

Displaced Iraqis Trade War For Hardship

NAJAF, Iraq (AP) — Abbas Mohammed Habib was born into Iraq's rapidly expanding world of the displaced. His mother Laila Ali was among tens of thousands of Shiite Turkmen driven from their homes when Islamic extremists captured the northern town of Tal Afar. Nine months pregnant, she fled with her husband and four young children, eventually squeezing into a bus for a 16-hour trip across the desert. They went an entire day without food or water. As the extremist Islamic State group plowed across northern Iraq, centuries-old communities of religious minorities — some viewed as apostates by the Sunni militants — fled for their lives. Christians and Yazidis headed to the north, where many found refuge in the largely autonomous Kurdish region. But the Turkmen, an ethnic group with historic ties to neighboring Turkey, said they were turned away by the Kurds, who fear that such an influx would dilute their majority and undermine their ambition of one day having an independent state. So some 50,000 Shiite Turkmen instead headed south to the holy city of Najaf, believing like so many other Iraqis that they would only be safe among those who share their faith. In Najaf they have security, for now, but little else.

In Gaza, Suffering Breeds Subtle Dissent

BEIT LAHIYA, Gaza Strip (AP) — The group of neighbors surveyed the destruction wreaked on their residential complex by Israeli bombardment, with building after building flattened or punctured by shells. The men then began to voice something almost never heard out loud in Gaza: criticism of its Hamas rulers. Exhausted by a month of pounding by Israel's military — on top of seven years of stifling closure of the tiny Mediterranean coastal strip — they questioned Hamas' handling of the crisis and the wisdom of repeatedly going to war with Israel. "We do not want to be bombarded every two or three years. We want to lead a good life: Sleep well, drink well and eat well," said Ziad Rizk, a 37-year-old father of two, a cigarette dangling from his mouth. He stared at the damaged apartment building where he lived. His sofa and a blue baby carriage were perched precariously on a tilting concrete slab that was his floor. It is impossible to say how widespread such discontent is among Gaza's 1.8 million residents. Under Hamas rule, it's rare and dangerous to share even as much as a hint of criticism of the government with outsiders. Still, the men's boldness in voicing their opinions could be a telling sign that some Gazans see Hamas as weakened. It points to how desperate many Gazans have become after the most ruinous of three bouts of major Hamas-Israel violence since the militant group overran the territory in 2007. More than 1,900 Palestinians have been killed, mostly civilians, nearly 10,000 wounded and some 250,000 displaced since fighting started July 8.

Wife: Williams Had Parkinson's Disease

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Robin Williams was in the early stages of Parkinson's disease at the time of his death, his wife said Thursday. In a statement, Susan Schneider said that Williams, 63, was struggling with depression, anxiety and the Parkinson's diagnosis when he died Monday in his Northern California home. Authorities said he committed suicide. "Robin's sobriety was intact and he was brave as he struggled with his own battles of depression, anxiety as well as early stages of Parkinson's disease, which he was not yet ready to share publicly," Schneider said. Schneider did not offer details on when the actor comedian had been diagnosed or his symptoms. The Marin County Sheriff's Department, which said Williams hanged himself, is conducting toxicology tests and interviews before issuing a final ruling.

Ukraine Vows To Block Russian Convoy

KAMENSK-SHAKHTINSKY, Russia (AP) — Raising the stakes in Ukraine's conflict, a Russian aid convoy of more than 200 trucks pushed up to the border on Thursday but then stopped, provocatively poised to cross into rebel-held territory. The Ukrainian government threatened to use all means available to block the convoy if the Red Cross was not allowed to inspect the cargo. Such an inspection would ease concerns that Russia could use the aid shipment as cover for a military incursion in support of the separatists, who have come under growing pressure from government troops. The United States has warned Russia that it needs to secure Ukraine's permission for the convoy to enter. "We've made that very clear to the Russians that they should not move these trucks in, without taking all of the steps the Ukrainian government has outlined," U.S. State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said Thursday. Amid the tensions surrounding the convoy, European Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso called Russian and Ukrainian leaders to arrange three-way consultations on ways to de-escalate the crisis. Barroso's office said that details will be worked out through diplomatic channels.

Liberia Faces Decisions With Ebola Drug

MONROVIA, Liberia (AP) — Liberian officials faced a difficult choice Thursday: deciding which handful of Ebola patients will receive an experimental drug that could prove life-saving, ineffective or even harmful. ZMapp, the untested Ebola drug, arrived in the West African country late Wednesday. A day later, no one had yet received the treatment, which officials said would go to three people. With more than 1,060 deaths and 1,975 sickened, the Ebola outbreak is already the deadliest ever. And the World Health Organization said Thursday that there is evidence those figures may "vastly underestimate the magnitude of the outbreak." The U.N. health agency said it was prepared for the crisis to continue for months. The outbreak, which was first identified in March in Guinea and since spread to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, has overwhelmed the already strained health systems in West Africa and raised questions about whether authorities are doing enough to respond.

Missouri HP Seizes Control Of Ferguson

Governor Orders Intervention After Days Of Protests

BY DAVID A. LIEB AND JIM SALTER
Associated Press

FERGUSON, Mo. — The Missouri Highway Patrol seized control of a St. Louis suburb Thursday, stripping local police of their law-enforcement authority after four days of clashes between officers in riot gear and furious crowds protesting the death of an unarmed black teen shot by an officer. The intervention, ordered by Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon, came as President Barack Obama spoke publicly for the first time about Saturday's fatal shooting of Michael Brown and the subsequent violence that shocked the nation and threatened to tear apart Ferguson, a town that is nearly 70 percent black patrolled by a nearly all-white police force. Obama said there was "no excuse" for violence either against the police or by officers against peaceful protesters. Nixon's promise to ease the deep racial tensions was swiftly put to the test as demonstrators gathered again Thursday evening in the neighborhood where looters smashed and burned businesses on Sunday and police repeatedly fired tear gas and smoke bombs. After a particularly violent Wednesday night, Nixon said Thursday that local police are no longer in charge of the area, although they would still be present. He said Highway Patrol Capt. Ron Johnson, who is black, would be in command. The change was meant to ensure "that we allow peaceful and appropriate protests, that we use force only when necessary, that we step back a little bit and let some of the energy be felt in this region appropriately," Nixon said. "Ferguson will not be defined as a community that was torn apart by violence but will be known as a community that pulled together to overcome it," the governor said at a news conference in the nearby community of Normandy. The governor was joined at a news conference by the white mayor of St. Louis and the region's four state representatives and the county executive, all of whom are black. Johnson said he grew up in the area and "it means a lot to me personally that we break this cycle of violence." He said he planned to keep heavily armored vehicles away from the scene and told his officers not to bring their tear gas masks. By late afternoon, Johnson was walking down the street with a group of more than 1,000 protesters as they chanted "Hands up, don't shoot," a reference to witness accounts that described Brown as having his hands in the air when the officer kept firing. Johnson planned to talk to the demonstrators throughout the night. "We're going to have some conversations with them and get an understanding of what's going on." Earlier Thursday, Obama appealed for "peace and calm" on the streets. "I know emotions are raw right now in Ferguson, and there are certainly passionate differences about what has happened," Obama said, speaking from the Massachusetts island where he's on a two-week vacation. "But let's remember that we're all part of one American family. We are united in common values, and that includes the belief in equality under the law, respect for public order and the right to peaceful public protests." St. Louis County police spokesman Brian Schellman said officers on Wednesday night tossed tear gas to disperse a large crowd of protesters after some threw Molotov cocktails and rocks at officers. More than 10 people were arrested in Ferguson. "In talking to these guys, it is scary," Schellman said of officers on the front



CHRISTIAN GOODEN/ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH/MCT
Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon, right, has given police oversight of the Ferguson situation to the Missouri State Highway Patrol under the command of Capt. Ronald S. Johnson, center, a Ferguson native. Nixon addressed questions from the press at the University of Missouri-St. Louis after touring areas of Ferguson Thursday.

lines of the protest. "They hear gunshots going off, and they don't know where they're coming from." Residents in Ferguson have complained about the police response that began soon after Brown's shooting with the use of dogs for crowd control — a tactic that for some evoked civil-rights protests from a half-century ago. The county police took over, leading both the investigation of Brown's shooting and the subsequent attempts to keep the peace at the request of the smaller city. County Police Chief Jon Belmar said his officers have responded with "an incredible amount of restraint" as they've had rocks and bottles thrown at them, been shot at and had two dozen patrol vehicles destroyed. The city and county are also under criticism for refusing to release the name of the officer who shot Brown, citing threats against that officer and others. The hacker group Anonymous on Thursday released a name purported to be that of the officer, but the Ferguson police chief said later that the name was incorrect. Twitter quickly suspended the Anonymous account that posted the officer's purported identity and personal information. The site's code of conduct strictly forbids the publication of private and confidential information without permission.

Iraq's al-Maliki Gives Up Post To Rival

BY SAMEER N. YACUB AND QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Embattled Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki announced late Thursday that he was relinquishing his post to his nominated replacement, ending a political deadlock that has plunged the country into uncertainty as it fights a Sunni militant insurgency. Standing alongside senior members of his party, including rival Haider al-Abadi, al-Maliki said he was stepping aside in favor of his "brother," in order to "facilitate the political process and government formation." Al-Maliki had been struggling for weeks to stay on for a third four-year term as prime minister amid an attempt by opponents to push him out, accusing him of monopolizing power and pursuing a fiercely pro-Shiite agenda that has alienated the Sunni minority. The United States, the U.N. and a broad array of political factions in Iraq had backed al-Abadi, saying only a new leader could unify a country under siege from Sunni extremists of the Islamic State group that have captured large swathes of Iraqi territory. Al-Maliki said his decision to throw his support behind

al-Abadi reflected a desire to "safeguard the high interests of the country," adding that he would not be the cause of any bloodshed. "My position is your trust in me, and no position is higher than your trust," he declared in a televised address. Al-Maliki's refusal to give up his position after eight years in power had provoked a political crisis that escalated this week in Baghdad, where armed guards patrolled most major bridges, intersections and roadways. The pressure intensified when his Shiite political alliance backed al-Abadi to replace him, and President Fouad Massoum nominated al-Abadi on Monday to form the next government. Al-Maliki refused to step aside, threatening legal action against the president for what he said was a violation of the constitution. But in a meeting of his party earlier Thursday, al-Maliki agreed to endorse al-Abadi as the next prime minister, two senior lawmakers from his State of Law parliamentary bloc — Hussein al-Maliki and Khalaf Abdul-Samad — told the Associated Press. The lawmakers said al-Maliki also agreed to drop a suit before the constitutional court challenging al-Abadi's nomination. The White House com-

mended al-Maliki for backing al-Abadi and expressed hope that the power shift "can set Iraq on a new path and unite its people" against the threat from Islamic militants, national security adviser Susan Rice said in a statement. The United Nations special representative for Iraq, Nickolay Mladenov, also welcomed the move, saying it "demonstrates statesmanship and a commitment to the democratic process and the constitution." Al-Maliki had grown increasingly isolated as he was deserted not only by his Shiite allies but also top ally Iran, the United States and the U.N.-backed al-Abadi, who has 30 days to put together a Cabinet for parliament's approval. The U.N. Security Council urged al-Abadi to work swiftly to form "an inclusive govern-

ment that represents all segments of the Iraqi population and that contributes to finding a viable and sustainable solution to the country's current challenges." Iraqis of all sects welcomed Thursday's announcement. "Now, all we want is a government that respects the people and does not discriminate against them," said Youssef Ibrahim, 40, a Sunni government employee in Baghdad. Adnan Hussein, 45, a Shiite in Sadr City, said he believes al-Maliki stepped down "because he came under enormous pressure and threat from inside and outside Iraq... The years he ruled were the worst in Iraq's history and he bears that responsibility."

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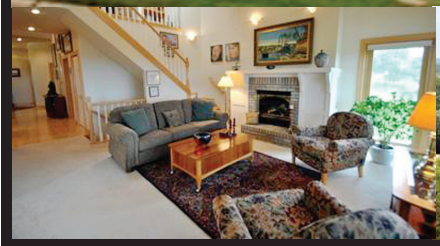


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