

Curfew Helps Ease Tensions in Baltimore

BALTIMORE (AP) — Cars rolled through the streets, students returned to class and a symphony played on a sidewalk Wednesday, offering the city a slice of normalcy as it recovers from the rioting and looting earlier this week.

Still, anger and anxiety hung over Baltimore.

Hundreds of protesters, many of them students wearing backpacks, marched through downtown, calling for swift justice in the case of Freddie Gray, a black man who suffered critical injuries while in police custody.

Authorities carefully monitored the rally after teenagers started the violence Monday afternoon, throwing bricks and bottles at officers who had gathered near a major bus transfer point. The situation escalated from there, overwhelming police as protesters set fire to cars and buildings and raided stores.

Schools closed Tuesday because of the mayhem, but reopened Wednesday, after the city's first night of a curfew went off without the widespread violence many had feared.

Japanese PM Offers Condolences

WASHINGTON (AP) — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe offered condolences Wednesday for Americans killed in World War II in the first address by a Japanese leader to a joint meeting of Congress, but stopped short of apologizing for wartime atrocities.

Abe came to Capitol Hill after a morning visit to a Washington memorial to more than 400,000 American service members who died in the conflict. His remarks to a packed chamber a day after meeting President Barack Obama were warmly received by lawmakers.

"My dear friends, on behalf of Japan and the Japanese people, I offer with profound respect my eternal condolences to the souls of all American people that were lost during World War II," he said, prompting his audience to rise in applause.

But he skirted another issue that some U.S. lawmakers had also been urging him to address in what is the 70th anniversary year of the end of war — the sexual slavery of tens of thousands of Asian women by Japan's military, which remains a sore point with another staunch U.S. ally, South Korea. One of the few dozen surviving Korean victims, Yong Soo-lee, 87, was in the gallery to watch Abe's address, seated in a wheelchair.

Instead, the Japanese prime minister expressed "feelings of deep remorse over the war." He acknowledged that "our actions brought suffering to the peoples in Asian countries, we must not avert our eyes from that." That won't satisfy his critics, who want Abe to do more than "uphold" the apologies for wartime abuses made by his predecessors.

France investigates Rape Accusation

PARIS (AP) — Paris prosecutors are investigating accusations that French soldiers in Central African Republic sexually abused children they were sent to protect.

The French probe follows an initial U.N. investigation into the allegations a year ago — both of which were kept secret until a report in the Guardian newspaper Wednesday forced officials to publicly acknowledge them.

A U.N. worker leaked information about the U.N. investigation to French authorities last year, the U.N. Secretary-General's office said in a statement. That worker, identified by the Swedish government as Swede Anders Kompass has been suspended and is now under internal investigation.

The allegations of sexual abuse, the secretive nature of the probe and the treatment of the suspended U.N. worker all cast a new shadow on the world body, which has faced accusations of abuses by its peacekeeping forces in the past.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders: 'I Am Running For President'

BY DAVE GRAM

Associated Press

MONTPELIER, VT — Promising to fight what he deems "obscene levels" of income disparity and a campaign finance system that is a "real disgrace," independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders said Wednesday he will run for president as a Democrat.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Sanders confirmed his plans to formally join the race Thursday.

The self-described "democratic socialist" enters the race as a robust liberal alternative to Hillary Rodham Clinton, and he pledged to do more than simply raise progressive issues or nudge the former secretary of state to the left in a campaign in which she is heavily favored.

"People should not underestimate me," Sanders said. "I've run outside of the two-party system, defeating Democrats and Republicans, taking on big-money candidates and, you know, I think the message that has resonated in Vermont is a message that can resonate all over this country."



Bernie Sanders

Democrat/Independent
• U.S. senator from Vermont 2007-present
• U.S. House rep. from Vermont 1991-2007

Source: U.S. Congress

As he has for months in prospective campaign stops in the early voting states, and throughout his political career, the former mayor of Burlington, Vermont, on Wednesday assailed an economic system that he said has devolved over the past 40 years and eradicated the nation's middle class.

"What we have seen is that while the average person is working longer hours for lower wages, we have seen a huge increase in income and wealth inequality, which is now reaching obscene levels," Sanders

told the AP.

"This is a rigged economy, which works for the rich and the powerful, and is not working for ordinary Americans. ... You know, this country just does not belong to a handful of billionaires."

The son of an immigrant from Poland who sold paint for a living in Brooklyn, Sanders has for decades championed working-class Americans. He lost several statewide races in the 1970s before he was elected mayor of Burlington in 1981, and went on to represent Vermont in the U.S. House for 16 years before his election to the Senate in 2006.

An independent in the Senate, he caucuses with Democrats in Washington and he is likely to attract some interest from voters who have unsuccessfully sought to draft Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren to join the race.

But Sanders rejected the idea his appeal is limited to voters on the left, boldly predicting Wednesday that his message would appeal to both fellow independents and Republicans.

Sanders said he would

release "very specific proposals" to raise taxes on wealthy Americans and corporations, as well as offer tuition-free education at all public colleges and universities. He touched on his past opposition to free-trade agreements, his support for heavier regulations of Wall Street and the nation's banking industry, and his vote against the Keystone XL oil pipeline as a preview of his campaign.

"So to me, the question is whose views come closer to representing the vast majority of working people in this country," Sanders said. "And you know what? I think my views do."

The 73-year-old Sanders starts his campaign as an undisputed underdog against Clinton. Sanders said he has known the former first lady, senator from New York and secretary of state for more than two decades. "I respect her and like her," he said.

He noted he has "never run a negative ad in my life," but still drew a distinction with Clinton in the interview, promising to talk "very strongly about the need not to get involved in perpetual warfare in the Middle East."

Syrian Opposition, Activists Report Chemical Attack In Idlib

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Syrian activist groups on Wednesday reported another suspected chemical attack in the northwestern province of Idlib, with one group tweeting that a dozen people were "suffocating."

Several Idlib-based groups said government helicopters dropped at least two barrel bombs containing chlorine on the town of Saraqeb, triggering cases of suffocation.

The Syrian Network for

Human Rights, which is based outside the country, tweeted that 12 people were "suffocating."

The reports could not be independently verified. A call to Syria's mission to the U.N. rang unanswered Wednesday evening.

The head of Syria's main opposition group in exile said he received the reports during his informal meeting with the U.N. Security Council behind closed doors.

Khaled Khoja with the

Syrian National Coalition said he urged the council to act on its resolutions, including one adopted last month that threatens action against the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Activists have reported several attacks since then, and the council earlier this month heard from a Syrian doctor who treated victims from a half-dozen of them. "Everyone smelled bleach-like odors" and heard the sound of helicopters, Mo-

haled Tennari said of one incident.

The U.S. and other council members have repeatedly blamed the Syrian government for such attacks, saying no one else in the four-year civil war has helicopters to deliver the toxic chemicals.

But the U.N.'s most powerful body seems stuck in taking further action because there is no way to formally assign blame.

Yemen Rebels

And Allies

Advance in Aden

SANAA, Yemen (AP) — Yemen's Shiite rebels and their allies made major advances Wednesday in the southern city of Aden, capturing parts of an upscale neighborhood in fierce combat and seizing men they accused of fighting them.

The gains extended rebel control over the port city, Yemen's second largest, casting doubt over the effectiveness of a monthlong Saudi-led air campaign intended to drive them out.

Security officials said the Houthi rebels, aided by military forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, had moved up the seaside road in the neighborhood of Khormaksar, taking an area stretching from the Russian Consulate to the Crater business district.

Thousands of civilians fled the fighting as the rebels and their allies searched house by house for suspected adversaries. Eyewitnesses, including activist Maha al-Sayyed, said they pulled some of the men onto the streets and shot them, while warning residents over loudspeakers against harboring fighters.

The rebel forces fended off counter attacks in Khormaksar, where they largely control the airport, as well as al-Mualala district, using heavy weapons including artillery, tanks, mortars and heavy machine guns, the officials said. Witnesses said a large shopping mall in Khormaksar caught fire.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to brief journalists.

Since March 26, a U.S.-backed alliance of Saudi Arabia and Arab countries has been carrying out airstrikes against the Houthis and Saleh's forces, trying to stop their advance after they captured the capital and much of the country's north last year. The Saudi- and Western-backed president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, was forced into exile.

So far, the air campaign has been unable to halt the Iranian-allied rebels.

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