

ISIS Seizes Iraq's Largest Dam

BAGHDAD (AP) — Militants from the Islamic State group seized Iraq's largest hydroelectric dam on Thursday, giving them control of enormous power and water resources and leverage over the Tigris River that runs through the heart of Baghdad.

The fighting has trapped tens of thousands of members of religious minorities on a mountaintop. President Barack Obama approved airdrops of humanitarian supplies for them, but he was still weighing whether to combine that assistance with U.S. airstrikes, officials said Thursday night.

Airstrikes would mark a significant shift in the U.S. strategy in Iraq, where the military fully withdrew in late 2011 after nearly a decade of war. Officials said Obama could announce a decision as early as Thursday night. The officials insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter by name.

Thursday's dam seizure was the latest in a string of victories by the Sunni radical group as it expands its hold in northern Iraq, driving back Kurdish forces, sending minority communities fleeing and unleashing bombings that have killed more than 90 people in the capital over the past two days.

After a week of attempts, the radical Islamist gunmen successfully stormed the Mosul Dam Thursday and forced Kurdish forces to withdraw from the area, residents living near the dam told The Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity due to safety concerns.

Israeli Army Says 2 Rockets Fired

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli army says that two rockets have been fired from the Gaza Strip just hours ahead of the expiration of the 72-hour ceasefire that ended a month of violence.

The rockets fell into an open area in southern Israel and caused no casualties, the army said early Friday. There has been no immediate Israeli response.

The rockets threaten to unleash a new round of violence after a month of fighting that has claimed nearly 1,900 Palestinian lives and 67 from Israel.

Indirect talks between Israelis and Palestinians were taking place in Cairo to extend the cease-fire, but Hamas representatives had threatened to resume fighting if their demands to end the blockade on Gaza in place since 2007 were not met.

More Airlines Cancel Hawaii Flights

HONOLULU (AP) — More airlines are canceling flights as a hurricane pushed closer to Hawaii and a second major tropical storm loomed behind it.

American Airlines and US Airways have canceled all flights leaving or going to the Big Island and Maui after 6 p.m. HST Thursday. They expect flights to resume at noon HST Friday.

Hawaiian Airlines has halted Thursday evening interisland flights in Hilo, Kona and Maui. It also moved its Maui-Los Angeles flight up by nearly five hours.

Commuter airline Island Air said earlier Thursday it was canceling some afternoon flights between the islands and shutting down all operations Friday.

The Hawaii Tourism Authority says United Airlines also canceled flights, but the carrier couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

Remains Of 9 Jonestown Bodies Found

DOVER, Del. (AP) — More than 35 years after the infamous suicide-murder of some 900 people — many forced to drink a cyanide-laced grape punch — in Jonestown, Guyana, the cremated remains of nine of the victims were found in a dilapidated former funeral home in Delaware, officials said Thursday.

The discovery brought back memories of a tragedy that killed hundreds of children and a U.S. congressman and horrified Americans.

The remains were clearly marked, with the names of the deceased and place of their death included on accompanying death certificates, authorities said. Kimberly Chandler, spokeswoman for the Delaware Division of Forensic Science, declined to release the names of the nine people to The Associated Press. She said officials were working to notify relatives.

She said the agency found the remains July 30 on a site visit prompted by a call from the property's current owner — a bank, according to Dover police and public records. Officials found 38 containers of remains, 33 of which were marked and identified. Chandler said the containers spanned a period from about 1970 to the 1990s and included the remains from Jonestown, established by Peoples Temple leader Jim Jones.

"It's simply a case of unclaimed cremains at a closed funeral home," Chandler said, adding that there is no reason to believe the five unmarked containers contain remains of more Jonestown victims.

Man Convicted Of 2nd-Degree Murder

DETROIT (AP) — A suburban Detroit man who insisted he killed an unarmed woman on his porch in self-defense was convicted of second-degree murder Thursday after the jury rejected his tearful claim that he fired through a screen door in the wee hours because he feared his life was at risk.

No one knows why Renisha McBride ended up at the Dearborn Heights home of Theodore Wafer last Nov. 2, although prosecutors speculated that the 19-year-old woman may have been confused and seeking help, hours after she had crashed her car blocks away. An autopsy found she was extremely drunk.

The jury convicted Wafer of second-degree murder, manslaughter and a gun-related charge after deliberating for about eight hours over two days.

Wayne County Judge Dana Hathaway warned that she would lock people up for any outbursts, and the courtroom was silent after the verdict was read.

McBride's mother, Monica McBride, cried and clasped her hands as if praying. She gave long hugs to prosecutors as the courtroom emptied.

Kerry On Unannounced Afghan. Visit

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Obama administration on Thursday stepped up efforts to press Afghanistan's two feuding presidential candidates to end their dispute over June elections, accept the results of an ongoing audit of all ballots and form a national unity government by early September.

On an unannounced visit to Kabul, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry made personal appeals to both candidates — former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah and former Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai — to understand the urgency of finding a resolution before the upcoming NATO summit in Wales on September 4, according to officials traveling with Kerry. At that summit, NATO leaders are hoping to make decisions about their nations' roles in Afghanistan after the end of the year, when most combat troops will be withdrawn.

Officials with Kerry said the summit would be an opportunity for the eventual election winner to present himself to the alliance and introduce his new cabinet, which, under a formula brokered by Kerry on his last visit to Kabul in June, would include the election loser appointing a new "chief executive officer" who would serve under the president. Once created, the Afghan government would convene a loya jirga, or nationwide assembly, to formalize the chief executive post as a prime minister, the plan envisions.

Kerry's visit comes as the election results are being audited in a process that he brokered last month but that had halted to mark the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in late July. The audit resumed earlier this week with representatives of both candidates participating but still at odds over charges of widespread election fraud in the June 14 runoff. Preliminary results of the poll showed Ghani Ahmadzai well ahead of Abdullah, but both sides alleged fraud.

Kerry, who will see current President Hamid Karzai on Friday before he leaves Afghanistan for an Asian security conference in Myanmar, met separately with Ghani Ahmadzai and Abdullah at the heavily fortified U.S. Embassy compound in Kabul. No details of the discussions were immediately available beyond the small talk the officials made while reporters and photographers were present. He will meet with the candidates again on Friday.

NATO Pledges Support To Conflict-Wracked Ukraine

BY PETER LEONARD AND YURAS KARMANAU

Associated Press

KIEV, Ukraine — NATO's chief defied mounting Russian belligerence Thursday with a pledge to provide assistance to Ukraine, which is battling to quash an insurgency being waged by pro-Russia rebels in the country's east.

The show of support from Anders Fogh Rasmussen comes as government troops increasingly focus their push to claw back rebel-held territory on the stronghold of Donetsk. Ukraine appears to be ratcheting up the urgency of its onslaught against the backdrop of an alleged escalation of Russian troop presence on the border.

"In response to Russia's aggression, NATO is working even more closely with Ukraine to reform its armed forces and defense institutions," Rasmussen said during a visit to the Ukrainian capital, Kiev.

In a sign of sagging morale among rebel forces, separatist authorities issued a desperate plea for assistance Thursday, complaining in a statement that a "critical situation has developed with the militia's food, uniform and ammunition supplies."

In Donetsk, sustained shelling struck residential buildings and a hospital, killing at least four people and wounding 10 others, local officials said.

Mortar fire struck the Vishnevskiy Hospital on Thursday morning, killing one and wounding five others, Donetsk city council spokesman Maxim Rovensky told The Associated Press.

"There was a sudden explosion," witness Dr. Anna Kravtsova said. "A mortar round flew through the window."

The shelling, which destroyed an array of equipment in the dentistry unit, also hit three nearby apartment buildings.

It followed a night of shelling in another neighborhood as the fighting between the government and pro-Russian separatists is inching ever closer to the city center. The mayor's office said in a statement posted on its website that three people had been killed, five wounded and several residential buildings destroyed during those attacks.

The government denies it uses artillery against residential areas, but that claim has come under substantial strain in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary.

Pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine have been fighting the Kiev government since April. Ukraine and Western countries have accused Moscow of backing the mutiny with weapons and soldiers. The West accused Russia of most likely providing the insurgents with surface-to-air missiles that may have been used to shoot down a Malaysia Airlines passenger jet over rebel-held territory on July 17, killing all 298 people on board.

The Russian government has repeatedly denied all those charges.

More recently, Moscow has drawn accusations it is attempting to sow more instability with an intimidating show of force by dispatching what NATO estimates is 20,000 troops to Ukraine's eastern border. That deployment has led many to speculate Russia may pursue an incursion under the guise of restoring stability to eastern Ukraine.

"I call on Russia to step back from the brink. Step back from the border. Do not use peacekeeping as an excuse for war-making," Rasmussen said.

While stopping short of committing to direct assistance in Ukraine's ongoing conflict, Rasmussen said that NATO would intensify its cooperation with Ukraine on defense planning and reform.

Hours before Rasmussen's arrival, clashes erupted in central Kiev as city

authorities sought to clear away the remnants of a tent colony erected by demonstrators involved in the street uprising against pro-Russia President Viktor Yanukovich. At the time, protesters were angry about endemic corruption and wanted closer ties with the European Union.

In scenes reminiscent of that revolt, which climaxed with Yanukovich's ouster in February, demonstrators set alight tires in their face-off against a volunteer battalion overseeing the clean-up operation.

In eastern Ukraine, government troops have made tentative progress in their strategy to retake Donetsk and other towns and cities. Armed forces have refrained from pitched urban battles, and instead favored pushing back their opponents with artillery fire. It has led to a growing number of civilians casualties.

Vishnevskiy Hospital, one of the city's larger medical treatment facilities, is around 4 kilometers (less than 3 miles) from the main square. It has been used to provide treatment to civilian victims of the ongoing conflict.

"The hospital became a nightmare. This is absurd," said 37-year old patient Dmitry Kozhur. "We came here to keep living, but now we are risking death."

Kozhur said he now wants to join the 300,000 people that the mayor's office says have already abandoned the once 1 million-person strong city.

As AP reporters were leaving the hospital, they heard the sound of four rounds of artillery being fired from a nearby neighborhood under rebel control. Although it wasn't immediately possible to confirm the sequence of events, it appeared that the shells that hit the hospital may have been a response to rebel fire.

Neighbors of a house struck by rockets Wednesday said their homes were also near a position used by rebel artillery forces.

Cambodia Tribunal Convicts Khmer Rouge Leaders

BY TODD PITMAN AND SOPHENG CHEANG

Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — They were leaders of Cambodia's infamous Khmer Rouge, the fanatical communist movement behind a 1970s reign of terror that transformed this entire Southeast Asian nation into a ruthless slave state — a place where cities were emptied of their inhabitants, religion and schools were banned, and anyone deemed a threat was executed.

When the nightmare ended, in 1979, close to 2 million people were dead — a quarter of Cambodia's population at the time.

On Thursday, a U.N.-backed tribunal convicted two of the once all-powerful men who ruled during that era of crimes against humanity in the first and possibly the last verdicts to be issued against the group's aging, top members.

Although survivors welcomed the decision to impose life sentences against Khieu Samphan, an 83-year-old former head of state, and Nuon Chea, the movement's 88-year-old chief ideologue, they also say justice has come far too late and is simply not adequate.

"Nothing can compare to the immense suffering they imposed, no sentence can be enough. They belong in hell, not an air-conditioned jail cell," said Youk Chhang, who heads The Documentation Center of Cambodia, which has collected more than a million documents related to the Khmer Rouge terror.

"But this gives us hope that we can learn from the past ... that we can try to prevent this from ever happening again."

There was no visible reaction from either of the accused when the decisions were announced. Nuon Chea, wearing dark sunglasses, was too weak even to stand

from his wheelchair. Defense lawyers insisted the case was not over and vowed to appeal within 30 days.

Summarizing the verdict, chief judge Nil Nonn said the defendants were part of "a joint criminal enterprise" that launched "a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population" after Khmer Rouge guerrillas seized Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975.

The attack took many forms, Nil Nonn said, including "murder, extermination, enforced disappearances, attacks against human dignity and political persecution."

The case, which lasted about two years, focused on just one of many mass killing sites and the forced exodus of millions of people from Cambodia's cities and towns, where even hospitals were emptied of patients.

Top Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot had reset the clock to "Year Zero." Society was to be "purified." Money was abolished. Communal kitchens were introduced nationwide. The failed aim: to create an agrarian "utopia."

Most of those who died succumbed to starvation, medical neglect and overwork. Marked for death were the educated, religious or ethnic minorities, Buddhist monks, and anyone suspected of ties with the former government or who questioned the new rulers.

Khieu Samphan acknowledged mass killings took place. But during the trial he claimed he was just a figurehead with no real authority. He called allegations that he ordered executions a "fairytale."

Nuon Chea, known as Brother No. 2 because he was Pol Pot's trusted deputy, also denied responsibility, saying that Vietnamese forces — not the Khmer Rouge — had killed Cambodians en masse.

The hybrid tribunal, comprised of Cambodian and in-

ternational jurists, began operations in 2006. It has been heavily criticized for spending too much — more than \$200 million so far — and doing too little.

The court has convicted only one other defendant — prison director Kaing Guek Eav, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2011.

The current trial began in 2011 with four senior Khmer Rouge leaders; only two remain. Former Foreign Minister Ieng Sary died in 2013, while his wife, Social Affairs Minister Ieng Thirith, was deemed unfit to stand trial due to dementia in 2012.

The group's leader, Pol Pot, died in 1998 at the age of 73, evading a trial altogether.

Chea Leang, a co-prosecutor, said Thursday's judgment "will not turn back time, it won't give back life to those who were executed, or those who died of heat and exhaustion or lack of food or water or medical assistance."

"Yet I believe it will give some justice ... denied to them for so long," she said.

Survivors of the regime traveled from across the country to witness the historic day, filling several hundred seats available to the public at the tribunal. After the verdict was read, several former prisoners wept and hugged. Many said they felt mixed reactions.

"The crimes are huge, and just sentencing them to life in jail is not fair," said 54-year-old Chea Sophon, who spent years in hard labor camps building dams and working in rice fields. His brother was killed during the Khmer Rouge era.

"But what can I do?" he said. "Even if they die many times over, it would not be enough."

Another survivor, 58-year-old Khuth Vouern, said she felt a sense of relief that justice was finally served, even if it came generations late.

Tragic End After Search For Missing Girl

BY PHUONG LE

Associated Press

SEATTLE — A four-day search for a missing Washington girl who vanished from her home over the weekend came to a tragic end Thursday, as authorities said they believe they have found the body of 6-year-old Jenise Wright.

Authorities in Kitsap County said Thursday they're trying to track down anyone responsible, and they're "not ruling out anything."

"This is going to be a criminal investigation, there's no doubt about that," said Kitsap County Sheriff's Deputy Scott Wilson.

A forensic pathologist under contract to the county will perform an autopsy, Wilson said. That may take place Friday, depending on the pathologist's schedule. The county coroner has custody of the body, and formal identification is expected Friday, the deputy said.

Determination of the manner and cause of death is pending, Wilson said,

but "we suspect that she just did not go off by herself and fall into some bushes and die."

Jenise was last seen when she went to bed Saturday night. Her parents waited a day before calling for help because they say the girl had wandered around the Steele Creek Mobile Home Park on her own in the past. She was outgoing and unafraid to talk to anyone, family said.

Wilson said in an interview Thursday that there were no signs of forced entry at the girl's home and no indication that she was taken from her room.

An FBI team using search dogs discovered the body late Thursday morning in a forested area near the mobile home park where the girl lived. Her family has been notified.

An FBI evidence research team has finished checking the area where the body was found and a forensic mapping team from the Washington State Patrol's criminal investigation division will map the spot, Wilson said Thursday evening.

Authorities said there have been no

arrests in the case.

Her parents are cooperating with authorities, Wilson said Thursday.

"It's tragic circumstances that bring us here," said Frank Montoya Jr., special agent in charge of the FBI's Seattle division. Several FBI specialized teams were involved in the search.

In a statement, the sheriff's department said a coroner will make official confirmation of the identity, but "it appears that the body is that of Jenise."

More than 350 people, including officers from 15 law enforcement agencies, searched for Jenise, going door to door at the mobile home park near Bremerton, on the west side of Puget Sound, across from Seattle.

They also pulled surveillance video from nearby businesses and checked in with sex offenders in the county.

After the search began, state child welfare workers removed two other children, an 8-year-old boy and 12-year-old girl, from the home.