

Bombers Target Israeli Diplomats At Two Sites

NEW DELHI (AP) — Israel blamed Iran on Monday for bomb attacks on its diplomats' cars in India and Georgia, heightening concerns that the Jewish state was moving closer to striking its archenemy.

Iran denied responsibility for the attacks that appeared to mirror the recent killings of Iranian nuclear scientists that Tehran blamed on Israel.

The blast in New Delhi set a car ablaze and injured four people, including an Israeli Embassy driver and a diplomat's wife; the device in Georgia was discovered and safely defused.

"Iran is behind these attacks and it is the largest terror exporter in the world," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told lawmakers from his Likud Party.

The violence added further tension to one of the globe's most contentious standoffs. Iran has been accused of developing a nuclear weapons program that Israel says threatens the existence of the Jewish state. Tehran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Greeks Clean Up Damage After Violent Riots

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Firefighters doused smoldering buildings and cleanup crews swept rubble from the streets of central Athens on Monday following a night of rioting during which lawmakers approved harsh new austerity measures demanded by bailout creditors to save the nation from bankruptcy.

Police said rioters destroyed or damaged more than 110 buildings, of which 50 were burned. They included nine listed as national heritage buildings, mostly in the neoclassical style, while 30 stores were looted.

Smoke still rose from the remains of a landmark 1870 building which had housed one of the capital's most loved cinemas, the Attikon, since 1916. About 100 people held a candle-light protest outside the gutted structure late Monday.

"Criminals targeted all that was best in the city of Athens, its neoclassical monuments," said Thanassis Davakis, cultural policy chief of the conservative New Democracy party, a coalition government partner. "The damage must be swiftly redressed and the city's memory restored."

The stench of tear gas still hung in the air on Monday, choking passers-by, while traffic lights at many major intersections were out after being smashed. The Athens municipality said cleanup crews had gathered an estimated 40 tons of broken marble and rocks from the streets of the center, while railings, drainage covers and paving stones from sidewalks also suffered extensive damage.

Activists Say Syria Rebels Repel Regime Attack

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian rebels repelled a push Monday by government tanks into a central town held by forces fighting President Bashar Assad's regime in an 11-month conflict that looks increasingly like a civil war.

The military pressed its offensive on Rastan a day after the regime rejected Arab League calls for the U.N. to create a peacekeeping force in Syria and for an end to the violent crackdown on dissent. Damascus called the League initiative "a flagrant interference in (Syria's) internal affairs and an infringement upon national sovereignty."

With diplomatic efforts bogged down, the conflict is taking on the dimensions of a civil war, with army defectors clashing almost daily with soldiers. The rebels have taken control of small swathes of territory in central Homs province, where Rastan is located, and the northwestern province of Idlib, which borders Turkey.

The Britain-based activist group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least three government soldiers were killed in the attempt to storm Rastan, which has been held by the rebels since late January.

"Troops maneuvered by moving on the northern edge of town, then other forces attacked from the south," said Rami Abdul-Rahman, who heads the Observatory. He said hundreds of army defectors were in control of Rastan.

Debate Over Arming Medevac Choppers Arises

BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan (AP) — It took a medevac unit 59 minutes to get U.S. Army Spec. Chazray Clark to a hospital in southern Afghanistan after receiving a call that a roadside bombing severed three of his limbs. Clark did not survive.

"I need something, please. It hurts," Clark, a 24-year-old combat engineer from Detroit, can be heard saying on a videotape as he waited in the dark for the helicopter.

But the rescue aircraft was unarmed, as are all Army medevacs. And the pre-dawn pickup zone in the Zhari district of Kandahar province was considered "hot," or dangerous, meaning the medevac could not swoop in for the pickup until another chopper with fire-power arrived to provide cover.

In Clark's case, the military says there was a delay in determining whether any armed escort helicopters already in the air could be diverted to the scene. It's unclear how long that lasted and whether it made a difference. Army officials said they could not disclose the time Clark died because of a policy not to reveal medical information about casualties.

About 20 U.S. lawmakers have written to military officials inquiring about the Sept. 18, 2011 incident, which has revived a debate over whether Army medevac helicopters should have their own guns.

Decision 2012

Romney Raps GOP Rivals' Government Backgrounds

BY BETH FOUHY  
Associated Press

SOUTH EL MONTE, Calif. — Republican Newt Gingrich on Monday dismissed calls to drop out of the presidential contest in order to set up a direct contest between rivals Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum. The former House speaker insisted that his ideas and a new determination to stay positive would help him once again resuscitate his flagging candidacy.

"I think my ideas are much bolder than Santorum or Romney's. I think my ideas are much clearer and more specific and I have to focus on communicating those ideas. Let's see how it plays out," Gingrich told reporters after addressing a Hispanic leadership event near Los Angeles. He is spending most of the week in California attending fundraisers.

Gingrich's comments came as the National Review, an influential conservative magazine, published an editorial calling on Gingrich to step aside and endorse Santorum, the former Pennsylvania senator who has recently surged in polls. Santorum himself suggested in an interview Sunday that he would like Gingrich to clear the way.

Gingrich called the National Review article "silly" and said he had no intention of abandoning the race. He noted that he had been counted out several times before in the presidential race but had rallied back each time.

"The National Review wanted me to drop out in June," Gingrich said, adding that he planned to revive his candidacy with policy speeches like the one he delivered Friday at a meeting of the Conservative Political Action Committee. The speech was well received, but Gingrich nonetheless placed third in the group's presidential straw poll.

Gingrich was riding high in polls before Iowa's kickoff caucuses Jan. 3, before Restore Our Future, a super PAC backing Romney's campaign, attacked him with negative ads casting him as a tainted Washington insider. The ads helped sink him to a weak fourth place finish there.

Gingrich came back to win a resounding victory in South Carolina's primary Jan. 21, at which time he urged Santorum to consider dropping out. But Romney's campaign, along with Restore Our Future, launched some \$15 million in negative ads against Gingrich in Florida, crushing his momentum. Romney won Florida's primary Jan. 31, and Gingrich has struggled to catch fire again while Santorum has surged.

Washington

Budget Draws Partisan Lines

BY ANDREW TAYLOR  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Taking a pass on reining in government growth, President Barack Obama unveiled a record \$3.8 trillion election-year budget plan Monday, calling for stimulus-style spending on roads and schools and tax hikes on the wealthy to help pay the costs. The ideas landed with a thud on Capitol Hill.

Though the Pentagon and a number of Cabinet agencies would get squeezed, Obama would leave the spiraling growth of health care programs for the elderly and the poor largely unchecked. The plan claims \$4 trillion in deficit savings over the coming decade, but most of it would be through tax increases Republicans oppose, lower war costs already in motion and budget cuts enacted last year in a debt pact with GOP lawmakers.

Many of the ideas in the White House plan for the 2013 budget year will be thrashed out during this year's election campaigns as the Republicans try to oust Obama from the White House and add Senate control to their command of the House.

"We can't just cut our way into growth," Obama said at a campaign-style rally at a community college in the vote-rich Northern Virginia suburbs. "We can cut back on the things that we don't need, but we also have to make sure that everyone is paying their fair share for the things that we do need."

Republicans were unimpressed. While the measure contains some savings to Medicare and Medicaid, generally by reducing payments to health providers, both programs would double in size over the coming decade.

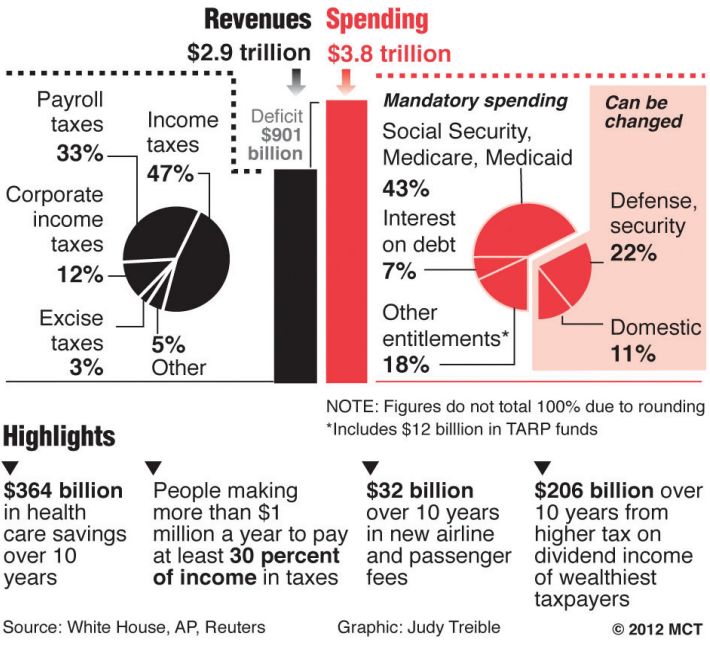
"It seems like the president has decided again to campaign instead of govern and that he's just going to duck this country's fiscal problems," said House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, R-Wis.

By the administration's reckoning, the deficit would drop to \$901 billion next year — still requiring the government to borrow 24 cents of every dollar it spends — and would settle in the \$600 billion-plus range by 2015. The deficit for the current budget year, which ends Sept. 30, would hit \$1.3 trillion, a near record and the fourth straight year of trillion-plus red ink.

Obama's budget blueprint reprises a long roster of prior proposals: raising taxes on couples making more than \$250,000 a year; eliminating numerous tax breaks for oil and gas companies, and approving a series of smaller tax and fee proposals. Similar proposals failed even when the Democrats controlled Congress.

Obama's 2013 budget

President Barack Obama's budget proposal of \$3.8 trillion projects a deficit below a trillion for the first time in five years.



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The Pentagon would cut purchases of Navy ships and F-35 Joint Strike Fighters — and trim 100,000 troops from its rolls over coming years — while NASA would scrap two missions to Mars.

But there are spending increases, too: The Obama plan seeks \$476 billion for transportation projects including roads, bridges and a much-criticized high-speed rail initiative. Grants for better performing schools would get a big increase under Obama's "Race to the Top" initiative, and there would be an \$8 billion fund to train community college students for high-growth industries.

Republicans accused the president of yet again failing to do anything meaningful to reduce deficits that could threaten the country with a European-style debt crisis

Authorities Say Houston Was Found Underwater In Tub

BY ANTHONY MCCARTNEY  
AP Entertainment Writer

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — Whitney Houston was underwater and apparently unconscious when she was pulled from a Beverly Hills hotel bathtub, and she had prescription drugs in her room, authorities said Monday.

The regal pop star's family made arrangements to fly her body home to New Jersey for a funeral at the end of the week.

Authorities said that there were no indications of foul play and no obvious signs of trauma on Houston's body but that it could be weeks before the coroner's office completes toxicology tests to establish the cause of death. The 48-year-old singer had struggled for years with cocaine, marijuana and pills, and her behavior had become erratic.

Houston was found underwater Saturday at the Beverly Hilton Hotel by a member of her staff about 3:30 p.m., hours before she was supposed to appear at a pre-Grammy Awards gala, police Lt. Mark Rosen said. She was pulled from the tub by members of her staff, and hotel security was promptly notified, Rosen said. She was pronounced



Houston

dead about a half-hour later.

"As of right now, it's not a criminal investigation," Rosen said, refusing to release further details. "We have concluded our portion of the investigation at the hotel."

Los Angeles coroner's assistant chief Ed Winter said there were bottles of prescription medicine in the room. He would not give details except to say: "There weren't a lot of prescription bottles. You probably have just as many prescription bottles in your medicine cabinet."

The coroner's office released the body to the family late Monday morning. Two people who spoke with Houston's family said the singer would be taken to New Jersey. The two, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak for the family, said Houston's family raised the possibility of a wake Thursday and a funeral Friday at Newark's Prudential Center, an arena that can seat about 18,000.

Houston was born in Newark and raised in nearby East Orange.

She began singing as a child at Newark's New Hope Baptist Church, where her mother, Grammy-winning gospel singer Cissy Houston, led the music program for many years.

The White House said President Barack Obama's thoughts and prayers were with Houston's family, especially her daughter. Press secretary Jay Carney paid tribute to the singer's "immense talent" and called it a tragedy to lose somebody so gifted at such a young age.

Houston's death is a sad rewind of what befell Michael Jackson and Amy Winehouse. It took three months for a London coroner to rule that Winehouse drank herself to death last July. A powerful anesthetic was quickly linked to Jackson's June 2009 death. Three months ago, Jackson's doctor was convicted of involuntary manslaughter.

Houston's death tinged the Grammy ceremonies with sadness. It also probably boosted viewership, which was 50 percent higher than last year, with nearly 40 million viewers tuning in to the program on CBS.

House GOP Offers Its Own Payroll Tax Plan

WASHINGTON (AP) — In an abrupt about-face, House GOP leaders announced Monday that they are willing to extend the two percentage point cut in the payroll tax through the end of the year and add the approximately \$100 billion cost to the nation's \$15 trillion-plus debt.

House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., and GOP Whip Kevin McCarthy of California said the House could vote on the payroll tax measure this week, but that the fate of unemployment benefits for millions of the long-term jobless and efforts to forestall a scheduled cuts in fees to doctors who treat Medicare patients would remain in the hands of a House-Senate negotiating panel that's looking for ways to pay for them.

The GOP statement came after intense talks this weekend failed to produce an agreement. Republicans were pressing for pay cuts for federal workers and requiring them to contribute more to their pensions.

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