

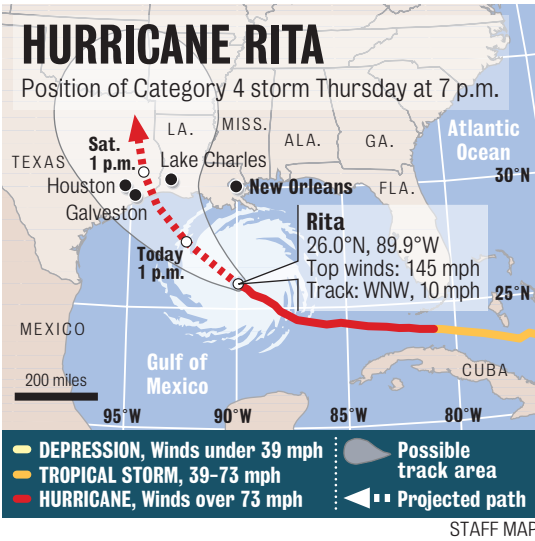


The Times-Picayune

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HURRICANE EDITION



RITA JOGS TOWARD LA.

Gov. Blanco urges half-million residents to leave

Prison became island of fear

Inmates and guards were in it together

By Michael Perlstein
Staff writer

When New Orleans plunged into darkness and spiraling chaos in the days after Katrina passed, Orleans Parish Prison, a 6,400-inmate city-within-a-city, plunged even deeper, bringing the complex of concrete lockups perilously close to a security and humanitarian meltdown.



Attorney General Charles Foti
He stepped in to quell panic

Interviews with more than a dozen deputies and employees, many of whom didn't want to reveal their names for fear of losing their jobs, depict a five-day struggle to keep destructive and desperate inmates at bay. The ordeal was marked by escapes by inmates and wholesale job walk-offs by deputies. But when officers in charge finally went over the head of Criminal Sheriff Marlin

See **JAIL**, A-4



STAFF PHOTO BY ALEX BRANDON

Orleans Parish Prison inmates hang out an SOS flag after Katrina. Rumors of jail breaks and riots after the storm have proved false, but the facility did collapse into chaos.

Internet connects loved ones

E-mail, Web sites keep people in touch

By Michelle Krupa
Staff writer

A few days after Hurricane Katrina, the phone rang at the home of a retired Air Force officer in Valdosta, Ga. The caller admitted she couldn't be sure the man she met at a barbecue for evacuees in West Monroe was the cousin Bob Jabon had been searching for on the Internet.

But she described a heavyset man, 72 years old, who liked to talk about his days as a New Orleans police detective. Well, frankly, he just liked to talk, she said. He'd fled with his girlfriend, who was a bit younger, and his son, a man of about 30, who

See **INTERNET**, A-11



STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID GRUNFELD

New Orleans resident Tracy Johnson, 35, thought he was headed for safety a few weeks ago when he evacuated to Hackberry, in Cameron Parish. On Thursday, as Hurricane Rita approached, with its 150-mph winds, Johnson found himself fleeing again, this time with a new tactic: Head north.

The official death toll in metropolitan New Orleans: **832**



Complete hurricane coverage at nola.com

By John Pope
Staff writer

Hurricane Rita churned closer to shore Thursday, downgraded to a Category 4 storm but still fierce enough to prompt the evacuation of about 1.8 million Gulf Coast residents and make officials and engineers in the New Orleans area order evacuations of low-lying areas and scramble to shore up levees weakened by Hurricane Katrina.

Rita, packing 150-mph

winds, followed a west-northwest path in the Gulf of Mexico on Thursday but was expected to turn to the north-west today, poised to strike early Saturday somewhere between Galveston, Texas, and southwest Louisiana.

The storm's progress motivated Gov. Kathleen Blanco to urge about 500,000 residents of southwest Louisiana, especially people living south of Interstate 10, to head north as soon as possible.

"We feel it is very, very im-

portant that everyone leave now," she said at a briefing in Baton Rouge. "Everything is fragile. ... Rita has Louisiana in her sights, and we must move."

When asked what people should do if they are determined to ride out the storm, Blanco replied, "Perhaps they should write their Social Security number on their arms in indelible ink."

Some people needed no persuasion.

In Texas, interstate highways became virtual parking

lots Thursday, prompting state officials to set up the largest contraflow effort in the state's history to get drivers out of harm's way. Traffic crept at 2 mph, and some cars began to stall and run out of fuel.

"Stay calm. Stay patient," Gov. Rick Perry said in a televised news conference. "You've done the right thing. You will get out of the coastal region on time. ... I would rather you be sitting in traffic for eight to 12 hours moving

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