

Syrian Government Blocks Red Cross

BEIRUT (AP) — The Syrian government blocked a Red Cross convoy Friday from delivering badly needed food, medical supplies and blankets to a rebellious neighborhood of Homs cut off by a monthlong siege, and activists accused regime troops who overran the shattered district of execution-style killings and a scorched-earth campaign.

Humanitarian conditions in the former rebel stronghold of Baba Amr have been described as catastrophic, with extended power outages, shortages of food and water, and no medical care for the sick and wounded.

British Prime Minister David Cameron called Homs “a scene of medieval barbarity.”

Syrian state TV showed burned-out and destroyed buildings in Baba Amr, a western neighborhood of Homs, which was covered with a blanket of fresh snow.

Syrian government forces took control of Baba Amr on Thursday after rebels fled the district under constant bombardment that activists said killed hundreds of people since early February. The Syrian regime has said it was fighting “armed gangs” in Baba Amr, and had vowed to “cleanse” the neighborhood.

Obama Joins In Denouncing Rush Limbaugh

NEW YORK (AP) — Stepping into an emerging culture clash over women, President Barack Obama made a supportive phone call Friday to a law student who testified before Congress about the need for birth control coverage, only to be called a “slut” by Rush Limbaugh.

For Obama, it was an emphatic plunge into the latest flare-up on social issues.

Democratic officeholders and liberal advocacy have accused Republicans of waging a “war on women” because of GOP stances on contraception and abortion rights, and Limbaugh’s tirade on his radio talk show was seen as an escalation.

In addition to her call from the president, the third-year Georgetown University law student, Sandra Fluke, was backed by members of Congress, women’s groups, and the administration and faculty at her Roman Catholic university.

Demands for Limbaugh’s sponsors to pull their ads from his rocketed through cyberspace, and at least three companies, Quicken Loans and bedding retailers Sleep Train and Sleep Number, bowed to the pressure.

Obama considers Limbaugh’s remarks “reprehensible,” according to White House spokesman Jay Carney. He said the president called Fluke to “express his disappointment that she has been the subject of inappropriate personal attacks” and to thank her for speaking out on an issue of public policy.

Suicide Bomber Kills 23 In Pakistan

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AP) — A suicide bomber attacked the headquarters of a rival insurgent group in northwest Pakistan on Friday, killing 23 of its supporters in an outbreak of factional fighting, an official said.

Elsewhere in the Afghan border region, fighting between security forces and militants claimed the lives of 41 others, an especially deadly day that showed the level of instability 10 years after the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan heralded the unrest.

Clashes among insurgents are quite common along the border, where tribal loyalties hold sway and the government has little or no control.

Smuggling, kidnapping for ransom and drug production are all lucrative businesses that militant groups are involved in.

The suicide bomber struck the base of the Lashkar-e-Islam group in the Tirah valley, where Pakistani security forces are also fighting militants threatening the nearby city of Peshawar, said local political administration official Iqbal Khan.

A commander of the Pakistani Taliban, which is a local rival of Lashkar-e-Islam, claimed responsibility for the attack in a call to an Associated Press reporter. The commander, who gave his name as Mohammed, said it was in revenge for an attack last month that killed Taliban fighters.

Dahmer Tour Causes Backlash In Milwaukee

MILWAUKEE (AP) — A planned walking tour providing a peek into serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer’s life and the Milwaukee haunts where he met and stalked his victims is drawing protests, even prompting online deal-maker Groupon to cancel what some called a creepy promotion.

Victims’ families and others call the tour an attempt to exploit an ugly part of the city’s history and want it to be stopped before the first sightseers hit the sidewalks.

But tour-organizer Bam Marketing and Media has said it’s not deterred. Each of the company’s first two trips through the Walker’s Point neighborhood, scheduled for Saturday, had nearly reached the 20-person capacity by Thursday, said spokeswoman Amanda Morden.

Walker’s Point Association president Victor Ray said Saturday, or any day in the near future, is too soon. Dahmer’s crimes are just two decades old and many of his victims’ family members are still around, he said.

“I just don’t think this is the right timing,” Ray said. “And a tour of the area is not the right thing to do. It’s sensationalism in its finest.”

Storms Wreck Towns, Kill 14 In 3 States

BY KEN KUSMER
AND BRUCE SCHREINER
Associated Press

HENRYVILLE, Ind. — Powerful storms stretching from the Gulf Coast to the Great Lakes wrecked several Indiana towns and killed at least 14 people Friday as the system tore roofs off schools and homes, flattened a fire station, flipped over tractor-trailer trucks and damaged a maximum security prison. It was the second deadly tornado outbreak this week.

Authorities reported eight deaths in southern Indiana, where Marysville was leveled and nearby Henryville also suffered extreme damage. There were five deaths in Kentucky and one in Ohio.

Aerial footage from a TV news helicopter flying over Henryville showed numerous wrecked houses, some with their roofs torn off and many surrounded by debris. The video shot by WLKY in Louisville, Ky., also shows a mangled school bus protruding from the side of a one-story building and dozens of overturned semis strewn around the smashed remains of a truck stop.

Andy Bell was guarding a demolished garage until his friend could get to the business to retrieve some valuable tools Friday night. He looked around at the devastation, pointing to what were now empty lots between a Catholic church and a Marathon station about a block away.

“There were houses from the Catholic church on the corner all the way to the Marathon station.

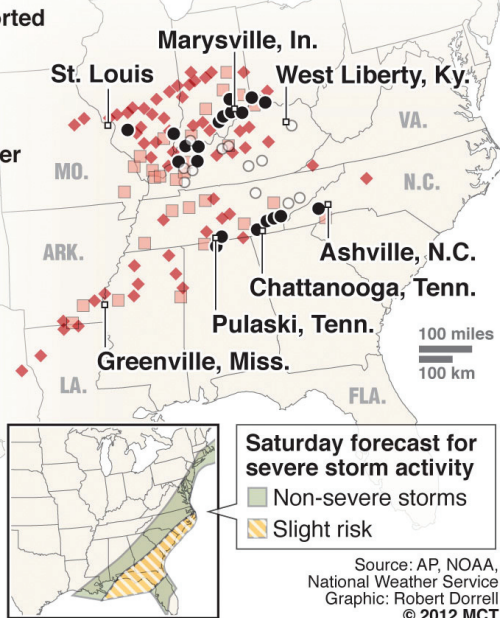
Another damaging day

Storms left new swaths of destruction in the Ohio and Tennessee River valleys Friday, but forecasts call for a calmer weekend.

- Tornadoes reported (preliminary)
- High winds
- ◆ Hail
- Tornadoes earlier in the week

• Meteorologists said Friday would likely end up as one of the five biggest tornado days of the year, with “tornadic activity” leading to watches or warnings in at

• Storms earlier this week killed 13 in four states in the Midwest and the South



And now it’s just a pile of rubble, all the way up,” he said. “It’s just a great ...”

His voice trailed off, before he finished: “Wood sticks all the way up.”

An Associated Press reporter in Henryville said the high school was destroyed and the second floor had been ripped off the middle school next door. Authorities said school was in session when the tornado hit, but there were only minor injuries there.

Classroom chairs were scattered on the ground outside, trees were uprooted and cars

had huge dents from baseball-sized hail. Throughout town, there were bent utility poles and piles of debris. Volunteers pushed shopping carts full of water and food up the street and handed it out to people.

Ruth Simpson of Salem came to the demolished town right after the storm hit, looking for relatives that she hadn’t been able to find. “I can’t find them,” she said, starting to cry, and then walked away.

The town was without power, and there was no cell phone reception or service for land lines.

In Interview, Obama Says He’s Not Bluffing On Iran

BY MARK S. SMITH
AND ANNE GEARAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama warned that he is not bluffing about attacking Iran if it builds a nuclear weapon, but in an interview published Friday, Obama also cautioned U.S. ally Israel that a premature attack on Iran would do more harm than good.

In his most expansive remarks on the issue thus far, Obama told The Atlantic magazine that Iran and Israel both understand that “a military component” is among a mix of many options for dealing with Iran, along with sanctions and diplomacy. That is the most direct threat he has issued during months of escalating tension with Iran over its disputed nuclear development program.

His comments appeared aimed more at Israel and its supporters in the United States than at Iran. Obama addresses the influential American Israel Public Affairs Committee on Sunday and meets



Obama

with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Monday at the White House. Netanyahu will also address AIPAC. “I think that the Israeli government recognizes that, as president of the United States, I don’t bluff,” he said in the interview. “I also don’t, as a matter of sound policy, go around advertising exactly what our intentions are. But (both) governments recognize that when the United States says it is unacceptable for Iran to have a nuclear weapon, we mean what we say.” Netanyahu, speaking Friday ahead of a meeting in Canada with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, called Iran’s nuclear ambitions a “grave threat to the peace and security of the world, and I think it’s important that the international community not allow this threat to materialize.”

“As for Israel, like any sover-

eign country, we reserve the right to defend ourselves against a country, against a country that calls and works for our destruction,” Netanyahu said.

Obama will try to convince Netanyahu to postpone any plans his government may have to unilaterally attack Iran’s nuclear facilities in coming months. An attack that soon would not carry U.S. backing, and the U.S. would probably not be involved in planning or executing it.

Nonetheless, it could force the

United States into a new conflict and an arms race in the Middle East, as Obama made clear in the lengthy interview. It also could allow Iran to paint itself as the victim and draw new support that would undermine rather than enhance Israel’s security, Obama warned.

“At a time when there is not a lot of sympathy for Iran and its only real ally (Syria) is on the ropes, do we want a distraction in which suddenly Iran can portray itself as a victim?” Obama said.

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