

Today: Mostly sunny, breezy. High 90. Low 68.  
Friday: Mostly sunny. High 90. Low 68.

Details, B8

128TH YEAR No. 270 5 DC

## In New Orleans, a Desperate Exodus



BY ERIC GAY — ASSOCIATED PRESS

David Johnson, who was unable to walk, is carried from his home in eastern New Orleans by Mickey Monceaux. Authorities say the water is leveling off as Lake Pontchartrain empties in the Gulf.

### Looting Persists; Mayor Fears Huge Death Toll

By SAM COATES and DAN EGGEN  
Washington Post Staff Writers

NEW ORLEANS, Aug. 31 — Frantic authorities escalated efforts to empty this submerged city Wednesday, with the mayor saying that as many as 100,000 people still needed to be evacuated and federal officials reading plans to transport as many as 23,000 refugees of Hurricane Katrina from the Superdome to Houston's Astrodome.

The city grew even more desperate as thousands fled on foot, hundreds of residents clambered onto rooftops to escape floodwaters, and looters plundered abandoned stores for food, liquor and guns. Things have spiraled so out of control, that the city's mayor told the Associated Press that he has ordered police officers to focus on looters and give up search-and-rescue efforts. He also warned that hundreds if not thousands of residents could be dead.

People who had resisted previous evacuation orders, including many elderly and infirm residents, lined up on highways and perched on islands of dry ground waiting for help. They were flown to safety in airborne baskets, ferried in boats or floated in bright-orange plastic buckets, one at a time.

The escalating crisis in New Orleans and along the hard-hit Gulf Coast prompted a surge of activity from the federal government, which dispatched Navy ships to assist in rescue efforts and declared a public health emergency for the region. President Bush, surveying the hurricane- and flood-ravaged area from the air earlier in the day, ordered a coordinated recovery ef-

See KATRINA, A16, Col. 1

### HURRICANE KATRINA: THE AFTERMATH

#### City's Bleak Future

New Orleans residents face months or years of waiting before they can go home — if they even choose to. **A10**

#### Hunt for Survivors

In Mississippi, rescue crews continue their search, and survivors scavenge for supplies. **A10**

More Coverage: **A10-22**



BY RICH LIPSKY — THE WASHINGTON POST

#### Flabbergasted

Rapidly rising gas prices in the region leave drivers nonplused. **BUSINESS, D1**

■ **IN METRO:** Getting in touch with relatives remains difficult; aid flows from the region. **B1**

■ **IN STYLE:** The moral ambiguity of survival looting; the news media go to extremes. **C1**

■ **IN BUSINESS:** Phone service is crippled; ripple effect of the oil supply. **D1**

■ **IN SPORTS:** The New Orleans Saints look for a new NFL home. **E1**

### On the Streets

## Obstacles on the Way to Drier Ground

By PETER SLEVIN  
Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW ORLEANS, Aug. 31 — Battered New Orleans disgorged thousands of thirsty and bedraggled residents who escaped by overstuffed car, bus and military truck. The luckiest had cars to drive and a stash of gasoline. The weakest were helped aboard helicopters or hefted onto the beds of

pickup trucks.

Some walked on heat-blistered feet, carrying what few belongings they could. After abandoning their homes, they waited in the streets or the open highway in 95-degree heat, begging rides from relief workers. Faced with dwindling supplies, miserable conditions and a mandatory evacuation order, they had little choice but to surrender to the growing calamity.

Many did not know where they were going — Houston, Baton Rouge or maybe a random town beyond the city limits. No one could tell them when they would return to the besieged city, or what they would find. Today, at least, people did not seem to care.

"I've been crying all morning," said Rochelle Baxter, sheltering her three young children beneath a Mississippi River bridge. "I just

want to be in a place where I can give me and my kids a bath. I want to get out of town and know that my kids are safe."

Evidence that New Orleans remained a perilous place went beyond the rooftop-swamping floodwater. It was clear in the police swoop on looters at a warehouse-district Wal-Mart and in the sight of

See NEW ORLEANS, A17, Col. 1

### Inside the Superdome

## 'And Now We Are in Hell'

By ANN GERHART  
Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW ORLEANS, Aug. 31 — Rochelle Montrel, dedicated middle school teacher, thought she should stay in town to prepare for the first day of classes. "We have all this testing now, earlier and earlier," she said Wednesday, "and I wanted to be ready."

Instead, she spent Monday clinging to her roof, and that turned to Tuesday, and then "the wonderful man" in the helicopter finally swooped in, after 24 hours, and delivered Montrel, her mother, father, sister and the poodle onto the ramp outside the Superdome. They had lived.

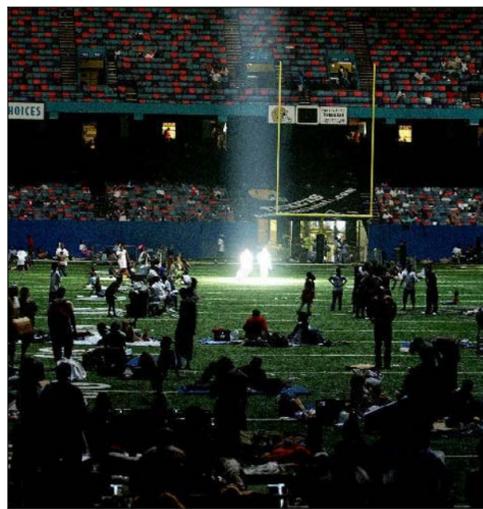
"We were so grateful," said Montrel, 35, "and now we are in hell."

There are four levels of hell inside the refuge city of the Superdome, home to about

15,000 people since Sunday. On the artificial-turf field and in the lower-level seats where Montrel sat sweltering with her family, a form of civilization had taken hold — smelly, messy, dark and dank, but with a structure. Families with cots used their beds as boundaries for personal space and kept their areas orderly, a cooler on one corner, the toys on another, almost as if they had come for fireworks and stayed too long.

The bathrooms, clogged and overflowing since Monday, announced the second level of hell, the walkway ringing the entrance level. In the men's, the urinal troughs were overflowing. In the women's, the bowls were to the brim. A slime of excrement and urine made the walkway slick. "You don't even go there anymore," said

See SUPERDOME, A17, Col. 2



BY KHAMPHIA BOUAPHANH — FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Sunlight streams through the dome's hurricane-damaged roof. The stadium has been without water and electricity for days.

### The View From Air Force One

## Vacation Ends, and Crisis Management Begins

By PETER BAKER  
Washington Post Staff Writer

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE, Aug. 31 — As his blue-and-white jet swooped low over New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, President Bush pressed his face against the window and stared out at oblivion.

He saw an expansive lake where a storied city used to be. He saw mile after mile of flattened

houses turned into so many matchsticks. He saw highways that disappeared into water, a train plucked off its track, a causeway collapsed into rubble. And he saw the next daunting challenge to confront his presidency.

After a month-long retreat at his Texas ranch, Bush returned to Washington on Wednesday in crisis-management mode, where his administration is likely to remain indefinitely. With his poll numbers at an all-time low, Bush faces one of the

stiffest leadership tests since Sept. 11, 2001, with continued violence in Iraq, gasoline prices topping \$3 a gallon in many places and now what he called "one of the worst natural disasters in our nation's history."

In response, Bush mobilized one of the biggest relief efforts in history as his administration tapped the nation's oil reserves and dispatched

See BUSH, A20, Col. 1

### The Economy

## Critical U.S. Supply Line Is Disrupted

By NEIL IRWIN  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The effects of the monster storm that devastated the Gulf Coast spread through the nation's economy yesterday, disrupting shipping and rail networks and sending prices for lumber, coffee and other commodities soaring.

Hurricane Katrina is likely to drag down U.S. economic growth in the months ahead, analysts said, threatening what has been a robust expansion.

Katrina's economic effects may be more lasting than those that usually follow big storms, economists and businesspeople said yesterday, owing to the severity of the damage and the unique geography of the New Orleans region. The storm hit a chokepoint in the U.S. economy — a concentration of ports, rail lines, barge traffic and major highways making up one of the nation's major trade hubs.

New Orleans is underwater, and its future is uncertain — as is that of the \$49 billion in goods, 60 percent of U.S. grain exports, and 26 percent of the nation's natural gas

See ECONOMY, A22, Col. 3

## Stampede in Baghdad Kills Hundreds of Shiite Pilgrims

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER  
and NASEER NOURI  
Washington Post Foreign Service

BAGHDAD, Aug. 31 — Rumors of a suicide bomber sowed panic among thousands of Shiite Muslim pilgrims Wednesday on a bridge over the Tigris River in Baghdad, triggering a stampede in which many jumped into the turbid river or fell to their deaths on sidewalks and a children's playground below.

At least 637 people died, said Col. Adnan Abdul Rahman, an Interior Ministry spokesman. Other estimates were much higher, al-

though an accurate count was not available because the bodies of victims were taken to many hospitals, mosques and private homes.

The disaster took more lives than any other single incident in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003. Tensions had been high among the pilgrims, who were marching to Baghdad's Kadhimiyah shrine, because of an insurgent rocket and mortar barrage earlier in the day that killed seven worshippers. Survivors and security officials placed much of the blame for the stampede on se-

See IRAQ, A25, Col. 1



BY HADI MIZBAN — ASSOCIATED PRESS

A man at a Baghdad hospital finds the body of his brother, who was among hundreds killed in a stampede sparked by rumors of a suicide attack.

### INSIDE

#### FDA Official Quits Over Plan B Delay

The women's health chief says her boss's decision on the morning-after contraceptive was unwarranted interference. **NATION, A8**

#### Fantasy Football Kicks Off

The Sports section begins a weekly feature by predicting who will be this year's most valuable fantasy player. **SPORTS, E12**

#### Metro Car Problems

Metro has ordered manual operation of its newest rail cars after an incident this week in which doors remained open on a moving train. **METRO, B1**

#### Community News Today

The District wants to build bike lanes to increase two-wheel commuting. Look for your local D.C. Extra behind the Home section today.



Contents © 2005 The Washington Post

0 70628 21100 3