

41 Killed In Deadly Yemen Street Battles

SANAA, Yemen (AP) — Street battles between Yemeni government forces and armed tribesmen killed dozens of people Wednesday in this country teetering on the brink of civil war, forcing residents to cower in basements or brave gunfire to fetch bread and water.

Nearly four months of mass protests calling for President Ali Abdullah Saleh's ouster have exacerbated already dire poverty, shuttering businesses and forcing up prices of essential goods. It's a trend that does not bode well for long-term stability in this gun-ridden corner of the Arabian Peninsula, home to an active al-Qaida branch and other armed Islamist groups.

Yemen's mainly peaceful protests gave way to fighting last week between Saleh's security forces and fighters loyal to the head of Yemen's most powerful tribal coalition, Sheik Sadeq al-Ahmar. That was the tipping point that pushed the anti-government uprising toward civil war.

At least 41 people were killed Wednesday as clashes spread to new quarters of the city.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Saleh's refusal to step down was prolonging the crisis.

Europes Food Infection Outbreak Increases

BERLIN (AP) — The number of people hit by a massive European outbreak of foodborne bacterial infections is one third higher than previously known and a stunningly high number of patients suffer from a potentially deadly complication than can shut down their kidneys, officials said Wednesday.

The death toll rose to 17, with German authorities reporting that an 84-year-old woman with the complication had died on Sunday.

Medical authorities appeared no closer to discovering either the source of the infection or the mystery at the heart of the outbreak: why the unusual strain of the E. coli bacteria appears to be causing so many cases of hemolytic uremic syndrome, which attacks the kidneys and can cause seizures, strokes and comas.

"This particular strain we're dealing with now seems to be unique," said Dr. Hilde Kruse, program manager for food safety at WHO Europe.

Germany's national health agency said 1,534 people in the country had been infected by EHEC, a particularly deadly strain of the common bacteria found in the digestive systems of cows, humans and other mammals. The Robert Koch Institute had reported 1,169 a day earlier.

IRS Grappling With Taxpayer Identity Theft

WASHINGTON (AP) — Imagine filing your tax return and learning that someone else got your refund. With your name and Social Security number, no less.

The IRS is grappling with a nearly five-fold increase in taxpayer identity theft between 2008 and 2010, a Government Accountability Office official plans to tell a House hearing Thursday. There were 248,357 incidents in 2010, compared to 51,702 in 2008.

The GAO findings, obtained by The Associated Press, don't begin to describe the pain for a first-time victim, who must wait for a refund while the IRS sorts out which return is real and which is a fraud.

Many identity thieves don't get prosecuted, according to James White, director of strategic issues for the GAO.

"IRS officials told us that IRS pursues criminal investigations of suspected identity thieves in only a small number of cases," White says in testimony prepared for a House Oversight and Government Reform subcommittee.

Stocks Drop, Adding To Economic Worries

NEW YORK (AP) — Fears that the economy is stalling sent the Dow Jones industrial average down 280 points Wednesday, erasing more than a quarter of the stock market's gains for the year. Treasury bond yields fell to their lowest level since December as traders put a higher value on safer investments.

The Dow Jones industrial average dropped 279.65 points, or 2.2 percent, to 12,290.14. It was the biggest point drop since June 4 of last year, and the largest percentage drop since August. The S&P index lost 30.65, or 2.3 percent, to 1,314.55. The Nasdaq composite fell 66.11, or 2.3 percent, to 2,769.19.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note fell to 2.95 percent. Bond yields fall when prices rise.

Doubts about the economy's strength that built in May were compounded by weaker-than-expected reports on manufacturing and jobs. The Institute for Supply Management's manufacturing index fell to 53.5 in May from 60.4 in April. A reading of more than 50 indicates the manufacturing industry is growing, but the index had been as high as 61.4 in February. Private employers added just 38,000 jobs in May, down from 177,000 in April, according to payroll processor ADP. Analysts had expected 180,000 new jobs.

"It looks like this recovery has hit its second 'soft patch,' which for a recovery that is less than two years old is troubling," said Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist for Capital Economics.

Lawmakers, Schools Worry About School Meal Costs

BY MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Eating healthy food isn't always cheap, and some conservatives in Congress are concerned that the Obama administration's effort to make school lunches more nutritious is a luxury the nation can't afford.

Many schools, especially the poorest ones, agree. They say new rules issued by the Agriculture Department in January will require them to buy pricier foods and more equipment at a time when federal and state budgets are tight and food costs are rising.

The new menus will cost an additional 14 cents a meal, according to the Agriculture Department. A spending bill approved Tuesday in the House Appropriations Committee estimates that the new lunch rules could cost schools an additional \$7 billion over five years. Saying that "unrealistic demands" can lead to burdensome costs, the Republican bill directs USDA to rewrite the rules so they wouldn't force schools to spend additional money.

"I think what is unanswered is where will the resources come from," says Lucy Gettman of the National School Boards Association, which has said the bill puts too many unfunded mandates on schools.

Under the USDA rules, schools would have to cut sodium in subsidized meals for low-income children by more than half, use more whole grains and serve low-fat milk. They also would limit kids to only one cup of starchy vegetables a week, so schools couldn't offer french fries every day.

Potatoes are cheap and schools said that replacing them in the menus would increase costs. More

expensive whole grains would be incrementally increased to the point that most grains in lunches are whole.

Schools also have expressed concern about requirements to serve more dark-green vegetables. According to Diane Pratt-Heavner of the School Nutrition Association, which represents school lunch workers, many schools have struggled to get kids to try spinach, collard greens and turnip greens and have had more luck with broccoli and lettuce. But some lettuce prices spiked earlier this year because of harsh winter weather.

Equipment is also a major cost, and the School Nutrition Association has expressed concern that additional coolers and freezers would be required to store the larger amount of fruits, vegetables and proteins required by the rules.

Some of these costs will be defrayed through a 6 cent-per-meal reimbursement included in a child nutrition bill signed by President Barack Obama earlier this year, along with a provision in that legislation requiring schools to increase the cost of paid meals to make up for some of the higher costs. But some schools say it won't be enough.

Sally Spero, food planning supervisor for the San Diego unified school district, said the changes to school breakfast programs — they call for more proteins and fruits and vegetables — will cost her district \$4 million.

She said the changes could mean that school districts may have to skimp in different ways, like serving more canned fruits instead of fresh fruits, despite government efforts to promote the opposite.

GOP Presses Obama On Medicare Spending

BY ERICA WERNER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Face to face at the White House, GOP leaders complained to President Barack Obama on Wednesday that he had not produced a detailed plan of spending cuts and accused him of playing politics over Medicare as the nation careers toward a debt crisis.

House Speaker John Boehner said he was ready to negotiate personally with Obama if that would hurry things along.

The White House said Obama had in fact led on the issue and made clear that he had no intention of dropping what Democrats believe is a winning political issue: accusing the GOP of trying to destroy the popular health care program for seniors.

"He doesn't believe that we need to end Medicare as we know it," said press secretary Jay Carney.

Republicans said their plan would save Medicare, not end it, and they in turn accused Obama of failing to present any proposals to preserve Medicare or drive down deficits at all.

"Unfortunately what we did not hear from the president is a specific plan," said Rep. Jeb Hensarling, R-Texas, as Republicans commented outside the White House.

Later, Boehner told reporters at the Capitol he hoped deficit-reduction talks could be wrapped up within a month and "the president agreed."

Boehner said private talks being led by Vice President Joe Biden were making "some marginal progress. But at the rate that they're going we'll be right up against the deadline." That was a reference to an Aug. 2 deadline to raise the government's borrowing limit or risk an unprecedented credit default that the White House and even many Republicans say would be disastrous for the U.S. economy.

Republicans are refusing to approve the debt-limit increase without ordering spending cuts topping a trillion dollars at the same time. The White House is insisting that in addition to spending restraint in the deficit trimming must include tax increases that Republicans say are off the table.

In the heat of early June, August looked a long way away Wednesday and it seemed clear that plenty of political posturing lay ahead before deadline pressure would induce the parties to step up with

real talks. Actual negotiations are being led in private by Biden involving a much smaller group of lawmakers who have recently expressed confidence they'll be able to identify at least \$1 trillion in cuts over the next decade. Negotiators are considering reductions in student loan subsidies, farm payments and support for federal workers' pensions. The Biden group next meets June 9.

Wednesday allowed the president a private face-to-face meeting with his Capitol Hill antagonists, and more than that a chance for both sides to recite now familiar political points. A key topic was Medicare, the massive government health insurance program for Americans 65 and older.

A plan put forward by House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan would not affect people over age 55, but future Medicare beneficiaries would instead be given government subsidies to purchase private health insurance. Independent analysts have concluded beneficiaries would end up paying more.

Democrats have turned that into a political weapon with what Republicans are decrying as "Mediscare" tactics, using it as the basis of attack ads against the GOP. A special election in New York last week turned into a referendum on Medicare, and the result was a Democratic victory in a Republican-heavy New York district. New Rep. Kathy Hochul was sworn in Wednesday.

That's led to unease among Republicans who voted for the plan, and elation among Democrats who intend to exploit the issue for all its worth as the 2012 presidential election approaches.

Ryan, R-Wis., said he urged Obama Wednesday to dial back the politics in the interest of finding the bipartisan deal on deficit reduction the president says he desires.

Ryan said he told Obama: "We got to get our debt under control, and if we try to demagogue each other's attempts to do that, then we're not applying the kind of political leadership we need."

The president brushed off allegations of demagoguery by reminding the Republicans he was the guy who "wasn't born in the U.S.," according to sources familiar with the talks who spoke anonymously to describe them. That was a reference to GOP questioning of his background.

FINAL LANDING



RED HUBER/ORLANDO SENTINEL/MCT
The space shuttle Endeavour, STS-134, is towed to an orbiter processing facility after safely landing on its final mission on Wednesday, June 1, 2011, at Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

4 Reported Dead After Tornadoes In Mass.

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. (AP) — At least two tornadoes swept through western and central Massachusetts Wednesday, sending debris slamming into buildings and killing four people, Massachusetts' governor said.

Gov. Deval Patrick said two people died in Westfield, one in West Springfield, and one in Brimfield in the central part of the state. He had no details about those killed.

The storms did extensive damage in Springfield, the state's third largest city.

State police report 33 injuries in Springfield. Police said five of the injuries were reported serious and required surgery.

Patrick said the path of damage from the first and more powerful of the two tornadoes extended from Westfield, just west of Springfield, and extended east to the community of Douglas. He said the second, slightly less powerful, tornado cut a path from West Springfield all the way to Sturbridge in the central part of the state.

Patrick declared a state of emergency and called up 1,000 National Guardsmen.

The storms also caused an unknown number of injuries and extensive damage. Patrick said the death total was preliminary.

Bob Pashko, of West Springfield, said he was coming from his doctor's office when the storm started and he went to a downtown bar in Springfield to wait for a ride.

"The next thing you know the TV says a tornado hit the railroad bridge in West Springfield," said Pashko, 50. "It's the baddest I've seen."

The Rev. Bob Marrone of The First Church of Monson said the storm cleared a view he's never seen across the valley where the town sits.

"I can see the plywood of roofs, and see houses where most of the house is gone," he said. "The road that runs up in front of my house ...

There's so many trees down, it's completely impassable."

The storm hit the Springfield area after a tornado watch was issued for much of the East Coast, including Philadelphia, New York and Boston.

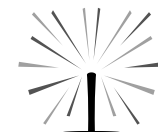
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