

Indian premier visits quake area

by Pamela Constable
The Washington Post
January 29, 2001

AHMADABAD, India - Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee Monday toured areas hit hardest by Friday's powerful earthquake and pledged that no expense would be spared to rebuild the affected region as soon as possible.

"I have never seen a natural disaster of such fury," Vajpayee said after a tour of the devastated city of Bhuj and an aerial inspection of rural areas here in India's Gujarat state. Official tallies put the death toll of Friday's 7.9-magnitude quake at 6,287 people confirmed dead and 15,481 injured, but other estimates have put the number of fatalities as high as 20,000.

Vajpayee's visit came on a day when hopes dwindled for rescuing further survivors from thousands of collapsed buildings and questions were being raised about the promptness of government relief efforts.

Leaders of a Swiss rescue team, which has been using sniffer dogs since Saturday to locate buried victims, said they had found only a handful of people still alive and expected that the vast majority of those still trapped are now dead.

"We couldn't hope to save more than a few lives, with a quake of such magnitude with so many rural areas where small houses collapsed instantly," said Toni Frisch, the 52-member team's spokesman. "At least 95 percent of those who survived were the ones who ran outside right away."

Frisch said a large part of his team's assistance was psychological rather than physical. He said the dogs were able to detect with certainty if buried bodies were dead, thus giving closure to relatives' anxieties, and that saving even one life among thousands gave a morale boost to the stricken communities.

"In Ahmadabad we saved two people in three hours, with hundreds of people watching us in the dark. They gave us a standing ova-

tion and brought us tea," he said. "We really motivate people by showing solidarity with them."

But in small towns and villages where no official rescue crews have yet arrived, residents were expressing anger and frustration. Officials with some foreign relief agencies here also said they had noticed a "lack of urgency" on the part of some local authorities after the quake.

"The star players are the Indian military and the Swiss rescue people. Government action is not visible," said C.S. Reddy, an official with CARE International. "The army responded immediately, and the (civilian) officials we met were cooperative, but I did not feel a sense of urgency. This is day four, which is an eternity to us, but the government still seems shellshocked."

The national director of India's Border Security Force, Gurbachan Jaggat, said Monday that "the tragedy is much bigger than we initially thought." Jaggat estimated that as many as 97 villages and towns throughout Gujarat state have been "virtually flattened."

Vajpayee said he was "fully satisfied" with government rescue and relief efforts, but he acknowledged that because Friday was a national holiday and official attention was focused elsewhere, "it took some time to get settled and move forward." He said the government was "looking into" complaints of slow action and would "expedite our efforts."

During his tour of Ahmadabad, where 553 people have been confirmed dead, Vajpayee was taken to an apartment building where an army team had tunneled beneath several stories to save seven people. Army officers called the operation a major success.

"We found one lady who refused to come out. Her child was dead but we told her he was still alive, and that motivated her to come out," said Maj. J.S. Sandhu, who directed the operation at the Siddhi apartments. "The public was very happy."

Hospital illegally took dead children's organs, report says

by Marjorie Miller
Los Angeles Times
January 30, 2001

LONDON - One of the leading children's hospitals in Britain illegally harvested hearts, brains, eyes and other organs from thousands of dead children without the consent of their parents, according to a government report published Tuesday.

The report blamed a rogue pathologist at Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool for systematically removing "every organ from every child who had a post-mortem" between 1988 and 1995.

But investigators also found stockpiled body parts, including the head of an 11-year-old boy, at the hospital and a Liverpool University research center that predated the term of Dutch pathologist Dick van Velzen. And a separate organ census issued by the Health Department on Tuesday indicated that removing body parts without "informed consent" is common in English hospitals.

The revelations come on the heels of admissions by Alder Hey, Birmingham Children's Hospital and London's Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children that they have sold live tissue removed from children during surgery to pharmaceutical companies for drug production - again, without the knowledge of parents.

The collection of organs for medical research is common in many countries, including the United States, and many of the Alder Hey families said they would have given their permission if they had been asked. They said they resented that their children's bodies were "taken apart like scrap from old cars" without regard or respect for the family's feelings.

"As far as I'm concerned, it's like grave robbery," said Tracy Fabiani, who lost a baby at the Liverpool hospital and was given the body back minus organs.

The organ scandals have fueled

public distrust in the National Health Service, already rocked by the case of Dr. Harold Shipman, a beloved small-town doctor who authorities say may have murdered as many as 200 of his elderly patients in a career spanning 25 years. Shipman was convicted last year of killing 15 patients in the Manchester suburb of Hyde and is in prison. A government inquiry is to be held to determine how the killings continued undetected for so long.

Health Secretary Alan Milburn condemned the NHS this week for its anachronistic attitudes and called for a

tained without consent.

Documentation of the organs was "shocking and disrespectful," according to the report. One entry relating to a 9-week-old fetus said: "Inflated monster. Humpty Dumpty." They were stored in jars and stacked in a dingy basement for years.

The 500-page Alder Hey report said the store of organs remained largely unused for research or education. It said the government should consider disciplinary action against managers of the hospital.

The Liverpool hospital apologized Tuesday and announced suspensions of high-ranking staff.

Alan Jarvis, whose 4-year-old son, Matthew, died at Alder Hey in 1990, said he had no idea until late last year that son's heart, brain, lungs and testes were removed after his death.

"We thought that Matthew was created

as a whole body, not a part body," Jarvis told BBC radio. "But the essence of Matthew is left behind in a bucket in Alder Hey to this day."

In issuing the separate Health Department organs census, the government's chief medical officer, Liam Donaldson, said current law governing the removal and retention of organs from dead patients in Britain is "unclear, ambiguous and aging." He said many organs are taken without consent and that some hospitals may have "ignored and deviated from the law" by keeping body parts for decades for no purpose.

Donaldson said 100,000 hearts, brains, lungs and other organs are held by hospitals and medical schools across England, many of them taken without the knowledge of the dead patients' families.

In many cases, grieving relatives weren't told that by signing a consent form for a post-mortem examination, they also were agreeing to allow pathologists to remove organs. He urged major changes in the law to ensure that patients and relatives were giving "informed consent."

"Documentation of the organs was 'shocking and disrespectful.' One entry relating to a 9-week-old fetus said: 'Inflated monster. Humpty Dumpty.' They were stored in jars and stacked in a dingy basement for years."

-information in a 500-page report about Alder Hey Children's Hospital

"revolution" in a medical culture that has put the word of a doctor and the needs of researchers above the rights of patients and parents.

Speaking to Parliament on Tuesday, Milburn apologized to the families of more than 2,000 children whose organs were removed at Alder Hey. He blamed van Velzen for ordering the "unethical and illegal" collection of organs and accused the pathologist of having lied to parents and falsified or stolen medical records to cover up his activities.

The case has been turned over to police, he said.

Van Velzen, an expert on sudden infant death syndrome, is on leave from his current job at a Dutch hospital and has been unavailable for comment. He is wanted by Canadian authorities in connection with a stash of children's organs discovered in Nova Scotia, where he worked after leaving Liverpool.

Milburn told lawmakers that more than 2,000 children's hearts, a large number of brain parts, eyes taken from fetuses, more than 1,500 fetuses or bodies from stillbirths, and a number of children's heads and bodies were ob-

Napster party ends this summer, says Bertelsmann chief

by Billy O'Keefe
TMS Campus
January 30, 2001

The party may still be raging, but the cops are on the way.

German publishing conglomerate Bertelsmann announced this week that it will introduce this summer a subscription plan requiring surfers to pay for Napster, the popular online music-swapping service that attracts more than eight million users a day.

Neither Bertelsmann nor Napster disclosed information regarding how much a subscription to the service, currently non-existent, would cost, what limitations it might carry, or exactly when the new plan takes effect.

Additionally, no information was available on what music Napster would offer subscribers.

Bertelsmann owns music publisher BMG Music, but plans for the involvement of other major and independent labels are still in question.

"I'm convinced we can introduce in June or July of this year a subscription model, with a real working digital rights management system," said Bertelsmann Chief Executive Thomas Middelhoff, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland.

Napster forged a partnership with Bertelsmann in October of last year after more than a dozen breach-of-copyright lawsuits from music publishers, BMG included, threatened to pull the company under.

Middelhoff said that he does not expect a significant decline in Napster's user base once the subscription takes effect. He referred to a survey of 25,000 of the service's more than 55 million users, in which 70 percent said they would be willing to pay up to keep the downloads coming.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Study: Rodents' higher IQ might come at painful price

by Rick Weiss
The Washington Post
January 29, 2001

It hurts to be smart.

That's one conclusion from the latest study of so-called Doogie mice - "smart" rodents that are genetically engineered to have enhanced memory and learning skills. Along with those extra IQ points, researchers have found, comes an added sensitivity to some kinds of pain.

The new work offers a sobering lesson about the difficulty of enhancing certain brain functions without simultaneously taking a toll on others. It might temper any momentum to engineering genetic enhancements into people.

"Beware what you ask for," said James L. McGaugh, a neuroscientist at the University of California at Irvine. "And when you get it, look carefully and see what else you got."

Doogie mice, named after the precocious television character Doogie Howser, MD, made a big splash when they were introduced to the world in September 1999. Having been endowed with extra copies of a gene involved in memory formation, the animals outperformed their normal counterparts on a variety of tasks.

They were better at recognizing objects they had seen before, remembered painful experiences longer, recalled with greater accuracy the location of submerged platforms in milky water and were better at "unlearning" old associations that were no longer true.

Some scientists sniffed at the suggestion that the mice were particularly brainy, noting intelli-

gence is much more than a collection of four or five mental skills. Nonetheless, the work was the first to show that by adding a few extra copies of a single gene to an embryo, researchers improve an animal's performance on a range of memory and learning tasks. Some suggested drugs designed to mimic the gene's effects might help Alzheimer's patients or even make sharp people sharper.

The new work hints it won't be that easy.

Min Zhou and his colleagues at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis assessed how Doogie mice responded to tissue damage and inflammation. They suspected that sensations of pain caused by those types of injury might be controlled by the same "NR2B receptor" that Doogie mice are overendowed with and that gives the animals their superior memories.

NR2B receptors are proteins that act as "coincidence detectors" in the brain. They recognize, for example, when a certain sound is linked to the arrival of food and help consolidate such coincidences into learned associations.

The researchers subjected the mice to stimuli that cause either short-term or long-term pain. They heated the animals' tails, poked their foot pads with stiff fibers and injected their paws with irritating solutions. Then they used molecular and neurological tests to see how the animals' brains responded and tracked the animals' behavior - measuring, for example, how long they licked the site of injury.

Those tests indicated that, com-

pared with normal mice, Doogie mice are equally sensitive to short-term pain. But chronic inflammatory pain, such as that caused by the injected irritants, lasts significantly longer in Doogie mice.

"Our results suggest that a genetic manipulation conferring enhanced cognitive abilities may also provide unintended traits, such as increased susceptibility to persistent pain," the team reports in Monday's issue of the journal *Nature Neuroscience*.

Joe Tsien, the Princeton scientist who led the creation of Doogie mice, said he wasn't convinced the mice feel more pain. The molecular, physiological and behavioral responses Zhou's team observed in the mice could be caused by enhanced memories of the painful experience, he said, not enhanced pain.

"The worst thing would be to say smarter mice are more miserable," Tsien said.

Other scientists conceded it's difficult to know what mice are experiencing because they cannot talk. Even in people, physical and cognitive components of pain are deeply integrated. Still, several scientists said, the new study offers strong substantiation that a Doogie mouse's pain is real.

"This is very convincing evidence" that the mice have prolonged chronic pain responses, said McGaugh, who directs U.C. Irvine's center for the neurobiology of learning and memory. The finding makes sense, he said. "Most of our brain regions are multipurpose. These things are all intertwined."

Leaving empty space at NASA



LOS ANGELES TIMES PHOTO BY LUIS SINCO.

Ed Stone, the chief of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory who is preparing to retire, played a key role in vastly adding to the knowledge of our solar system's outer planets.

Old life form teems in oceans

The Washington Post
January 29, 2001

Scientists have long understood that the open seas are teeming with simple microscopic life forms, but they thought these organisms were bacteria. Last week, researchers reported that a shocking fraction of this part of the food chain appears to be made up of odd one-celled organisms called archaea, which is quite a different kettle of nonfish.

Genetic research had earlier revealed that archaea (a name derived from the Greek word for "ancient") make up a third domain of life, distinct from bacteria and plants and animals. But until now they were considered a "failed" life form that had adapted poorly to changes in the planetary environment and therefore was confined to certain extreme environments reminiscent of the infant Earth that spawned its earliest ancestor, such as high-temperature volcanic vents on the sea floor and highly acidic waters.

Instead, a year-long study of archaeal abundance in the Pacific, from the sur-

"This remarkable new insight will have a major impact on our view of how the oceans function ecologically."

-Phil Taylor, director of biological oceanography for the National Science Foundation

face to depths of almost 16,000 feet, shows such high concentrations that the organisms could make up 50 percent of the life, or "biomass," in the open ocean, according to David Karl of the University of Hawaii. Karl, with UH colleague Markus Kerner and Edward DeLong of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, reported the findings in the Jan. 24 issue of *Nature*.

"This remarkable new insight will have a major impact on our view of how the oceans function ecologically," said Phil Taylor, director of biological oceanography for the National Science Foundation, which funded the research. To the extent that archaea function differently from bacteria, he said, current theories on a variety of processes such as carbon recycling should be reevaluated.