

Eight People Hit With New EU Sanctions

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union targeted Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle for the first time Wednesday for the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine, subjecting three of his long-time associates to EU-wide asset freezes and travel bans.

A total of eight people were added to the EU's sanctions list for allegedly undermining Ukraine's sovereignty or profiting from Moscow's takeover of Crimea, the EU's Official Journal showed. Three companies were also black-listed.

Among the individuals was Arkady Rotenberg, Putin's former judo partner and a major shareholder of the civil engineering company Giprottransmost. The company has received a public contract to conduct a study on building a bridge from Russia to Crimea, the EU said.

Also targeted was Yuri Kovalchuk, a longtime Putin acquaintance identified by the EU as co-founder of the Ozero Dacha, a cooperative society bringing together influential individuals around Russia's president. Kovalchuk is also the chairman and largest shareholder of Bank Rossiya, which has opened branches in Crimea since its unilateral annexation by Russia.

The third Putin ally on the sanctions list was Nikolai Shamalov, another Ozero Dacha co-founder and the second largest shareholder in Bank Rossiya.

Experts Kept Back By Fighting

DONETSK, Ukraine (AP) — Almost two weeks after Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was blown out of the sky, the remains of some passengers are feared rotting in the 90-degree (32-degree Celsius) midsummer heat, deepening the frustration of relatives desperate to recover the bodies of their loved ones.

Fighting between Ukrainian forces and separatist rebels has kept away international police charged with securing the site, a sprawling area of farmland and villages. And until it's secured, there is no way for forensic experts to gather up any remaining bodies or collect debris for analysis.

Even the rebels — who initially oversaw the collection of more than 200 of the 298 bodies in a disorganized, widely criticized effort — have stopped their work, saying attacks from the Ukrainian military have forced them to focus on defending themselves.

It remains unclear exactly how many bodies remain and what condition they are in after being exposed for so long to the elements. Dutch officials are adamant there are still bodies to be recovered, and Prime Minister Mark Rutte has said repeatedly that bringing them back is his government's top priority.

But Dutch officials were gloomy Wednesday about the prospects of reaching the site any time soon.

Measure To Overhaul VA Approved

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House overwhelmingly approved a landmark bill Wednesday to refurbish the Veterans Affairs Department and improve veterans' health care.

The 420-5 vote sends the bill to the Senate, where approval is expected by Friday.

The \$16.3 billion measure is intended help veterans avoid long waits for health care, hire more doctors and nurses to treat them and make firing senior executives at the VA easier.

The measure includes \$10 billion in emergency spending to help veterans who can't get prompt appointments with VA doctors to obtain outside care; \$5 billion to hire doctors, nurses and other medical staff and about \$1.3 billion to lease 27 new clinics across the country.

The House vote came one day after the Senate confirmed former Procter & Gamble CEO Robert McDonald to lead the sprawling agency, which provides health care to nearly 9 million enrolled veterans and disability compensation to nearly 4 million veterans.

Vets Cleanup Eases Toward Passage

WASHINGTON (AP) — Eager to begin a monthlong break, Congress leavened its customary heavy partisanship on Wednesday with a pinch of compromise, advancing legislation to repair the deeply troubled Department of Veterans Affairs and working to clear funds for highway construction at home and missile defense in Israel.

Yet old habits proved unbreakable less than 100 days before elections with control of Congress at stake. House Republicans hastened to authorize an official lawsuit accusing President Barack Obama of failing to enforce the health care law. And gridlock loomed on the administration's call for billions to cope with a surge in young immigrants pouring into the U.S. illegally from Central America.

"Stop being mad all the time. Stop just hating all the time," Obama lectured lawmakers from afar in Kansas City, Missouri, in a speech that was particularly harsh on Republicans. "Come on. Let's get some work done together."

There was a modest amount of progress on compromise legislation during the day, and hopes in both parties for considerably more before a scheduled adjournment on Thursday.

On a vote of 420-5, the House overwhelmingly approved a compromise bill to clean up the scandal-soiled VA, where some officials are accused of covering up long delays in patient care. The \$16.3 billion measure would allow veterans to get outside care if they live too far from a VA health facility or face a delay of longer than 30 days in getting an appointment.

Boy, 8, Dies After Being Hit By Bullet

DETROIT (AP) — Sporadic gunfire isn't an unusual sound in the Brewster Homes public housing complex in Detroit, but booming noises that shook Tenesha Higgins early Wednesday morning were way too close.

Numerous shots were fired at an apartment building, with one piercing a wall and hitting an 8-year-old boy who was sleeping. The child — who Higgins described as a "good boy" who loved playing baseball — died 45 minutes later.

"I haven't been to sleep. I don't feel safe at all. I didn't go to work today. I didn't want to leave my baby," Higgins told *The Associated Press* as she and other women huddled together hours after another night of violence in a city struggling mightily to reduce its crime rate.

The boy's name wasn't released by police, but *The Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press* identified him as Jakari Pearson.

No arrests were made, but police were speaking with a "person of interest" in the case, Detroit Police Officer Adam Madera said.

Deadly Israeli Strikes Hit UN School, Market Area

BY KARIN LAUB AND TIA GOLDENBERG
Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Israeli artillery shells tore through the walls of a U.N. school crowded with sleeping war refugees and back-to-back explosions rocked a market filled with shoppers Wednesday as Israel's stepped up campaign against Gaza's Hamas rulers claimed at least 116 Palestinian lives.

After the strikes near the shopping area in Gaza City, bodies lay scattered in the streets as the wounded screamed for help. "Where is the ambulance?" one man moaned as he lay on the blood-soaked ground.

Some 3,300 Gazans seeking refuge from the fighting had been crammed into the U.N. school at the Jebaliya refugee camp when a series of Israeli artillery shells hit before daybreak, turning a classroom where families had been sleeping into a tragic scene of bloodied clothing, bedding and debris.

Assad Sabah said he and his five children were huddled under desks because of the constant sound of tank fire throughout the night when suddenly mayhem struck. "We were scared to death," he said. "After 4:30 a.m., tanks started firing more. Three explosions shook the school. One classroom collapsed over the head of the people who were inside."

Palestinian health officials said at least 17 people were killed and 90 wounded in the school attack — the latest in a series of strikes the United Nations says has hit U.N. facilities that are supposed to be safe zones in the 23-day-old war.

"Where will we go next?" wailed 56-year-old Aishe Abu Darabeh, sitting dazed outside a classroom after the shelling. "We fled and they are following us."

Israel's military said no U.N. facility had been intentionally targeted during Wednesday's operation, but troops had responded to Hamas mortar fire directed at Israeli soldiers near the school.

However, the chief of the



CAROLYN COLE/LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT
Palestinian children in Gaza City pick up fliers dropped by Israeli forces on Wednesday.

U.N. aid agency for Palestinian refugees expressed "anger and indignation" at Israeli forces firing toward a U.N. facility even after being told 17 times, including just hours before the shelling attack, that it was filled with civilians.

"Enough is enough," Pierre Kraehenbuehl told *The Associated Press*, noting that six U.N. schools have been hit since the fighting began.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called the school shelling "outrageous" and "unjustifiable," and demanded an immediate humanitarian cease-fire.

"Nothing is more shameful than attacking sleeping children," the U.N. chief said.

At least 116 Palestinians were killed Wednesday, including 16 in the shopping area, while the overall Palestinian death toll since July 8 climbed to 1,361, said Palestinian health official Ashraf al-Kidra.

The Israeli military said three of its soldiers were killed when a booby-trapped house collapsed after they identified an entrance to a Hamas tunnel inside. In all, 56 soldiers have been killed, as well as two Israeli civilians and a Thai citizen.

Wednesday marked a second day of particularly heavy Israeli air and artillery attacks, at a time when Egyptian cease-fire efforts appeared to be stalling. Israeli media said late Wednesday that Israel's Security Cabinet decided to press forward with the operation.

Egyptian officials, meanwhile, met with an Israeli envoy about Israel's

conditions for a cease-fire, including disarming Hamas, according to a high-ranking Egyptian security official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not allowed to discuss the delicate diplomatic efforts.

Hamas has said it will only halt fire once it receives guarantees that the Gaza border blockade by Israel and Egypt will be lifted. Rejecting calls for an unconditional cease-fire, Hamas has fired dozens of rockets at Israel each day.

Israel, in turn, has said its forces will stay in Gaza at least until they complete the demolition of more than 30 Hamas military tunnels used for launching attacks on Israel. Brig. Gen. Mickey Adelstein, commander of the Gaza Regional Division, said two-thirds had been destroyed and that it will take "a few more days" to destroy the rest.

Israel says it wants to decimate Hamas' rocket-launching capability, diminish its weapons arsenal and demolish the tunnels. It has launched more than 4,000 strikes against Hamas-linked targets, including rocket launchers and mosques where it says weapons were stored.

Israeli strikes have also hit dozens of homes. Mahmoud Abu Rahma of the Palestinian human rights group Al Mezan said nearly half of the Palestinians killed so far died in their homes.

Israeli officials have accused Hamas of using Gaza's civilians as human shields by firing rockets from crowded neighborhoods and putting

them at risk in the event of an Israeli counterstrike.

However, Kraehenbuehl, the U.N. official, said Israel must try harder to ensure that civilians are not hurt, especially in Gaza where 1.7 million people are squeezed into a small coastal territory. His agency has opened 80 of its schools to more than 200,000 Gazans fleeing the violence.

"What maybe the world forgets ... is that the people of Gaza have nowhere to go," he said. "So when the fighting starts and they move, it is not as if they can cross a border to somewhere."

Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Palmor called Wednesday's deaths at the U.N. school "tragic," but blamed "Hamas's criminal entrenchment within civilian populations and its frenzy to wage war within civilian establishments."

He noted that Kraehenbuehl's U.N. agency has issued three statements about finding weapons in empty schools, presumably stashed there by militants.

Kraehenbuehl said the attempt by militants to use the schools is unacceptable, and that the U.N. agency has been transparent about the discoveries.

The White House also condemned the deadly school shelling.

The Obama administration is "extremely concerned" that thousands of Palestinians aren't safe in U.N.-designated shelters, White House spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan said.

The mortar shells that struck the U.N. school were fired from a distance of some 200 yards (meters), said an Israeli military official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Hours later, Israeli artillery fire hit a crowded shopping area in the Shijaiyah district in Gaza City, killing 16 people and wounding more than 200 others, Gaza health officials said.

"People were in the street and in the market, mostly women and kids. Suddenly more than 10 shells landed," said Salim Qadoun, 26, who witnessed the strike.

GOP-led House Gives Lawsuit The Go-Ahead

BY ALAN FRAM
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A sharply divided House approved a Republican plan Wednesday to launch a campaign-season lawsuit against President Barack Obama, accusing him of exceeding the bounds of his constitutional authority. Obama and other Democrats derided the effort as a stunt aimed at tossing political red meat to conservative voters.

Just a day before lawmakers were to begin a five-week summer recess, debate over the proposed lawsuit underscored the harshly partisan tone that has dominated the current Congress almost from its start in January 2013.

The vote to sue Obama was 225 to 201. Five conservative Republicans voted with Democrats in opposing the lawsuit. No Democrats voted for it.

Republicans said the legal action, focusing on Obama's implementation of his prized health care overhaul, was designed to prevent a further presidential power grab and his deciding unilaterally how to enforce laws.

"Are you willing to let any president choose what laws to execute and what laws to change?" asked House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio.

The Republicans also scoffed at Democratic claims that the lawsuit would be a waste of taxpayers' money.

"What price do you place on the continuation of our system of checks and balances? What price do you put on the Constitution of the United States?" said Rep. Candice Miller of Michigan. "My answer to each is 'priceless.'"

However, Democrats said the lawsuit would go nowhere and was designed only to encourage conservatives to vote in this November's congressional elections. They also warned repeatedly that it could be a precursor of a more drastic

GOP effort. Said Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-N.Y.: "The lawsuit is a drumbeat pushing members of the Republican Party to impeachment."

Congressional lawsuits against presidents are rare. In 2008, a federal judge backed a suit by Democrats who then controlled the House and were trying to force the Bush administration to honor House subpoenas of senior White House officials. Though the House won the first round in court, that decision was under appeal when a settlement was reached and the lawsuit was dropped.

On Wednesday, neither side wasted time in using the fight to mine campaign contributions and line up support for their candidates.

House Democrats emailed one fundraising solicitation as debate was underway and another moments after the vote, with one saying, "The GOP is chomping at the bit to impeach the president." And White House Senior Adviser Dan Pfeiffer emailed supporters, saying, "This is the least productive Congress in decades. And instead of doing their job, they are suing the president for doing his."

The Republican Party also went to work. An email called the House vote a "huge step" in curbing Obama and added, "Contribute right now to end Obama's executive overreach by expanding our Republican majority in the House and gaining a majority in the Senate."

Though the vote was almost entirely along party lines, five conservative GOP lawmakers opposed the lawsuit: Reps. Paul Brown of Georgia, Scott Garrett of New Jersey, Walter Jones of North Carolina, Thomas Massie of Kentucky and Steve Stockman of Texas.

Some prominent conservatives including former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin have called for Obama's impeachment, and some

House GOP lawmakers have not ruled it out. Boehner has said he has no such plans and has called Democratic impeachment talk a "scam" to raise money.

On the road in Kansas City, Missouri, Obama cast the lawsuit as a "political stunt" and a distraction from the public's priorities.

"Every vote they're taking like that means a vote they're not taking to actually help you," he told his audience. He urged Republicans to "stop just hating all the time."

By suing Obama to demand that he carry out specific provisions of the 2010 health care overhaul, House Republicans would be asking the courts to hold him to the letter of a law that they all opposed and that the House has voted over 50 times to dismantle.

Republicans have accused Obama of exceeding his powers in a range of areas, saying he has enforced provisions he likes and ignored others.

These include not notifying Congress before releasing five Taliban members from the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in exchange for captive Army Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, blocking the deportation of some children who are in the U.S. illegally and waiving some provisions of the No Child Left Behind education law.

Democrats say Obama has acted legally and has simply used the authority he has as chief executive.

Republicans have not laid out a timetable for actually filing the suit.

As for its chances of legal success, federal courts are often reluctant to intervene in disputes between the executive and legislative branches. For the suit to survive, the GOP would first have to prove that the House had been injured by Obama's actions. And even if the lawsuit was heard, it is unclear whether it could be decided while Obama was still in office.

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