

Israel Lifts Closure Of West Bank

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel on Wednesday lifted its tight restrictions on Palestinian access to Jerusalem's holiest shrine and called off an extended West Bank closure after days of clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces.

Despite moving to end the lockdown, Israel still kept thousands of police officers on alert as an uneasy calm settled over

the holy city.

On Tuesday, the U.S. and Israel signaled they were trying to move beyond the crisis that erupted when Israel announced plans to build 1,600 apartments in disputed east Jerusalem during Vice President Joe Biden's visit last week. Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke by phone Tuesday night, Israeli officials said.

VIBORG

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The town has always come out and cheered for us. It's been a great experience being a Viking for 12 years."

Sending both the boys and girls team to the "Big B" has been a constant emotional high that didn't let down in the week between tournaments, Daniels said.

Viborg has been whipped into a basketball frenzy, Larsen said. "The whole town is into it. There are Viborg posters everywhere you go uptown," she said. "Everyone offers you congratulations and wishes you good luck. It's awesome to get that kind of support."

Larsen's father, Jim, played high school sports for VHS. Now the school board chairman, Jim said it was a thrill to watch his daughter play in the final state girls tournament as Vikings.

"Chelsey was injured the first game (of the state tourney)," he said. "It was pretty tough, but she sucked it up and still played the last two games."

The girls lost their three games but still felt pride in reaching the state tourney, Jim said.

"Chelsey spoke at the (boys) pep rally the other night, and she mentioned, whether you play at noon (for seventh) or 8 o'clock (for the title), it's still fun," Jim said. "If you don't want to be there at the state tournament, there are 85 other teams who would take your place."

Danielsen believes the boys team will benefit from last year's state tourney experience and fifth-place finish. The Viking boys have turned up the intensity in preparing for their upcoming appearance, even practicing at the Watertown Arena's auxiliary gym during the girls state tournament.

"Last year was the first time the boys team went in school history, and it was exciting," he said. "This year, one of the goals was to get back to the state tournament. We are taking care of unfinished business."

Viborg superintendent Pat Kraning experiences both state tournaments from different perspectives. Not only is he the district's top administrator, but he is the athletic director, head girls basketball coach and the father of Zach Kraning, a 6-foot-9 player on the boys team.

"It's been a neat bond between the boys and girls

teams," he said. "I think they compete with each other in a good way, comparing their records and checking the newspaper to see how each other is ranked. But they are all good friends, and the coaches work together well."

Chelsey Larsen agreed, noting the strong support during boy-girl doubleheaders. The twinbills built a strong bond between the teams, also allowing Viborg fans to see both the boys and girls in action, she said.

"In the end, we support each other," she said. "At the games, we want to be there for each other and end up on top."

Pat Kraning admits a personal satisfaction as both a father and coach.

"Watching your own son be a part of it is a rare experience. I try to enjoy it, because it doesn't happen often," he said. "As for the girls, it's a little bittersweet. Anytime you end a season and you exit a group of seniors, there are strong feelings. There are a lot of really great memories with this group of kids."

Looking ahead, seniors Larsen and Daniels believe the co-op with Hurley will be successful.

"Hurley has great programs and coaches," Larsen said. "It was great, at the district and region tournaments, some Hurley kids came in Viborg clothes and cheered us on."

Danielsen expects the Viborg and Hurley athletes to begin workouts together before the next school year even begins.

"During the summer, some will go to team camps and get chemistry," he said. "Some of the players already know each other, as they started co-oping for junior high four years ago."

The new co-op won't forget the achievements of past teams, Pat Kraning said. But the future will bring new relationships, as Viborg and Hurley are pursuing consolidation talks, he said.

"We are stressing to people, we want to keep the pride of where we come from, but we are also going in a new direction, and we want that to be positive," he said.

Danielsen noted the satisfaction of holding a piece of school history.

"It's been special for us," he said. "The seniors have known their whole life as Viborg, and we will end it as the Vikings."

Jim Larsen said he's glad to see the highly successful ending as the teams turn a new page.

"This is the last year for the Viborg Vikings," he said. "It's just like it was meant to be."

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Bill Gains Ground, But Release Delayed

BY DAVID ESPO
AP Special Correspondent

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's sweeping health care legislation won precious support from a longtime liberal hold-out in the House on Wednesday and from a retired Catholic bishop and nuns representing dozens of religious orders — gaining fresh traction ahead of a climactic weekend vote.

"That's a good sign," said Obama, two weeks after taking personal command of a campaign to enact legislation in what has become a virtual vote of confidence on his still-young presidency.

But Democrats delayed the planned release of formal legislation at least until Thursday as they sought to make sure it would reduce federal deficits annually over the next decade.

At the White House, Obama met with Richard Trumka, the head of the AFL-CIO. Officials said the labor leader raised concerns over the details of a planned excise tax on high-cost insurance plans as well as other elements of the as-yet-unreleased legislation.

The long-anticipated measure is actually the second of two bills that Obama hopes lawmakers will send him in coming days, more

than a year after he urged Congress to remake the nation's health care system. The first cleared the Senate late last year but went no further because House Democrats demanded significant changes — the very types of revisions now being packaged into the second bill.

Together, the measures are designed to extend coverage to more than 30 million who now lack it and ban the insurance industry from denying coverage on the basis of pre-existing medical conditions. Obama also has asked lawmakers to slow the growth of medical spending generally, a far more difficult goal to achieve.



Kucinich

Rep. Dennis Kucinich's announcement in the Capitol made him the first Democrat to declare he would vote in favor of the legislation after voting against an earlier version, and he stressed he was still dissatisfied with key parts.

"I know I have to make a decision, not on the bill as I would like to see it but as it is," said the Ohio lawmaker, who twice ran for

president advocating national health care. "If my vote is to be counted, let it now count for passage of the bill, hopefully in the direction of comprehensive health care reform."

Referring to the political struggle under way, Kucinich said, "You do have to be very careful that the potential of President Obama's presidency not be destroyed by this debate. Even though I have many differences with him on policy, there's something much bigger at stake here for America."

Obama lobbied Kucinich heavily for his vote, including aboard Air Force One earlier in the week on a trip to northeastern Ohio for a presidential speech.

Republicans are opposed to the legislation, arguing it still amounts to a government takeover of health care, largely paid for through higher taxes and deep cuts in Medicare that will harm seniors. In recent days, they have also turned their criticism on Pelosi, who says the House may approve the Senate-passed bill without casting a separate vote on it. Instead, under a rule that would itself be subject to a vote, it would be considered passed automatically if the second fix-it bill passed.

Sandbags On Hand, Fargo Waits For Flood

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — Schoolchildren, parents and hundreds of residents have spent days packing and stacking sandbags to protect their cities against the rising Red River. The National Guard is in place, keeping watch over the water. Dike builders are finishing last-minute work.

Now comes the difficult part for residents of Fargo and neighboring Moorhead, Minn., who must wait to find out if all of their efforts are enough to hold back the water.

Volunteers filled their 1-millionth sandbag Wednesday as the river rose above 30 feet — considered major flood stage — on its way to an expected crest of about 38 feet Sunday that could swamp roads and threaten some neighborhoods.

Officials, meanwhile, exuded confidence.

Fargo itself is beginning to show signs of wear and tear from days of preparations. Dump trucks carrying clay for dikes let some spill out, coating roads and making them a muddy mess. Roads are blocked off to let heavy equipment through.

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