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Floods in Mexico cause mudslides; 123 dead

VILLAHERMOSA, Mexico (AP) — Furious rains sent swollen rivers raging through the streets of the Gulf coast city of Villahermosa and caused flooding and mudslides that killed 123 people in eastern Mexico's coastal mountain ranges. Rain continued in some areas today.

In low-lying areas, people isolated by rising rivers clung to trees or rooftops awaiting help. More than 800 people were rescued by helicopter in Veracruz state, officials said.

More than 157,000 others were driven from their homes by the rains that flooded 10 states in eastern and southern Mexico.

The Carrizal and Grijalva rivers continued to rise Wednesday in the Tabasco state capital of Villahermosa, pushing into city streets, flooding houses with five feet of water and forcing residents to flee in boats with their belongings.

"Not even the army's efforts have been enough. Unfortunately it is now impossible to control the flow of water," said Georgina Trujillo, mayor of Villahermosa, where 500,000 people live.

More than 50,000 people were evacuated in Tabasco, where four people were killed.

A tropical depression in the Gulf of Mexico that lashed the coast and nearby mountains with rain Monday and Tuesday mostly dissipated on Wednesday. But forecasters predicted its remnants would continue to bring rain — as would another weather system blowing in from the east.

Seventy people were reported dead in Puebla state, southeast of Mexico City, state Gov.

Melquiades Morales said in a radio address today. Most had been killed in mudslides in remote communities and aid workers were struggling to reach the stricken areas.

"We know that it is very probable the figure will grow," as officials reach isolated areas, he said. About 19,000 evacuated their houses in the state, he said.

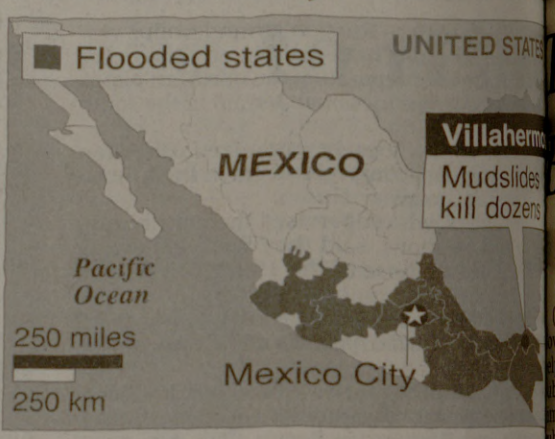
In Teziutlan alone, officials recorded more than 80 mudslides — one of which swept away 20 houses — said Julieta Perez, secretary-general for the municipality of 180,000.

Veracruz state police reported five additional deaths there today, bringing the storm's toll to 40 in the state. State officials said 48,000 people had been evacuated.

There were four confirmed deaths in the central state of Hidalgo, the city of Tulancingo, 60 miles northeast of Mexico City. The city was ravaged by floodwaters, and about 50,000 people were evacuated.

Some regions had received 2 1/2 feet of rainfall in two days — a total greater than the average annual rainfall for the Mexico City area, National Water Commission Director Guillermo Guerrero said today.

"We had never seen anything like this," truck driver Armando Rosas said Wednesday after wait-



ing for more than 12 hours to cross a flooded way there. "They say it could take two weeks before we can get across."

Scattered flooding was reported in parts of southern and central Mexico. Floodwaters in the state of Oaxaca killed two people earlier in the week. The army said it had installed 190 military posts for storm refugees throughout the country in addition to hundreds more established by local or state officials.

Newspapers and television stations in Mexico City urged people to bring food, clothing, blankets and medicine for the victims to distribution centers in the capital.

Hindu nationalist party wins Indian elections

NEW DELHI, India (AP) — A 22-party alliance led by the Hindu nationalists won India's parliamentary elections, unofficial results showed yesterday, giving the nation its first chance at a stable government in several years.

With winners declared for 536 seats, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's alliance had won 286 while the main Congress party and its allies trailed at 129.

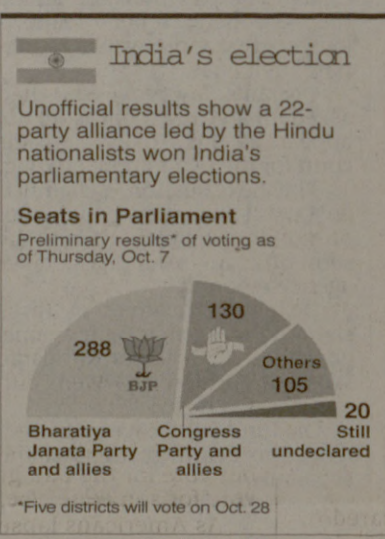
Congress, led by Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, suffered its worst showing ever, with a projected 113 of the 543 elected seats in the lower house of parliament.

Results were expected to be counted yesterday and officially announced today for all but five constituencies, where voting was rescheduled because of flooding.

India's stock exchange, looking for stability after four governments in four years, reacted with confidence to television projections showing Vajpayee's alliance would win at least 294 seats, a comfortable majority.

Bombay's Sensitive Index rose 5.64 percent and Moody's Investor Service upgraded India's rating from stable to positive, saying the new government is likely to pursue aggressive economic restructuring.

One of the new government's



first tasks will be to restart efforts to forge a lasting peace with neighboring Pakistan.

Efforts at improving ties between the South Asian rivals were wrecked when Indian troops battled Pakistan-backed intruders in Kashmir in fierce fighting lasting from May to July.

The victory gives the new government a good chance of serving a full five-year term, something no party in India other than Congress has been able to do.

Germany offers billions in WWII compensation

WASHINGTON (AP) — The German government and industries offered \$3.3 billion yesterday to compensate for World War II atrocities. Lawyers for victims labeled the offer "an enormous disappointment."

"I told the German delegation they have done more harm to the German government and German people than they can ever imagine," Mel Weiss, an attorney for survivors in class-action suits in U.S. courts, said.

Otto Lamsdorff, chief German envoy to two days of compensation talks hosted by the State Department, called the \$3.3 billion offer "a considerable amount given the budget constraints in Germany."

Wolfgang Gibowski, spokesman for German corporations in the talks, said he felt the offer shows German industry "standing up to its moral responsibility."

German officials said the offer would include payment of about \$5,500 to each slave laborer.

It was unclear what would be paid to other victims, including those classified as forced laborers.

Talks are scheduled to resume this afternoon.

Weiss first told reporters the offer in front of the State Department after hearing the offer made to a meeting of international negotiators by Lamsdorff.

"The offer amounts to \$300 million or less in today's terms," Weiss said, "and Germany has vastly overpaid in the past since the war." He said the offer "allows him to continue to pay for the laboring who were prisoners of war."

He said the proposed offer would cover payments to survivors of labor camps as well as compensation relating to unpaid World War II insurance claims, but not counts and some other issues.

"This is disgusting," Weiss said, adding that one-third of the offer is supposed to come from German government. He said the means industry came up with about \$2.1 billion of the total, building up enormous wealth at the backs of these victims."

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Entry fees if registered prior to October 10, 1999 are \$8.00 for youths & A&M students and \$12.00 for Adults & non-A&M students; after October 10, 1999, \$12.00 for youths & A&M students and \$15.00 for Adults & non-A&M students.

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