

Fear Of Looting Grips NYC As New Storm Threatens

BY TOM HAYS AND COLLEEN LONG
 Associated Press

NEW YORK — Richard Chan prowled around his cold, dark Staten Island home with knives and a sword to protect it from thieves, standing his ground as another East Coast storm threatened and police went through neighborhoods with loudspeakers warning people to get out.

"I still have some valuables. I just can't leave it," he said Tuesday. "I just don't want to lose my stuff to some dirtbag."

While city officials strongly encouraged storm-ravaged communities to seek higher ground before Wednesday's nor'easter, Chan was among a group who adamantly refused to leave, choosing to stick close to the belongings they have left.

Since the superstorm made landfall more than a week ago, killing 40 people in the city, more than 100 in 10 states and leaving millions without power, police said overall crime has actually gone down, not up. There are few reports of looting storm-damaged homes.

But Alex Ocasio wasn't convinced. The nursing home worker planned to ride out the latest storm in his first-floor Rockaway apartment — even after seeing cars float by his front door during Sandy.

As the water receded, men dressed in dark clothes broke down the door and were surprised to find him and other residents inside. "They tried to say they were rescue workers, then took off," he said.

He put up a handmade sign — "Have gun. Will shoot U" — outside his apartment and started using a bed frame to barricade the door. He has gas, so he keeps on the oven and boils water to stay warm at night. "It gets a little humid, but it's not bad," he said. "I'm staying. Nothing can be worse than what happened last week."

In the Rockaways, one of the worst-hit areas, nightfall brings with it fears of looting, burglaries — even armed robberies. The idyllic seaside boardwalk was in ruins, streets



ALEJANDRA VILLA/NEWSDAY/MCT
A Long Beach resident looks for clothes at an impromptu aid station for victims of Superstorm Sandy outside City Hall in Long Beach, New York, on Tuesday.

were covered with sand and cars scattered like trash.

"You can't go there after dark anymore," said 57-year-old construction worker William Gavin, pointing to a battered, lower-income section of his beachfront community. "It's a good way to get a gun pulled on you."

Earlier this week, a retired police officer fired warning shots at someone trying to break into her home in the middle of the night, said Sean Kavanagh.

"I don't blame her," said Kavanagh, also a retired officer. "I would have done the same."

Kavanagh says he's staying home, in part to protect it. "I leave and anything can happen," he said. "It's open season."

Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly said it wasn't wise to stay put.

"I think your life is more important than property," he said.

Kelly said police have arrested 123 people citywide since the storm blew in last week, 54 burglary arrests and 41 others stemming from gas line disputes. Police said the majority were in areas suffering from the storm.

"You would think, under the circumstances, you would see much more," Kelly said. "We haven't seen that."

Burglaries were up 6 percent citywide compared to the same period last year, but overall crime was down 27 percent, police said.

More than 1 million people remained without power on Tuesday, and forecasters said the nor'easter headed to the region on Wednesday could still bring 50 mph winds gusts to New York and New Jersey, an inch of rain and a storm surge of 3 feet.

"I know it's been a long, long eight days," Gov. Andrew Cuomo said.

Police: Calif. Shooting Suspect Was Methodical

BY GOSIA WOZNIAKKA
 Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. — A parolee who killed two people and wounded two others on Tuesday at a California chicken processing plant where he worked moved methodically between his first three victims, putting a handgun against their head or neck before pulling the trigger, police said.

Lawrence Jones shot 32-year-old Fatima Lopez in the back as she tried to flee then put the gun to the head of Estevan Catano and pulled the trigger but was out of bullets, Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer said.

Jones, 42, then went outside the Valley Protein plant, where he reloaded his gun, shot himself and died later at a hospital, the chief said.

The victims inside the plant did not hear the shooter because it was loud and at least some of them wore noise protectors, Dyer said.

"He had opportunity to shoot other co-workers that were in the business at this time, but he chose not to," Dyer said. "He walked around them in order to get very close to the intended targets, place the gun very close and fire a round."

Salvador Diaz, 32, was pronounced dead at the scene, and Manuel Verdin, 34, died later at a hospital. Arnulfo Conrriguez, 28,



CRAIG KOHLRUSS/FRESNO BEE/MCT
A group of unidentified people hug together outside the police perimeter in central Fresno, California, where a shooting occurred at a workplace on Tuesday.

was in critical condition, and Lopez was expected to be released later from a hospital, Dyer said.

Police said they didn't know what prompted the attack by Jones midway through his shift at the plant, although other workers told police he did not appear to be himself when he arrived at the plant for work.

"There was something that must have provoked this incident, perhaps that occurred today, or maybe was building up to today," Dyer said soon after the attack.

Police said they found 24 rounds of .357

caliber ammunition — the type used in the shooting — and 21 rounds of .38 caliber ammunition at Jones' apartment.

Jones arrived at work on a bike just before 5 a.m. About three-and-a-half hours into his shift, he pulled out the handgun and began firing, Dyer said.

About 30 employees witnessed the shooting, and there were a total of about 65 people at work when the gunfire started, police said.

The company was established in 2005, according to online business records. A call to the company went to a voicemail recording that said "due to an emergency we are closed for the day."

A woman who answered the phone at a listing for CEO Durbin Breckenridge and identified herself as his wife said she would pass a phone message to him.

News media and onlookers were kept several blocks from the plant in the morning, as police used yellow tape to block access. Dozens of officers swarmed the area.

Joe Martinez, 45, told the Fresno Bee that he was in the drive-thru lane of a fast-food restaurant when he heard a loud pop that he initially thought was a car backfiring.

Then he looked to the north and saw a man on the ground with two people standing over him.

"It's the last thing you expect to see," Martinez said. "It's very upsetting."

Syria Envoy Warns Country Could Turn Into Somalia

BY ZEINA KARAM
 Associated Press

BEIRUT — The U.N.-Arab League envoy for Syria warned Tuesday that the country could become another Somalia — where al-Qaida-linked militants and warlords battled for decades after the ouster of a dictator — if the civil war is not ended soon.

Battles between regime forces and Syrian rebels left more than 140 people dead across Syria on Tuesday, while the brother of Syria's parliament speaker was gunned down in Damascus — the latest victim of a wave of assassinations targeting high-ranking supporters of President Bashar Assad's regime.

Among the dead were at least 13 people who died in a series of explosions in the capital Damascus, targeting impoverished districts of the capital. Dozens others were wounded, activists said.

The violence aroused new concern about the faltering diplomatic efforts to try to end the conflict, with the U.N. political chief warning that the Syria crisis risks "exploding outward" into Lebanon, Turkey and Israel.

Britain's prime minister offered the latest long shot — that Assad could be allowed safe passage out of the country if that would guarantee an end to the fighting.

But there has been no sign the embattled Syrian leader is willing to step down as part of a peaceful transition to save the country. Assad has vowed to militarily crush the nearly 20-month old rebellion against his rule, and aides say a new president will only be chosen in elections scheduled for 2014.

U.N.-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, who, like his predecessor Kofi Annan has been unable to put an end to the conflict, warned the civil war could spiral into new levels of chaos.

"The situation in Syria is very dangerous," Brahimi said in remarks published Tuesday in the pan-Arab daily Al Hayat. "I believe that if the crisis is not solved ... there will be the danger of Somaliaization. It will mean the fall of the state, rise of warlords and militias."

Somalia has been mired in conflict for more than two decades after warlords overthrew the east African nation's longtime dictator in

1991 and then turned on each other. The government, backed by African Union troops, is currently battling Islamist extremist rebels linked to al-Qaida.

Syria, by comparison, has always had a strong central government, and despite losing large swathes of territory, the regime still maintains a grip on many parts of the country, including Damascus, the seat of Assad's power, where basic government services still function.

But if the regime collapses, the country could fast shatter along multiple fault lines, leading to protracted bloodshed.

The predominantly Sunni nation is a patchwork of religious and ethnic groups. The regime is led by Assad's Alawite minority, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, but there are also considerable Kurdish and Christian populations.

The conflict's already increasing sectarian overtones suggest any power vacuum could usher in renewed violence. Predominantly Kurdish areas in the north and Alawite majority areas in the central coastal mountains could spin away, and mixed areas — already hard hit by the conflict — could plunge further into conflict.

Intrigue Surrounds Downfall Of Russian Official

MOSCOW (AP) — Vladimir Putin fired his powerful defense chief over a corruption scandal Tuesday, but a heady mix of sex, power struggles and military vendettas dominated talk in Russia about what was really behind the downfall of the man who has overseen the nation's most radical defense reform in decades.

The dismissal of Anatoly Serdyukov was a surprise because the burly politician was widely regarded as having the president's blessing for a military modernization that has won the enmity of generals and arms makers with connections to members of Putin's inner circle.

Adding intrigue was the fact that Serdyukov is married to the daughter one of Putin's close allies, a former prime minister who wields enormous influence as chairman of state-run natural gas giant Gazprom. Media reports suggest that Serdyukov's alleged philandering angered Viktor Zubkov and may have been a factor in the sacking.

But most experts see a behind-the-scenes power struggle at the root of Putin's decision.

Serdyukov has masterminded a campaign to drastically cut the ranks of officers and overhaul an antiquated military structure to create a leaner, meaner force that might restore Russia's faded military glory.

Measure Of Home Prices Rise Most In 6 years

WASHINGTON (AP) — A measure of U.S. home prices jumped 5 percent in September compared with a year ago, the largest year-over-year increase since July 2006. The gain reported by CoreLogic offered more evidence of a sustainable housing recovery.

The real estate data provider also said Tuesday that prices declined 0.3 percent in September from August, the first drop after six straight increases. The monthly figures are not seasonally adjusted. CoreLogic says the monthly decline reflects the end of the summer home-buying season and not a softening in the housing recovery.

Steady price increases should give the housing market more momentum when home sales pick up in the spring. Rising prices encourage more homeowners to sell their homes and entice would-be buyers to purchase homes before prices rise further.

Other measures have also shown healthy gains in home prices over the past year. The Standard & Poor's Case Shiller 20-city index rose 2 percent in August compared with a year ago, a faster pace than the previous month.

The price gains in the past year reported by CoreLogic were widespread. Prices have risen in all but seven states. And they declined in only 18 out of 100 large cities that are tracked by the index.

Statements Plague Defense In Afghan Deaths

JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, Wash. (AP) — The medic saw Staff Sgt. Robert Bales covered in blood and knew from the pattern of the staining it wasn't his own. He asked where it came from and where he'd been.

Bales shrugged, the medic, Sgt. 1st Class James Stillwell, testified Tuesday.

"If I tell you, you guys will have to testify against me," Stillwell quoted him as saying.

The statement was one of many attributed to Bales that suggest he knew what he was doing the night he surrendered after a two-village killing spree in southern Afghanistan, prosecutors say.

The remarks, offered by fellow soldiers testifying for the government Monday and Tuesday, could pose a high hurdle for defense lawyers who have indicated that Bales' mental health will be a big part of their case. The testimony is part of a preliminary hearing being held to help determine whether the case goes to a court martial.

Defense lawyers have noted that Bales was serving his fourth deployment, and had suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder as well as a concussive head injury in Iraq. One witness testified Tuesday that he was quick to anger.

The 39-year-old father of two from Lake Tapps, Wash., faces 16 counts of premeditated murder and six counts of attempted murder in the March 11 attack on the villages of Balandi and Alkozai, which counted nine children among its victims.

One of the worst atrocities of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the attack prompted the U.S. to halt combat operations for days in the face of protests, and military investigators couldn't reach the crime scenes for a month.

Study: Looking Old May Signal Heart Risks

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Want a clue to your risk of heart disease? Look in the mirror. People who look old — with receding hairlines, bald heads, creases near their ear lobes or bumpy deposits on their eyelids — have a greater chance of developing of heart disease than younger-looking people the same age do, new research suggests.

Doctors say the study highlights the difference between biological and chronological age.

"Looking old for your age marks poor cardiovascular health," said Dr. Anne Tybjaerg-Hansen of the University of Copenhagen in Denmark.

She led the study and gave results Tuesday at an American Heart Association conference in Los Angeles.

A small consolation: Wrinkles elsewhere on the face and gray hair seemed just ordinary consequences of aging and did not correlate with heart risks.

The research involved 11,000 Danish people and began in 1976. At the start, the participants were 40 and older. Researchers documented their appearance, tallying crow's feet, wrinkles and other signs of age. In the next 35 years, 3,400 participants developed heart disease (clogged arteries) and 1,700 suffered a heart attack.

The risk of these problems increased with each additional sign of aging present at the start of the study. This was true at all ages and among men and women, even after taking into account other factors such as family history of heart disease.

Those with three to four of these aging signs — receding hairline at the temples, baldness at the crown of the head, earlobe creases or yellowish fatty deposits around the eyelids — had a 57 percent greater risk for heart attack and a 39 percent greater risk for heart disease compared to people with none of these signs.

Having yellowish eyelid bumps, which could be signs of cholesterol buildup, conferred the most risk, researchers found. Baldness in men has been tied to heart risk before, possibly related to testosterone levels. They could only guess why earlobe creases might raise risk.

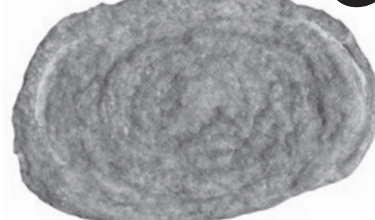
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