

WorldWatch

by Staff

Forerunner, "WorldWatch," May 1997

Earthquakes

A powerful 7.3 earthquake shook western Pakistan on February 28, killing at least 80 people. One resident said, "There was complete panic, and I never felt such a violent shaking." Hours later, a 6.1 quake in northwestern Iran killed more than 3,000 and injured 2,600.

Weather

The highest floods in 150 years may occur across the northern tier of states this year, the result of as much as 40 feet of snow. Experts expect flooding in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Washington, California and Oregon.

Disease

A World Health Organization report released on March 15 claims that science could eliminate several major tropical diseases for less than \$1 per patient. *Chagas disease* (spread by parasites left by biting insects) infects 18 million people in Latin America. *River blindness* (a parasite spread by black flies) infects 18 million in Africa and Latin America. *Leprosy* strikes about 1 million yearly. As many as 120 million people in the tropics have contracted *lymphatic filariasis* (a parasite spread by mosquitoes), a disease that disables its victims by swelling their limbs. Tropical disease experts, however, warn that eradicating these diseases will be a tough fight.

Wildlife

Since the late 1980s, two parasitic mites have spread throughout North America, devastating America's wild honeybee population. Experts say the mites represent the single greatest threat ever to confront the food chain and our agricultural industries, since bees have no natural defense against them.

European Union

Greece threatens to block EU expansion until the body resolves the question of Cyprus' application to the Union. The Western powers' main strategies for stabilizing Eastern Europe (EU and NATO expansion) are being held hostage by the continuing enmity between Greece and Turkey, as well as Russia's hard-line position.

Israel

Prime Minister Netanyahu has given the head of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem a silver bas-relief map depicting a Jewish Temple in place of the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque. Yassir Arafat says this raises fears that Israel may be planning to rebuild a temple after desecrating Islamic holy sites. This comes amidst sharply rising tensions over Israel's decision to build 6,500 homes in East Jerusalem.

Religion

» Religious groups claiming to represent 100 million Americans recently unveiled a \$4 million effort to join U.S. churches to the environmental movement. The National Religious Partnership for the Environment is a well-funded coalition of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish leaders. Vice President Al Gore, known for his "green theology," a mystical environmentalism, helped spawn the Partnership, and claims that the group merely seeks to exercise biblical stewardship and to preserve God's creation. However, Gaia (the ancient Greek earth goddess), Ra (the Egyptian sun god), other nature deities and an "earth mass" feature prominently in the group's rites held in major venues such as New York's Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

» Pope John Paul II will make his first pastoral visit to the Middle East when he visits Lebanon on May 10-11.