

US, Cuban Leaders To Meet Face-To-Face

PANAMA CITY (AP) — President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro moved toward a groundbreaking meeting on the sidelines of the Summit of the Americas Friday in what would be a remarkable display of reconciliation between two nations with the leadership of the Western Hemisphere gathered around them.

The powerful symbolism of a face-to-face exchange Saturday between the two leaders could signal progress even though both sides are still working through nettlesome issues that would lead to the opening of embassies in Washington and Havana, the first stage in a new diplomatic relationship.

“The two leaders will be able to address and take stock in any discussion they have over where we are in the process of normalization, where we are in the discussions around the establishment of embassies and where we continue to have differences,” White House deputy national security adviser Benjamin Rhodes said.

The White House was coy over the status of the State Department’s recommendation to remove Cuba from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terror. Removal is a top issue with Castro because it would not only eliminate Cuba’s status as a pariah, but also ease Cuba’s ability to conduct simple financial transactions.

Nevertheless, the pace of activity over the terror list suggested that even if Obama did not make an announcement Saturday, one would come soon.

Census Suspect Had Violent Past

WASHINGTON (AP) — A man charged in a crime spree that left a Census Bureau guard dead and a police officer wounded was previously convicted of manslaughter and recently was arrested in an assault case involving his “visibly afraid” girlfriend, according to court documents obtained Friday by The Associated Press.

Ronald Anderson, 48, was arrested Feb. 17 on a charge of assaulting his girlfriend in the Washington, D.C., suburb of Prince George’s County, according to court records. He was released the day of his arrest.

The officer responding to a domestic dispute call said that the man’s girlfriend was clearly afraid.

“The victim was shaking, crying and was whispering while speaking because she was afraid of the suspect hearing her,” the officer wrote, according to the documents.

The woman, whose 10-month-old son was home, told police that Anderson had hit her several times, knocking her into walls, because he thought she was looking at another man, the records say.

Changes May Be Made To Nuclear Bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bill calling for Congress to have a say on an emerging nuclear agreement with Iran has turned into a tug of war on Capitol Hill, with Republicans trying to raise the bar so high that a final deal might be impossible and Democrats aiming to give the White House more room to negotiate with Tehran.

Senators of both parties are considering more than 50 amendments to a bill introduced by Sens. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., and Bob Menendez, D-N.J. The bill would restrict Obama’s ability to ease sanctions against Iran without congressional approval.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tuesday is to debate the amendments and vote on the bill, which has pitted the White House against the GOP-led Congress on a critical foreign policy issue that President Barack Obama wants etched in his legacy. Obama administration officials, who are expected to continue lobbying lawmakers next week, don’t want Congress to take any action before a final deal could be reached by the end of June.

There is strong support, however, from lawmakers of both parties who think they should be able to weigh in on any agreement aimed at preventing Iran from being able to develop nuclear weapons. Iran says its program is for civilian purposes, but the U.S. and its partners negotiating with Tehran suspect Iran is keen to become a nuclear-armed powerhouse in the Middle East, where it already holds much sway.

There have been intense negotiations on Capitol Hill for the past several days about ways to amend the bill. Advocacy groups and congressional staffers provided details about amendments, which still might be withdrawn or rewritten.

Shoppers Get To Know Apple Watch.

The luxury versions of Apple Watch, known as Edition, have price tags ranging from \$10,000 to \$17,000. Watch cases are made with 18-karat gold alloys, and some of the pricier models have special band options unavailable with other models.

All Apple stores will have these luxury versions on display, but only a handful let customers try them on. In the U.S., 21 stores will make them available for try-ons, including three in New York City. That’s out of 265 U.S. stores.

Edition is available in 34 stores outside the U.S., including three non-Apple department stores with sections dedicated to Apple Watch.

Mining Co. Has Relationship With Cartel

CULIACAN, Mexico (AP) — The head of the mining company robbed of \$8.5 million in gold in Mexico made the rare revelation in a television interview that his company has a “good relationship” with area drug traffickers.

Rob McEwen, president and chairman of Canada-based McEwen Mining Inc., said in an interview Thursday with Canada’s Business News Network that company employees ask the drug cartels for permission before they explore.

“Generally we’ve had a good relationship with them (the cartels),” McEwen said. “If we want to go explore somewhere you ask them and they tell you, ‘No.’ But then they’ll say ‘Come back,’ in a couple of weeks; ‘We’ve finished what we’re doing.’”

He said the company had not suffered any other crime beyond the robbery of the gold. McEwen said the mining company operates in the foothills, and more problems occur higher in the mountains.

7 Hurt In Car Bomb On Tourist Island

BANGKOK (AP) — A car bomb exploded at a shopping mall on a Thai island popular with foreign tourists for its pristine beaches, injuring seven people, officials said Saturday.

The improvised bomb was hidden in a pickup truck and went off late Friday night in the basement of the Central Festival mall on Samui Island in Surat Thani province, after a fashion show, the island’s disaster prevention and mitigation chief Poonsak Sopphonpathumrak told The Associated Press.

He said authorities believed the vehicle was stolen from one of the three southernmost Thai provinces plagued by Islamic insurgency. More than 5,000 people have been killed in the three southern provinces since 2004.

Muslims in the area, which was an independent Islamic sultanate until it was annexed by Thailand in the early 20th century, have long complained of discrimination, and the insurgents are thought to be fighting for autonomy. The militants, however, have made no public pronouncements about their aims.

Poonsak said the bomb destroyed most of the pickup truck and damaged a few other vehicles that were parked nearby at the mall, which is located a few hundred meters (feet) from the popular Chaweng beach.

“The authorities are still investigating the scene to find out more details before linking it to any insurgency groups,” he said.

The Two Women Killed In Illinois Tornadoes Were Neighbors, Friends

BY MICHAEL TARM
AND SOPHIA TAREEN

Associated Press

FAIRDALE, Ill. (AP) — The two women killed by a devastating tornado system that barreled through northern Illinois shared a friendship, favors and, ultimately, a neighborhood that turned out to be a prime target of a twister that also leveled much of their rural hamlet.

Jacklyn Klosa, 69, was found Friday morning in the rubble of her Fairdale home, not far from where Geraldine Schultz, 67, died Thursday night when the tornado bore down on their neighborhood. The storm cut through the region about 80 miles west of Chicago, injuring more than a dozen and ripping buildings from their foundations.

Schultz, known as “Gerl,” and remembered by neighbors in the community of about 150 people as kind-hearted, hosted annual Christmas parties and made a point of driving Klosa to clinics for medical treatment. Klosa, known as “Jackie,” was described by friends as a friendly and quick-witted woman who spoke her mind.

The county coroner said Klosa, who had no basement, took shelter in her shower; she was found clutching her purse.

Klosa “was just one of the most friendly people in the world, a wonderful mother and a wonderful friend,” said Les Bellah, mayor of neighboring Kirkland, recalling the “big ol’ hug” he got from her recently but also how she’d “let you know” if she was upset with you. “You never had to wonder what she was thinking.”

At least two tornadoes touched down in the six-county vicinity. Most of the injuries weren’t considered serious. To the south in Ogle County, no one was injured although the tornado system caused severe damage to roughly 30 buildings in Rochelle and others in Flagg Township, according to Sheriff Brian VanVickle — who lost his own home.

Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner declared both Ogle and DeKalb counties as disaster areas, facilitating the use of state resources in the recovery efforts.

“We are very blessed that more people were not hurt. This was a devastating storm,” Rauner said in the



ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TNS
Homes in the town of Fairdale, Ill. are severely damaged Friday after a tornado ripped through north central Illinois the previous night.

town of Flagg after touring the damage.

National Weather Service meteorologist Jamie Enderlen said at least one tornado touched down near Fairdale and was initially rated an EF4, meaning it was capable of producing winds up to 200 mph. Damage survey teams were working Friday to officially determine how long tornadoes stayed on the ground, their strength and extent of the damage.

Meteorologist Matt Friedlein said the storms and cold front headed northeast, dumping snow in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and sweeping across the Ohio Valley overnight.

In Illinois, Fairdale was the hardest hit, though the storm also collapsed buildings in surrounding towns, including a restaurant in Rochelle from which a dozen people had to be dug out of a storm cellar. At least several individual farms near Fairdale were also struck.

Fairdale has no village government, no school, no cable TV and no major businesses. Some residents kept horses in town; one family found one of its horses dead amid the debris Friday afternoon.

Children are bused to nearby Kirkland, where classes were canceled Friday. Gas lines to most other communities in the area also don’t reach Fairdale — meaning residents relied on tanks of propane, the first thing that survivors smelled when they emerged

from their shattered homes Thursday night.

“The rent was cheap over there,” Bellah said. “It was unincorporated and people, they liked to live there because they didn’t have to put up with a lot of ‘government bull crap,’ so to speak.”

Kirkland firefighter Carl Bunder said there had already been an outpouring of help, with people calling in from all over the region offering to lend trucks, chainsaws or tractors.

All Fairdale homes were evacuated, in part, because of a lack of electricity. But trees, power lines and debris lay strewn on the ground, posing a safety hazard. Roofs from buildings were missing. Metal siding from barns were wrapped around trees.

Crews spent Thursday night and Friday going through the wreckage looking for missing residents, but authorities expressed confidence by the afternoon that they’d accounted for everyone.

Residents gathered Friday at a roadblock a mile from town, eager to check the damage to their homes. Police said it was too dangerous, and authorities said residents would likely be able to return by Saturday.

Al Zammuto, a 60-year-old machinist among those trying to get back in. He recalled the evening before when he and other residents received cellphone alerts at 6:45 p.m. — the town doesn’t have sirens — but he dismissed it, as previous



warnings hadn’t amounted to anything.

Then his windows exploded.

Joe Benedetto, 55, who lives just outside Fairdale, saw the tornado roll into the community and likened the sound to “a giant vacuum cleaner.” While his house was spared major damage, powerful winds launched a single branch, like a spear, through his kitchen wall.

Zammuto, in Fairfield itself, took cover as the severe weather struck. Bricks were torn off the side of his home. Minutes later he stepped outside, and he said the town looked trashed “looked like a landfill” and the sounds were haunting.

“People were screaming and yelling,” he said. “People were in total shock.”

Pakistan Votes To Stay Out Of Yemen Conflict

BY AHMED AL-HAJ
AND MUNIR AHMED

Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen — Pakistan’s parliament voted unanimously Friday to stay out of the Saudi-led air campaign targeting Shiite rebels in Yemen, offering instead to mediate a solution, in a blow to Saudi Arabia’s attempts to build a Sunni front in an increasingly sectarian conflict.

Pakistan’s decision is unlikely to greatly affect the Saudi-led coalition’s military capabilities. But it was an embarrassment to the kingdom from a traditionally close ally, now reluctant to get pulled into a conflict that is threatening to escalate into a new proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Saudi Arabia had been seeking to expand the coalition, made up of fellow Gulf nations as well as Egypt and Sudan, which has waged a nearly 3-week campaign of airstrikes against the rebels, known as Houthis, and is reportedly considering a ground incursion. At the same time, Shiite powerhouse Iran, which backs the Houthis, also lobbied Pakistan and other Sunni nations to back a cease-fire and a negotiated end to the conflict.

A senior official in the United Arab Emirates — a member of the coalition — lashed out angrily at Pakistan, accusing it of choosing Iran over the Gulf nations at a time when they face an “existential confrontation” in

the Yemen conflict.

Anwar Gargash, the UAE’s minister of state for foreign affairs, said on his Twitter account that Pakistan should look out for its strategic relations with Gulf nations, pointing to the Gulf’s economic and investment help to the South Asian nation.

“Contradictory and ambiguous positions in this existential matter will cost (Pakistan) dearly,” he wrote.

Airstrikes along with escalated fighting on the ground between the Houthis and supporters of Yemen’s beleaguered president threaten to push Yemen, the Arab world’s poorest country, into collapse. On Friday, the U.N. and International Committee of the Red Cross succeeded in bringing in the first two plane loads of aid, delivering tons of medical and humanitarian supplies to the capital, Sanaa, to relieve hospitals overburdened by casualties.

Saudi Arabia and its allies, including the United States, accuse Iran of arming the Houthis. The Gulf countries view the rebels’ power grab as a move by Iran to establish a stronghold on their southern flank. Iran says it backs the rebels politically and with humanitarian aid but denies sending weapons. The Houthis have full or partial control over 11 of Yemen’s 22 provinces, backed by military units loyal to ousted autocrat Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The current president, Abed Rabbo Mansour

Hadi, was forced to flee the country last month, leaving a shaky collection of forces on the ground to fight the Houthis — including military units still loyal to him, militiamen and Sunni tribesmen. Al-Qaida’s Yemen branch is also fighting the Houthis.

The coalition is reportedly considering a ground incursion, likely including Saudi and Egyptian forces, once airstrikes have sufficiently weakened the Houthis and Saleh’s forces, a process that could take weeks. On Friday, Egypt’s defense minister met with Saudi King Salman in Riyadh to discuss the coalition’s operations.

According to Pakistani officials, Saudi Arabia asked Pakistan to send troops to take part in the campaign. Pakistani troops have considerable experience fighting militants in mountainous terrain similar to Yemen’s.

After the parliament vote Friday, a spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition, Ahmed Asiri, still held out hope the Pakistani government would choose to participate. But he said even if it didn’t, other coalition forces are as well

trained as the Pakistanis. “Not joining on the ground, sea or sea level will not obstruct the coalition operations,” he told reporters.

The debate put Pakistan in an awkward position. It has long had military ties to Saudi Arabia. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was sheltered by Saudi Arabia after the coup that overthrew him in 1999. For weeks, Sunni hard-liners, including a group linked to militants, have organized rallies around Pakistan denouncing the Yemeni rebels and urging Islamabad to join the coalition.

But participation threatened to enflame Pakistan’s own sectarian divisions. Pakistan is predominantly Sunni but has a Shiite minority that is frequently targeted by Sunni extremists.

It also has important ties with Iran, with which it shares a long border. Iran’s foreign minister, Javad Zarif, was in Islamabad for several days before the vote, meeting Pakistani officials and calling for a cease-fire and negotiations on creating a broad-based government in Yemen.

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