

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Israeli Prime Minister Defends Gaza Blockade

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected international criticism of a deadly raid against a flotilla carrying aid to Gaza earlier this week, saying Wednesday the blockade of the Palestinian territory is needed to prevent missile attacks against Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

The comments came hours after all remaining pro-Palestinians activists from the aid ships were sent to Ben-Gurion airport near Tel Aviv to be deported. Three ambulance planes heading to Turkey were the first to take off, with four other planes ready to embark, Israeli officials said.

In all, 527 activists were being deported by air, Interior ministry spokeswoman Sabine Haddad said, and seven wounded activists were remaining behind in Israeli hospitals.

About a dozen female activists scuffled with security officers at the airport but were quickly subdued by authorities, Israeli officials said. Officials said no charges would be filed and the women were to be deported as planned.

Israel has come under harsh international condemnation after its commandos stormed a six-ship aid flotilla Monday in international waters, setting off clashes that killed nine activists and wounded dozens. About 700 activists — including 400 Turks — were trying to break the three-year-old Israeli naval blockade of the Gaza Strip by bringing in 10,000 tons of aid.

Taxi Driver Kills 12, Wounds 25 During Spree

SEASCALE, England (AP) — A taxi driver drove his vehicle on a shooting spree across a tranquil stretch of northwest England on Wednesday, methodically killing 12 people and wounding 25 others before turning the gun on himself, officials said.

The rampage in the county of Cumbria was Britain's deadliest mass shooting since 1996 and it jolted a country where handguns are banned and multiple shootings rare.

The body of the suspected gunman, 52-year-old Derrick Bird, was found in woods near Boot, a hamlet popular with hikers and vacationers in England's hilly, scenic Lake District. Police said two weapons were recovered from the scene.

Eight of the wounded were in the hospital, with three of them in critical condition. Queen Elizabeth II, who rarely issues statements responding to the news, said she shared in "the grief and horror of the whole country" and passed on her sympathy to the families of the victims.

The shootings had "shocked the people of Cumbria and around the country to the core," Police Deputy Chief Constable Stuart Hyde said.

AT&T To Limit Data For Smart Phone Users

NEW YORK (AP) — Just in time for the release of a new iPhone, AT&T will stop letting new customers sign up for its unlimited Internet data plan for smart phones and iPads and charge more for users who hog the most bandwidth.

AT&T hopes to ease congestion on its network, which has drawn complaints, particularly in big cities. But the approach could confuse customers unfamiliar with how much data it takes to watch a YouTube video or fire up a favorite app.

Current subscribers will be able to keep their \$30-per-month unlimited plans, even if they renew their contracts. But starting Monday, new customers will have to choose one of two new data plans for all smart phones, including iPhones and BlackBerrys.

Subscribers who use little data — like those who may get dozens of e-mails a day but don't watch much video — will pay slightly less every month than they do now, while heavy users will be dinged with higher bills.

The move takes effect in time for the expected unveiling of Apple's new iPhone next week. Analysts said they expect other phone companies to follow. With no caps on consumption, data use could swamp wireless networks while revenue for the operators remains flat.

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U.N. Criticism Not Likely To Stop CIA Drone Strikes

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government's covert program using unmanned drones to strike at terrorists inside Pakistan is not likely to stop or change, despite new criticism from a U.N. human rights expert.

U.S. officials insist the CIA program has been an effective tool to take out insurgents along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, particularly those hidden beyond the reach of the military. The stepped-up use of drones over the past year has shown no signs of slowing down and was credited earlier this week with the killing inside Pakistan of al-Qaida's third in command.

The Obama administration does not acknowledge the secret program, but one senior U.S. official defended its use Wednesday, saying a careful and rigorous targeting process is used to avoid civilian casualties. The official, who is familiar with the operation, spoke on condition of anonymity because the program is classified.

The program, which officials say has killed hundreds of insurgents in dozens of strikes over the past year, has been condemned by critics who say it may constitute illegal assassinations and violate international law. They argue that intelligence officers conducting the strikes could be at risk of prosecution for murder in foreign countries.

In a 29-page report released Wednesday, Philip Alston, the independent U.N. investigator on extrajudicial killings, called on countries to lay out rules and safeguards for carrying out the strikes, publish figures on civilian

casualties and prove they have attempted to capture or incapacitate suspects without killing them.

"Unlike a state's armed forces, its intelligence agents do not generally operate within a framework which places appropriate emphasis upon ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law, rendering violations more likely and causing a higher risk of prosecution both for war crimes and for violations of the laws of the state in which any killing occurs," wrote Alston, a New York University professor.

The report to the U.N. Human Rights Council puts unwanted scrutiny on the intelligence operations of the United States, Israel and Russia, who Alston says are all credibly reported to have used drones to kill alleged terrorists and insurgents.

He said the drone strikes by intelligence agencies launched in Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere are particularly fraught because of the secrecy surrounding them.

Other experts disagree. "Drone operations are essential," said Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution Saban Center. "The drones are part of a much broader effort to put pressure on al-Qaida through the war in Afghanistan. They're the cutting edge of the pressure, but they're not the only pressure."

Earlier this week, al-Qaida leaders confirmed that a drone strike in Pakistan had killed the terror group's No. 3 officer and top commander in Afghanistan, Mustafa al-Yazid.

GULF OIL SPILL

BP Faces Setback In Sealing Well

Oil Slick Now Closely Approaching Florida

BY MELISSA NELSON AND ADAM GELLER
Associated Press Writers

PENSACOLA, Fla. — The BP oil slick drifted perilously close to the Florida Panhandle's famous sugar-white beaches Wednesday as a risky gambit to contain the leak by shearing off the well pipe ran into trouble a mile under the sea when the diamond-tipped saw became stuck.

The saw had sliced through about half of the pipe when it snagged, and it took BP 12 hours to free it. The company said preparations were being made to resume cutting, but didn't give a timetable on when it might start.

The plan is to fit a cap on the blown-out well at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico to capture most of the spewing oil; the twisted, broken pipe must be sliced first to allow a snug fit.

"I don't think the issue is whether or not we can make the second cut. It's about how fine we can make it, how smooth we can make it," said Coast Guard Adm. Thad Allen, the government's point man for the crisis.

As the edge of the slick drifted within seven miles of Pensacola's beaches, emergency workers rushed to link the last in a miles-long chain of booms designed to fend off the oil. They were slowed by thunderstorms and wind before the weather cleared in the afternoon.

Forecasters said the oil would probably wash up by Friday, threatening a delicate network of islands, bays and white-sand beaches that are a haven for wildlife and a major tourist destination dubbed the Redneck Riviera.

"We are doing what we can do, but we cannot change what has happened," said John Dosh, emergency director for Escambia County, which includes Pensacola.

Allen said more staff, boats and helicopters were sent to the eastern Gulf Coast as the slick spread, including a cutter in Mobile Bay, Ala., and one off Pensacola. The boats will help skim oil and add more boom to collect it. Four helicopters would help skimmers spot threatening oil.

Since the biggest oil spill in U.S. history began to unfold April 20 with an explosion that killed 11 workers aboard an offshore



CAROLYN COLE/LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT

The main platform is shown at the worksite of Deepwater Horizon on Wednesday. As BP's latest attempt to capture leaking oil from its crippled rig in the Gulf of Mexico stalled Wednesday, Alabama, Florida and Mississippi braced for what officials said could be the first crude oil to hit their beaches.

drilling rig, crude has fouled some 125 miles of Louisiana coastline and washed up in Alabama and Mississippi as well. Over the past six weeks, the well has leaked anywhere from 21 million to 45 million gallons by the government's estimate.

The latest attempt to control the leak is considered risky because slicing away a section of the 20-inch-wide riser could remove kinks in the pipe and temporarily increase the flow of oil by as much as 20 percent. The cap could be placed over the spill as early as Wednesday.

If the strategy fails — like every other attempt to control the leak 5,000 feet underwater — the best hope is probably a relief well, which is at least two months from completion.

As the oil drifted closer to Florida, beachgoers in Pensacola waded into the gentle waves, cast fishing lines and sunbathed,

even as a two-man crew took water samples. One of the men said they were hired by BP to collect samples to be analyzed for tar and other pollutants.

A few feet away, Martha Feinstein, 65, of Milton, Fla., pondered the fate of the beach she has been visiting for years. "You sit on the edge of your seat and you wonder where it's going," she said. "It's the saddest thing."

Officials said the slick sighted offshore consisted in part of "tar mats" about 500 feet by 2,000 feet in size.

County officials set up the booms to block oil from reaching inland waterways but planned to leave beaches unprotected because they are too difficult to defend against the action of the waves and because they are easier to clean up.

"It's inevitable that we will see it on the beaches," said Keith Wilkins, deputy chief of neighborhood and community services for Escambia County.

Florida's beaches play a crucial role in the state's tourism industry. At least 60 percent of vacation spending in the state during 2008 was in beachfront cities. Worried that reports of oil would scare tourists away, state officials are promoting interactive Web maps and Twitter feeds to show travelers — particularly those from overseas — how large the state is and how distant their destinations may be from the spill.

In other developments: — Investors ran from BP's stock for a second day, fearful of the potential cleanup costs, lawsuits, penalties and damage to the company's reputation.

— President Barack Obama said it is time to roll back billions of dollars in tax breaks for oil companies and use the money for clean energy research and development.

— A pair of Democratic senators pressed BP to delay plans to pay shareholder dividends worth \$10 billion or more. They called it "unfathomable" that BP would pay out a dividend before the total cost of the cleanup is known. BP had no comment.

— More fishing grounds were closed. More than one-third of federal waters in the Gulf are now off-limits to fishing, along with hundreds of square miles of state waters.

"I'm going to be bankrupt very soon," said fisherman Hong Le, who came to the U.S. from Vietnam and rebuilt his home and business after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 wiped him out. "Everything is financed. How can I pay? No fishing, no welding, I weld on commercial fishing boats and they aren't going out now, so nothing breaks."

Obama Challenges GOP To Help On Economy

WASHINGTON (AP) — Striking a partisan tone, President Barack Obama said Wednesday he is working to rebuild the economy without much help from Republicans, saying they have mostly "sat on the sidelines and shouted from the bleachers."

The White House released excerpts of Obama's speech while he was en route to a speech at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University. In his remarks, the president aggressively sought to cast Republicans as a party that fought him on tax cuts for small businesses, tax credits for college tuition, new spending on clean energy and more.

The timing comes as Obama, juggling the oil-spill disaster in the Gulf and mounting foreign crises, tried to assure the country that he is also working on the people's chief concern —

the economy. The president's political speech also underscores the importance of the upcoming midterm elections, in which the outcome of House and Senate races could shape Obama's ability to enact his agenda for the rest of his term.



Obama

"We already know where their ideas led us," Obama said of Republicans. "And now we have a choice as a nation. We can return to the failed economic policies of the past, or we can keep building a stronger future."

Obama also said it is time to roll back "billions of dollars in tax breaks" for oil companies and use the money for clean energy research.

He said the catastrophic Gulf

oil spill shows the country must move toward clean energy by embracing energy efficiency, tapping natural gas and nuclear power and eliminating tax breaks for big oil. Obama said that the Gulf spill "may prove to be a result of human error — or corporations taking dangerous shortcuts that compromised safety" — but that deepwater drilling is inherently risky and America cannot rely solely on fossil fuels.

The president said that as the election approaches, he expects Republicans to make the same economic argument they have for decades.

He described that as giving tax cut to millionaires "who didn't need them," gutting regulations and putting industry insiders in charge of oversight, as well as shortchanging investment in research.

"To be fair, a good deal of the other party's opposition to our

agenda has also been rooted in their sincere and fundamental belief about government," Obama said. "It's a belief that government has little or no role to play in helping this nation meet our collective challenges."

He added: "It's an agenda that basically offers two answers to every problem we face: more tax breaks for the wealthy and fewer rules for corporations."

The White House said Obama's remarks aim to describe the progress that has been made in building the "new foundation" for growth and prosperity that the president called for a year ago.

That new foundation, Obama said in April 2009, would be built on five pillars: new rules for Wall Street; investments in education, renewable energy and health care; and reductions in federal spending to bring down budget deficits.

Haggard To Start New Church In Colo. Springs

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — Former megachurch pastor Ted Haggard said Wednesday that he will launch a new church from his Colorado Springs home, 3 1/2 years after he resigned from his ministry amid an embarrassing and devastating sex scandal.

"This is my resurrection day," he declared.

Haggard said his new venture would not be a megachurch like New Life Church, the congregation he founded in 1985 and then left in 2006 after a male prostitute said Haggard paid him for sex.

Haggard said he doesn't know how many people will attend his new church, but he said the ordeal he and his wife, Gayle, went through has prepared them to help others.

"I have an incredible heart for broken people," he said. "I think we're qualified to hold people's hands" in times of trouble.

Haggard made his announcement outside his home, a two-story, brick-fronted structure with a large barn, a swimming pool and white-fenced corrals on Colorado Springs' north side, not far from New Life Church.

Wearing an open-neck shirt and jeans, Haggard sounded both optimistic and chastened, calling himself a repentant sinner and a broken man who believes he can still help others.

"When the crash came in my personal life, it was so incredibly embarrassing and heartbreaking," he said. "It broke me. And I'm still broken, some."

Haggard said a television documentary on the birth of his new church was a possibility but nothing was certain.

At his new church, Haggard said he will teach that God intended marriage to be a monogamous union of a man and a woman. But he said heterosexual marriage was just one ideal in a long list of things God wants people to do, including pray, be healthy and stay monogamous.

He also said the biblical ideals are sometimes hard to live up to.

"There is a complex process people have to go through between their personal beliefs and their own ideals that they themselves fail at, and I am a glaring example of that," he said.

In an interview with The Associated Press after his announcement, Haggard said he was in counseling from the time of his 2006 downfall until recently, dealing with both his sexual identity and the feelings of shame and embarrassment that followed the scandal.

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