

President May Remove Cuba From List

PANAMA CITY (AP) — Turning the page on a half-century of hostility, President Barack Obama signaled Thursday he will soon remove Cuba from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism, boosting hopes for improved ties as he prepared for a historic encounter with Cuban President Raul Castro.

Hours before his arrival in Panama for a regional summit, Obama announced that the U.S. State Department had finished its review of Cuba's presence on the list, a stain on the island nation's pride and a major stumbling block for efforts to mend U.S.-Cuba ties. Obama said he would decide quickly after receiving the formal recommendation, all but ensuring action within days.

"We don't want to be imprisoned by the past," Obama said during a visit to Kingston, Jamaica. "When something doesn't work for 50 years, you don't just keep on doing it. You try something new."

Earlier, in Panama City, he called the list "a powerful tool to isolate countries that genuinely do support terrorism," but he added that "as circumstance change that list will change as well."

With his optimistic assessment, Obama sought to set the tone for the U.S. and Cuba to come closer to closing the book on more than a half-century of estrangement, when he and Castro come face to face at the Summit of the Americas. Obama was arriving Thursday evening in Panama City.



Obama

Bomber's Lawyer Faces Daunting Task

BOSTON (AP) — Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's attorney is renowned for keeping her high-profile clients off death row, but Judy Clarke could face her most daunting challenge yet in trying to save the Boston Marathon bomber from execution.

Most of Clarke's past successes hinged on persuading prosecutors to take the death penalty off the table before their cases ever reached a jury. She accomplished that on behalf of such killers as Unabomber Ted Kaczynski, Atlanta Olympics bomber Eric Rudolph and Arizona mass shooter Jared Loughner.

With Tsarnaev, Clarke doesn't have that option.

A federal jury convicted Tsarnaev of all 30 charges against him Wednesday and found him responsible for the deaths of the three people killed in the 2013 attack and the killing of an MIT police officer three days later. The same jurors will begin hearing evidence next week on what his punishment should be. They have only two choices: life in prison or execution.

Clarke has had some success in persuading juries that someone who committed a horrific crime should be allowed to live. In 1995, a jury in South Carolina spared the life of Susan Smith, who drowned her two young sons by sending her car into a lake with the boys buckled in their car seats.

VA Making Little Headway In Efforts

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. (AP) — The chronic delays plaguing the Veterans Affairs health system are concentrated in a fraction of its hospitals and clinics — many of them in the South — that have done far worse than others in delivering prompt care, according to government data reviewed by The Associated Press.

A year after Americans recoiled at revelations that sick veterans were getting sicker while languishing on waiting lists, VA statistics show that the number of patients facing long waits has not declined, even after Congress gave the department an extra \$16.3 billion last summer to shorten waits for care.

Nearly 894,000 appointments completed at VA medical facilities from Aug. 1 to Feb. 28 failed to meet the health system's timeliness goal, which calls for patients to be seen within 30 days. More than a quarter of those appointments involved a delay of longer than 60 days.

Since the summer, the number of vets waiting more than 30 or 60 days for non-emergency care has largely stayed flat. The number of medical appointments that take longer than 90 days to complete has nearly doubled.

Those delays were not spread evenly throughout the VA's vast network of hospitals and clinics.

Sanction Provisions Hound Iran Deal

WASHINGTON (AP) — Snap back? Not so fast.

The biggest enforcement provision in the preliminary nuclear agreement with Iran is turning into one of the most hotly contested elements. And the debate barely involves Iran.

Instead, it concerns the Obama administration's promise to quickly re-impose sanctions on Iran if the Islamic Republic cheats on any part of the agreement to limit its nuclear program to peaceful pursuits.

This would be relatively straightforward for the sanctions imposed by the U.S., as Congress is eager to keep the pressure on. But it is far from clear whether President Barack Obama can guarantee such action at the United Nations, which has imposed wide-ranging penalties that all U.N. members must enforce.

At present, there's no firm agreement to how or when to lift the sanctions in the first place. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, and President Hassan Rouhani said Thursday they want all sanctions lifted on the first day of implementation. That's not the position of U.S. and other negotiators, a major issue that still must be worked out.

Yemen Rebels Overrun City Amid Strikes

SANAA, Yemen (AP) — Shiite rebels and allied troops overran the capital of an oil-rich Yemeni province in a heavily Sunni area on Thursday, making significant territorial gains despite Saudi-led airstrikes, now entering their third week.

Iran, which is trying to garner international support to the bombing, stepped up its condemnation, with the supreme leader calling the air campaign "genocide."

The rebel fighters, known as Houthis, along with military units loyal to former autocrat Ali Abdullah Saleh, overran Ataq, the capital of oil-rich Shabwa province, after days of airstrikes and clashes with local Sunni tribes.

The Saudi-led coalition has imposed an air and sea blockade on Yemen and targeted the rebels and their allies to try to create a safe corridor that would allow the return of Yemen's internationally recognized president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who fled the country last month.

The conflict pits the Saudi-led Sunni Gulf Arab coalition against Shiite rival Iran, which supports the Houthis and has provided humanitarian aid, though both Iran and the rebels deny it has armed them.

Obama Promotes A Focus On Energy

KINGSTON, Jamaica (AP) — As he wades into a region suffering economic and political stresses, President Barack Obama sought Thursday to reassert U.S. influence in the Caribbean and the Americas with pledges of energy assistance and diplomatic fence mending, a mix of modest steps and high ambition for the U.S.'s southern neighbors.

Obama huddled with Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller and then separately with leaders of the Caribbean Community, including Simpson Miller, as he opened a three-day trip that will conclude with his attendance at the Summit of the Americas in Panama City.

Even as he sought U.S. sway in the region, Obama was careful not to cast the U.S. as a single benefactor.

Tornado Causes Major Damage In Central Illinois

BY HERBERT G. MCCANN
AND ALAN SCHER ZAGIER
Associated Press

CHICAGO — At least one large tornado touched down Thursday night in central Illinois, and authorities said initial reports indicate there was significant damage.

The National Weather Service confirmed the tornado was on the ground and urged residents on Twitter to "seek shelter immediately if in the path of this dangerous storm."

An Illinois sheriff's dispatcher who declined to give her name due to department policy said there was widespread damage but no immediate reports of injuries when the tornado swept across the town of Hillcrest, about 80 miles west of Chicago.

Robin Biggs, an employee at the Super 8 motel in nearby Rochelle, said she took video of the storm, which she said "took everything out in its path."

"I have lived her 18 years and I have never seen a tornado that big or stay on the ground that long," she said. "What we have is a small one touching the ground and going right back up, but this just stayed down and went all the way across the horizon."

Koleen Kessen, who works at the Comfort Inn & Suites in Rochelle, said she went outside and spotted the tornado a few miles away after hearing sirens. She said hotel guests told her

the tornado leveled a restaurant.

Winnebago County Sheriff's spokesman Ken DeCoster said funnel clouds also were spotted near Rockford a few miles north but did not touch down. However, television footage showed multiple homes damaged in the unincorporated community of Fairdale.

The system, packing hail and damaging winds, was headed east as storms rumbled through the Midwest and Plains during the region's first widespread bout of severe weather.

The severe weather forced the cancellation of more than 850 flights at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport and dozens of others at the city's Midway International Airport.

The Weather Service in Davenport, Iowa, said it had received multiple reports of tornadoes in Scott and Clinton counties in the far eastern part of the state but no reports of injuries.

Minor injuries were reported Thursday in central Missouri when storms toppled trees, utility poles and billboards.

The National Weather Service's "enhanced risk" area stretched from northeast Texas to Michigan, Wisconsin and across the upper Midwest. Forecasters say Philadelphia, Washington and other parts of the Atlantic coast could see the same weather patterns Friday, including Augusta, Georgia, where the Masters golf tournament is taking place through the weekend.

"It's quite an expansive area," said Greg Carbin, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma.

In central Indiana, a 75-year-old woman died Wednesday night after being swept into a rain-swollen creek near Indianapolis. Pittsboro Fire Chief Bill Zeunik said the woman, identified as Doris D. Martin, was clearing debris from a water-filled ditch in her front yard along with her husband when she fell in and was swept away into a drainage pipe. Martin's body was found in a creek nearly a mile away.

In Wisconsin, an interstate north of Milwaukee was closed for several hours Thursday morning after several vehicles became partially submerged in flood water due to heavy rain.

And in Michigan, lightning strikes caused a fire at a mobile home and a fire place explosion, according to authorities. No one was injured in either incident.

By mid-afternoon, temperatures in downtown St. Louis topped 80 degrees under bright sunshine. The balmy burst arrived in stark contrast to temperatures in parts of the northeast; freezing drizzle in New Hampshire delayed some school openings and more than 2 inches of snow postponed the first game of the season for the Portland Sea Dogs in Portland, Maine.

Police Cruiser Video Shows Moments Before Fatal Shooting

BY JEFFREY COLLINS AND
MICHAEL BIESECKER
Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. — The traffic stop starts like any other: an officer pulls over a motorist, walks up to the driver's side window and asks for license and registration. What happened minutes later appears to take place without any obvious sign of provocation or conflict: The driver opens the door and runs, and the officer chases after him.

Video released Thursday from the dashboard of white North Charleston police Officer Michael Thomas Slager's cruiser captures the very first moments he and black motorist Walter Scott meet, a strikingly benign encounter at its earliest stages. It changes within minutes as Scott takes off running and the officer runs after him.

The video captures the moments leading up to a fatal shooting that has sparked outrage as the latest example of a white police officer killing an unarmed black man. The shooting itself was captured by an eyewitness on his iPhone and provided the impetus for the officer to be charged with murder and fired.

But questions had remained how the traffic stop turned deadly. The dash cam video provides a more complete picture of the encounter.

Seth Stoughton, a former police officer and criminal law professor at the University of South Carolina, said the dash cam video shows nothing that would indicate that such a routine traffic stop would escalate to a fatal shooting.

"It's not entirely normal. Most people don't run during traffic stops. But it is not overly threatening or anything that should take an officer aback," Stoughton said.

The shooting took place on Saturday and the department and Slager's lawyer said the officer fired in self-defense during a scuffle over his department-issued Taser. Within days, the eyewitness video surfaced and immediately changed perceptions of what happened, leading the department to charge Slager with murder and fire him from the force he'd worked on for five years.

Leaders: Dismissing Complaints Sends Dangerous Message

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — The fatal shooting of an unarmed black man fleeing from a police officer has stirred outrage around the nation, but people in this South Carolina city aren't surprised, calling it inevitable in a police department they believe focuses on petty crimes and fails to keep its officers in check.

There is almost nothing in Michael Thomas Slager's police personnel file to suggest that his bosses considered him a rogue officer capable of murdering a man he just pulled over for a broken tail light. People in the community he served say this reflects what's going wrong with policing today: Officers nearly always get the last word when citizens complain.

"We've had through the years numerous similar complaints, and they all seem to be taken lightly and dismissed without any obvious investigation," the Rev. Joseph Darby, vice president of the Charleston branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said Thursday.

The mostly black neighborhood in North Charleston where Slager fired eight shots at the back of Walter Lamer Scott on Saturday is far from unique in this regard, said Melvin Tucker, a former FBI agent and police chief in four southern cities who often testifies in police misconduct cases.

The dash cam video shows Scott being pulled over in a used Mercedes-Benz he had purchased just days earlier. Police have said he was being stopped for a broken tail light. Slager is seen walking toward the driver's side window and heard asking for Scott's license and registration. Slager then returns to his cruiser. Next, the video shows Scott starting to get out of the car, his right hand raised above his head, then he quickly gets back into the car and closes the door.

Seconds later, he opens the door again and takes off running. Within a city block or two, out of the dashboard camera's view, Slager catches up to him in an empty lot.

A bystander noticed the confrontation and pushed record on his cellphone, capturing video that has outraged the nation: it shows Scott running away again, and Slager firing eight shots at his back.

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Nationwide, training that pushes pre-emptive action, military experience that creates a warzone mindset, and legal system favoring police in misconduct cases all lead to scenarios where officers see the people they serve as enemies, he said.

"It's not just training. It's not just unreasonable fear. It's not just the warrior mentality. It's not just court decisions that almost encourage the use of it. It is not just race," Tucker said. "It is all of that."

Both Slager, 33, and Scott, 55, were U.S. Coast Guard veterans. Slager had one complaint in his personnel file of excessive force that was ultimately dismissed. Scott had been jailed repeatedly for failing to pay child support. But neither man had a record of violence. Slager consistently earned positive reviews in his five years with the North

Charleston Police. Slager's new attorney, Andy Savage, said Thursday that he's conducting his own investigation, and that it's "far too early for us to be saying what we think."

The officer is being held without bond pending an Aug. 21 hearing on a charge of murder that could put him in prison for 30 years to life if convicted.

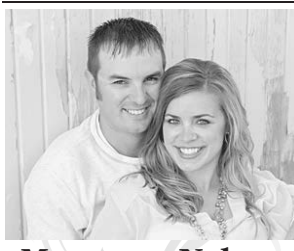
As a steady crowd left flowers, stuffed animals, notes and protest signs in the empty lot where Scott was shot, many said police in South Carolina's third-largest city routinely dismiss complaints of petty brutality and harassment, even when eyewitnesses can attest to police misbehavior. The result, they say, is that officers are regarded with a mixture of distrust and fear.

Slager's file includes a single excessive use-of-force complaint, from 2013: A man said Slager used his stun gun against him without reason. But Slager was exonerated and the case closed, even though witnesses told The Associated Press that investigators never followed up with them. Police say they are now looking at that case again amid questions by the man Tased and eyewitnesses who said authorities never questioned them about it.

"It's almost impossible to get an agency to do an impartial internal affairs investigation. First of all the investigators doing it are co-workers of the person being investigated. Number two, there's always the tendency on the part of the departments to believe the officers," Tucker said.

Mario Givens, the man who accused Slager of excessive force in 2013, told the AP that Slager woke him before dawn by loudly banging on his front door, and saying "Come outside or I'll Tase you!"

"I didn't want that to happen to me, so I raised my arms over my head, and when I did, he Tased me in my stomach anyway," Givens said. "They never told me how they reached the conclusion. Never. They never contacted anyone from that night. No one from the neighborhood."



Morman - Nelson

Emily Morman and Ehrin Nelson, both of Yankton, SD, announce their engagement and upcoming marriage. Parents of the couple are Dean and Ruth Morman, Volin, SD and Delmar and Melissa Nelson, Yankton, SD.

The bride-elect graduated Irene High School in 2007, then attended the University of South Dakota and graduated in 2012 with a bachelor's degree in dental hygiene. She currently works at Neighborhood Dental in Yankton.

The groom-elect graduated Yankton High School in 2005 and is currently farming near Yankton.

The couple is planning a May 30, 2015 wedding at United Church of Christ, Yankton, SD.



Gratzfeld

The family of Joe Gratzfeld would like to thank everyone for the flowers, food, cards, gifts, and memorials. Words cannot begin to express how much your kindness meant to us during the time of Joe's death. A special thanks to Opsahl-Kostel Funeral Home for your care and compassion and to Sacred Heart's funeral committee for preparing and serving and to all who donated for the lunch.

Joyce Gratzfeld, Joe & Sylvia Gratzfeld
Josh, Leah, Mary, Wendy, Gregory, & Michael

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