

Activists Say Syrian Troops Kill 100

BEIRUT (AP) — As government troops advanced on a village in northwestern Syria, activists say the terrified residents fled into a valley for fear of being arrested or worse. What happened next, one of the activists said, was “an organized massacre.”

The troops surrounded the valley and unleashed a barrage of rockets, tank shells, bombs and gunfire in an hours-long assault, according to two human rights groups and a witness, killing more than 100 people and leaving no survivors in one of the bloodiest days of a crackdown by President Bashar Assad against a nine-month popular uprising.

The White House said it was “deeply disturbed” by Tuesday’s attack, France called it a “murderous spiral,” and the Arab League reminded the Assad regime of its responsibilities to protect its civilians.

The United Nations says more than 5,000 people have died since March as Syria has sought to put down the uprising — part of the Arab Spring of protests that has toppled long-serving unpopular leaders in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

Members of Syria’s opposition said the bloodshed outside the village of Kfar Owaid, about 30 miles from the northern border with Turkey in Idlib province, was evidence of the authoritarian leader’s intent to intensify its crackdown on the uprising before Arab League observers arrive in the country Thursday. The death toll from two days of violence this week topped 200, including up to 70 army defectors killed near the city of Idlib, the activists said.

Soldiers Charged In Death Of Comrade

NEW YORK (AP) — Even before the Army sent him to Afghanistan, supporters say, Pvt. Daniel Chen was fighting a personal war.

Fellow soldiers at a base in Georgia teased him about his Chinese name, crying out “Chen!” in an exaggerated Asian accent. They called him “Jackie Chen,” a reference to the Hollywood action star Jackie Chan. People would ask him if he was Chinese, even though he was a native New Yorker.

At one point Chen wrote in his diary that he was running out of jokes to respond with.

Then he was sent overseas, and the hazing began: Soldiers dragged him across a floor, pelted him with stones and forced him to hold liquid in his mouth while hanging upside down, according to diary entries and other accounts cited by a community activist.

On Oct. 3, the 19-year-old Chen was found dead in a guardhouse in Afghanistan with what the Army said was apparently a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Gingrich Falls, Romney Strategy Working

KEENE, N.H. (AP) — The stars may be aligning for Mitt Romney — and at just the right time.

Four years after his failed White House bid, the former Massachusetts governor’s strategy in the 2012 Republican presidential race has long been premised on a respectable finish in the Jan. 3 Iowa caucuses followed by a decisive New Hampshire victory to drive momentum heading into South Carolina, Florida and beyond.

To be sure, no one has voted yet. The outcome in Iowa will shape the race, the contest has been mercurial and Romney still faces hurdles, not the least of which is his failure to become the chosen one in GOP circles after running for president for the better part of five years.

Still, his preferred scenario is looking more plausible now, thanks to Ron Paul’s helpful ascent, Newt Gingrich’s slide and fractures among conservatives who have not rallied behind an alternative to Romney. There’s a growing sense inside and outside of Romney’s campaign that his path to the nomination is clearer than it has been in weeks.

“Barring a tornado, things are starting to line up for Romney at the right time,” said Dave Roederer, an unaligned Republican who served as Sen. John McCain’s Iowa campaign chairman in 2008.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration pressed its concerns Wednesday with Egyptian officials over the ongoing violence and abuse of female demonstrators in Egypt.

The State Department said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton had spoken by phone a day earlier to Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal el-Ganzouri to register deep U.S. unease about the situation, particularly well-documented attacks on women participating in anti-military protests by security forces. The conversation came after Clinton earlier this week bluntly called the treatment of the women a “disgrace” that dishonored this year’s revolution that ended decades of repressive rule.

“It was a very productive call, all focused in the right direction,” State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said of the exchange between Clinton and Ganzouri. “She, obviously, said that she had been greatly concerned, and

FAA’s Rules Aim To Prevent Fatigued Pilots

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government told passenger airlines Wednesday they’ll have to do more to ensure pilots aren’t too tired to fly, nearly three years after the deadly western New York crash of a regional airliner flown by two exhausted pilots.

The Federal Aviation Administration’s update of airline pilot work rules, some of which dated to the 1960s, reflects a better understanding of the need for rest and how night shifts and traveling through time zones can increase errors.

“This is a big deal,” Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said. “This is as far as our government has ever gone” to protect the traveling public from pilot fatigue.

Carriers have two years to adapt to the new rules. The FAA estimated the cost to industry at \$297 million over 10 years, a fraction of the \$2 billion a year that an airline trade association had estimated the draft proposal released by FAA over a year ago would cost.

The airline industry had opposed the draft rule as too costly for the safety benefits it would achieve. But FAA officials made substantial changes to the final rule to lower the cost. Several expensive reporting and training requirements were eliminated.

Police Believe Missing Girl Killed 2 Months Ago

PHOENIX (AP) — Police now believe a 5-year-old Arizona girl missing for more than two months was killed and that her body was dumped in a trash bin across town before her mother reported her missing — the most substantive information detectives have released about what they think happened to the girl.

Police in the Phoenix suburb of Glendale stopped short of saying who they think killed Jhessye Shockley, but Glendale police Sgt. Brent Coombs reiterated Wednesday that the girl’s mother is the “No. 1 focus.”

“We’re in what we believed to be the worst-case scenario from the beginning,” Coombs said.

A month ago, detectives arrested Jhessye’s mother, Jerice Hunter, on a child abuse charge related to the girl, announcing at the time that they didn’t believe they’d find the girl alive.

Hunter was released from jail days later, and the charge against her was dropped. Prosecutors said at the time that they wanted further investigation and were worried that Hunter would not be eligible for a potential murder charge if she was convicted of abusing Shockley, a situation known as double jeopardy.

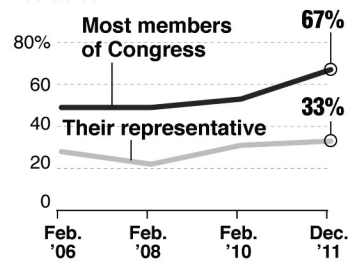
Obama To Boehner: Two-Month Tax Cut Is The Only Option

Who wins payroll taxcut battle?

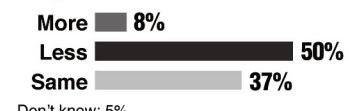
Congressional Republicans have a lot to lose in the turmoil over a Social Security tax cut and President Barack Obama may get a boost; what the polls say:

Voter frustration with Congress

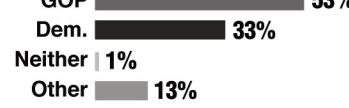
• Percent who don’t want to see reelected ...



• Compared to others, this Congress has accomplished:

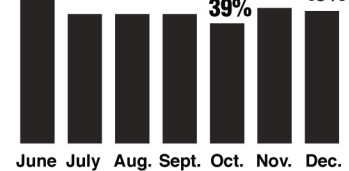


• Which party is more extreme?



Obama job approval inches up

From mid-month since June



Source: Gallup daily poll of 1,500 adults on Obama's job approval (three-day rolling average); margin of error: +/-3 percentage points; Pew Research Center poll of 1,521 adults, Dec. 7-11, 2011; margin of error: +/-3.5 percentage points. Graphic: Judy Treible © 2011 MCT

BY BEN FELLER
AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Careening toward a politically toxic tax hike, President Barack Obama implored House Speaker John Boehner on Wednesday to get behind a two-month stopgap until a longer deal could be struck early next year, calling it the only real way out of a mess that is threatening the paychecks of 160 million workers and isolating House Republicans.

In a weary Washington, the outreach accomplished little. All sides seemed to end the day where they began, with heavy political and economic consequences at stake.

Boehner remained insistent on a full-year extension of the existing payroll tax cut before Jan. 1, urging Obama to haul Senate Democrats back to town to talk to his chosen negotiators. “Let’s get this done today,” Boehner told Obama, according to a speaker’s aide, who required anonymity to characterize a private conversation.

But the Capitol was emptying out fast, and the Senate showed no inclination to return, having already passed a bipartisan two-month tax cut it thought had settled the matter.

For taxpayers, and for an economy starting to show some life again, the standoff was all holiday gloom.

Barring any action by Congress, Social Security payroll taxes will go up almost \$20 a week for a worker making a \$50,000 salary — that’s \$40 less for a typical paycheck or \$1,000 over the whole year. Almost 2 million people would lose unem-

ployment benefits as well.

The political risks seemed only to deepen, too, particularly for House Republicans. They appeared poised to take the biggest blame for a tax increase even while pushing for a deeper one.

The reliably conservative editorial page of The Wall Street Journal blasted both Boehner and Sen. Mitch McConnell, the GOP leader, for how they handled the matter. “The GOP leaders have somehow managed the remarkable feat of being blamed for opposing a one-year extension of a tax holiday that they are surely going to pass,” the paper’s editorial said.

In a year of legislative brinksmanship remarkable even by Washington standards, the latest fight spilled into the lap of Republican candidates running for president.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich chastised Congress, particularly the Senate, for failing to extend the 2 percentage point tax cut for a full year.

“They can’t figure out how to pass a one-year extension, so the Senate leaves town?” Gingrich remarked while campaigning in Iowa. “It’s an absurd dereliction of duty.”

Rival Mitt Romney refused to take a position, again steering clear of Washington’s hot policy debate.

“I’m not going to get into the back-and-forth on the congressional sausage-making process,” the former Massachusetts governor told reporters after events in New Hampshire. “I hope they’re able to sit down and work out a solution that works for the American people.”

But the White House made

clear the time for talks were over for this year.

“The negotiating has happened already,” presidential spokesman Jay Carney said, referring to the Senate bill the White House insists was sealed with Boehner’s blessing.

Boehner disputes that he ever gave a nod of support to the two-month tax cut that many in his caucus oppose.

He and other House members call it a poor and unworkable tax policy.

Obama also called the Senate’s Democratic leader, Harry Reid, and praised him for the bipartisan tax-cut bill with McConnell that passed the Senate.

Obama did most of the talking in his 10-minute call to Boehner.

The president made clear to Boehner that this was essentially his last legislative chance: There was no other option under consideration except the two-month tax bill, no surprise last-minute deal, and no real chance that Reid was calling the Senate back, according to an administration official who spoke anonymously to describe the private phone call.

From Boehner’s perspective, the only real progress was that Obama had shown engagement with the speaker that he had not in weeks, according to an aide who also spoke anonymously to describe internal thinking.

Obama for months has called for a year-long extension of the tax cut; he would prefer that it be deepened, too, although that idea never went anywhere in Congress. Obama reiterated to Boehner that he wants to work out a full-year deal with Congress but there is no time for that to be done right now.

U.S. Alarmed By Violence In Egypt

BY MATTHEW LEE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration pressed its concerns Wednesday with Egyptian officials over the ongoing violence and abuse of female demonstrators in Egypt.

The State Department said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton had spoken by phone a day earlier to Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal el-Ganzouri to register deep U.S. unease about the situation, particularly well-documented attacks on women participating in anti-military protests by security forces. The conversation came after Clinton earlier this week bluntly called the treatment of the women a “disgrace” that dishonored this year’s revolution that ended decades of repressive rule.

“It was a very productive call, all focused in the right direction,” State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said of the exchange between Clinton and Ganzouri. “She, obviously, said that she had been greatly concerned, and

particularly alarmed about the horrible images. And he was very clear that the Egyptian authorities want to see their security forces operate within the rule of law.”

As the elections continue, Clinton told Ganzouri that the U.S. wanted to see a “genuine inclusive democratic process” that respects the rights of all Egyptians, including women and minorities.

The attacks on the women came in fierce clashes beginning last week as troops broke up protests by activists demanding the immediate end to the rule of the military, which took power after the Feb. 11 fall of Hosni Mubarak. The clashes saw military police chasing young men and women through Tahrir Square and nearby streets, beating them with clubs and sticks. The crackdown has killed 14 protesters, mostly from gunshots.

In a speech Monday, Clinton decried the abuse, saying: “This systematic degradation of Egyptian women dishonors the revolution, dis-

graces the state and its uniform, and is not worthy of a great people,” she said.

Her comments were denounced as interference by some Egyptian officials, but Nuland rejected the characterization.

“People around the world will hear the United States speak out in defense of our values and in defense of our interests,” Nuland said. “The secretary of state is not shy on those subjects. We are going to speak out for the human rights of people around the world. We do not consider that interference.”

On Tuesday, some 10,000 women marched in central Cairo, demanding the military step down and expressing their anger over the abuse of female protesters by troops during the crackdown.

The military issued a statement expressing its regret but did not apologize for the brutality, which included pulling women by their hair, beating them with truncheons and stomping on them as they lay on the ground.

Closure

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will be closed entirely once the move is completed.

“To my knowledge, we are not currently working with a potential buyer,” he stated in an e-mail to the Press & Dakotan.

The USPS estimates a savings of \$1,089,432 over a 10-year period by closing Yankton’s downtown post office. That would result from savings in staffing, utilities, maintenance and transportation (between two facilities).

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