

EU Threatens New Sanctions On Syria

BEIRUT (AP) — The European Union will impose harsher sanctions on Syria, a senior EU official said Wednesday, as Russia tried to broker talks between the vice president and the opposition to calm violence. Activists reported at least 50 killed in the regime’s siege of the restive city of Homs.

Russia, a close ally of Syria, and the West are pushing down starkly different paths in trying to deal with Syria’s nearly 11 months of bloodshed. After blocking a Western and Arab attempt to bring U.N. pressure on President Bashar Assad to step down, Russia has launched a bid to show it can resolve the turmoil.

Moscow is calling for a combination of reforms by the regime and negotiations, without calling for Assad to go. Its provisions are so far finding no traction with the opposition, which dismisses promises of reform as empty gestures, refuses any negotiations while violence continues and says Assad’s removal is the only option in the crisis.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said outside forces should let Syrians settle their conflict “independently.”

“We should not act like a bull in a china shop,” Putin said, according to the ITAR-TASS news agency. “We have to give people a chance to make decisions about their destiny independently, to help, to give advice, to put limits somewhere so that the opposing sides would not have a chance to use arms, but not to interfere.”

Powell: Office Unhappy With Dispatcher

SEATTLE (AP) — A 911 recording reveals a social worker’s urgent attempts over more than six minutes to get a dispatcher to send deputies after Josh Powell locked himself and his two sons in his home.

The social worker tried repeatedly to relay the gravity of what was going on. Josh Powell was scheduled for a supervised visit with his sons Sunday, but he slammed the door in her face — then used a hatchet on his sons and torched the building in a gas-fueled inferno. All three were killed.

In the first minutes of the 911 call, the woman laid out the situation.

“Something really weird has happened. The kids went into the house and the parent — the biological parent — whose name is Josh Powell will not let me in the door. What should I do? ... I could hear one of the kids crying, and he still wouldn’t let me in.”

The social worker told the dispatcher she “was one step in back of (the boys). He shut the door right in my face.”

Calif. Investigators Find More Photos In Case

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Investigators said Wednesday they have found 200 additional photos they believe were taken by a former teacher who is accused of committing lewd acts on 23 children over a five-year period.

The photos were found late last week at the same pharmacy where a photo lab technician had first noticed odd pictures that led to Mark Berndt’s arrest, said sheriff’s Lt. Carlos Marquez. The recent discovery brings the total number of photos to roughly 600.

Many of the photos involve children already identified by authorities, but there may be other potential victims, Marquez said.

Berndt has been charged with lewd acts on children between 2005 and 2010. Some of the photos show children ages 6 to 10 blindfolded, their mouths taped and being fed a milky, white liquid authorities believe was semen. The new batch of photos depicts similar poses, Marquez said.

Berndt taught at Miramonte Elementary School, where the entire staff was replaced this week amid outrage from parents.

Child Tax Credit To Illegal Immigrants Targeted

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans are looking to deny child tax credits to illegal immigrants — refund checks averaging \$1,800 a family — in an effort that has roused anger among Hispanics and some Democratic lawmakers.

The proposal, which would require people who claim the federal credit to have Social Security numbers to prove they’re legal workers, is being offered as a way to help pay for extending the Social Security tax cut for most American wage-earners. It would trim federal spending by about \$10 billion over a decade.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada says the proposal unfairly goes after the children of poor Hispanic workers. Such kids often are U.S. citizens, even when their parents aren’t, because they were born in this country.

Says Leticia Miranda, senior policy adviser of the National Council of La Raza: “People who are making close to the minimum wage and are raising children in this country — and we’re asking them to pay for the payroll tax cut?” She says, “It’s outrageous and it’s crazy.”

On the other side, Republicans and some Democrats say what’s crazy is even having a debate over whether the government should be cutting checks to people who have sneaked into the country illegally. It’s hard to imagine there isn’t a healthy majority, even in the Democratic-controlled Senate, to stop the practice — if it’s actually brought to a vote.

Navy, Researchers Seek Clues To ID Shipwreck

WESTERLY, R.I. (AP) — For two centuries it rested a mile from shore, shrouded by a treacherous reef from the pleasure boaters and beachgoers who haunt New England’s southern coast.

Now, researchers from the U.S. Navy are hoping to confirm what the men who discovered the wreck believe: that the sunken ship off the coast of Rhode Island is the USS Revenge, commanded by Oliver Hazard Perry and lost on a stormy January day in 1811.

“The Revenge was forgotten, it became a footnote,” said Charlie Buffum, a brewery owner from Stonington, Conn., who found the shipwreck while diving with friend Craig Harger. “We are very confident this is it.”

On Wednesday Buffum and Harger braved the raw weather of Block Island Sound to accompany the researchers as they surveyed the wreck site. The Navy — along with help from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution — is using high-tech sensor equipment to locate artifacts that might prove the ship’s identity.

If they’re successful, they will illuminate a critical episode in the life of one of the nation’s greatest naval officers. Perry is remembered as the Hero of Lake Erie for defeating the British navy in the War of 1812. He was famous for reporting simply “we have met the enemy and they are ours” after the decisive Battle of Lake Erie in 1813.



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GOP Vows To Fight Birth Control Policy

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans vowed Wednesday to reverse President Barack Obama’s new policy on birth control, lambasting the rule that religious schools and hospitals must provide contraceptive coverage for their employees as an “unambiguous attack on religious freedom in our country.”

The White House pushed back in the face of a political firestorm, arguing that Obama was sensitive to the objections and looking for a way to allay the concerns. Democratic women lawmakers put up a united front in defending the administration.

“Women’s health care should not depend on who the boss is,” said Illinois Rep. Jan Schakowsky.

The fight over the administration mandate escalated as House Speaker John Boehner accused the administration of violating First Amendment rights and undermining some of the country’s most vital institutions, such as Catholic charities, schools and hospitals. He demanded that Obama rescind the policy or else Congress will.

“This attack by the federal government on religious freedom in our country cannot stand, and will not stand,” Boehner, a Catholic and Ohio Republican, said in a floor speech rare for the speaker.

The contentious issue has roiled the presidential race and angered religious groups, especially Catholics, who say the requirement would force them to violate church teachings and long-held beliefs against contraception.

It also has pushed social issues to the forefront in an election year that has been domi-

nated by the economy. Abortion, contraception and any of the requirements of Obama’s health care overhaul law have the potential to galvanize the Republicans’ conservative base, critical to voter turnout in the presidential and congressional races.

Clearly sensing a political opening, Republicans ramped up the criticism. Shortly after Boehner spoke, GOP senators gathered on the other side of the Capitol to hammer the administration and insist that they will push ahead with legislation to undo the requirement.

Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., called the new rule “an unprecedented affront to religious liberty. This is not a women’s rights issue. This is a religious liberty issue.”

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