

Syrian Opposition Rejects International Plan

BEIRUT (AP) — Syria's main opposition groups rejected on Sunday a new international plan that calls for a transitional government because the compromise agreement did not bar President Bashar Assad from participating.

Their reaction held out little hope for an end to more than 15 months of carnage on a day when the main opposition group said 800 people were killed in violence in the past week alone.

Opposition activists groups say more than 14,000 people have been killed since the uprising against President Bashar Assad's authoritarian rule began in March 2011, or on average about 900 a month. That would make last week's toll alone almost as high as the monthly average as government forces furiously pounded rebellious towns and cities with helicopters, tanks and artillery in an offensive aimed at recovering rebel-held territories.

World powers at a conference in Geneva on Saturday accepted a U.N.-brokered plan calling for creation of a transitional national unity government with full executive powers in Syria. But at Russia's insistence, the compromise agreement left the door open to Assad being part of the interim administration. It could also include members of Assad's government and the opposition and other groups. The transitional government would oversee the drafting of a new constitution and elections.

However Syria's fragmented opposition has long opposed any solution that involved negotiating with Assad or allowing him to cling to power.

GOP: Voters Will Decide Health Care Reform

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican congressional leaders said Sunday that voters — not the Supreme Court — will have the final word on President Barack Obama's health care law come November. And they are betting that the law's unpopularity will be enough to drive Democrats from power.

The White House's response? Bring it on.

"We've got one last chance here to beat Obamacare, and we can do that in the November election," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, calling the law the "single worst piece of legislation" passed in modern times.

White House chief of staff Jack Lew countered that he believes most Americans want to put the health care debate to rest.

"I actually think the American people want us to focus on the economy, on creating jobs and moving forward," said Lew.

Mexican Voters Poised For Ruling Change

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's voters appeared poised to bring the old guard back to power on Sunday, a dozen years after the former ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party lost the presidential seat it held for more than seven decades in a contest that proved the country was finally a democracy.

The party known as the PRI, led by telegenic former Mexico State Gov. Enrique Pena Nieto, has held a strong lead throughout the campaign, and also appears likely to retake at least a plurality in the two houses of Congress.

The party has been bolstered by voter fatigue with a sluggish economy and the sharp escalation of a drug war that has killed roughly 50,000 Mexicans over the past six years. The desire for change suddenly works to benefit the PRI, which ran Mexico from 1929 to 2000.

Hoping for an upset are leftist Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, whose narrow loss in Mexico's last election led to charges of voter fraud and weeks of massive protests, and the candidate of the ruling National Action Party, Josefina Vazquez Mota, the first woman ever nominated for the presidency by a major party in Mexico.

It would be a once-unthinkable comeback for the PRI, which many believed was doomed after its 2000 loss and which was still reeling in the last presidential election, when it finished a weak third.

Hong Kong Protests As New Leader Sworn In

HONG KONG (AP) — A pro-democracy heckler interrupted a speech by Chinese President Hu Jintao at the swearing-in of Hong Kong's new leader Sunday and tens of thousands of residents marched to protest Chinese rule on the 15th anniversary of the Asian financial hub's return to Beijing's control.

The outpouring of discontent underscored rising tensions between the Communist mainland and the vibrant city of 7 million that was returned to China in 1997 after more than a century of British colonial rule. While much of the discontent revolves around growing economic inequality and stunted democratic development, Hong Kongers are also upset over what they see as arrogant Chinese behavior — wealthy mainlanders taking over retail outlets during flashy Hong Kong shopping trips, for example, or even the choice of language during Sunday's swearing-in ceremony, Beijing-accented Mandarin instead of the Cantonese dialect spoken locally.

In the ceremony, self-made millionaire Leung Chun-ying, 57, became Hong Kong's third chief executive after Donald Tsang and Tung Chee-hwa. He has promised to address Hong Kongers' economic needs, including skyrocketing housing prices, which many blame on deep-pocketed mainland apartment buyers.

A demonstrator who tried to interrupt Hu as he began his address was bundled away by security officials. The man, one of the guests invited to the inauguration, waved a small flag and yelled slogans calling for China's leaders to condemn the brutal June 4, 1989, crackdown on protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. He also called for an end to one-party rule in China. Hu took no notice and continued to read his speech, but the incident marred what was supposed to be a carefully orchestrated visit emphasizing strengthened ties between Hong Kong and mainland China.

Leung, a police officer's son, replaces career bureaucrat Tsang, who took office in 2005 and is barred from another term.

'Ted' Outstrips 'Mike' At Weekend Box Office

LOS ANGELES (AP) — It's both a bear and bull market for Hollywood.

The bear is "Ted," Mark Wahlberg and Seth MacFarlane's comedy for Universal Pictures about a talking teddy bear, which opened as the No. 1 movie with \$54.1 million, according to studio estimates Sunday.

And the bulls are baring it in the Warner Bros. release "Magic Mike," Channing Tatum and Steven Soderbergh's male-stripper tale that debuted a strong No. 2 with \$39.2 million.

The two new movies were backed by a deep bench, with Pixar Animation's Disney fairy tale "Brave" holding up well at No. 3 with \$34 million in its second weekend. "Tyler Perry's Madea's Witness Protection," the latest from the dependable breadwinner for Lionsgate Films, opened solidly at No. 4 with \$26.4 million.

The four movies combined to keep Hollywood in the money compared to the same weekend last year, when "Transformers: Dark of the Moon" launched with \$97.9 million.

Famed Civil Rights Prosecutor Dies

BRANDON, Miss. (AP) — Jack Brooks Lacy Jr., who as an assistant U.S. attorney led the first federal murder prosecution in a civil rights-era killing, has died. He was 69.

Lacy died Friday of a single bullet to the head, Rankin County Coroner Jimmy Roberts said. He said he would not have the autopsy report until Monday, but suspects suicide.

Lacy was known for his work in the 2003 conviction of former Ku Klux Klansman Ernest Avants for aiding and abetting the murder of black sharecropper Ben Chester White on federal property. Prosecutors said White, 67, was killed in the Homochitto National Forest in 1966 in an attempt to lure Martin Luther King Jr. to southwest Mississippi for assassination.

After his federal work, Lacy became assistant state attorney general for the Mississippi Band of Choctaws.

"Jack had an undying commitment to doing what was right as a public servant," John Dowdy, criminal division chief for the U.S. Attorney's Office told WAPT-TV.

"His passion over the years became serving for the betterment of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. He will be sorely missed, no question," Dowdy told *The Clarion-Ledger*.



Residents show their support for firefighters in Colorado Springs, Colo., on Saturday. Officials say progress was made this weekend against a 26-square-mile wildfire that started June 23.

Western Wildfires

'Unreal': Residents Tour Colo. Blaze Devastation

BY MEAD GRUVER
Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Melted bowling balls in the front yard were among the strange sights that met C.J. Moore upon her return Sunday to her two-story home, now reduced to ashes by the worst wildfire in Colorado history.

"You wouldn't think bowling balls would melt," she told The Associated Press by phone from the scene in her Mountain Shadows neighborhood, where she was among residents who were allowed temporary visits to areas most affected by the fire.

More than a week after it sparked on June 23, the Waldo Canyon fire was still being attacked by some 1,500 personnel. But crews working grueling shifts through the hot weekend made progress against the 26-square-mile fire, and authorities said they were confident they finally had built good fire lines in many areas to stop the spread of the flames.

So far, the blaze, now 45 percent contained, has damaged or destroyed nearly 350 homes.

It was just one of several still burning in the West, where parched conditions and searing heat contributed to the woes facing crews on hundreds of square miles across Utah, Montana, Wyoming and Idaho.

In Colorado Springs, a line of cars a mile long queued up at a middle school checkpoint, where police checked the identification of returning residents and handed them water bottles.

on. You know, we're good to go. We're feeling pretty happy about it at the moment," Simmons said by phone. "We're feeling pretty sad for our neighbors and pretty lucky for ourselves. It's been a real sobering experience."

Authorities said they would lift more evacuation orders Sunday night, bringing the total number of people who remain blocked from their homes down to 3,000 from more than 30,000 at the peak of the fire.

Rich Harvey, incident commander for Waldo Canyon, said crews continue to make good progress.

"We're cautiously optimistic," he said Sunday morning. "We still remain focused on things that could go wrong."

Authorities are still trying to determine the cause of the fire, which so far has cost \$8.8 million to battle. Dangerous conditions had kept them from beginning their inquiry, but investigators were able to start their work on Saturday.

More than 150 National Guard soldiers and airmen helped Colorado Springs police staff roadblocks and patrol streets.

A "bear invasion" confronted a few mountain enclaves west of Colorado Springs. The scent of trash had enticed black bears pushed out of their usual forest habitat by fire.

People who left in a hurry didn't take typical precautions to secure household trash against wildlife, said El Paso County Sheriff's Lt. Jeff Kramer.

"So that's become an attraction for the bears," Kramer said.

Among the fires elsewhere in the West:

— Utah: Fire commanders say Utah's largest wildfire has consumed more than 150 square miles and shows no sign of burning itself out. Hundreds of firefighters are trying to hold the Clay Springs fire from advancing on the ranching towns of Scipio and Mills on the edge of Utah's west desert. The fire has destroyed one summer home and threatens 75 others. The fire was 48 percent contained on Sunday.

— Montana: Crews in eastern Montana strengthened fire lines overnight on a 246-square-mile complex of blazes burning about 10 miles west of Lamar. More than 500 firefighters are now at the lightning-caused fires that started Monday and have destroyed more than 30 structures.

— Wyoming: A wind-driven wildfire in a sparsely populated area of southeastern Wyoming was burning across more than 100 square miles.

— Idaho: Firefighters in eastern Idaho had the 1,038-acre Charlotte fire 80 percent contained Sunday but remained cautious with a forecast of high winds and hot temperatures that could put hundreds of homes at risk.

— Colorado: The last evacuees from the High Park Fire in northern Colorado have been allowed to return home as crews fully contained the blaze. The 136-square-mile fire killed one resident and destroyed 259 houses, a state record until the fire near Colorado Springs.

Fed Judge Temporarily Blocks Miss. Abortion Law

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — A federal judge on Sunday temporarily blocked enforcement of a Mississippi law that could shut down the only abortion clinic in the state.

U.S. District Judge Daniel P. Jordan in Jackson issued a temporary restraining order the day the new law took effect.

He set a July 11 hearing to determine whether to block the law for a longer time.

"Though the debate over abortion continues, there exists legal precedent the court must follow," Jordan wrote.

The law requires anyone performing abortions at the state's only clinic to be an OB-GYN with privileges to admit patients to a local hospital. Such privileges can be difficult to obtain, and the clinic contends the mandate is designed to put it out of business. A clinic spokeswoman, Betty Thompson, has said the two physicians who do abortions there are OB-GYNs who travel from other states.

The clinic, Jackson Women's Health Organization, filed a lawsuit seeking to block it. The suit says the admitting privileges requirement is not medically necessary and is designed to put the clinic out of business.

If Jackson Women's Health Organization closes, Mississippi would be the only state without an abortion clinic.

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