a reliable stockpile (of nuclear weapons). We don't need to test more, and we want others not to test."

At Cohen's side was Gen. Henry H. Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who sought to assure the public that the treaty would not handicap the United States militarily.

“
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MADELEINE ALBRIGHT
secretary of state

"If the national security were in any way going to be damaged, the Joint Chiefs would never recommend that we ratify this treaty," Shelton said.

And Energy Secretary Bill Richardson joined Cohen and Albright in saying the Senate should not act on the treaty without benefit of full hearings.

"What we have now is the need to explain it to the Senate, to the Congress," he said on Fox.

Senate opponents, led by Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., have said the vote will proceed unless President Clinton withdraws the treaty and promises not to resubmit it.

Kyl contended a defeat would strengthen the United States' hand in negotiations with other countries.

"I think the Senate must vote on this treaty and defeat it," he said on "Fox News Sunday." "This treaty is not of the same caliber as previous arms control treaties."

The treaty would impose a blanket international ban on all nuclear test explosions. Supporters estimate they are 15 to 20 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed for ratification.

The treaty has been signed by 154 nations, including the United States, but ratified by only 48. It will not go into effect if the United States does not ratify it.

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