

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Israeli: Syria Gave Hezbollah Scud Missiles

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli defense officials said Wednesday they believe Hezbollah has Scud missiles that could hit all of Israel, a day after Israel's president accused Syria of supplying the Lebanese guerrillas with the weapons for the first time.

Israeli officials say the introduction of Scuds could alter the strategic balance with Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militia that battled Israel to a stalemate during a monthlong war in 2006.

President Shimon Peres, speaking in Paris, charged that Syria is playing a double game, talking about peace, while "it is delivering Scuds to Hezbollah to threaten Israel," according to a statement from his office.

The remarks by Peres, whose position is largely ceremonial, went beyond public assessments of senior Israeli defense figures. He gave no details.

In Washington, the Syrian Embassy dismissed the allegations and accused Israel of trying to divert attention from questions about Israel's nuclear program. Israel is widely believed to possess nuclear arms, though it does not confirm or deny this.

Holder: U.S. Still Wants bin Laden Alive

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under pressure from Republican critics, Attorney General Eric Holder said Wednesday the U.S. still hopes to capture and interrogate Osama bin Laden but expects the al-Qaida leader won't be taken alive.

Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee, the attorney general was peppered with questions about terrorism issues, including the planned shutdown of the Guantanamo Bay detention center and where those suspects should be sent for trial. The hearing didn't have the confrontations that marked his appearance last month before House lawmakers, however.

During the earlier hearing, questions about what legal rights might be granted to suspected terrorists led Holder to tell lawmakers the chances of capturing the al-Qaida leader alive were very slim and "we will be reading Miranda rights to the corpse of Osama bin Laden."

On Wednesday Holder again tried to deflect hypothetical questions about what would happen were bin Laden taken alive.

Congress Approves Debt Relief For Haiti

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is calling for the United States to take the lead in relieving earthquake-shattered Haiti of its debts to international institutions.

The House approved by voice vote Wednesday and sent to President Barack Obama legislation that instructs U.S. directors at the International Monetary Fund and other global development institutions to use their votes and influence to cancel Haiti's debt.

Debt relief is one of several approaches to helping Haiti recover from the January earthquake that took an estimated 230,000 lives.

Congress is considering legislation that would provide some \$2.8 billion in new aid and the United Nations recently hosted a donors' conference where nearly 50 nations pledged about \$9.9 billion in assistance.

The debt relief bill, passed earlier by the Senate, would urge the immediate and complete cancellation of all debt owed by Haiti to multinational institutions. It would also recommend that for the next five years aid to Haiti be provided as grants rather than loans.

The Treasury said that at the beginning of March Haiti owed \$828 million to multilateral development institutions. Since then, the Inter-American Development Bank, which Treasury said was owed some \$447 million, announced it would forgive all of Haiti's debt and convert undisbursed loans to the country into grants.

The World Bank has said it is canceling the remaining \$38 million in debt as part of a World Bank Group package of \$479 million being made available to support Haiti's recovery and development. Since 2005 all World Bank aid to Haiti has been in grant form.

The International Monetary Fund said after the donors' conference in New York that it was preparing a proposal to organize debt relief for Haiti's total outstanding debt of \$271 million.

Iraqi, U.S. Officials: Forces Foil al-Qaida Plot

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraqi security forces disrupted a 9/11-style plot by al-Qaida in Iraq to fly hijacked planes into Shiite religious shrines, Iraqi and U.S. officials said Wednesday.

Iraqi security officials said they temporarily shut down at least two airports and have arrested two men — one of the intended pilots and an airport worker — suspected in the plot, which appeared aimed at undermining the country's stability while U.S. troops prepare to go home.

Two U.S. intelligence officials in Washington confirmed the plot but said it did not appear to be fully planned out, nor was it clear that militants would be able to carry out any attacks. Both U.S. officials spoke on condition of anonymity because the investigation was still under way.

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Quake In Remote China Kills 589

Thousands Injured, Local Officials Say 85 Percent Of Buildings Destroyed

BY ANITA CHANG
Associated Press Writer

XINING, China — Rescuers combed through the rubble of collapsed buildings for survivors Thursday, more than a day after strong earthquakes shook a mountainous Tibetan region of China, killing nearly 600 people and injuring thousands.

The series of quakes flattened buildings across remote western Yushu county and sent survivors, many bleeding from their wounds, flooding into the streets of Jiagu township. State television showed block after devastated block of toppled mud and wood homes. Local officials said 85 percent of the buildings had been destroyed.

Residents and troops garrisoned in the town used shovels and their hands to pull survivors and bodies from the rubble much of the day Wednesday. Several schools collapsed, with the state news agency saying at least 56 students died. Worst hit was the Yushu Vocational School, where the officials Xinhua News Agency cited a local education official as saying 22 students, 20 of them girls, died.

Crews set up emergency generators to restore operations at

Yushu's airport, and by late afternoon the first of six flights landed carrying rescue workers and equipment. But the road to town was blocked by a landslide, hampering the rescue as temperatures dropped below freezing.

The death toll had risen to 589 by early Thursday, with more than 8,000 others injured, the Ministry of Civil Affairs said in a statement. About 15,000 houses had collapsed and 100,000 people need to be relocated, it said.

Many survivors spent the night in the cold outdoors, wrapping themselves in thick cotton blankets and lying on thin pads on the ground with cardboard boxes serving as makeshift pillows. Others spent the night in quake-damaged cars, covering exposed areas with sheets of plastic. CCTV footage showed.

Xinhua said temperatures in the area can fall below freezing at night.

The airport in Xining, the nearest big city 530 miles (860 kilometers) away, was filled in the predawn hours Thursday with Chinese troops in camouflage, firefighters and rescue teams leading dozens of sniffer dogs. They were whisked onto waiting



2008 earthquake killed 90,000 people

buses for the difficult drive to the quake zone, which takes 12 hours under the best of conditions.

While China's military is well-practiced in responding to disasters, the remote location posed logistical difficulties. The area sits at around 13,000 feet (4,000 meters) and is poor. Most people live in Jiagu, with the remaining — mostly herders — scattered across the broad valleys. The

small airport has no refueling supplies, so relief flights were carrying extra jet fuel, reducing their capacity for hauling supplies, state media reported.

The local quake relief headquarters put the death toll at 589 and the injured at 10,000 by early Thursday morning, according to the Xinhua news agency. Wu Yong, commander of the army garrison, said the deaths "may rise further as lots of houses collapsed." Hospitals were overwhelmed, and rescue teams were slowed by damaged roads, strong winds and frequent aftershocks.

President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao urged "all-out efforts" to rescue survivors and dispatched a vice-premier to supervise the effort. The government immediately allocated \$30 million (200 million yuan) for relief, and mobilized more than 5,000 soldiers, medical workers and other rescuers, joining 700 troops already on the ground.

The initial quake, measured at magnitude-6.9 by the U.S. Geological Survey and 7.1 by the China Earthquake Networks Center, hit Yushu at 7:49 a.m. (7:49 p.m. EDT, 2349 GMT). It was followed by a series of tremors.

Jobless Benefits Bill Rebounds In Senate

WASHINGTON (AP) — After weeks of partisan struggle that caused more than 400,000 people to miss unemployment checks, a bill restoring those benefits is on track to pass the Senate as early as Thursday.

The \$18 billion measure would provide additional weeks of jobless benefits averaging \$335 a week to people whose six months of state-paid benefits have run out. It's a temporary extension through June 2 that gives House and Senate Democrats time to iron out a measure funding the program for the long-term jobless through the end of the year.

With help from a single Republican, George Voinovich of Ohio, Democrats by a 60-40 vote beat back a challenge from

Republicans seeking to force them to pay for the measure with new revenues or cuts in spending rather than adding costs to the \$12.8 trillion national debt.

Several other programs have lapsed as well, which has meant that newly jobless people can't sign up for federal health insurance subsidies and prompted the government to delay Medicare payments to doctors rather than imposing a 21 percent cut. Democrats protested people living in flood plains can't sign up for flood insurance or renew their policies, which has delayed mortgage lending and home sales.

Wednesday's key vote appears to have set the stage for the Senate to pass the bill on Thursday, which would give the

House time to pass the measure this week — and prevent even more people from losing benefits next week.

Specifically at issue in Wednesday's votes was whether to

permit the measure to be financed by adding to the national debt.

Under Senate rules, a successful GOP challenge could have required the chamber to come up with ways to pay for the measure.

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