

Ukraine Begins Talks On Ending Crisis

KIEV, Ukraine (AP) — European-backed peace talks on ending Ukraine's crisis began with little promise Wednesday when pro-Russian insurgents — who weren't even invited to the session — demanded that the Kiev government recognize their sovereignty.

The "road map" put forth by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe calls for national dialogue as a first step toward resolving the escalating tensions, in which the insurgents have seized government buildings in eastern Ukraine and declared independence, while government forces have mounted limited offensives to retake control of the region.

But instead of a dialogue, the day was more a case of competing monologues, with the two sides as far apart as ever.

Denis Pushilin, a leader of the insurgency in the city of Donetsk, said his faction was not invited to the government-organized roundtable in Kiev, and that the "talks with Kiev authorities could only be about one thing: the recognition of the Donetsk People's Republic."

Acting President Oleksandr Turchynov said in his opening remarks at the Kiev talks that authorities were "ready for a dialogue," but insisted they will not talk to the pro-Russia gunmen, which the government has denounced as "terrorists."

Sept. 11 Museum Opens This Week

NEW YORK (AP) — The museum devoted to the story of Sept. 11 tells it in victims' last voicemails, in photos of people falling from the twin towers, in the scream of sirens, in the dust-covered shoes of those who fled the skyscrapers' collapse, in the wristwatch of one of the airline passengers who confronted the hijackers.

By turns chilling and heartbreaking, a place of both deathly silence and distressing sounds, the National September 11 Memorial Museum opens this week deep beneath ground zero, 12 1/2 years after the terrorist attacks.

The project was marked by construction problems, financial squabbles and disputes over the appropriate way to honor the nearly 3,000 people killed in New York, Washington and the Pennsylvania countryside.

Whatever the challenges in conceiving it, "you won't walk out of this museum without a feeling that you understand humanity in a deeper way," museum President Joe Daniels said Wednesday.

The privately operated museum — built along with the memorial plaza above for \$700 million in donations and tax dollars — will be dedicated Thursday with a visit from President Barack Obama and will be open initially to victims' families, survivors and first responders. It will open to the public May 21.

Widow To Raise PTSD Awareness

BURLINGTON, Vt. (AP) — Amy Miner says her late husband's fight did not end when he left the war.

As with many veterans, Kryn Miner's battle against the emotional scars of a long military career was just beginning when he returned home.

It ended last month when he was shot to death by one of their four children after he threatened to kill the family.

Since losing him, the 39-year-old widow has vowed to bring attention to the need for better treatment for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

"The truth of the matter is if we can't take care of our veterans we shouldn't be sending them off to war," she said in a Monday interview with The Associated Press. "It doesn't make sense. Because they're coming back and this is the result and it's happening more and more."

Nigerian Soldiers Fire On Senior Officer

BAUCHI, Nigeria (AP) — Soldiers say angry Nigerian troops fired at a senior officer in another sign of a demoralized military supposed to be leading the hunt for nearly 300 schoolgirls kidnapped by Islamic extremists.

They say the soldiers fired Wednesday on a vehicle carrying Maj. Gen. Ahmadu Mohammed following the killings of 14 soldiers in an ambush. The soldiers killed were in a group that had told their command the road was dangerous and wanted to spend the night in a village. They were ordered to travel instead.

Soldiers who spoke on condition of anonymity because they want their jobs said soldiers opened fire as Mohammed drove into a barracks in northeast Maiduguri city to sympathize. He was not hit.

Demoralized troops is one reason Nigeria's military has failed to rescue the kidnapped girls, sparking outrage and forcing the government to accept international help in their rescue.

'Miracle Baby' Expected To Survive

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A young boy who survived an 11-story fall from a Minneapolis high-rise has been dubbed "the miracle baby" and was recovering in a hospital Wednesday.

Fifteen-month-old Musa Dayib suffered a broken spine and ribs as well as a concussion and a punctured lung. Musa's relatives believe he slipped through the railing of his family's apartment balcony Sunday evening.

The boy was in critical but stable condition Wednesday, Hennepin County Medical Center spokeswoman Christine Hill said.

Dr. Tina Slusher of the hospital's pediatric intensive care unit told the *Star Tribune* that Musa landed on a small patch of mulch.

"If you and I fell that far, we would be dead," Slusher said. "He's a kid. So they tend to be more flexible and pliable than you and I would be. Having said that, it's a real gift from God that he made it because this is a huge fall."

Changes On Tobacco Farms Sought

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — An international rights group is pushing the federal government and the tobacco industry to take further steps to protect children working on U.S. tobacco farms.

A report released Wednesday by Human Rights Watch claims that children as young as 7 are sometimes working long hours in fields harvesting nicotine- and pesticide-laced tobacco leaves under sometimes hazardous conditions. Most of what the group documented is legal, but it wants cigarette makers to push for safety on farms from which they buy tobacco.

Human Rights Watch details findings from interviews with more than 140 children working on farms in North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia, where a majority of the country's tobacco is grown.

"The U.S. has failed America's families by not meaningfully protecting child farmworkers from dangers to their health and safety, including on tobacco farms," said Margaret Wurth, children's rights researcher and co-author of the report.

274 Dead In Turkey's Worst-Ever Mine Disaster

BY DESMOND BUTLER AND SUZAN FRASER

Associated Press

SOMA, Turkey — Amid wails of grief and anger, rescue workers coated in grime trudged repeatedly out of a coal mine Wednesday with stretchers of bodies that swelled the death toll to 274 — the worst such disaster in Turkish history.

Hopes faded for 150 others still trapped deep underground in smoldering tunnels filled with toxic gases.

Anti-government protests broke out in the mining town of Soma, as well as Istanbul and the capital, Ankara, with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan heckled as he tried to show concern. Protesters shouted "Murderer!" and "Thief!" and Erdogan was forced to seek refuge in a supermarket, surrounded by police.

The display of anger could have significant repercussions for the Turkish leader, who is widely expected to run for president in the August election, although he has not yet announced his candidacy.

Tensions were high as hundreds of relatives and miners jostled outside the mine's entrance Wednesday, waiting for news amid a heavy police presence. Rows of women wailed uncontrollably and men knelt sobbing or simply stared in disbelief as rescue workers removed body after body, some charred beyond recognition.

One elderly man wearing a prayer cap wailed after he recognized one of the dead, and police had to restrain him from climbing into an ambulance with the body. An injured rescue worker who emerged alive was whisked away on a stretcher to the cheers of onlookers.

Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said 787 people were inside the coal mine at the time of Tuesday's explosion: 274 died and 363 were rescued, including scores who were injured.

The death toll topped a 1992 gas explosion that killed 263 workers near Turkey's Black Sea port of Zonguldak. It also left 150 miners still unaccounted for.

Yildiz said rescue workers were trying

late Wednesday to reach the bodies of up to 22 people trapped in one zone. Some of the workers were 1,400 feet (420 meters) deep inside the mine, he said.

One rescue worker who declined to be named said he led a 10-man team about a half-mile down into the mine's tunnels, where they recovered three bodies before being forced to flee because of smoke from burning coal. Rescue operations were halted for several hours into Thursday morning because high gas concentrations in the mine needed to be cleared.

The last miner rescued alive emerged from the mine around dawn and the first burials took place later Wednesday.

Giza Nergiz, a 28-year-old English teacher, said some of the victims had complained about safety at the mine.

"We buried three of our high school friends today," she said, walking with her husband Onur Nergiz, a 30-year-old mine administrator. "A lot of people were complaining about safety, but nobody (in management) was doing anything about it."

Erdogan declared three days of national mourning and postponed a trip to Albania to visit the mine in Soma, 155 miles (250 kilometers) south of Istanbul. He warned that some radical groups would try to use the disaster to discredit his government.

"Our hope is that, God willing, they will be brought out," Erdogan said of those still trapped. "That is what we are waiting for."

Yet his efforts to show compassion — discussing rescue operations with authorities, walking near the mine entrance, trying to comfort two crying women — did not always go over well.

At a news conference, he tried to deflect a question about who was responsible for the disaster, saying: "These types of things in mines happen all the time."

"These are ordinary things. There is a thing in literature called 'work accident'... It happens in other work places, too," Erdogan said. "It happened here. It's in its nature. It's not possible for there to be no

accidents in mines. Of course we were deeply pained by the extent here."

In this industrial town, where coal mining has been the main industry for decades, Erdogan's ties to mining leaders were vehemently noted. Townspeople said the wife of the Soma mine's boss works for Erdogan's party and the boss himself had skipped town.

"They are trying to look like they care, but they are not helping anyone. There is no urgency, even now. People blame Tayyip," Nergiz said.

In downtown Soma, protesters, most in their teens and 20s, faced off against riot police in front of the ruling NKP party headquarters, smashing its windows with rocks.

"Our prime minister is a dictator," said 16-year-old Melih Atik. "Neither the government nor the company took precautions in the mine, and everyone knows that's why this happened."

Erdogan has been dogged by corruption allegations and was forced to oust four government ministers in December after they were implicated in a police bribery probe. The scandal deepened after audio recordings were posted on the Internet suggesting corruption by the prime minister and his family members. Erdogan denies the allegations and says they are a plot to discredit his government.

In Istanbul, hundreds of demonstrators gathered outside the headquarters of mine owner Soma Komur Isletmeleri A.S. Police used tear gas and water cannon to break up a group who tried to march to the city's iconic Taksim Square to denounce poor safety conditions.

Police also dispersed a group marching to the energy ministry in Ankara to protest the deaths.

Fences were erected and police stood guard outside Soma's hospital, where scores of the injured were being treated. Some residents said the men were being pressured by the mining company not to talk about the blast.



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