

NATO To Discuss Downing Of Turkish Plane

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) - NATO will hold emergency talks on Tuesday to discuss Syria's downing of a Turkish jet fighter, but the alliance is not expected to take military action, even if it confirms Turkey's claim that the unarmed plane was attacked in international airspace. The incident has further raised regional tensions over the conflict

in Syria, where some 40 people were reported killed Sunday in new clashes between rebels and government troops.

On Sunday, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton sharply criticized Syria for downing the Turkish plane, which Turkey's Foreign Ministry called an "open and grave violation of international law" that would justify retaliation.

'The United States condemns this brazen and unacceptable act in the strongest possible terms," Clinton said in Washington. "It is yet another reflection of the Syrian authorities' callous disregard for international norms, human life, and peace and security."

Clinton said Washington will maintain close contact with Turkish officials as they determine their response, including via the U.N. Security Council. "We will work with Turkey and other partners to hold the Assad regime accountable," she said.

Debby Expected To Hit Eastern Gulf Coast

NEW ORLEANS (AP) - Parts of Florida and Alabama were under a tropical storm warning Sunday as Debby churned off the Gulf Coast, leaving wary residents to closely watch a storm system already inundating some areas with rain.

Underscoring the storm's unpredictable nature, forecasters discontinued a tropical storm warning for Louisiana after forecast models indicated Debby was less likely to make a westward turn than initially predicted. Coastal Alabama and parts of Florida, including the Panhandle, remained under tropical storm warnings.

Debby already had dumped heavy rain on parts of Florida and spawned some isolated tornadoes, causing some damage to homes and knocking down power lines. High winds forced the closure of an interstate bridge that spans Tampa Bay and links St. Petersburg with areas to the southeast

Storm tracks are difficult to predict days in advance. But as of late Sunday the latest forecast map shows the center of the storm 100 miles (165 km) south-southwest of Apalachicola, Fla., and likely to meander northward for several days before making landfall.

Chris Landsea, a meteorologist at the National Hurricane Center, said forecasters rely on computer models which were contradictory until Sunday.

Revelers Celebrate Gay Community Across U.S.

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The sidewalks of downtown San Francisco are crowded with colorful revelers as the city marks its 42nd year celebrating the lesbian, gay and transgender community.

The city already has hosted a weekend of events, including a march in the city's Dolores Park and the so-called "Pink Saturday" street party. But the biggest one is Sunday's annual gay pride parade.

Organizers say more than 200 floats, vehicles and marching bands are taking part. The city's mayor, Ed Lee, also will address the crowd at the city's Civic Center.

Organizers say San Francisco's events are the largest LGBT gathering in the nation.

Thousands of attendees are also celebrating in Chicago and New York City, where parade-goers are toasting the state's anniversary of its same-sex marriage law.

Hedge Fund Manager To Pay Back \$405M

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — A settlement announced Sunday will bring \$405 million to victims of Bernard Madoff's historic investment scam, the state attorney general said.

The clients of hedge fund manager J. Ezra Merkin will receive \$405 million, and New York state will get \$5 million to cover the cost of the settlement worked out by Attorney General Eric Schneiderman. The victims include New York Law School, Bard College, Harlem Children's Zone, Homes for the Homeless and the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty.

Schneiderman called the agreement "a victory for justice and accountability."

Momentous Decisons Expected This Week From Supreme Court

BY DAVID C. SAVAGE ©2012, MCT Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - The Supreme Court is set this week to decide the politically charged constitutional clashes between President Barack Obama and Republicans over his health-care reform law and his immigration enforcement policy.

By most accounts, the justices must make a stark, clear choice to either endorse Obama's policies _including the mandate for all to buy health insurance — or to strike them down as flatly unconstitutional.

But the justices could rule in unexpected ways that would allow both sides to claim a victory.

Since the spring, when Obama's lawyers were hit with hostile questions at oral arguments, the administration has faced the prospect of a double defeat. It appeared the court's more conservative justices could strike down the entire healthcare law and rule Arizona and other states are free to arrest and jail illegal immigrants. Many are predicting just that.

But Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. has said he hopes to avoid momentous rulings that turn on a 5-4 vote, and both cases offer the justices other options that have been overlooked.

The health-care case has been fiercely debated as a test of whether Congress can require individuals to buy health insurance under its power to regulate commerce. Opponents have likened it to forcing Americans to buy vegetables.

Lurking in the background is a way to decide the case on tax law grounds. No one can be prosecuted, punished or fined for violating the mandate. In fact, the word "mandate" does not appear in the law. In "practical operation," the administration argued, it's just a tax law.

If the mandate is really just a tax, that would be supported by the Constitution, which says Congress "shall have the power to lay and collect taxes ... to provide for the common defense and general welfare.'

So, in the end, the justices could agree that the law's required tax payments are constitutional, while also making clear the government does not have broad power to mandate purchases.

Late last year, Judge Brett Kavanaugh of the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, an appointee of President George W. Bush and a friend of the chief justice, wrote an opinion arguing for treating the mandate as a tax law, not a regulation of commerce.

During oral arguments in March, the conservative justices sounded highly skeptical of giving the government the power to mandate purchases. But at one point, liberal Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked if it would be constitutional for Congress to assess a tax for health insurance and include an exemption for everyone who had insurance.

"The government might be able to do that," agreed Paul Clement, the lawyer for the Republican states. If so, the liberals asked, why can't Congress require persons to have private insurance or pay a tax penalty?

Upholding the law on tax grounds would be a big win for the president. "It's a neat way out of the box and the most reasonable way to uphold the law," said Washington attorney Andrew Pincus. But it also would give Republicans fodder for arguing the health-care law means new taxes, a claim Obama disputed when the bill was being debated.

There are several other possibilities. The court could uphold

the law as a regulation of commerce because health care is unique. Or the justices could strike down the entire law.

If the court were to strike down the mandate while upholding the rest of the law, both sides could claim a victory. The Republicans could say Obama and the Democrats were slapped down for violating the Constitution. The president and his allies could say the insurance reforms and the expansion of Medicaid will provide better health care to millions of Americans.

A ruling in the Arizona immigration case also could leave both sides claiming a win. At issue is whether states can enforce laws against illegal immigrants, or whether this power rests solely with the federal government.

Two years ago, the Arizona Legislature. frustrated over federal inaction, told its police to check whether people they stop for some other reason are in this country legally. Its also made it a state crime for immigrants to seek work or to fail to show proper documents. Before the law could take effect, however, the Obama administration sued and won rulings that put its key provisions on hold.

During the arguments in April, Roberts and several of the liberal justices suggested they would uphold the "stop and question" part of Arizona's law but block the provisions that make it a state crime to be an illegal immigrant.

The Immigration and Nationality Act says federal authorities

have the final word on who is deported, but it also says states may "cooperate" in the "identification, apprehension and detention" of illegal immigrants.

The most disputed provision in the Arizona law tells the police that when they make a lawful stop, they must check the immigration status of any person they suspect is "unlawfully present in the United States."

The chief justice said he saw no problem with this provision. Once the police detain a suspected illegal immigrant, they would contact federal officials. "It's still your decision" on whether to hold or release the individual, Roberts told the administration's lawyer.

On the other hand, the parts of the law creating separate state crimes — if upheld — would allow Arizona to send illegal immigrants to jail, even if federal authorities objected. The justices hinted they were likely to block those provisions as conflicting with federal law.

If so, Arizona can claim its law has been upheld, but it will be a much weaker version.

In its final week, the justices will also decide whether it is cruel and unusual punishment to send a 14-year-old to life in prison with no chance for parole, and whether the First Amendment protects a liar who claims to have won military honors.

The court says it will issue decisions on Monday, but the final rulings are not likely until Wednesday or Thursday.

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