

Shadow Hangs Over Latest Killings In Syria

BEIRUT (AP) — The bodies of the Syrian boys and young men in jeans and casual shirts were strewn along a blood-stained pavement, dying apparently where they fell. Weeping women moved among the dead, and one of them screamed, "Where are you, people of the village?"

In the Syrian civil war's latest alleged mass killing, activists said Friday that regime troops and gunmen from nearby Alawite areas beat, stabbed and shot at least 50 people in the Sunni Muslim village of Bayda.

The slayings highlighted in the starkest terms the sectarian overtones of a conflict that has already killed more than 70,000 people. Details of the killings came to light as the Obama administration said it was again weighing whether to arm the rebels.

Syria's 2-year-old crisis has largely broken along sectarian lines: the Sunni majority forms the backbone of the rebellion, while President Bashar Assad's minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, anchors the regime's security services and military officer corps. Other minorities, such as Christians, largely support Assad or stand on the sidelines, worried that the regime's fall would bring about a more Islamist rule.

The killings in Bayda fall against this backdrop. Tucked in the mountains outside the Mediterranean coastal city of Banias, the village is predominantly Sunni but is located in the Alawite ancestral heartland centered in the rugged region along the sea.

In Costa Rica, Obama Talks Drug Violence

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (AP) — President Barack Obama on Friday cast Mexico as a nation ready to take "its rightful place in the world" and move past the drug battles and violence that have defined its relationship with the United States. He then headed to Costa Rica to prod Central American leaders to tackle those same issues more aggressively.

Obama's three-day visit to Mexico and Costa Rica is his first to Latin America since winning a second presidential term in an election in which he gained the support of Hispanic Americans by a large margin. His trip is being followed with great interest by Hispanics in the U.S. as well as in Mexico, Central America and farther to the south.

In Mexico in particular, he tried to set a new course for ties between the U.S. and its southern neighbor, eagerly promoting Mexico's improving economy and its democracy.

"A new Mexico is emerging," Obama told a crowd of young people during a speech at Mexico City's grand National Museum of Anthropology. "Mexico is also taking its rightful place in the world, on the world stage. Mexico is standing up for democracy not just here in Mexico but throughout the hemisphere. Mexico's sharing expertise with neighbors across the Americas. When they face earthquakes or threats to their citizens or go to the polls to cast their votes, Mexico is there helping its neighbors."

Despite Obama's rosy portrayal, Mexico's high poverty rates have barely budged in recent years. Its economy grew by only about a 1 percent rate in the first three months of 2013 and is not creating anywhere near the 1 million jobs annually it needs to employ young Mexicans entering the workforce. Without jobs or opportunities to study, many young people have become easier prey for recruitment by drug cartels

Incoming NRA President: Fighting 'Culture War'

HOUSTON (AP) — The National Rifle Association kicked off its annual convention Friday with a warning to its member they are engaged in a "culture war" that stretches beyond gun rights, further ramping up emotions surrounding the gun control debate.

NRA First Vice President James Porter, who will assume the organization's presidency Monday, issued a full-throated challenge to President Barack Obama in the wake of a major victory regarding gun control and called on members to dig in for a long fight that will stretch into the 2014 elections.

More than 70,000 NRA members are expected to attend the three-day convention amid the backdrop of the national debate over gun control and the defeat of a U.S. Senate bill introduced after December's mass shooting at a Newtown, Conn., elementary school. A small gathering of gun control supporters were outside of the convention in Houston.

Porter's remarks came in a short speech to about 300 people at a grass-roots organizing meeting and set the tone for a "Stand and Fight"-themed convention that is part gun trade show, political rally and strategy meeting.

"This is not a battle about gun rights," Porter said, calling it "a culture war."

Solar Powered Airplane Leaves Northern Calif.

MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. (AP) — A solar-powered airplane left Northern California on Friday for the first leg of a planned cross-country trip that its co-pilot described as a "milestone" in aviation history.

The Solar Impulse — considered the world's most-advanced sun-powered plane — left Moffett Field in Mountain View just after dawn. Its creators said the trip is the first attempt by a solar airplane capable of flying day and night without fuel to fly across America.

It plans to land at Sky Harbor airport in Phoenix, Dallas-Fort Worth airport in Texas, Lambert-St. Louis airport, Dulles airport in the Washington area and New York's John F. Kennedy airport. Each flight leg will take about 19 to 25 hours, with 10-day stops in each city.

"All the big pioneers of the 20th century have tried to fly coast to coast across America," said co-pilot and one of the plane's founders, Bertrand Piccard. "So now today we're trying to do this, but on solar power with no fuel with the first airplane that is able to fly day and night just on solar power."

The plane is powered by about 12,000 photovoltaic cells that cover massive wings and charge its batteries.

Stocks Surge After Hiring Climbs

BY BERNARD CONDON
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK — Optimism about the economy swept through the stock market Friday, pushing two widely watched indexes past major milestones.

After weeks of mixed signals about manufacturing and earnings, a surprisingly strong U.S. jobs report gave investors confidence that the economy isn't about to falter. The market jumped from the opening bell. Traders donned party hats, and a wave of buying helped the Standard and Poor's 500 index crack the 1,600 mark for the first time. The Dow Jones industrial average broke through 15,000.

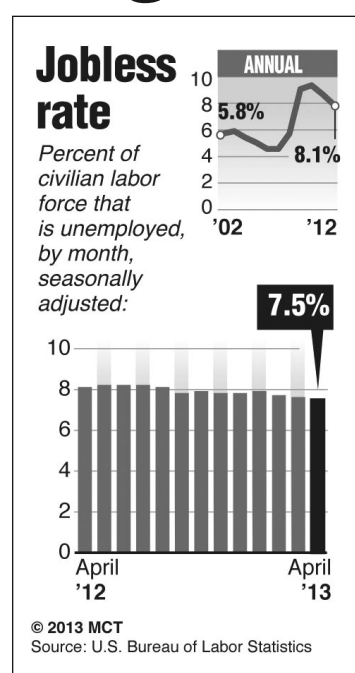
"There's euphoria today," said Stephen Carl, the head equity trader at The Williams Capital Group. "That's what you'd have to call it."

On the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, brokers sported baseball caps emblazoned with "Dow 15,000."

Jobs are crucial to keeping the stock market climbing. Big U.S. companies are making record profits, but much of that has come from cutting costs, not boosting sales. More jobs, and more consumer spending, would help.

U.S. employers added 165,000 workers last month and many more in February and March than previously estimated. The unemployment rate fell to the lowest level in four years, 7.5 percent.

The Dow rose 142.38 points to close at a record 14,973.96, up 1 percent. The S&P 500 index



climbed 16.83 points, or 1 percent, to 1,614.42, also a record.

"We're breaking through psychological barriers and that will continue to bring investors off the sidelines," said Darrell Cronk, regional chief investment officer for Wells Fargo Private Bank. He called the jobs news "wonderful."

Cronk, like many others on Wall Street, has been watching individual investors for signs they may finally have shed their fear of stocks. A surge in buying from them would help push stocks higher. But individuals pulled more money out of stock mutual funds than they put in late last month, a

reversal from the trend earlier this year, according to the Investment Company Institute.

They've had reasons to pull back lately.

First came news of falling retail sales in March, then a series of weak manufacturing reports and signs of an economic slowdown in China.

Other reports, including two out Friday, have pointed to a slowdown. Factory orders sank in March and a gauge of growth in the service sector fell short of estimates.

First-quarter earnings have been mixed, too. Though they've come in higher than expected, many companies have reported little or no revenue growth, which has spooked investors.

Investors have also been concerned that higher Social Security payroll taxes and sweeping government spending cuts that took effect earlier this year will slow U.S. economic growth, and pinch corporate profits.

Friday's jobs numbers suggested the private sector might be strong enough to overcome those obstacles.

In its report, the government revised its previous estimate of job gains up to 332,000 in February and 138,000 in March. The economy has created an average of 208,000 jobs a month from November through April — above the 138,000 added in the previous six months.

"Jobs are key," said Randall Warren, chief investment officer of Warren Financial Service in Exton, Penn. "Everyone is worried about

New Evacuation Ordered In California Wildfire

BY RAQUEL MARIA DILLON
Associated Press

CAMARILLO, Calif. — A huge Southern California wildfire burned through coastal wilderness to the beach on Friday then stormed back through canyons toward inland neighborhoods when winds reversed direction.

The wind shift forced fire commanders to order a new evacuation of homes in a Thousand Oaks neighborhood along a two-mile stretch of road overlooking smoke-filled coastal canyons.

Fears arose after gusty Santa Ana winds from the northeast faded and ocean breezes from the southwest pushed inland.

The "worst-case weather scenario" sent flames ripping through fresh fuel just to the east of where the blaze charred wildlands a day earlier, said Ventura County fire spokesman Bill Nash.

"In the perfect scenario we'd just hope for the wind to go away but what happened is the wind just turned around," Nash said.

The wind-whipped fire erupted Thursday in the Camarillo area, threatening as many as 4,000 homes but only damaging 15. No injuries were reported.

The 15 1/2-square-mile blaze 50 miles east of Los Angeles was only 10 percent contained, and the work of more than 900 firefighters, aided by air tankers, was just beginning.

Evacuations had been lifted overnight for neighborhoods as the fire moved toward the coast. California State University, Channel Islands remained closed, and new evacuations were called for scattered homes in coastal canyons, Nash said.

Those areas mainly included ranches, orchards, camps and vacation homes rather than dense

neighborhoods. Some expensive ridge-top and canyon homes also were in the path of the flames. Fire engine crews took up positions to defend the dwellings as helicopters made water drops.

The fire was 20 miles west of Malibu, burning mostly in rugged mountains. Nash said it was not moving toward Malibu as of mid-afternoon.

Earlier, it jumped the Pacific Coast Highway at Point Mugu and burned on a beach shooting range of Naval Base Ventura County.

The base ordered an evacuation of a nearby housing area as a precautionary measure and urged personnel in other Point Mugu housing to voluntarily leave.

The fire reinforced predictions that California is in for a bad summer fire season because dry winter and spring weather has left brush tinder-dry.

In addition, the California Department of Water Resources found the water content in the snowpack was just 17 percent of normal. The snowmelt is a vital water source for the state.

More than 3,000 firefighters were battling six major wildfires on Friday in California, the state fire agency said.

Fire crews have responded to more than 680 wildfires since the beginning of the year — some 200 more than average for the period.

Hot, dry Santa Ana winds gusting to 50 mph or more swept flames from the Camarillo-area fire toward the coast on Thursday.

Cooler, calmer ocean air was beginning to move ashore on Friday and could send the humidity soaring — the beginning of change that could even bring a chance of rain in the fire area by Sunday

night or Monday morning.

The change pushed relative humidity at Camarillo from just 3 percent to 19 percent in an hour. The temperature hit 96 then fell into the low 80s. Smoke that had been streaming offshore began stagnating over the fire.

The National Weather Service canceled mountain wind advisories and predicted onshore winds of only 10 mph to 15 mph, with some 20 mph gusts.

That raised concerns of flare-ups along the path of the fire.

"The fire can jump up at any time and any place," Tom Kruschke, a Ventura County fire spokesman, said earlier. "There's that hot bed of coals out there covering thousands of acres."

Overnight, the fire roared down a canyon in Point Mugu State Park and through an evacuated campground, but firefighters managed to protect a nature center and other buildings.

"We had 20-, 25-foot flames. They were having a devil of a time making a stand," said Craig Sap, a state parks supervisor for the district.

things like fiscal policy, the government spending money it doesn't have. If you want to turn that situation around, you have to get people off their couches."

On Friday, on market's gains were broad. Eight of the 10 industry groups in the S&P 500 index rose. Nearly three stocks rose for every one that fell on the NYSE.

Companies that stand to benefit most from an upturn in the economy led the market. Those that make basic materials and produce oil and gas rose the most in the S&P 500 index.

U.S. Steel rose \$1.08, or 6.3 percent, to \$18.14. General Electric rose 25 cents, or 1.1 percent, to \$22.57. Dow Chemical rose 84 cents, or 2.5 percent, to \$33.96.

Utilities, consumer-staple companies and other safe-play stocks trailed the market as investors took on more risk.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note jumped from its lowest level of the year, as traders moved money out of the safety of government bonds. The yield rose to 1.74 percent from 1.63 percent late Thursday.

Small-company stocks are more risky than bigger companies but can also offer investors greater returns. On Friday, they outpaced the broader market. The Russell 2000 jumped 14.57 points, or 1.6 percent, to 954.42, a new all-time high.

The Nasdaq composite index rose 38.01 points to 3,378.63, an increase of 1.1 percent. Still, it remains well below its dot-com peak.

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