

Cholera outbreak kills 142 in Haiti

AP, Haiti
At least 142 people have died in a cholera outbreak, and aid groups are rushing in medicine and other supplies Friday to combat Haiti's deadliest health problem since its devastating earthquake.

The outbreak in the rural Artibonite region, which hosts thousands of quake refugees, appeared to confirm relief groups' fears about sanitation for homeless survivors living in tarp cities and other squalid settlements.

"We have been afraid of this since the earthquake," said Robin Mahfood, president of Food for the Poor, which was preparing to fly in donations of antibiotics, dehydration salts and other supplies.

Many of the sick have converged on St. Nicholas hospital in the seaside city of St. Marc, where hundreds of dehydrated patients lay on blankets in a parking lot with IVs in their arms as they waited for treatment.

Health Ministry director Gabriel Thimothe said laboratory tests confirmed that the illness is cholera. He said Friday morning that 142 people have died and more than a thousand infected people were hospitalized.

The president of the Haitian Medical Association, Claude Surena, said people must be vigilant about hygiene and wash their hands frequently to slow the spread of the disease.

"The concern is that it could go from one place to another place, and it could affect more people or move from one region to another one," he said.

Cholera is a waterborne bacterial infection spread through contaminated water. It causes severe diarrhoea and vomiting that can lead to dehydration and death within hours. Treatment involves administering a salt and sugar-based rehydration serum.

No cholera outbreaks had been reported in Haiti for decades before the earthquake, according to the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. Haitian officials, including President Rene Preval, have been pointing to the lack of severe disease outbreaks as a hard-to-see success of the quake response.

With more than a million people left homeless by the disaster, however, experts have warned that disease could strike in the makeshift camps with nowhere to put human waste and limited access to clean water.

At the hospital, some patients including

70-year-old Belismene Jean Baptiste said they got sick after drinking water from a public canal.

"I ran to the bathroom four times last night vomiting," Jean Baptiste said.

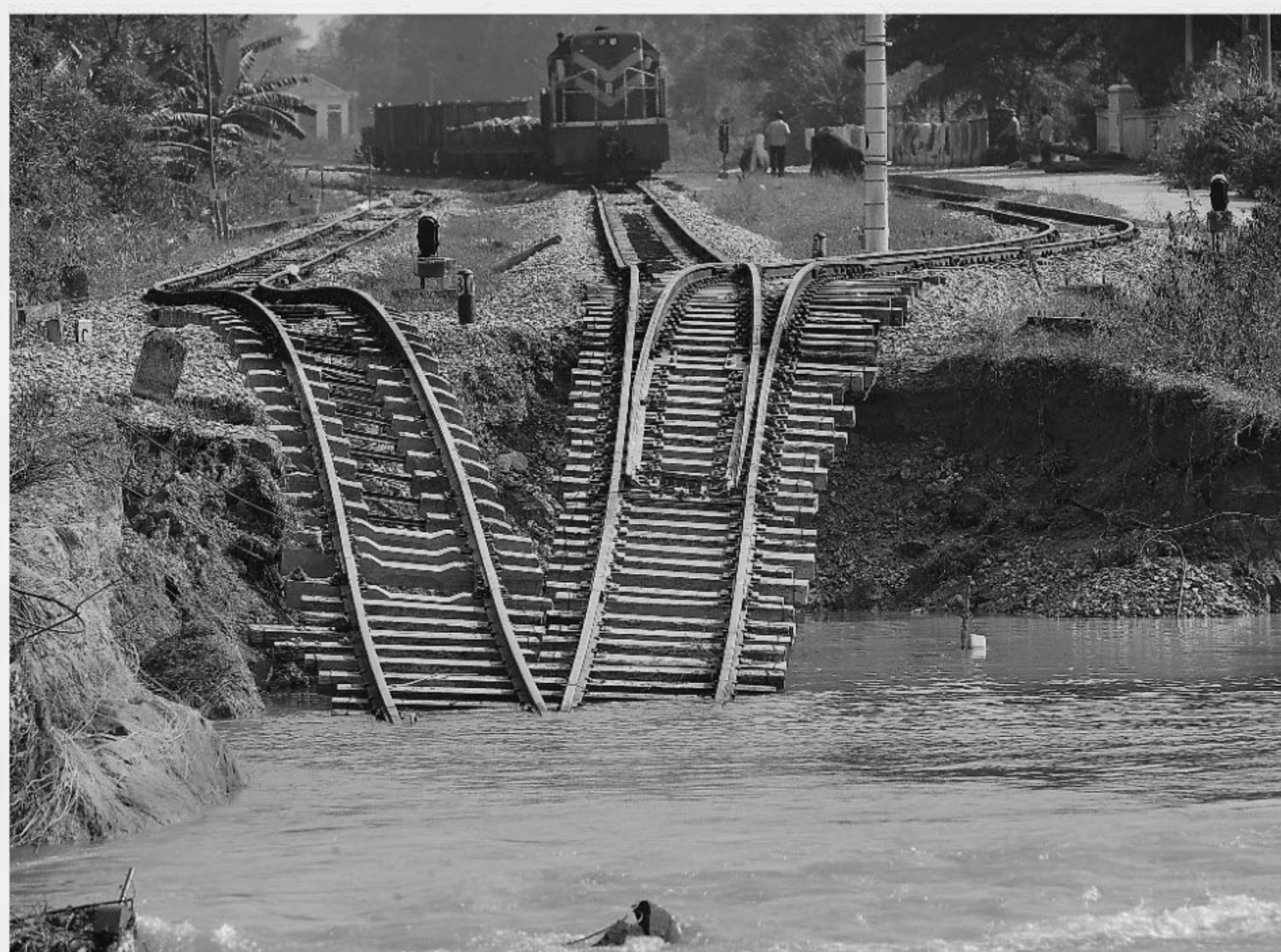
The sick come from across the Artibonite Valley, a starkly desolate region of rice fields and deforested mountains. The area did not experience significant damage in the Jan. 12 quake but has absorbed thousands of refugees from the devastated capital 45 miles (70 kilometers) south of St. Marc.

Trucks loaded with medical supplies including rehydration salts were to be sent from Port-au-Prince to the hospital, said Jessica DuPlessis, an OCHA spokeswoman. Doctors at the hospital said they also needed more personnel to handle the flood of patients.

Elyneth Tranckil was among dozens of relatives standing outside the hospital gate as new patients arrived near death.

"Police have blocked the entry to the hospital, so I can't get in to see my wife," Tranckil said.

The US Embassy in Port-au-Prince issued an advisory urging people to drink only bottled or boiled water and eat only food that has been thoroughly cooked.



A portion of North-South railway which was destroyed by recent floods in Vu Quang district, Vietnam yesterday. The floods which killed at least 74 people, destroyed also many infrastructure facilities in central Vietnam.

Rescued Chile miner hospitalised

AFP, Santiago

One of the Chilean miners rescued after more than two months trapped underground was hospitalized and had to be sedated after suffering an anxiety attack, medical sources told local media yesterday.

Edison Pena, 34, known for running in the mine galleries while listening to Elvis Presley tunes, broke down when he was about to speak at a party honoring the miners on Tuesday. He earlier broke down during a live television interview on Friday.

"He showed signs of severe anxiety and we determined that it was necessary to sedate him. We are analyzing the cause," Jorge Diaz, a doctor at one of the government-run clinics caring for miners told the daily La Tercera.

Pena, who is single and has no children, is the first miner to return to the hospital after the 33 men were rescued from deep inside a northern Chilean copper and gold mine in a 22-hour operation that ended October 14.

US journo fired for Muslim remarks

BBC ONLINE

US broadcaster National Public Radio has fired news analyst Juan Williams for saying on Fox News that he gets nervous if he sees Muslims on a plane.

Williams, who has written several books on the US civil rights movement, made the remarks last week on chat show The O'Reilly Factor.

NPR said in a statement that Williams' contract had been ended on Wednesday.

Fox News later signed Williams up as a contributor on a multi-year contract, reportedly worth \$2m (£1.3m).

In a discussion on Muslims and 9/11 on the O'Reilly Factor, outspoken conservative presenter Bill O'Reilly said: "The cold truth is that in the world today jihad, aided and abetted by some Muslim nations, is the biggest threat on the planet."

CREDIBILITY 'UNDERMINED'

Williams said he concurred with O'Reilly.

"I mean, look, Bill, I'm not a bigot. You know the kind of books I've written about the civil rights movement in this country," Williams replied. "But when I get on the plane, I got to tell you, if I see people who are in Muslim garb and I think, you know, they are identifying themselves first and foremost as Muslims, I get worried. I get nervous."

The Council on American-Islamic Relations said before Mr Williams was sacked that such commentary from a journalist about other racial, ethnic or religious minority groups would not be tolerated.



China eyeing independent Mars exploration

ANI, Beijing

The Chinese Academy of Space Technology (CAST) plans to send an orbiter to Mars in 2013 for exploring the planet, the Xinhua reports.

The earliest possible launch date for the orbiter is 2013, Huang Jiangchuan, a space technology expert with the CAST, told the state-run broadcaster China Central Television on Thursday.

The project is based on a research conducted by CAST and will make use of the technologies developed for China's first lunar satellite launched in 2007, he added.

The space technologies likely to be used, including those that boost the satellite's payload capability and exploration accuracy, were already quite advanced, Huang said.

Iraq weapons inspector's death was suicide: UK files

REUTERS, London

Britain released secret medical files on Friday that poured cold water on lingering conspiracy theories that former UN Iraq weapons expert David Kelly may have been murdered.

Kelly, 59, was found dead in 2003 after being named as the source of a BBC report which accused then-Prime Minister Tony Blair's government of exaggerating the military threat posed by Iraq's Saddam Hussein to help build the case for war.

His death caused one of the biggest controversies of Blair's time in office and led to fevered speculation about the circumstances surrounding his loss of life.

Judge Lord Hutton led an independent inquiry into the death and concluded in 2004 that the scientist slit his left wrist after taking painkillers in countryside near his home.

Critics called the ruling a whitewash and medical experts have since questioned whether Kelly's injuries were severe enough for him to bleed to death.

Hutton asked that Kelly's post mortem papers remain classified for 70 years to protect his family. However, the government decided to release them after only seven years.

"I am publishing these reports in the interests of maintaining public confidence in the inquiry into how Dr Kelly came by his death," said Justice Secretary Ken Clarke.

'SELF-INFLICTED INJURY'
Pathologist Nicholas Hunt, who conducted the

post-mortem, said there was no evidence Kelly had been assaulted, strangled or dragged to the scene of his death in Oxfordshire.

"The orientation and arrangement of the wounds over the left wrist are typical of self-inflicted injury," he wrote. Tests showed he had taken a "significant quantity" of a painkiller containing paracetamol and dextropropoxyphene, an opioid.

A group of doctors wrote to the Times newspaper in August to argue that the wound to Kelly's wrist was "extremely unlikely" to have killed him. Hunt responded by saying the death was an "absolute classic case of self-inflicted injury."

Lawmaker Norman Baker, who investigated the death for a year, told Reuters in an interview in November 2007 that he was convinced Kelly had been murdered.

He wrote a book that claimed Kelly was killed by Iraqis close to Saddam in revenge for his work as a weapons inspector. He alleged that Britain's secret services had covered up the murder due to its political sensitivity.

Hutton said in a statement the medical papers had been available to lawyers representing parties at his inquiry.

"There was no secrecy surrounding the post-mortem report," he said. "I requested, not 'ordered', that the post mortem report should not be disclosed for 70 years. I made this request solely in order to protect Dr Kelly's widow and daughters for the remainder of their lives."

Jewish settlers start 600 new homes

BBC ONLINE

Jewish settlers have started building more than 600 homes in the West Bank since a building freeze expired last month, an Israeli pressure group says.

The pace of building was four times faster than before the restrictions were put in place, Peace Now said.

Palestinian negotiators have threatened to walk out of the recently resumed direct peace talks with Israel unless the construction freeze is reinstated.

A UN envoy criticised Israel over the report, describing it as "alarming".

Robert Serry, the UN Special Co-ordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, said building on occupied land was illegal under international law and would "only further undermine trust" in the peace process.

A spokesman for Peace Now, Yairiv Oppenheimer, told the BBC that more details on the new homes being built by settlers would be released in a report on Monday.

Tibet language protests spread in China

Campaign group says

AFP, Beijing

Protests by Tibetan students demanding the right to study in their language have spread to other areas of northwestern China, a London-based Tibet rights group said.

Thousands of middle school students had protested Tuesday in Qinghai province's Malho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in anger at being forced to study in the Chinese language, Free Tibet said.

But the protests have since spread to two adjacent Tibetan prefectures in the remote region, it said in a statement Thursday.

About 2,000 students from four schools in the town of Chabcha in Tsoho prefecture marched on Wednesday to the local government building, chanting "We want freedom for the Tibetan language," the group said.

They were later turned back by police and teachers, it said.

Students also protested on Thursday in the town of Dawu in the Golog Tibetan prefecture. Police responded by preventing local residents from going out into the streets, it said.

Local government officials in both areas denied any protests.

"We have had no protests here. The stu-

dents are calm here," said an official with the Gonghe county government in Tsoho, who identified himself only by his surname Li.

Local officials in China face pressure from their seniors to maintain stability and typically deny reports of unrest in their areas.

The protests were sparked by education reforms in Qinghai requiring all subjects to be taught in Mandarin and all textbooks to be printed in Chinese except for Tibetan-language and English classes, Free Tibet said.

"The use of Tibetan is being systematically wiped out as part of China's strategy to cement its occupation of Tibet," Free Tibet said earlier this week.

The area was the scene of violent anti-Chinese protests in March 2008 that started in Tibet's capital Lhasa and spread to nearby regions with large Tibetan populations such as Qinghai.

While Qinghai officially lies outside the borders China has set for the Tibet region, much of it is part of the traditional Tibetan homeland.

Many Tibetans accuse China of a campaign to water down their culture in a bid to increase its control over the remote Himalayan region, where resentment against Chinese rule runs deep.



US President Barack Obama (C) holds up a University of Washington Cross Country t-shirt during a rally for US Senator Patty Murray, D-WA, at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington, on Thursday.

Argentina protests over labour activist killing

BBC ONLINE

Thousands of people have demonstrated in the Argentine capital Buenos Aires in protest at the murder of a left-wing activist during a labour dispute.

Crowds blocked roads and railway lines and gathered outside the presidential palace to demand justice.

The activist, Mariano Ferreyra, was shot dead during a clash between rival groups of railway workers.

One of the country's main trade union federations has called a general strike.

Left-wing opposition groups have blamed the killing on members of the main railway workers union, which they say was acting to break up a protest against low pay and job losses in contractors that provide services to the state railway company.

Eyewitnesses said Mr Ferreyra, 23, was shot in the head at close range when a group of protesters from the left-wing Workers' Party was attacked.

The Workers' Party alleges police stood by while the violence took place.

President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner has expressed regret at his death, saying she "does not want to live in a society where people go out to protest with sticks and weapons".

But she said her government would maintain its policy of "not repressing" social protests.

The leader of the CTA trade union federation, Hugo Yasky, said it was time to end "the complicity between business groups and trade unions which act as their shock troops".

The railway workers union, members of which are alleged to have carried out the attack, belongs to the rival CGT federation.

WikiLeaks plans 'major' announcement in Europe

AP, London

The WikiLeaks website appears close to releasing what the Pentagon fears is the largest cache of secret US documents in history -- hundreds of thousands of intelligence reports compiled after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

In a message posted to its Twitter page on Thursday, the organisation said there was a "major WikiLeaks press conference in Europe coming up." WikiLeaks has not commented publicly on the imminent announcement.

Their disclosure would be the most massive leak of secret documents in US history, and defense officials are racing to contain the damage.

A team of more than a hundred analysts from across the US military, lead by the Defense Intelligence Agency, has been combing through the Iraq documents they think will be released.

Called the Information Review Task Force, its analysts have pored over the documents and used word searches to try to pull out names and

other issues that would be particularly sensitive, officials have said.

The task force has informed the US Central Command of some of the names of Iraqis and allies and of other information they believe might be released that could present a danger, officials have said, noting that -- unlike the WikiLeaks previous disclosure of some 77,000 documents from Afghanistan -- in this case they had advance notice that names may be exposed.

That previous leak, back in July, outraged the US military, which accused WikiLeaks of irresponsibility.

But The Associated Press has obtained a Pentagon letter reporting that no US intelligence sources or practices were compromised by the posting of secret Afghan war logs.

Although US officials still think the leaks could cause significant damage to US security interests, the assessment suggests that some of the administration's worst fears about the July disclosure have so far failed to materialize.

French police force open blockaded fuel depot

AP, Paris

Shoving striking oil workers aside, French riot police forced a strategic refinery to reopen Friday, aiming to halt growing fuel shortages as the Senate looked ready to approve the controversial pension reforms at the heart of the union protests.

The refinery at Grandpuits had been a bastion of resistance to President Nicolas Sarkozy's bid to raise the retirement age to 62. Despite the government's efforts to conquer union resistance, the prime minister said it will take several more days to end gasoline shortages that are taking a toll on France's economy.

The French Senate neared the end of a debate that has taken more than 130 hours, the second-longest debate in 30 years in the Senate. Legislators mostly opposition

Socialists submitted a staggering 1,237 amendments, but Sarkozy's conservative UMP party and its allies have a majority and dismissed nearly all amendments.

After Friday's Senate vote, the final text goes back to both houses for final formal approval, which is expected next week.

Unions oppose a pillar of the reform -- raising the retirement age from 60 to 62 -- and have staged months of strikes and protests that have boiled over into radical action and scattered clashes.

Sarkozy had ordered regional authorities to intervene and force open depots, accusing the strikers of holding ordinary people and the French economy "hostage."

The Interior Ministry said the operation at the Grandpuits fuel refinery succeeded "without incident," but the CGT union

said three workers were injured. Emergency workers brought stretchers to the depot, located 50 miles (80 kilometers) east of Paris, the closest source of gasoline supplies to the French capital.

Helmeted officers in body armor descended overnight on Grandpuits, confronting workers who shoved back and shouted union slogans as they sought to keep police from opening the gates to the depot, run by oil giant Total SA.

"We are outraged, scandalized," said Charles Foulard, a union leader at the Grandpuits depot.

Workers have been camped for 10 days in front of the site, blocking access and contributing to widespread fuel shortages. As of Friday, about 20 percent of France's service stations were still empty, down from 40 percent a few days ago.