**Thursday, 3.1.12** 

## **Tornados Devastate Two Midwest Towns**

BY JIM SUHR AND JIM SALTER **Associated Press** 

HARRISBURG, Ill. — Twisters roared through the nation's heartland in the early morning darkness Wednesday, flattening entire blocks of homes in smalltown Illinois and Kansas and killing at least 10 people.

Winds also ripped through the country music mecca of Branson, Mo., damaging some of the city's famous theaters just days before the start of the busy tourist season.

The tornado that blasted Harrisburg in southern Illinois, killing six, was an EF4, the second-highest rating given to twisters based on damage. Scientists said it was 200 yards wide with winds up to 170 mph.

By midday, townspeople in the community of 9,000 were sorting through piles of debris and remembering their dead while the winds still howled around them.

Not long after the storm, Darrell Osman raced to his mother's home, arriving just in time to speak to her before she was taken to a hospital with a head injury, a severe cut to her neck and a broken arm and leg.

"She was conscious. I wouldn't say she was coherent. There were more mumbles than anything," he said. "She knew we were there.'

Mary Osman died a short time

The twister that raked Branson seemed to hopscotch up the city's main roadway, moving from side to side.

As sirens blared, Derrick Washington stepped out of his motel room just long enough to see a greenish-purple sky. Then he heard the twister roar.

"Every time the tornado hit a building, you could see it exploding," he said.

At least 37 people were reported hurt, but most suffered only cuts and bruises. After the start of Branson's peak season in mid-March, up to 60,000 visitors would have been in hotels on any given day.

Just six guests were staying at J.R.'s Motor Inn, and all of them escaped injury by taking refuge in bathtubs. Engineers deemed the building a total loss after the second floor, the roof and all windows were destroyed.

Manager Lori McGauley



Firefighters drive up Water Street in Harrisburg, Illinois, Wednesday, after

a tornado swept through the surrounding neighborhood.

choked back tears thinking about what might have been.

"We had 25 people booked for next week," McGauley said. "If this happened a week later, we would have lost some people."

At the 530-room downtown Hilton, intense winds sucked furniture away. Hotel workers were able to get all guests to safety.

Looking at the city's main strip, it was difficult to believe there weren't more serious injuries. A small mall was nearly completely demolished. The Legends Theater, the Andy Williams Moon River Theater and the Branson Variety Theater all sustained significant damage.

The Veterans Memorial Museum was in shambles, and a small military jet that sat in front of the museum was blown apart.

Some of the most popular theaters were barely damaged. The popular Presley's Country Jubilee was virtually unscathed, as was Yakov Smirnoff's theater. A manager at the Baldknobbers Jamboree Show expected to cancel just three or four shows before performances resume next

Other venues weren't so lucky. Branson Variety Theater's 1,600-seat auditorium was intact, but the lobby and gift shop were nearly destroyed. It could be almost two months before the theater's popular Twelve Irish Tenors and Shake, Rattle & Roll shows perform again.

Back in Harrisburg, Nell Cox woke up during the tornado and glanced out her window with a flashlight to see her neighbor

being blown out a window. "She crawled back to the front of my house," Cox said. She ventured outside to grab the woman. brought her indoors and sum-

moned an ambulance. The winds were strong enough to blow the walls off some rooms at the Harrisburg Medical Center. The staff had enough warning to move the most endangered patients. Then they heard the walls collapse, of-

ficials said. The hospital discharged patients who could go home or moved them to other medical facilities. But they also had to confront an influx of injured.

"Helicopters have been coming in and out here all morning," said Vince Ashley, the hospital's

In the shattered neighborhoods, debris was strewn everywhere — washing machines and dyers tossed in neighbors' yards, along with kitchen sinks and sticks of lumber with nails protruding. Chunks of pink insolation added color to the disarray.

Osman and his sister sorted through the wreckage at the site of their mother's duplex, looking for photos and financial records. They found 10 old picture slides that were among a collection of hundreds. Some were caked in mud and damaged by water.

"My mother was a Christian," Osman said. "I know she's in a better place. That is the only thing getting me through this."

In Missouri, one person was killed in a trailer park in the town of Buffalo, about 35 miles north of Springfield. Two more fatalities were reported in the Cassville and Puxico areas.

A 10th person was reported killed in Cumberland County,

The tornado that barreled through the tiny eastern Kansas

town of Harveyville was an EF-2, with wind speeds of 120 to 130mph, state officials said. It left much of the community in

The twisters were spawned by a powerful storm system that blew down from the Rockies on Tuesday and was headed toward the East Coast.

Corey Mead, lead forecaster at the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Okla., said a broad cold front was slamming into warm, humid air over much of the eastern half of the nation.

Long a tourist destination for visitors attracted to the Ozark Mountains, Branson rose to prominence in the 1990s because of its theaters, which drew country music stars including Merle Haggard and Crystal Gayle, as well as other musical celebrities such as Chubby Checker and Andy Williams.

Branson is about 110 miles southeast of Joplin, which was devastated by a monstrous twister last May that killed 161 people. Memories of that disaster motivated people to take cover after the sirens sounded early Wednesday.

"I think so many people from Branson went over to help in Joplin, and having seen that, it was fresh on our minds," said Mayor Raeanne Presley, whose family owns Presleys' Theater. "We all reached for our loved ones a little sooner and got to the basement a little faster."

The violent weather also lashed parts of Arkansas, Oklahoma and Kentucky, where three buildings belonging to an Elizabethtown trucking company were heavily damaged.

"It picked the whole building up," said Jim Owen, son of the owner of Harry Owen Trucking. "It would take a group of 20 men five days with equipment to tear that down.'

The Midwest and South were to get a reprieve from the menacing weather Thursday, ahead of another strong system expected Friday.

Ryan Jewell, a meteorologist with the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Okla., said the next system is forecast to take a path similar to Wednesday's and has the potential to inflict even more damage.

On Friday, he said, both the Midwest and South would be "right in the bull's eye."

#### N. Korea To Suspend Key Nuclear Activities

WASHINGTON (AP) — North Korea raised hopes Wednesday for a major easing in nuclear tensions under its youthful new leader, agreeing to suspend uranium enrichment at a key facility and refrain from missile and nuclear tests in exchange for a mountain of critically needed U.S. food aid.

It was only a preliminary step but a necessary one to restart broader six-nation negotiations that would lay down terms for what the North could get in return for abandoning its nuclear weapons program. Pyongyang pulled out of those talks in 2009 and seemingly has viewed the nuclear program as key to the survival of its dynastic, communist regime, now entering its third generation.

But the announcement, just over two months after the death of longtime ruler Kim Jong II, also opened a door for the secretive government under his untested youngest son, Kim Jong Un, to improve ties with the United States and win critically needed aid and international

#### Santorum Seizes Critical Michigan Delegates

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — Rick Santorum seized about as many of Michigan's GOP delegates as primary winner Mitt Romney, and could end up with more, in a close contest that does little to clarify the muddled presidential race heading into Super Tuesday.

After Romney's strong win in Arizona and close finish in his native state of Michigan, the GOP field fanned across Ohio, Tennessee and Georgia for the weeklong sprint to Tuesday's 10 contests. Washington state's caucuses fall in the middle, on Saturday.

Romney tried to build momentum from his wins, Santorum crowed about his near-miss and Newt Gingrich looked to revive his campaign in the South — where he will battle Santorum for the party's most con-

Texas Rep. Ron Paul could also be a factor in the Super Tuesday delegate count, especially in caucus states such as North Dakota.

### **Syria Threatens To 'cleanse' Rebel District**

BEIRUT (AP) — The Syrian regime showed a new determination Wednesday to crush its opponents, vowing to "cleanse" a rebel-held district in the besieged central city of Homs after nearly four weeks of

Government troops massed outside the embattled neighborhood of Baba Amr, raising fears among activists of an imminent ground invasion that could endanger thousands of residents, as well as two trapped Western journalists, who have been under heavy bombard-

A Spanish journalist who had been stuck in the area escaped Wednesday to Lebanon, the second foreign reporter to do so since a government rocket attack last week killed two of his colleagues and wounded two others.

The fate of the foreign journalists has drawn attention to Homs, which has emerged as a key battleground between government forces and those seeking to end the regime of authoritarian President Bashar



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# Clinton Tells Congress U.S. Is Moving On Iran Penalties

BY DONNA CASSATA

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton insists the U.Š. is moving quickly on new penalties against Iran, but some lawmakers worry the Obama administration won't be tough enough on financial institutions doing business with Tehran's Central Bank.

We should recognize what has been accomplished with the sanctions Congress passed and we are aggressively implementing," Clinton told the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations Wednesday, explaining that the U.S. is relying on pressure and discussion. "Discussion hasn't gone anywhere but pressure has been ratcheted up," Clinton said.

The first round of penalties

under legislation that President Barack Obama signed Dec. 31 were to take effect Wednesday, and lawmakers expected to hear from the administration about steps planned to thwart Iran's disputed nuclear program.

That law says that 60 days after enactment, the president must penalize on any privately owned foreign financial institutions that knowingly conduct or facilitate any significant financial transaction with the Central Bank of Iran for any purpose other than the purchase of petro-leum or petroleum products from

The administration indicated it had no plans to mark that deadline by announcing a new round of penalties. A Treasury Department official said the U.S. was interpreting the law to mean that transactions with the Central Bank occurring after the deadline would put financial institutions at risk of penalties.

"Foreign private banks that, after today, engage in significant transactions with the CBI unrelated to the purchase of oil risk losing their correspondent account access to U.S. financial institutions," said David Cohen, Treasury's undersecretary for terrorism and financial

intelligence. Also Wednesday, 56 senators were backing a bipartisan resolution calling on Iran to allow free and fair voting when it holds parliamentary elections Friday, the measure's chief sponsors said.

Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., and others said the resolution was designed to show the Iranian people that the United States is on their side, even as the U.S. raises the pressure on their government to abandon its suspected nuclear program. Clinton told the Senate For-

eign Relations Committee on Tuesday that the U.S. is "diligently reaching out around the world to get agreements from countries for whom it's quite difficult to comply with our sanctions. But they are doing the best they can. ... We are focused on the toughest form of diplomacy and economic pressure to try to convince Iran to change course, and we have kept every option on the table."

Sens. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., and Mark Kirk, R-Ill., pushed for the sanctions in the defense bill, and in a rare unanimous vote, the waiver under the law, that all Senate backed them. 100-0.

During Clinton's testimony, Menendez pressed her on the administration's enforcement of the new penalties. Menendez raised concerns about the criteria used to determine whether a country had achieved significant reductions in the purchase of petroleum.

The government's Energy Information Administration planned to issue both a classified and unclassified report Wednesday on the availability and supply of non-Iranian-produced oil, reflecting the current production rate and the total reserve. The report will be the basis for whether the administration proceeds with the next round of penalties.

"Can I presume that in the absence of a national security

countries will be required to actually make significant reductions in their purchases during each of the 180-day period?"
Menendez asked.
Clinton said the administration

expects to see significant reductions. She said the administration has had "very intense and very blunt" conversations with India,

China and Turkey.

"Both on their government side and on their business side, they are taking actions that go further and deeper than perhaps their public statements might lead you to believe and we're going to continue to keep an absolute foot on the pedal in terms of our accelerated aggressive outreach to them. And they, you know, they are looking for ways to make up the lost revenues, the lost crude oil," Clinton said.



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