

NEWS IN BRIEF

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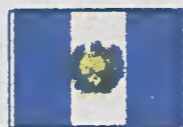
UNITED STATES

According to the Washington Post, on Sept. 6 President Barack Obama announced an infrastructure improvement plan that will invest \$50 billion in railroads, roads, airports, and create an infrastructure bank. "We used to have the best infrastructure in the world, and we can have it again," he announced, according to the BBC. Efforts to modernize and improve transportation, are also aimed to stimulate the economy, which just suffered a loss of over 54,000 more jobs.



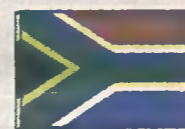
MEXICO

Kingpin drug boss Edgar "La Barbie" Valdez Villarreal was arrested in Mexico last week, marking a major victory for Mexican law enforcement officials. According to the Christian Science Monitor, his apprehension has been viewed by the country as a major step countering the trend of drug-related violence. In the last four years, drug wars in Mexico have accounted for nearly 28,000 deaths, and in the last few weeks, especially, the escalation of brutality amongst drug cartels has drawn much global attention.



GUATEMALA

Mother Nature has brought the latest disaster to Guatemala; mud slides have caused a death toll of at least 45 and contributed to the evacuation of more than 11,000 people. Following days of torrential rains, mud slides have devastated the country; even rescue efforts were briefly halted. The mud slides affected a major highway northwest of Guatemala City as the crowd tried to dig out five vehicles and a bus. Guatemala's civil defense director told the BBC that they have lost hope that the victims will be pulled out alive.



SOUTH AFRICA

Unions representing over 1.3 million workers have ended a strike that has crippled South Africa's public services for the past three weeks. Hospitals were unstaffed and schools closed before the government agreed on a 7.5 percent pay raise for the government workers. Netcare, a private South African health care provider, reports rescuing nearly 100 infants from public hospitals and treated over 400 people affected by violence related to the strike who had been turned away by unstaffed public hospitals.



IRAQ

Iraqi officials and religious leaders are struggling to respond to the latest episode of anti-Muslim sentiments in the United States. A church in Gainesville, Fla., has announced it will commemorate the anniversary of 9/11 by publicly burning copies of the Koran. The church's website states that the purpose of the burning is "to warn about the teaching and ideology of Islam, which we do hate as it is hateful." On the issue, U.S. Gen. David Petraeus warns the burnings "could endanger troops and it could endanger the overall effort in Afghanistan." Many religious organizations and Muslim groups have joined together to oppose the burning.

France: new evidence in 1951 case could point towards LSD poisoning by the CIA

By Helen Gushue
STAFF WRITER

On Aug. 16, 1951, the inhabitants of the small French town, Pont Saint Esprit, were suddenly struck by illness and hallucinations.

Originally, the incident was attributed to food poisoning in a local bakery, but new evidence suggests there could be a link to Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operations.

The descriptions of events occurring during this time period provide a record of the disorder that took over Pont Saint Esprit that August. The Daily Telegraph, a newspaper published in the UK, accounts several of the incidents: a child attacking his grandmother and a man jumping from a second floor window while shouting, "I am a plane."

In the same article, the Telegraph reported that, "Many were taken to the local asylum in straightjackets."

While only about 10 percent of the poisoned Pont Saint Esprit residents experienced mental side-effects, those who

did had intense, violent reactions.

Victims of the poisoning experienced such intense symptoms that they were at risk to themselves and others.

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"Among the stricken, delirium rose: patients thrashed wildly on their beds, screaming that red flowers were blossoming from their bodies, that their heads had turned to molten lead."

Time Magazine, Sept. 10, 1951

screaming that red flowers were blossoming from their bodies, that their heads had turned to molten lead," according to Time Magazine. "Pont Saint Esprit's hospital reported four attempts at suicide."

At the time, investigators claimed that ergot, a poisonous fungus that grows on

grain, was the cause. This theory has been questioned by some investigators, however, since there had not been a verified epidemic of ergot in France since 1816.

In his recent book, "A Terrible Mistake: The murder of Frank Olsen and the CIA's

Secret Cold War Experiments," investigative journalist HP Albarelli claims that the CIA used the town to experiment with a man-made hallucinogen similar to LSD.

"The outbreak at Pont Saint Esprit had actually been produced by a top-secret, joint Army-CIA experiment conducted as part of

the Project MK/NAOMI, an adjunct project to the CIA's ultra-secret Projects Artichoke and MK/ULTRA," Albarelli said.

Steven Kaplan, professor of European history at Cornell University who specializes in French history and the history of bread, has serious doubts about Albarelli's theory.

"There is absolutely NO evidence that the CIA had anything to do with the collective intoxication," said Kaplan in an e-mail interview. "I have an open-mind, in part because I have no particular affinity for the CIA. But I have never seen the least iota of a case for CIA intervention in PSE, certainly not in Albarelli's book."

Like Albarelli, Kaplan has studied the incident and does not subscribe to the theory of food poisoning. His book, "Le Pain Maudit," questions the ergotism thesis and provides material reasons why it does not fit.

Both authors believe the French government needs to take a second look at this event to discover the true causes. Until then, it will most likely remain a disturbing and widely-disputed event, shrouded in mystery.