

Calif. Blaze Threatens Community

GROVELAND, Calif. (AP) — For 30 years, Ike Bunney has run a dude ranch amid the tall pines and steep canyons along the North Fork of the Tuolumne River in California's Sierra Nevada. Now his 15 horses are safe in distant pastures as wildfire on the northern edge of Yosemite National Park threatens his mountain community.

"We've already evacuated the horses," said Bunney, who was maintaining vigil Sunday at his Slide Mountain Guest Ranch. "I think they're worried about the fire sparking over these hills."

At the nearby Black Oak Casino in Tuolumne City, the slot machines were quiet as emergency workers took over nearly all of the resort's 148 hotel rooms.

"The casino is empty," said casino employee Jessie Dean. "Technically, the casino is open but there's nobody there."

As thick smoke portends the fire's fast approach, the area has been cleared of everyone but locals and emergency workers. Dean lives on the reservation of the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians and left her four children at relatives' homes in the Central Valley.

Israel Project Complicates Peace Talks

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel pushed forward Sunday with plans to construct 1,500 apartments in east Jerusalem in a move that could undermine recently renewed Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

City spokeswoman Brachie Sprung said city officials had approved plans to lay down infrastructure for the project. She called the move a "standard and bureaucratic process" and said final government approval was still required. Actual construction is still years away, she said.

Still, the move comes just after Israelis and Palestinians resumed talks after a five-year stalemate. Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank and east Jerusalem is one of the thornier issues separating the two sides.

The city is pushing development in the neighborhood of Ramat Shlomo, a project that has also raised tensions with the U.S. Israel first announced the plans in 2010 during U.S. Vice President Joe Biden's visit to Israel, sparking a diplomatic rift with Washington that took months to mend.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem following its 1967 war with its Arab neighbors and claims the area as an inseparable part of its capital. The Palestinians also claim east Jerusalem as the capital of their hoped-for state. About 200,000 Jews and roughly 250,000 Palestinians live in east Jerusalem, which is home to sensitive Jewish, Christian and Muslim holy sites.

Insurgent Attacks In Iraq Kill At Least 46

BAGHDAD (AP) — Insurgents bent on destabilizing Iraq killed at least 46 people in numerous attacks scattered around the country on Sunday, striking targets as varied as a coffee shop, a wedding party convoy and a carload of off-duty soldiers.

The attacks are part of a months-long wave of killing that is the country's worst spate of bloodshed since 2008. The violence is calling into question the security forces' ability to protect the country and raising fears that Iraq's sectarian and ethnic divisions are pushing it back toward the brink of civil war.

One of the day's boldest attacks happened near the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, where militants set up a fake security checkpoint, captured five soldiers and shot them dead, a police officer said. The soldiers were dressed in civilian clothes and returning to base in a taxi.

Inside Mosul, other gunmen in a speeding car shot and killed a grocer, he said, though the motive was not immediately clear. The grocer was a member of the Shabak ethnic group, which has its own distinct language and religious beliefs.

Mosul, a former insurgent stronghold, is about 360 kilometers (220 miles) northwest of Baghdad.

Police Make Last Arrest In Mumbai Rape

NEW DELHI (AP) — Police on Sunday arrested the last of five men wanted in the gang rape of a photojournalist in Mumbai, and said charges would be filed soon in a case that has incensed the public and fueled debate over whether women can be safe in India.

The victim, a 22-year-old Indian woman, said she was anxious to return to work after Thursday night's assault, in which five men repeatedly raped her while her male colleague was beaten and tied up in an abandoned textile mill in the country's financial capital.

"Rape is not the end of life," the woman told the Times of India. A statement from Jaslok Hospital, where she has been since the attack, said her condition was being monitored but that she was "much better" and was being visited by family. Indian law forbids identifying rape victims by name.

Police arrested the fifth suspect Sunday in New Delhi, the capital, after rounding up the other four in Mumbai.

"We will file a comprehensive charge sheet soon," said Mumbai's police commissioner, Satyapal Singh, assuring that police had the evidence to prosecute the suspects, including the victim's testimony and medical samples taken at the hospital after the assault.

Private Groups Getting Public Pensions

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — As a lobbyist in New York's statehouse, Stephen Acquario is doing pretty well. He pulls down \$204,000 a year, more than the governor makes, gets a Ford Explorer as his company car and is afforded another special perk:

Even though he's not a government employee, he is entitled to a full state pension.

He's among hundreds of lobbyists in at least 20 states who get public pensions because they represent associations of counties, cities and school boards, an Associated Press review found. Legislatures granted them access decades ago on the premise that they serve governments and the public. In many cases, such access also includes state health care benefits.

But several states have started to question whether these organizations should qualify for such benefits, since they are private entities in most respects: They face no public oversight of their activities, can pay their top executives private-sector salaries and sometimes lobby for positions in conflict with taxpayers. New Jersey and Illinois are among the states considering legislation that would end their inclusion.

"It's a question of, 'Why are we providing government pensions to these private organizations?'" said Illinois Democratic Rep. Elaine Nekritz.

Syria OKs Chemical Weapons Investigation

BY RYAN LUCAS AND LEE KEATH
Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syria agreed Sunday to a U.N. investigation into last week's alleged chemical weapons attack outside Damascus — a deal a senior White House official dismissed as "too late to be credible," saying the United States has "very little doubt" President Bashar Assad's forces used such weapons.

The hardening of the U.S. position came as calls for military action grow. In a sign the U.S. may be a step closer to an armed response, naval forces have already been dispatched toward Syria's coastal waters, although President Barack Obama has cautioned against a hasty decision.

With France, Britain, Israel and some U.S. congressmen urging swift military action against Assad's regime if the use of

chemical agents is confirmed, the U.N. team's conclusions could have a dramatic impact on the trajectory of the country's civil war.

The agreement struck in Damascus calls for U.N. experts already in the country to begin an investigation Monday into the suspected chemical attack on rebel-held areas in the capital's eastern suburbs.

Anti-government activists and Doctors Without Borders say that more than 300 people were killed in an artillery barrage by regime forces Wednesday that included the use of toxic gas. The government calls the allegations "absolutely baseless."

The suburbs hit in the suspected chemical strike, collectively known as eastern Ghouta, are under the control of rebel fighters, and regime artillery and warplanes have pounded the area for

days. The U.N. inspectors will have to traverse through both government-held and opposition-controlled turf to conduct their probe. Rebels have said they will help facilitate the visit.

Under Sunday's agreement with the U.N., the Syrian government "affirmed that it will provide the necessary cooperation, including the observance of the cessation of hostilities at the locations related to the incident," U.N. spokesman Martin Nesirky said in a statement.

In Washington, a senior administration official said the U.S. has "very little doubt" that regime forces used chemical weapons in Wednesday's attack, an assessment that was "based on the reported number of victims, reported symptoms of those who were killed or injured" as well as witness accounts and facts gathered by the U.S. intelligence community.



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT
People listen to speakers Saturday during the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Youth See Washington March Anniversary As Chance To Lead

BY SHAQUILLE BREWSTER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Mary-Pat Hector of Atlanta was operating much like a 1960s civil rights activist as she laid plans for the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington. She was constantly on the phone as she confirmed event details, tweaked the draft of the speech she gave at Saturday's rally at the Lincoln Memorial and prepared for a presentation.

Mary-Pat is 15 years old. Just as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. led the Montgomery Bus Boycott at age 26, and Rep. John Lewis helped to lead freedom rides at 23, young Americans like Mary-Pat are not letting age get in the way as they seek more than a contributing role in the push for social reform.

Young people are eager to influence this year's March on Washington, says Jessica Brown, national coordinator for the Black Youth Vote coalition, which organized several youth events around Saturday's march to the Lincoln Memorial.

"Of course you have the seasoned people who are there, and they are always rightfully going to have their position," Brown said. "But you're starting to see the pickup of the youth saying, 'This is our time, this is our moment, this is the opportunity we have to show the world and the nation, that we're here and we're ready to work and organize to get things done.'"

In 1963, those "seasoned people" were A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, who birthed the idea of a Washington march to appeal for jobs and justice, and ultimately

attracted 250,000 people. Today, the Rev. Al Sharpton and Martin Luther King III, who were 8 and 5 years old, respectively, in 1963, are the veterans who brought thousands to the

Lincoln Memorial on Saturday. The King Center also has organized a ceremony on Wednesday, the actual march anniversary, when President Barack Obama will speak.

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