

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Pope Does 1st Question-And-Answer TV Show

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Benedict XVI consoled a 7-year-old Japanese girl, reassured a mother about her ailing son's soul and advised a Muslim woman that dialogue was the way to peace in Ivory Coast.

In a push to engage the world online, the pontiff fielded their questions during an unusual Good Friday appearance on Italian TV. It was hardly a casual or spontaneous chat: Seven questions were selected from thousands that poured in via RAI television's website, and Benedict recorded his answers last week.

He seemed a bit stiff, sitting all alone in a big white chair behind his desk inside the Apostolic Palace as an unseen interviewer read out the letters to him.

But the teacher and pastor in the 84-year-old Benedict came through as he fielded the questions, which all dealt with suffering and Jesus' death, which Christians recall on Good Friday, and his resurrection, celebrated on Easter Sunday.

The first question came from young Elena, who asked the pope why she felt so afraid after Japan's earthquake shook her house and killed so many children.

GM Likely To Retake Title Of Top Automaker

DETROIT (AP) — General Motors is almost certain to claim the title of world's biggest automaker this year, retaking the top spot from Toyota, which has been hurt by production problems since the Japanese earthquake and still can't escape the shadow of major safety recalls.

The No. 1 title, a morale booster for the winner's employees and managers, would cap GM's remarkable comeback from bankruptcy.

GM's sales are up, mainly in China and the U.S., the world's top two markets. Cars are better than in the past, especially small ones.

But even though GM came within 30,000 sales of Toyota last year and began strong in 2011, any sales victory this year has more to do with Toyota's problems.

First, a series of big recalls has ballooned to 14 million vehicles worldwide and damaged Toyota's reputation for reliability. That has spurred loyal buyers to look at other brands.

Senate Committee: Ensign Made Right Call

LAS VEGAS (AP) — U.S. Sen. John Ensign's decision this week to resign marked a mysterious change of heart for the Nevada Republican, raising questions about what an ongoing Senate ethics probe has uncovered while also muddling the field of candidates for congressional seats now held by the GOP headed into a key election year.

Leaders of the Senate Ethics Committee noted tersely Friday that Ensign made the proper decision in turning in a letter of resignation amid their unrelenting, but as yet unfinished, two-year probe of his conduct.

Ensign, 53, cited "wear and tear" on himself and his family in his announcement Thursday, which came nearly two years after he acknowledged having had an extramarital affair with a former staffer. He was accused of helping the woman's husband — a top former Ensign staffer — obtain lobbying work.

Ensign's pending departure also casts a new sense of urgency over Nevada's closely watched Senate race to replace him. After he announced last month that he would not seek re-election, Democrats hoped to claim the seat to protect their fragile Senate majority.

In the meantime, Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval will appoint a successor to serve the remainder of the term through 2012. Sandoval had endorsed Republican Rep. Dean Heller of northern Nevada in the race and is widely expected to name him the incumbent, affording Heller an advantage over Rep. Shelley Berkley, the Democrat's favored candidate.

Army Testing New Uniforms For Women

WASHINGTON (AP) — Throughout history, military gear has been made with the male physique in mind. But for women in today's combat or close-to-combat jobs, that can mean body armor that fits so poorly it's tough to fire a weapon, combat uniforms with knee pads that hit around mid-shin and flight suits that make it nearly impossible to urinate while in a plane.

With women taking on new roles, the issue is getting fresh attention from the military.

Seven hundred female Army troops are testing a new combat uniform for women with shorter sleeves and with knee pads in the right place for their generally shorter legs. A committee on women's issues has recommended that flight suits be redesigned for both men and women so it's unnecessary to disrobe before urinating. And engineers have been looking at ways to design armor that better fits the contours of a woman's body.

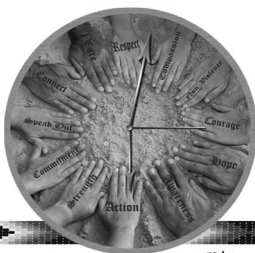
Some military women are reluctant to embrace changes that would set them apart from their male colleagues, but several said in interviews that the changes beat the consequences of the current one-piece flight suits or being unable to engage in battle or defend themselves because of uncooperative gear.

Female troops are about 20 percent more likely than their male counterparts to report musculoskeletal disorders, and poorly fitting body armor could be a factor. For female aviators, dehydration can be a hazard if they opt not to drink water before flights, and those who wait too long to use the bathroom can experience urinary problems.

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Bloodiest Day Of Syria Uprising Kills Dozens

BY BASSEM MROUE AND
ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY
Associated Press

BEIRUT — Syrian security forces fired bullets and tear gas Friday at tens of thousands of protesters across the country, killing at least 75 people in the bloodiest day of the monthlong uprising and signaling that the authoritarian regime was prepared to turn more ruthless to put down the revolt against President Bashar Assad.

Among the dead were a 70-year-old man and two boys ages 7 and 10, Amnesty International said. In the southern town of Izraa, a man ran carrying the body of a young boy, whose hair was matted with blood from a gaping wound on his head, as another child wept and shouted, "My brother!" Footage of the scene was posted on the protest movement's main Facebook page.

In other towns, protesters scattered for cover from sniper bullets, then dragged corpses through the streets. Mobile phone images showed the bodies lined up on the floor inside buildings.

The rallies, most marching out from mosques after Friday's noon Muslim prayers, erupted in towns and cities stretching along the breadth of the country, including in at least two suburbs of the capital, Damascus.

The death toll was likely to rise, raising fears that there will be an explosion of violence Saturday as relatives bury their dead in funerals that in the past have turned into new protests. Ammar Qurabi, head of Syria's National Organization for Human Rights, said another 20 people were missing.

Friday's toll was double that of the previous deadliest day of the uprising, on April 8, when 37 were killed around the country. The heavier

crackdown came after Assad warned a week ago that any further unrest would be considered "sabotage" after he made the gesture of lifting long-hated emergency laws, a step he ratified on Thursday.

It was a clear sign that regime was prepared to escalate an already bloody response, with nearly 300 already dead in more than five weeks. Previously, Assad has mixed the crackdown with gestures of reform in a failed attempt to deflate the protests.

The bloodshed so far has only served to invigorate protesters whose demands have snowballed from modest reforms to the downfall of the 40-year Assad family dynasty. Each Friday, growing numbers of people in multiple cities have taken to the streets despite the near certainty that they would come under swift attack from security forces and shadowy pro-government gunmen known as "shabiha."



PATRICIA BECK/DETROIT FREE PRESS/MCT
People gather outside the Henry Ford Centennial Library in Dearborn, Michigan, for the counter protest of the Rev. Terry Jones rally, which didn't take place, on Friday, April 22, 2011.

Florida Pastors Jailed For Refusing To Pay \$1 Bond

BY NIRAJ WARIKOO
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DEARBORN, Mich. — A Michigan judge late Friday day sent two Florida pastors to jail for refusing to post a \$1 bond.

The stunning development came after a Dearborn jury sided with prosecutors, ruling that Terry Jones and Wayne Sapp would breach the peace if they rallied at the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn.

Prosecutors asked Judge Mark Somers for \$45,000 bond. Somers then set bond at \$1 each for the two pastors.

They refused to pay. And Somers ordered them remanded to jail.

Earlier, in closing arguments, Wayne County assistant prosecutor Robert Moran said the pastors would disturb the peace if they were allowed to protest Friday at the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn.

Jones and Sapp argued their right is protected under the First Amendment. "That's what made America great," said Sapp. "We're entitled to our opinion."

Earlier, after an intense debate in court Friday morning over free speech and religion, Jones said that he was not backing down from his plans to protest at the Islamic Center of America.

Dearborn Police Chief Ronald Haddad testified Friday that there have been at least four serious threats made against Jones from Detroit area residents, arguing that his protest could lead to violence if allowed.

But Jones told the *Detroit Free Press* during his lunch break: "We'll do it today at 5 or we'll come back next week."

Speaking at a McDonald's restaurant down the street from the courthouse, Jones — who was defending himself — said he thought the proceedings were going well. And he said the government's case was weak.

As he spoke, someone drove down Michigan Avenue yelling, "Get out of Dearborn, you terrorist!"

Jones was facing a jury trial Friday on whether he should be allowed to protest outside the Islamic Center of America.

McCain Wants More For Libya's Rebels

BY SEBASTIAN ABBOT
AND BEN HUBBARD
Associated Press

BENGAZI, Libya — U.S. Sen. John McCain called for increased military support for Libya's rebels Friday, including weapons, training and stepped-up airstrikes, in a full-throated endorsement of the opposition in its fight to oust Moammar Gadhafi.

In the Libyan capital, meanwhile, a senior official said government troops would step back and allow local armed tribesmen to deal with rebels in the besieged city of Misrata.

The action came a day after the U.S. began flying armed drones to bolster NATO airstrikes, and having the tribesmen take up the fight could make it harder for the Predators to distinguish them from Misrata's civilians or the rebels.

McCain, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the United States and other nations should recognize the opposition's political leadership as the "legitimate voice of the Libyan people." The White House disagreed, saying it was for the Libyan people to decide who their leaders are.

McCain also called the rebels "patriots" with no links to al-Qaida, in contrast to what some critics have suggested, and added they should receive Gadhafi assets that were frozen by other countries.

The chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, said in Iraq that although the timing was hard to

predict, the eventual ouster of Gadhafi and his family from power "is certain."

Rebels in the western city of Misrata raised their tricolor flag atop an eight-story building in celebration after driving pro-government snipers out of the structure Thursday. The battle-scarred building commands a strategic view of the central part of Libya's third-largest city and the key main thoroughfare of Tripoli Street. The snipers had terrorized residents and pinned down rebel fighters.

As a result, the number of civilian casualties dropped dramatically Friday for the first time in several weeks, said one rebel who spoke on condition of anonymity because he feared retaliation.

"Spirits are high but the military situation is still unknown," he said. "The rebels easily entered yesterday, so it was clear that the Gadhafi forces quickly withdrew."

Although there was less fear about snipers, fighting was still taking place near Misrata's central hospital and the vegetable market, a rebel said.

In Tripoli, Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Kaim said tribal leaders had given the army an ultimatum, saying it must step aside if it cannot retake control of Misrata, which has been besieged by Gadhafi's forces for two months.

The tribal leaders would fight the rebels if they don't surrender, Kaim said late Friday night.

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