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## CRISIS AFTER KATRINA

# TOTAL EVACUATION



Tears stream down the cheeks of Shelia Dixon as she holds her 18-month-old daughter Emily and waits to be evacuated Wednesday from Metairie, La.

## Region faces monumental health threats

BEE STAFF AND NEWS SERVICES

As a public health catastrophe unfolded Wednesday in New Orleans, hospitals in the Crescent City sank further into disaster, airlifting babies to other states without their parents and struggling to accommodate the sick people appearing at their doors.

Dangerous, unsanitary conditions spread across the city, much of which now sits in a murky stew of germs.

The federal government declared a public health emergency for the Gulf Coast region, promising 40 medical centers with up to 10,000 beds and thousands of doctors and nurses for the hurricane-ravaged area.

In a stunning example of how desperate the situation has become, 25 babies who had been in a makeshift neonatal intensive care unit at New Orleans' Ochsner Clinic were airlifted Wednesday to hospitals in Houston, Baton Rouge, La., and Birmingham, Ala. Many were hooked up to battery-operated breathing machines keeping them alive.

Their parents had been forced to evacuate and

► HEALTH, Page A21

## Relatives can only wait, wonder, hope

By Gina Kim  
BEE STAFF WRITER

Elliot Quave doesn't know where his mom is. No one's heard from KaShawn Seible's brother-in-law.

Debra Kessler wonders if her father is getting the dialysis he needs.

Brooke Ruschell simply hopes her husband's parents are alive.

Like people across the country, these Sacramento-area residents are scouring the Internet and combing the news for a mere mention of the Gulf Coast towns or New Orleans neighborhoods their relatives live in.

They're keeping their phones near, posting their relatives' names on message boards and saying silent prayers that their loved ones have weathered the devastating hurricane that may have a death toll in the thousands and has left tens of thousands

► RELATIVES, Page A18



New Orleans residents gather on a strip of high ground Wednesday to board helicopters. An estimated 3,000 people have been rescued by boats or copters, yet hundreds were said to still be huddled on rooftops or on isolated ground. As small boats moved through the city looking for survivors, the Army Corps of Engineers said the water has stopped rising.

● **RELIEF EFFORTS:** Military mobilizing ships, planes, convoys for largest relief effort in nation's history.

● **LOOTING:** Crackdown ordered as brazen looters cart off food, clothing, TVs, jewelry and guns.

● **THE OUTLOOK:** New Orleans faces months to dry out and repair levees, years to rebuild.

## Death estimate surges

By Robert D. McFadden and Joseph B. Treaster  
NEW YORK TIMES

NEW ORLEANS - Chaos gripped New Orleans on Wednesday as looters ran wild, food and water supplies dwindled, bodies floated in the floodwaters, the Superdome was to be evacuated and officials said there was no choice but to abandon the city devastated by Hurricane Katrina, perhaps for months.

For the first time, a New Orleans official suggested the scope of the death toll. Mayor Ray Nagin said the hurricane might have killed thousands in his city alone, an estimate that, if correct, could make it the nation's deadliest natural disaster since the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, which killed up to 6,000.

"We know there is a significant number of dead bodies in the water," and others hidden from view in attics and other places, the mayor said. Asked how many, he said: "Minimum, hundreds. Most likely, thousands."

As survivors struggled with a disaster that left damage of up to

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### INSIDE

Full coverage on Pages A19-24

New Orleans police diverted from search-and-rescue to stop looting.

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Racing the clock, rescuers call in volunteers to help save survivors.

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Additional coverage on Pages B2, C1 and D1



For more information about Hurricane Katrina relief information, a forum for those seeking missing people and a photo gallery, see www.sacbee.com

## Panic grips march to shrine - stampede kills 800 Iraqis

### INSIDE

A new Field Poll finds that a majority of California voters believe at least some troops should be withdrawn from Iraq. ► Page A6

By Hannah Allam and Tom Lasseter  
KNIGHT RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

BAGHDAD, Iraq - Madiha Shamki said she knew tragedy would strike Wednesday as hundreds of thousands of Shiite Muslims marched toward a shrine in Baghdad to mark the death of a revered saint, and she tried to do everything she could to keep her two grown sons at home. She told them she'd dreamed

of disaster. She even threatened to kill herself if they left. But they insisted, saying that faith was more important than fear.

Shamki told her story as she joined throngs of hysterical Iraqis outside a vast medical complex in Baghdad, waiting to claim the bodies of her sons, who were among about 800 Shiites killed Wednesday in a panic-induced stampede.

The tragedy was the single ► IRAQ, Page A17

### INSIDE THE BEE

CAPITOL & CALIFORNIA • A3

## Folsom prison inmate, followers indicted in war plot

METRO • B1

### How do local schools rate?

The state releases scores for the Academic Performance Index, but there are differing views on progress made by students in our region.

SCIENCE • A8

### Chimps vs. humans

Scientists compare the genetic blueprints of humans and chimps to show how we're similar - yet so different.



HEALTH • A10

### FDA official resigns

Her reason: The agency's refusal to allow over-the-counter sales of emergency contraception.

SPORTS • C1

### Pac-10 plays it again

Conference enters the techno age with instant replay.

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