




African Rift

 A new ocean is likely one day to separate northeastern Africa from the rest of the continent due to a developing rift similar to the one that split Africa from the Americas millions of years ago, according to researchers. First evidence of the rift appeared in northern Ethiopia in September 2005 when a 35-mile-long fracture up to 20 feet wide developed during two volcanic eruptions. Geological analysis since then confirmed that the process causing the rift is identical to those that occur deep on the ocean floor. They are the main reason continents have gradually broken off from each other. While the huge crack that appeared in 2005 took only a few days to develop, geologists say it will take millions of years for the new ocean to split Africa in two from the Red Sea to Mozambique.

Arctic Freeze Delayed

 Warm southerly winds during October warmed the Arctic so much that they prevented sea ice from reforming at a rate typical of the previous 30 years. The U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center reports that October had the second-lowest ice extent for the month over the period from 1979 to 2009. The formation of polar ice normally accelerates during that month as the sun sinks lower in the southern sky each day and the day-long nights of winter return above the Arctic Circle. But the growth rate slowed for a while early in the month as strong winds from the south blew over central Siberia, preventing the ice from forming along the coast there. By month's end, expansive areas of open water regions still existed in the northernmost North Atlantic and north of Alaska.

Warming Whitewash


 A Peruvian scientist told his country's parliamentary commission on climate change that global warming could be combated by painting highly reflective white paint over rock and ground exposed by receding glaciers. Eduardo Gold, president of Glaciers of Peru, says reflecting the sunlight would keep the ground from absorbing as much solar radiation. He proposes using only environmentally friendly lime-based paint made without harmful chemicals. His scheme has drawn interest from the World Bank, which is considering various "geoengineering" proposals to counter climate change. Gold says hiring local residents to do the landscape painting could create about 15,000 jobs.

Tropical Cyclones


 The Philippines was battered by the fourth tropical cyclone within a month when Typhoon Mirinae slammed into Luzon Island. At least 20 people perished from the latest round of flash flooding and mudslides across the sodden region. The storm later struck central Vietnam, leaving about 100 people dead.

- Late-season Hurricane Ida drenched parts of Nicaragua and Honduras with up to 20 inches of rainfall.

Andean Rumbblings


 Colombia's Galeras volcano joined nearby Huila volcano in causing concern for officials and thousands of residents in the south of the country. The state-run Institute of Geology and Mines cautioned that Galeras, currently the country's most active volcano, could erupt in a matter of days or weeks. Nevado del Huila volcano also remains unsettled, according to geologists.

Earthquakes

 Southwest China's Yunnan province was jolted by a sharp pre-dawn tremor that injured 28 people while collapsing approximately 1,000 homes. About 30,000 other residences sustained at least some damage and more than 430 head of livestock were killed due the 4.9 magnitude shaking.

- More than 700 people were injured during a 4.8 magnitude quake centered near Iran's southern port of Bandar Abbas. State radio said that the injuries occurred as people rushed into the streets when the quake struck in the middle of the night.
- Earth movements were also felt in Sumatra, western Greece, northern Algeria, along the California-Mexico border and in southeastern Tennessee.

Hybrid Bears

 German biologists say they are getting a better idea of what the offspring of polar bears mating with grizzlies might look like as the two species come in contact with each other due to global warming. Only one such hybrid bear has ever been seen in the wild, but some have inadvertently been bred in captivity due to being kept in the same enclosure. Studies of two hybrid bears at Germany's Osnabruck Zoo indicate that while they inherit characteristics from their parents, they also appear to be a blend of the two species. The habitats of the two types of bears generally don't overlap. But climate change may allow grizzlies to migrate northward and interbreed with polar bears, which are being forced to spend more time on the mainland due to loss of sea ice.