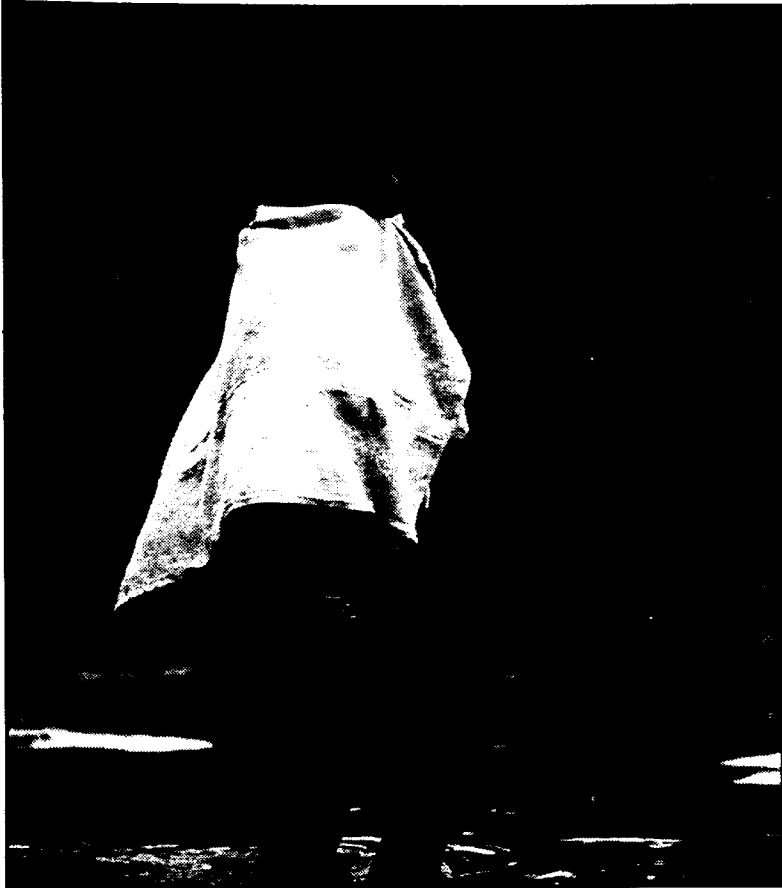


## Hurricane Mitch roars through Caribbean



AP Photo/Victor R. Caivano

A child stands on a flooded street caused by Hurricane Mitch in Honduras yesterday. The National Weather Service still considers the hurricane "extremely dangerous," according to its latest advisory.

*With 155 mph winds, Hurricane Mitch's path was unpredictable as it ripped through Honduras and Belize killing two, and now heads for Mexico.*

By VICTOR R. CAIVANO  
Associated Press Writer

LA CEIBA, Honduras — Hurricane Mitch cut through the western Caribbean yesterday, pummeling coastal Honduras and Belize with driving rain and fierce winds that snapped trees and sent thousands of people fleeing for higher ground. Two storm-related deaths were reported.

Honduran President Carlos Flores Facusse declared the highest state of alert and sent in troops to evacuate thousands of people from villages on the sparsely populated coast. Thousands more made their way to safer ground on their own.

Most of the population of Belize City fled inland in cars and government buses, while tourists rushed to find ways out of the Mexican resorts of Cancun and Cozumel, where the storm is expected to hit by the end of the week.

At 4 p.m. EST, Mitch was about 60 miles north of Honduras and moving west-southwest — roughly parallel to the coast — at 6 mph. Its winds dropped from 180 mph to near 155 mph, reducing Mitch to a Category 4 hurricane, one category below the most powerful. But the 350-mile-wide storm remained very powerful — and dangerous.

Mitch's slow speed made the hurricane's path especially unpredictable, forecasters said. Earlier in the day, when Mitch's 180 mph

winds made it a Category 5 storm, the U.S. National Weather Service said only three Atlantic storms were stronger — Gilbert in 1988, Allen in 1980 and the Labor Day hurricane of 1935.

Strong winds bent palm trees along the Honduran coast yesterday, and heavy rain caused at least four rivers to overflow their banks. The entire coast of Honduras was under a hurricane warning, and up to 20 inches of rain was forecast in mountainous areas.

In La Ceiba, on the western Honduran coast, residents fled to shelters set up in schools and fire stations on higher ground. The area has the sea to the north, the Cangrejal River to the east and a creek to the west.

Fisherman Manuel Padilla said he wanted to evacuate with his three children but authorities had not told him where the shelters were located.

"Nobody has come to see us," he complained. "They've forgotten us."

Still, hundreds of people waded through knee-deep waters to safety. At one fire station shelter, about 150 people huddled in the damp, with no dry blankets or other protection. Some brought pets, including five parrots.

Blanca Almeida Ramirez, 22, said she and her three children fled early yesterday when water began to seep into her wooden house. "The wood is all rotten inside," she said. "I couldn't stay any longer."

The head of the Honduran armed forces, Gen. Mario Hung Pacheco, said 5,000 soldiers were deployed to help victims of the storm.

Five villages in the northeastern province of Gracias a Dios were cut off by flooding, but police evacuated all 2,000 residents before the rivers rose, said national police chief Col. Anael Perez.

Two other villages were cut off by fallen trees.

In El Progreso, 100 miles north of the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa, the army evacuated more than 5,000 people who live in low-lying banana plantations along the Ulua River, said resident Nolly Soliman.

Two brothers, Misael and Rainel Juarez, were electrocuted Monday when they tried to take a television antenna down from their roof in the village of Jutiapa, near La Ceiba.

Early yesterday, the storm passed almost directly over the tiny Islas del Cisne, Honduran islands used in the 1980s as a U.S. radar station and radio base for broadcasts to Cuba. Authorities said the military base lost its roof, but the five soldiers posted there were unhurt because they took refuge in nearby caves.

Forecasters expect Mitch to swirl parallel to the Honduran coast and then turn northward and head for Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula and its resorts of Cancun and Cozumel. But a strike on Belize also was possible.

Belize residents weren't taking any chances. Stores and banks were closed in Belize City and almost all the city's 75,000 residents were fleeing by car or bus to higher ground.

A huge traffic jam — and a heavy rain — slowed drivers headed to Belmopan, the Belizean capital built after Belize City itself was destroyed by Hurricane Hattie in 1961.

All gas stations in Belize City had run out of gasoline, but the government commandeered all buses in the country to run 24 hours a day, ferrying people inland for free.

The government also ordered the evacuation of Ambergris Cay, a northern island that is home to many Americans and Europeans. Residents were fleeing on water taxis and military planes, authorities said.

## NATO extends airstrike threat

By JEFFREY ULBRICH  
Associated Press Writer

OSTROZUB, Yugoslavia — Serb forces drew back yesterday from former Kosovo battlefronts, holding off the immediate threat of NATO airstrikes. But the alliance reserved the right to launch an attack anytime if the situation worsens.

To keep up the pressure on Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, the 16-nation military alliance decided to maintain more than 400 NATO warplanes on alert, but did not set any new deadlines for airstrikes after the previous one expired yesterday.

That continuing threat should help guarantee the safety of hundreds of thousands of refugees, terrified of returning home

unless government troops and Serb police are held back.

"We know that President Milosevic only moves when he is presented with the credible threat of force," NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana told a news conference after a 2 and a half hour meeting of NATO ambassadors in Brussels, Belgium.

More than 4,000 Serb policemen were reported to have pulled out of Kosovo on Monday alone, vacating many villages and dug-in positions. That encouraged a few among the 300,000 displaced people in this largely ethnic Albanian province to take a chance on returning home.

"We have observed what I would consider significant reductions in the Serbian police presence in the field," said Shaun

Byrnes, head of the American section of the Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission, part of what eventually will be 2,000 "ground verifiers" who will make sure that Milosevic is living up to his promises.

"Last night, we watched convoys of Serbian police leaving Kosovo and going north into Serbia proper," he said. "We estimated that there were roughly 4,100. That's quite a few policemen."

The Clinton administration said observations on the ground indicated Milosevic was in "substantial compliance," meaning the threat of allied military intervention has been, at least for the moment, averted.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said NATO would move quickly to use force against

Yugoslavia if Milosevic sends troops and special police back to Kosovo.

NATO allies were preparing to assemble a rapid-reaction force in neighboring Macedonia to be ready to intervene if Milosevic sends troops against civilians again, Albright said.

As the diplomats were pondering how to deal with Milosevic, Avdullah Krasniqi, an ethnic Albanian from Ostrozub, a small community southwest of Pristina, loaded up his farm wagon with wife, kids and household goods and headed home Tuesday.

He made his decision less out of confidence that NATO had forced an end to the crisis than the fact that it was getting colder by the day in his mountain refuge.



AP Photo/Eric Marti

A Kosovo Libertarian Army soldier talks on his radio as he hides on the side of the road from passing Serb police near Pristina yesterday. Although most of the Serb forces have withdrawn to meet the NATO deadline, some KLA forces were still taking position.

## Consumer confidence falls sharply in October

By RACHEL BECK  
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK — Consumer confidence tumbled to its lowest level in nearly two years in October amid increasing concerns about global economic and political troubles.

The Conference Board reported yesterday its index of consumer confidence fell 9.1 points to 117.3 from a revised 126.4 in September. The last time it was lower was in December 1996.

October's decline, the fourth straight month of retreat, was much larger than Wall Street analysts expected. The index now is down 20.9 points from its 29-year high in June.

"Growing anxiety about the financial markets, combined with political concerns and recent layoff announcements, have given consumers the jitters," said Lynn Franco, associate director at the Conference Board, a New York-based, business-financed private research group.

Consumer sentiment is an important economic indicator since consumer spending accounts for two-thirds of the nation's overall economic activity.

The report comes amid increasing evidence that the U.S. economy is slowing as a result of the financial crisis in Asia and Russia that is now threatening Latin America.

In reaction to continued economic turbulence, U.S. stocks slumped sharply in early October, before beginning to rebound.

Stocks were up broadly yesterday, with the Dow Jones industrial average adding 47.38 at 8,479.59 late this morning. That's more than 7 percent above where it began the year but 9 percent below its record high of 9,337.97, reached July 17.

Federal Reserve policy-makers cut short-term interest rates by a quarter-percentage point twice in

"Consumers are most concerned about personal wealth."

— Dan Seto

economist at Nikko Securities International Co.

the last month in hope of cushioning the U.S. economy from the financial turmoil.

The Conference Board survey, which ran from Oct. 1 to Oct. 15, does not reflect consumer reaction to the surprise second rate cut on Oct. 15.

The survey does show that consumers are nervous about the effect of the gyrating stock market and slowing economy.

Consumers said they were most concerned about what's to come in the near future, sending the index that measures expectations for the next six months down 10.2 points to 86.6.

Fewer Americans said they would buy a home or major appliance or planned a vacation. More consumers expect business conditions to worsen, meaning fewer jobs and lower paychecks.

Only one of the nation's nine geographic regions — the south-central section of the United States — saw a rise in consumer confidence in October.

"Consumers are most concerned about personal wealth," said Dan Seto, an economist at Nikko Securities International Co. "They watch the extreme market volatility and hear of the economy slowing and wonder what they means for them."

Although consumers are worried about future economic conditions, they remain somewhat confident about their current economic situation.

## Weather concerns improving for launch, Glenn's historic return to space

By PAUL RECER  
AP Science Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — All elements for John Glenn's historic return to space were in good shape yesterday, with the astronauts on hand, the countdown going smoothly and the outlook for launch day weather improving.

Forecasters said yesterday that there was a 70 percent chance of favorable weather for Thursday's launch, with a slight chance of showers. Earlier, the chance for good weather had been put at 60 percent. Stiff winds peeling off from Hurricane Mitch are the only concern.

The hurricane was far from Florida and posed no threat to the state, but forecasters worried that the storm system could trigger an increase in winds blowing across the oceanside launch pad. Winds of 17.2 mph at launch time could force a postponement.

If the launch is delayed for some reason to later in the week, forecasters said weather could become more of a problem. The outlook for

favorable launch conditions declines to 60 percent for both Friday and Saturday.

Glenn and his six crewmates had some rare leisure hours today at the crew quarters, a short drive from the launch pad.

They were to review their flight plans, check equipment, including their spacesuits and undergo brief medical exams. In the afternoon, they were given five hours of free time to spend with adult family members. As a guard against colds or infections, mission rules bar children and teenagers from the crew quarters.

Nearly, preparations by spectators and journalists were reaching a pace that rivaled the frenzy of the Apollo moon shot days of 30 years ago.

Motels in nearby Titusville and Cocoa Beach were filled. Traffic jams were common.

Along highways that afford cross-water views of the launch pad, workers erected barriers and installed portable toilets for the thousands of tourist expected to watch Glenn's return to space. By

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— John Glenn  
astronaut

launch day, the highways are expected to be lined with cars and recreational vehicles filled with spectators awaiting the show.

About 3,500 journalists have registered to cover the mission. More than two dozen television trucks jammed the media complex.

President Clinton and a large congressional delegation are scheduled to attend, along with sports and show business celebrities.

The crew was about an hour late arriving at the space center yesterday. One of the five T-38 jets carrying the crew members developed a battery problem when the astronauts stopped for refueling at Tyndall

Air Force Base in the Florida Panhandle. Scott E. Parazynski waited at Tyndall for a ride in another plane while the others flew on to the Cape.

In brief remarks after arriving, Glenn introduced himself as "PS2 on this flight." Payload specialist number 2 is the lowest rank on the crew.

"I am very glad to be here," Glenn said. "I have been pleasantly surprised at the outpouring of interest in this flight, and it's really gratifying to see people get so fired up about the space program again."

Glenn walked quickly to his waiting family, hugging his wife,

Annie, and his children, daughter Lyn and son David. Lyn held her father for a long moment, apparently whispering in his ear.

In an interview earlier in the day, the astronaut's son said he at first was apprehensive about his father returning to space 36 years after becoming the first American in orbit.

David, a family physician, said that when he learned of his father's space shuttle flight, he saw mental images of the 1986 explosion of Challenger that killed seven astronauts.

"I just watched it over and over and over," he said.

More recently the doctor said he has come to believe that the shuttle safety record "is as close to perfect as you can imagine it possibly being, so I've sort of gotten beyond seeing that replay in my head."

Discovery's nine-day mission will concentrate on science, with Glenn participating in 10 experiments on the effects of weightlessness on the human body and how those effects might relate to aging on Earth.



AP Photo/George Shelton

Sen. John Glenn tries on his gloves while in his launch and entry suit yesterday. The final preparations are being planned for Thursday's space shuttle launch.