

“Liberians did heinous things to one another. And how are we going to get past that? The only way is to forgive.”



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / ANDREW DICKERMAN, above; GETTY IMAGES / CHRIS HONDROS, below

The Rev. Claudius Cooper, above, of Providence has testified for the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission about atrocities during the civil war in Liberia. Below, refugees run as a gun battle arises in a refugee compound in Monrovia, Liberia, in 2003.

A past too painful for some to speak of



BY KAREN LEE ZINER
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — During Liberia’s protracted civil war, rebel soldiers forced the Rev. Claudius Cooper to bury decomposing bodies in exchange for a cup of rice, so precious a commodity it was then known as “gold dust.”

He saw human heads propped on sticks, and intestines “used as rope.” “Liberians did heinous things to one another. And how are we going to get past that? The only way is to forgive,” said Mr. Cooper, pastor of the Christ Center of Praise Full Gospel Ministries in Providence. “I think it’s helpful that we know what we’ve been through. The only way to stop it is to talk about it.”

As such, Mr. Cooper is among dozens of Liberians in Rhode Island who have given statements for the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The Liberian legislature established the TRC in 2005 as part of a peace process: in 2006, newly elected president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf appointed its 10 members.

Like other truth and reconciliation efforts worldwide — most notably in post-apartheid South Africa — the Liberian TRC aims to promote healing after more than two decades of conflict marked by horrendous human-rights abuses. It must, by mandate, identify victims and perpetrators and make recommendations on prosecution, amnesty and reparations. Its work will enter the historical record.

SEE LIBERIANS, A6

Liberians around the world are being called on to testify about horrors that civil war brought to their homeland.

Evidence of reactor in Syria outlined

The Bush administration says photographic images show Syria was building a nuclear reactor with North Korean assistance before an Israeli air strike destroyed the complex.

BY DAVID E. SANGER
THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration yesterday released detailed photographic images to support its assertion that the building in Syria that Israel destroyed in an air strike last year was a nuclear reactor constructed with years of help from North Korea.

The administration said it withheld the pictures for seven months out of fear that Syria could retaliate against Israel and start a broader war in the Middle East.

The photographs taken inside the reactor before it was destroyed in an air raid on Sept. 6 clearly show the rods that control the heat in a nuclear reactor, one of many close engineering similarities to a reactor halfway around the world where North Korea produced the fuel for its nuclear arsenal.

SEE SYRIA, A5

Audit faults Providence meal program

The director of the summer program has been fired and her administrative staff will not return after an audit finds what the city calls “serious mismanagement.”

BY DANIEL BARBARISI
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — The director of the city’s summer lunch program has been fired and the entire administrative staff will not be brought back after a state audit has found that the program falsely claimed it had served far more lunches than it actually had over the past several years, resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of improper federal reimbursement payments, according to city officials.

A criminal investigation conducted by Providence police is under way, but city officials would not divulge the details or the targets of the investigation, or

SEE LUNCHES, A6

Greatest dangers for fliers may be on the ground

BY MATTHEW L. WALD
THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — The recent groundings of thousands of flights have raised flags about skipped airplane inspections and botched repairs to wiring.

But what really worries aviation specialists? Runway collisions.

“Where we are most vulnerable at this moment is on the ground,” the chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, Mark V. Rosenker, said. “To me, this is the most dangerous aspect of flying.”

For the six-month period that ended March 30, there were 15 serious “runway incursions,” compared with eight in the period a year earlier. Another occurred at the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport on April 6, one of the closest on record, when a tug operator pulling a Boeing 777 along a taxiway failed to stop at a runway as another plane was landing, missing the tug by

SEE INCURSIONS, A9

Saint may be the answer to merchants’ prayers

Despite the controversy surrounding Padre Pio, the faithful are flocking to see his newly exhumed remains — and to spend money.

BY IAN FISHER
THE NEW YORK TIMES

SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO, Italy — The only visible parts of Padre Pio are his fingers, blackened now 40 years after he died. The palms, which once provoked sharp debates over how they came to be marked with the same wounds as Christ’s, are covered by his famous half gloves (replicas of which can be bought here for \$8).

The cosmetically enhanced face

is made of silicon, a convincing likeness, gray beard and all.

“It left me breathless,” said Rosa Michitelli, 60, a nurse who as a girl attended Mass celebrated by Pio, then a Capuchin monk suspected of fraud and self-promotion by the Vatican but since his canonization in 2002, Italy’s most revered saint. “It was just like when he was alive.”

Michitelli spoke just after seeing

Pio’s body, which was put on display here yesterday. She was one of the first.

Some 750,000 people have made reservations to see him between now and December — a testament to his enduring popularity, a thirst for something immediately spiritual that the Roman Catholic Church often does not provide and, it cannot be ignored, the need to expand tourism in a town that while attracting 8 million visitors a year has too many hotels and not enough tourists who actually stay the night.

“This is an opportunity we have to turn religious tourism into mass

tourism,” said Massimiliano Ostilio, who is in charge of tourism for the region of Puglia, which makes up the heel on Italy’s boot.

Occupancy rates for the 125 or so hotels in this town where Pio had lived for more than 50 years are the lowest in Italy, Ostilio said. He said he hoped that the large number of people expected to come to see Pio might stay longer, then explore the rest of Puglia (not to mention possibly buy more Padre Pio thimbles, statues, key chains, rosaries, alarm clocks, plates and candles), just as

SEE MONK, A9



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UPHEAVAL AT SCHOOL

Three trustees of the state-run Rhode Island School for the Deaf resign and an administrator is abruptly fired, the latest examples of turmoil that has affected the public school in recent years. **B1**

TALKING WITH THE ENEMY

The Pakistani government is negotiating with the Taliban militants accused of being behind the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and supporting al-Qaida. **A9**

DINOSAURS AMONG US

Scientists say protein retrieved from a 68-million-year-old Tyrannosaurus rex bone provides the strongest evidence yet that birds rather than reptiles are the closest living descendants of dinosaurs. **A4**

A SMALL MASTERPIECE



The new film *The Visitor* is a small masterpiece, thanks in large part to the performance by Richard Jenkins, the former acting mainstay at Trinity Rep, where he also served briefly as artistic director. **E1**