

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Iceland Volcano Erupts; No Injuries Reported

REYKJAVIK, Iceland (AP) — Authorities evacuated hundreds of people after a volcano erupted beside a glacier in southern Iceland, Iceland's civil protection agency said Sunday, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries.

The eruption occurred late Saturday beside the Eyjafjallajökull glacier, the fifth largest in Iceland. The last time the volcano erupted was in the 1820s.

Authorities initially said the eruption was below the glacier, triggering fears that it could lead to flooding from glacier melt, but scientists conducting an aerial survey in daylight located the eruption and said it did not occur below ice.

"The eruption is a small one," said Agust Gunnar Gylfason, a risk analyst at the Civil Protection Department.

"An eruption in and close to this glacier can be dangerous due to possible flooding if the fissure forms under the glacier," he said. "That is why we initiated our disaster response plan."

Scientists can see lava flows in the half-mile long fissure, and authorities are watching for further activity.

Authorities evacuated some 450 people in the area 100 miles southeast of the capital, Reykjavik, as a precaution, said Vidir Reynisson, the department manager for the Icelandic Civil Protection Department.

A state of emergency has been declared in communities near the 100-square-mile glacier, and three Red Cross centers were set up for evacuees in the village of Hella.

Three Icelandair flights from the U.S. — departing from Seattle, Boston, and Orlando, Fla. — bound for Keflavik airport in Reykjavik were turned back to Boston, leaving about 500 people waiting, the airline said.

GM Recalls Nearly 60,000 Cars In S. Korea

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — General Motors is recalling nearly 60,000 automobiles in South Korea due to potential problems with steering wheels, fuel hoses and seats, the company's local unit and the government said Sunday.

The recall of 58,696 vehicles will begin Monday and cover four models manufactured in South Korea, said Kim Byeong-soo, a spokesman for GM Daewoo Auto & Technology Co., the country's third-largest automaker.

Recalls in other countries where some vehicles were exported under the Chevrolet and Opel brands will be decided and announced later in accordance with local rules, Kim said. He said China has already announced some recalls, though he did not immediately have details.

A total of 45,957 small SUVs sold in South Korea as the Winstorm and Winstorm Maxx are being recalled due to the possibility that the steering wheel can become separated. The Winstorm is exported as the Chevrolet Captiva, while the Winstorm Maxx is sold overseas as the Opel Antara, Kim said.

A total of 12,604 Lacetti Premiere sedans — sold overseas as the Chevrolet Cruze — are being recalled for possibly defective fuel hoses that could leak, Kim said.

Also, the company is recalling 135 of its Damas model, a small commercial vehicle, over materials in seats that do not meet South Korean safety standards, he said.

U.S.-Russian Nuke Deal Could Build Trust

PARIS (AP) — Nearly a year after President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev ordered negotiators to start work on a new treaty to reduce their nuclear arsenals, the two countries say they are finally close to completing a deal — taking a small but important step toward the U.S. leader's goal of a nuclear-free world.

A deal could build momentum and trust toward resolving other key nuclear issues. They range from how to pressure Iran and North Korea to abandon their nuclear ambitions to reducing the number of tactical nuclear weapons that are so unpopular in Europe. It could also set a positive tone for a key conference on nuclear nonproliferation this spring.

On another level, it could bolster Obama's credibility, which is being battered on multiple fronts: the disappointing results of the Copenhagen climate change conference, ongoing economic miseries, faltering Middle East peace efforts and growing skepticism about last year's Prague speech in which he promised to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

"It's important to show the Prague speech was not just rhetoric," Mark Fitzpatrick, senior fellow for nonproliferation at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, told The Associated Press.

An agreement would end a drought in disarmament accords between the United States and Russia, which were a hallmark of the Cold War years and were negotiated even during the worst periods of tension between them. It officially would reconfirm Moscow's nuclear superpower status, which remains an essential element of its national identity and prestige.

Web May Fuel Trade In Endangered Species

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — The Internet has emerged as one of the greatest threats fueling the illegal wildlife trade, making it easier to buy everything from live baby lions to wine made from tiger bones, conservationists said Sunday.

The Web's impact was made clear at the meeting of the 175-nation Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, or CITES. A vote Sunday was scheduled on a proposal to ban the sale of the Kaiser's spotted newt which the World Wildlife Fund says has been devastated by the Internet trade.

The United States and Sweden, meanwhile are proposing to regulate the trade in red and pink coral which is crafted into expensive jewelry and sold extensively on the Web.

The IFW has done several surveys of illegal trade on the Web and found that thousands of species are sold on auction sites, classified ads and chat rooms, mostly in the United States but also Europe, China, Russia and Australia. Most of what is traded is illegal African ivory but the group has also found exotic birds along with rare products such as tiger-bone wine and pelts from protected species like polar bears and leopards.

A separate 2009 survey by the group Campaign Against the Cruelty to Animals targeted the Internet trade in Ecuador, finding offers to sell live capuchin monkeys, lion cubs and ocelots.

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Spring Blizzard Blasts Okla., Ark.

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — More snow fell Sunday as part of a powerful storm blowing through Oklahoma and the southern Plains on the first weekend of spring.

The National Weather Service said there was moderate to heavy snow across northeast Oklahoma, northwest Arkansas and southwest Missouri, with some places reporting 8 to 12 inches of snow. The snow and rain was expected to end later Sunday.

The storm disrupted travel on highways and other roads. Wind was as much as a hazard as the snow itself, one trucker said.

Jason Nation, who drives a Werner Enterprises tractor-trailer,

took a break Sunday afternoon at a Pilot truck stop along Interstate 44 in Mount Vernon, Mo., in the state's southwest corner. He said he was on a trip from Laredo, Texas, to northern Missouri.

"When we entered Arkansas (early Sunday) it was really a blizzard," Nation said. "The wind keeps pushing you to the right."

Authorities have attributed at least five deaths in four states to the weather. Police in Arlington, Texas, said ice on an interstate caused an accident Sunday involving five vehicles and two 18-wheelers. One of the 18-wheelers fell on another vehicle, killing one person.

The storm came a day after temperatures had reached into the 70s, and forecasters say temperatures should rebound into the 60s as soon as Monday.

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation urged people in the eastern part of the state not to travel on the snow-packed and slick roads if they didn't have to, but said roads in the western part of the state were improving as the weather did.

Authorities reported dozens of wrecks amid heavy snow and high winds, many of them with injuries. Single deaths were reported in Missouri, Kansas and Texas, while Oklahoma reported two traffic fatalities.

The second death in Oklahoma happened Sunday morning, when an SUV slid off a snowy highway east of Marietta, just north of the Red River separating Oklahoma from Texas. The Oklahoma Highway Patrol said Dixie G. Anderson, 77, of Marietta, suffered fatal injuries when her vehicle hit a tree.

The storm is the third major winter storm to hit Oklahoma in the past three months, including a Christmas Eve blizzard that stranded holiday travelers at airports and on snow-packed highways. Forecasters, though, said that this time temperatures should rebound into the 60s as soon as Monday.

Recount Calls Add To Iraq's Political Tension

BY REBECCA SANTANA
Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD — Iraq's president on Sunday demanded a recount in this month's historic parliamentary elections, intensifying the political conflict over the not-yet-completed tally and increasing the chances that the vote will be a long, chaotic test of the nascent democracy.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's coalition is narrowly trailing in the overall vote tally to one led by former prime minister Ayad Allawi, with 95 percent of the vote counted. President Jalal Talabani, whose own coalition is losing to Allawi's secular alliance in a key province, invoked the power of his office in calling for a recount.

On his official Web site, Talabani demanded that the Independent High Electoral Commission manually recount the ballots to "preclude any doubt and misunderstanding" about the results. He said he was making the demand "as the president of the state, authorized to preserve the constitution and to ensure justice and absolute transparency."

Al-Maliki on Saturday called on the election commission to quickly respond to requests from political blocs for a recount.

The commission has rejected



QASSIM ZEIN/MCT

Supporters of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki stage a protest Sunday in the southern Iraqi city of Najaf, to demand a recount of ballots in the March 7 parliamentary election.

such calls, and Iraqi law empowers neither Talabani nor al-Maliki to force the issue. The panel is an independent body appointed by parliament, and submits its results only to the country's supreme court for ratification.

A recount or a protracted election dispute could complicate the seating of a new government. In Iraq's fledgling democracy, such periods of political instability have often been accompanied by violence, as debates not settled at the negotiating table are taken to the streets.

The process of counting ballots cast in the March 7 election has been criticized by some Iraqi

politicians — often those losing at the time — as being plagued with fraud, though international observers have said the vote and count has been fair. Election officials have been handing out results in piecemeal fashion, creating the appearance of a tallying process in disarray.

The head of the election commission, Faraj al-Haidari, urged the political parties to be patient Sunday and scoffed at the idea that a manual recount would be any more accurate than the computerized count nearing completion.

"If you do not believe in the most advanced counting technologies, then how you are going

to believe in an employee using pen and paper?" al-Haidari asked.

Sunday marked the first time Talabani, a Kurd, has weighed in on the counting process. His party is part of the Kurdish Alliance, which is narrowly losing to Allawi's Iraqi alliance in the key Tamim province in the north. The province is home to the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which is claimed by both Arabs and Kurds, and an Iraqi win would be a blow to Kurdish claims on the city.

Allawi is a secular Shiite whose Iraqi alliance has both Shiite and Sunni supporters. Iraqiya nudged ahead of al-Maliki's State of Law coalition in the overall vote tally Saturday, and by Sunday it has a lead of 11,346 votes. An overall lead in the vote count, however, would not guarantee that Iraqiya would get the most parliamentary seats, because those are apportioned province by province.

The Kurds, known for their political unity, are believed to be key by many observers to forming a government, and Talabani's demands could be an attempt to influence the negotiating that will follow the final vote tally. Talabani, who's seeking a third term, could also be trying to maneuver to ensure his own political future.

OBITUARIES

Elizabeth Schnabel

TRIPP — Funeral services for Elizabeth Schnabel, 90, of Tripp will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, March 22 at Frieden's Reformed Church in Tripp with Rev. Gregory Way officiating. Interment will be in Frieden's Cemetery, Tripp.

Visitation will be one hour prior to the service at the church on Monday.

Liz passed away on Friday, March 19, 2010 at the Good Samaritan Society of Tripp.

Online condolences may be sent at www.goglinfh.com.

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Clara Hlavac

HUMPHREY, Neb. — Clara R. Hlavac, 102, of Humphrey, Neb., and formerly of Tabor, died Saturday (March 20, 2010) at the Columbus Hospital in Columbus, Neb.

Funeral services are at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday at St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church, Tabor, with the Rev. Joe Puthenkulathil celebrating and Msgr. Carlton Hermann concelebrating. Burial will be in the parish cemetery.

Visitations is 4-7 p.m. Tuesday at Opsahl-Kostel Memorial Chapel, Tabor, with a 7 p.m. Scripture service and rosary. Visitations will resume one hour prior to the service at the church.

Militant Group In Kabul Presents Peace Deal

BY DEB RIECHMANN
Associated Press Writer

KABUL — Thirteen Afghan civilians died in violence Sunday as the nation's hard-line vice president expressed hopes for reconciliation and representatives of a militant group with ties to the Taliban brought their own draft of a peace deal to the capital.

Talk of reconciling with insurgents has done little to slow the fighting across Afghanistan, yet the issue is gaining steam, partly fueled by a "peace jirga" that Afghan President Hamid Karzai will host in late April or early May.

The Afghan government and others from the international community have had secret contacts

with the Taliban, or their representatives at the same time that thousands of U.S. and NATO reinforcements are streaming into the country to slow the insurgency.

Helmand province in southern Afghanistan was the scene of Sunday's deadliest violence. A suicide bomber killed 10 civilians and wounded seven others when he detonated his explosives near an Afghan army patrol at a bridge in Gereshek.

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