

Cholera reaches Haiti capital

AFP, Port-au-prince
An epidemic of cholera that has ravaged northern and central Haiti killing 220 people has reached the country's densely populated capital, according to UN health officials.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said in a statement late Saturday that the Haitian Public Health Ministry's "national reference laboratory today confirmed cases in Ouest Department, including Port-au-Prince."

No specific number of cholera cases in Port-au-Prince was given.

The sudden cholera epidemic, mainly in northern Haiti, has sent officials scrambling to contain a wider outbreak 10 months after an earthquake devastated the Caribbean nation.

Hundreds of thousands of people are still living in impoverished tent cities, particularly around Port-au-Prince, where sanitation is poor and where relief groups say the diarrhoea-causing illness could spread rapidly.

The PAHO said that while no cases of cholera have been reported in the neighbouring Dominican Republic, the outbreak has prompted the Haitian government "to mobilize a contingency plan in the border area, while the border remains open."

Regional health director Dieula Louissaint said 12 more people died in the Artibonite department in northern Haiti on Saturday, boosting that area's toll to 206, while 14 people died in central Haiti.

"We cannot continue to treat cholera in this structure where we are also seeing other kinds of patients," Louissaint said. "We need to establish specific treatment centres."

Around 3,000 people have been admitted to hospitals and health centres near the northern city of Saint Marc which is struggling to cope with the overwhelming rush of sick patients as Haiti grapples with its first cholera outbreak in over a century.

More than 50 inmates at a prison in the centre of the country have been infected with cholera, and three inmates have died, officials said.



Photo taken yesterday shows ships anchored before buildings of the financial business district of Singapore blanketed with a smoky haze originating from forest fires in nearby Sumatra. The problem, known euphemistically as "the haze", raises fresh questions about the effectiveness of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), whose leaders will hold a summit in Hanoi from October 28-29.

Google 'spied' on British emails, passwords

NDTV, London

In what could be called a major security breach, Internet search engine 'Google' has admitted spying on computer passwords and entire emails from households across Britain.

The California-based company has, however, apologized for downloading personal data from wireless networks when its fleet vehicles drove down residential roads taking photos for its Street View project, 'The Sunday Telegraph' reported.

"It's clear from those inspections that while most of the data is fragmentary, in some instances entire emails and URLs (web addresses) were captured, as well as passwords. We want to delete this data as soon as possible, and I would like to apologise again for the fact that we collected it in the first place," Alan Eustace, Google's Vice-President of engineering and research, was quoted as saying.

Millions of Internet users have potentially been affected.

The Information Commissioner's Office, the privacy watchdog, said it would be looking into Google's admission.

Images for Street View were gathered by vehicle-mounted panoramic cameras starting in 2008.

In May this year, Google confessed the vehicles had also been gathering information about the location of wireless networks, the devices which connect computers to the tele-communications network via radio waves.

China lifts typhoon warning

AP, Beijing

Torrential rains drenched China's southeastern coast yesterday as the government downgraded Typhoon Megi to a tropical depression and more than 300,000 evacuees waited to return to their battered homes.

Megi hit China on Saturday, dumping up to 13 inches (33 centimetres) of rain on coastal villages after earlier cutting a swath of destruction through the Philippines and Taiwan. Landslides and flooding in Taiwan killed as many as 31 people, and at least 28 people died in the northern Philippines.

No deaths were reported in China, but news reports said there was extensive damage to fishing boats and shellfish beds in coastal Fujian province, where more heavy rain was falling Sunday.

An estimated 313,700 people were evacuated and authorities were deciding Sunday whether it was safe to return, said an employee of the Fujian provincial Flood Control Headquarters.

Tony Blair's sister-in-law converts to Islam

GUARDIAN ONLINE

Tony Blair's sister-in-law has converted to Islam after having what she describes as a "holy experience" during a visit to Iran.

Journalist and broadcaster Lauren Booth, 43, Cherie Blair's sister now wears a hijab whenever she leaves her home, prays five times a day and visits her local mosque whenever she can.

She decided to become a Muslim six weeks ago after visiting the shrine of Fatima al-Masumeh in the city of Qom.

"It was a Tuesday evening and I sat down and felt this shot of spiritual morphine, just absolute bliss and joy," she said in an interview today.

When she returned to Britain, she decided to convert immediately.

Booth who works for Press TV, the English-language Iranian news channel has stopped eating pork and reads the Qur'an every day. She is currently on page 60.

Booth has stopped drinking alcohol and says she has not wanted to drink since converting. Before her spiritual awakening in Iran, she had been "sympathetic" to Islam and has spent considerable time working in Palestine, she said, adding that she hoped her conversion would help Blair change his presumptions about Islam.

Israel to Palestinians: Talks only option

AP, Jerusalem

Israel's leader is cautioning the Palestinians against taking unilateral action in their efforts to establish an independent state.

With peace talks stalled over Israeli settlement construction, Palestinians are considering sidestepping Israel by seeking UN Security Council recognition of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem territories captured by the Jewish state in the 1967 Mideast war.

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke out against such an approach.

He told his Cabinet that Israel expects the Palestinians to honour their obligation to engage in direct negotiations.

WikiLeaks founder on the run

NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE, London

Julian Assange moves like a hunted man. In a noisy Ethiopian restaurant in London's rundown Paddington district, he pitches his voice barely above a whisper to foil the Western intelligence agencies he fears.

He demands that his dwindling number of loyalists use expensive encrypted cell phones and swaps his own as other men change shirts. He checks into hotels under false names, dyes his hair, sleeps on sofas and floors, and uses cash instead of credit cards, often borrowed from friends.

"By being determined to be on this path, and not to compromise, I've wound up in an extraordinary situation," Assange said over lunch last Sunday, when he arrived sporting a woollen beanie and a wispy stubble and trailing a youthful entourage that included a filmmaker assigned to document any unpleasant surprises.

In his remarkable journey to notoriety, Assange, founder of the WikiLeaks whistle-blowers' Web site, sees the next few weeks as his most hazardous. Now he is making his most brazen disclosure yet: 391,832 secret documents on the Iraq war. He held a news conference in London on Saturday, saying that the release "constituted the most comprehensive and detailed account of any war ever to have entered the public record."

Twelve weeks ago, he posted on his organization's Web site some 77,000 classified Pentagon documents on the Afghan conflict.

Much has changed since 2006, when Assange, a 39-year-old Australian, used years of computer hacking and what friends call a near

genius IQ to establish WikiLeaks, redefining whistle-blowing by gathering secrets in bulk, storing them beyond the reach of governments and others determined to retrieve them, then releasing them instantly, and globally.

Now it is not just governments that denounce him: some of his own comrades are abandoning him for what they see as erratic and imperious behaviour, and a nearly delusional grandeur unmatched by an awareness that the digital secrets he reveals can have a price in flesh and blood.



Julian Assange

Several WikiLeaks colleagues say he alone decided to release the Afghan documents without removing the names of Afghan intelligence sources for Nato troops. "We were very, very upset with that, and with the way he spoke about it afterwards," said Birgitta Jonsdottir, a core WikiLeaks volunteer and a member of Iceland's Parliament. "If he could just focus on the important things he does, it would be better."

He is also being investigated in connection with accusations of rape and molestation involving two Swedish women. Assange has denied the allegations, saying the relations were consensual. But prosecutors in Sweden have yet to formally approve charges or dismiss the case eight weeks after the complaints against Mr. Assange were filed, damaging his quest for a secure base for himself and WikiLeaks. Though he characterizes the claims as "a smear campaign," the scandal has compounded the pressures of his cloaked life.

"When it comes to the point where you occasionally look forward to being in prison on the basis that you might be able to spend a day reading a book, the realization dawns that perhaps the situation has become a little more stressful than you would like," he said.

Iraqi court forces parliament back to work

AP, Baghdad

Iraq's highest court yesterday ordered parliament back to work after a seven-month political impasse that has blocked the formation of a new government.

Iraq's federal Supreme Court called the delay unconstitutional.

Parliament's acting speaker, Fouad Massoum, told The Associated Press that he expects to have a meeting date set by the end of this week.

The four-page court order termed as "illegal" a June decision by lawmakers to delay parliament's return and give leaders time to broker political alliances.

"The federal Supreme Court decided to cancel this decision, binding the parliament speaker to call on lawmakers to convene parliament and resume work," read the order that was issued Sunday.

The delay, it said, "violated the constitution."

Parliament's 325 lawmakers have met only once, briefly in June, since March 7 elections that failed to give any party a ruling majority. Since then, duelling political leaders have resisted returning as they try to corral alliances for enough support to name new government leaders, including the prime minister, when parliament reconvenes.

WIKILEAKS' RELEASE Probe rights abuses UN to US

PTI, BBC ONLINE, New York

The UN has asked the US administration to probe the involvement of American forces' in human rights abuses, summary executions and war crimes in following the "largest classified military leak" detailing accounts of torture and killing of over 66,000 civilians.

Iraq's prime minister has criticised the timing of the release by WikiLeaks of almost 400,000 secret US military documents about the conflict there.

Nouri Maliki's office accused it of trying to sabotage his bid to form a new government by making allegations he was linked to Shia death squads.

Maliki is struggling to keep his job after inconclusive elections in March.

WikiLeaks said the disclosure was aimed at revealing the truth about the war.

In the "largest classified military leak" in the US history, whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks has released nearly 400,000 secret American documents on Iraq war detailing graphic accounts of torture, killing of over 66,000 civilians and Iran's role in the conflict.

BAHRAIN'S ELECTION Shias close to win, fall short of majority

AP, Manama

Bahrain's embattled Shia-led opposition held on to all of its parliament seats in weekend elections, according to official results announced yesterday, but fell short of the majority it hoped to win as a show of strength against the island kingdom's Sunni rulers.

The leaders of the strategic US ally have waged a campaign of arrests and intimidation against suspected Shia opponents since August, claiming they seek to undermine the ruling system and could open the door for Shia powerhouse Iran to exert influence in the heart of the Arab Gulf.

Shias in Bahrain say they only seek greater rights and opportunities after being shut out from key decision-making roles in the country.

Barack Obama gives his first iPad autograph

GUARDIAN ONLINE

It's official: there is no escape from the iPad. Even Barack Obama, a man used to firsts, can also go down in the history books as the first US president to autograph an iPad.

After an election rally held at the University of Washington in Seattle on Thursday, President Obama was shaking hands with supporters along the ropeline when one of them, Sylvester Cann, wrote on his iPad "Mr President, sign my iPad," etching the message on the screen using his finger.

In a video of the historic moment posted on YouTube by Cann, as Obama gets near a Secret Service agent can be seen shaking his head, presumably at Cann's high-tech chutzpah.

But when Obama approaches, Cann

describes what happened: "He looked at it for a second and then used his left hand to sign. It was kinda funny because



SOURCE: INTERNET

he looked up and gave me a big grin afterwards as if he thought it was pretty cool too."

This "first" may not quite rank along-

side being the first African American to be elected president. But it will have given him something to tell Apple chief executive Steve Jobs when they met later that afternoon.

Asked recently if he had an iPad, Obama replied: "I have an iReggie, who has my books, my newspapers, my music all in one place" a reference to his personal aide Reggie Love.

Obama himself is hardly a big Apple fan: he is famously addicted to his BlackBerry and has even been seen using a Zune, Microsoft's ill-fated rival to the iPod. A few months ago he declared in a speech: "With iPods and iPads and Xboxes and PlayStations none of which I know how to work information becomes a distraction, a diversion, a form of entertainment, rather than a tool of empowerment, rather than the means of emancipation."



PHOTO: AFP

Clients of a suburban shopping centre of Madrid watch people taking part in the first Siesta (Nap) Championship on Tuesday.

Ecuadorean wins siesta championship

GUARDIAN ONLINE

A 62-year-old Ecuadorean man managed to ignore the uproar of a crowded Madrid shopping centre and snore loudly enough to win what was billed as Spain's first siesta championship.

Organisers yesterday proclaimed unemployed security worker Pedro Soria Lopez the champion after he slept for 17 minutes.

They said his snoring on Tuesday registered 70 decibels the equivalent of the noise of someone talking loudly. That earned him extra points and enough to defeat the runner-up who had slept for 18 minutes.

"Oh I am so happy to be the first champion," said Soria Lopez before collecting the €1,000 winning cheque. "My wife made me do this, but then they couldn't wake me up. Naturally, the lunch I had before with the €7 (£6) they had given me helped."

FRENCH PENSION PROTEST New week marks turning point

AFP, Paris

The titanic battle over French President Nicolas Sarkozy's bid to raise the retirement age reached a turning point yesterday as the start of a new week of strikes, rallies and fuel blockades.

With thousands of families heading off for school half-term holidays, and lawmakers preparing to give the pensions bill their formal final approval, Sarkozy hopes that the mass protest movement will start to die away.

But, with opinion polls showing the embattled president more unpopular than ever, trade unions and student bodies have declared at least two more days of action, and strikes continue in the key fuel sector.

A poll by the IFOP institute for the weekly JDD newspaper showed Sarkozy's approval rating had dropped below 30 percent for the first time, clouding his hopes that passing the pensions law could kick start a political comeback.

French university students are planning to march on Tuesday to defend the right to retire at 60, and trade unions have called their campaign's seventh one-day nationwide strike and day of rallies on Thursday.

Meanwhile, one petrol station in four around the country has run dry, amid strikes at refineries and blockades of fuel depots by strikers playing a cat and mouse game with riot police sent to disperse them.

Government supporters were putting a brave face on things, however, betting that on Wednesday -- when the National Assembly rubber stamps a pensions law already approved by both houses -- the movement will fizzle.