

Los Angeles Times

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Deaths tied to agency lapses

L.A. County DCFS social workers often can't access current electronic records.

GARRETT THEROLF

Persistent management lapses and a poor use of technology continue to hobble Los Angeles County's child welfare system, and two high-profile child fatalities from last year have been newly tied to the breakdowns, according to records and interviews.

A special counsel acting for the Board of Supervisors has found that despite pledges to fix the problems, social workers still do not fully retrieve and evaluate case files electronically during home inspections. Not enough equipment is available, officials contend, and it often doesn't work.

And county officials have made little progress assigning more experienced social workers to the most difficult jobs. Officials say civil service rules let veterans transfer to less stressful duties.

Both shortcomings played a role in the suicide last year of 12-year-old Jorge Tarin, according to the counsel's special investigations unit, which was established to identify systemic breakdowns that may contribute to child fatalities.

For months, the Department of Children and Family Services has been under intense scrutiny because more than 70 children have died of maltreatment over the last three years after coming to the attention of social workers.

As a result of Jorge Tarin's death, the special counsel recently issued a confidential update to supervisors. When child welfare officials reacted to the report in a 12-page memo, copies were widely circulated among county officials and obtained by The Times.

[See Agency, A7]

HEALTH & WELLNESS



M. ROBINSON CHAVEZ LAT

More tasks for man's best friend

The use of service dogs is growing. They may even assist people with epilepsy and autism. E1

Al Qaeda's reach

A branch of the terrorist group has aided Somali militants, U.S. officials say. WORLD, A3

Rural fire fee

A new state law requires some residents to pay a wildfire protection fee. LATEXTRA

Watchdog post

A nominee to head the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is named. BUSINESS, A9

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FRISO GENTSCH European Pressphoto Agency

RESURGENT: Japan's Saki Kumagai, from left, celebrates with team captain Homare Sawa and Yuki Nagasato after tying the score for the second time. It was Kumagai's penalty kick that won the game. SPORTS, C1

More than a game for Japan

A joyful, nearly unbelieving Tokyo bursts into celebration over the Women's World Cup victory — a most welcome infusion of hope

KENJI HALL
REPORTING FROM TOKYO

JOHN M. GLIONNA
REPORTING FROM SEOUL

As Japan's Saki Kumagai prepared for her decisive penalty kick in the shootout that ended Sunday's Women's World Cup final, a wounded nation held its breath.

For Japan, this was more than a soccer game. It was an opportunity to prove on a global stage that a country devastated four months ago by a killer earthquake, tsunami and nuclear catastrophe still possessed the heart and soul of a fierce competitor.

The dramatic final kick, defeating a taller and stronger U.S. team in a nail-biting seesaw contest, established Japan as the first Asian country to win the women's World Cup.

But it also allowed a beaten-down nation to declare to the world that it was no longer just a victim.

"This is a big psychological lift for all of us," said Ai Asada, 26, tears in her eyes, as she celebrated the final penalty kick at the Footnik sports bar in central Tokyo.

Nearby, Saori Shiratori was sobbing. She had traveled an hour by train to watch, and she wasn't disappointed. [See Japan, A4]

'CARMAGEDDONE'

As 405 closure ends early, experts worry that its success could backfire the next time.

KENNETH R. WEISS,
MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE
AND ANDREW KHOURI

The first drivers roared up the newly reopened 405 Freeway at high noon Sunday, honking horns, kicking up roostertails of demolition dust, arms stretched through open windows to wave at no one in particular.

And so the reprieve from freeway traffic ended early, along with the planned weekend closure that had threatened to unleash "Carmageddon" if not for the public's cooperation.

Contractors had padded the schedule to allow for unforeseen mishaps in tearing down half of the Mulholland Drive bridge before the Monday morning rush, risking



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

ON THE ROAD AGAIN: Officials wave at the first motorists to travel on the southbound 405 under the Mulholland Drive bridge after the freeway reopened.

enormous fines and public disdain under an international spotlight if they were late.

It wasn't needed. The demolition went smoothly, enabling contractors to finish about 17 hours ahead of

schedule, pocket an extra \$300,000 in incentive payments and win acclaim from Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and other officials who jockeyed for position in front of television cameras.

"Mission accomplished," the mayor said, beaming as if he had just won a war.

Much praise was heaped on Southern California drivers who stayed off the freeways and city streets in, perched. [See 405, A7]

COLUMN ONE

French political star seems ready to rise again



BERTRAND LANGLOIS AFP/Getty Images

'WHY NOT?' Rachida Dati aims to become mayor of Paris, an established launchpad for the ultimate job at the Elysee Palace.

Back from a sort of exile, the glamorous ex-justice minister represents what the disadvantaged can achieve through hard work.

KIM WILLISHER
REPORTING FROM PARIS

She has been described as the nearest thing France has to Barack Obama.

The story of Rachida Dati, the child of illiterate North African immigrants who scrambled out of poverty to one of the highest offices in France, certainly echoes that of the U.S. president.

Add her feisty, full-of-herself manner and unabashed ambition, not to mention her taste for vertigo-inducing heels and Dior dresses, and Dati brings a certain *je ne sais quoi* to her Gallic version of

the American dream.

To French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who named her France's first Muslim Cabinet member and called her *ma beurette* ("my little Arab girl"), the glamorous Dati represented what the disadvantaged could accomplish if they worked hard enough.

Dati's success was indeed remarkable: Few of France's estimated 6 million Muslims hold positions of influence in government, academia, business or the media.

But her fall was as rapid as her rise had been meteoric. The unmarried Dati became pregnant and refused to name the father, igniting furious speculation about his identity. Then she was accused of spreading rumors that Sarkozy's marriage to supermodel Carla Bruni was in trouble, accusations she denied. Sarkozy sent her to serve in the European Parliament, the French equivalent of exile.

Today, after two years in the [See France, A12]

LONDON POLICE CHIEF STEPS DOWN

Paul Stephenson had been under fire over ties between Scotland Yard and Murdoch's media empire.

HENRY CHU
REPORTING FROM LONDON

The head of Scotland Yard resigned amid a phone-hacking scandal that has reached into the highest levels of public life in Britain, a shocking turn of events that came hours after the arrest of one of media baron Rupert Murdoch's most trusted deputies.

Paul Stephenson on Sunday night said he was stepping down as commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, as Scotland Yard is formally known, because of continued criticism and speculation over links between senior police officials and Murdoch's media empire.

Stephenson's announcement came hours after Rebekah Brooks, the former chief of Murdoch's British operations, was arrested on suspicion of conspiring to intercept private voicemail messages and on corruption charges stemming from bribes allegedly paid to police officers by journalists in exchange for information.

The two surprising developments are certain to focus greater attention on Murdoch's scheduled appearance Tuesday before a parliamentary committee to answer questions on the allegations of large-scale cellphone hacking by the News of the World, a now-defunct tabloid owned by his media conglomerate News Corp.

The scandal has reached far beyond the media to envelop the police, who have been accused of conducting a halfhearted investigation into the hacking allegations in order to preserve a good relationship with the press, and high-ranking politicians, who have also been criticized for maintaining too-cozy ties with the media, Murdoch's newspapers in particular.

Public confidence in key institutions of British society — the police, politicians and the press — has now been badly shaken.

Stephenson acknowledged that Scotland Yard's initial inquiry into allegations of phone hacking by the News of the World several years ago was inadequate. [See Britain, A4]