

Austrian’s N.M. Skydive Could Aid Astronauts

ROS WELL, N.M. (AP) — Skydiver Felix Baumgartner’s attempt at the highest, fastest free fall in history Tuesday is more than just a stunt.

His planned 23-mile dive from the stratosphere should provide scientists with valuable information for next-generation spacesuits and techniques that could help astronauts survive accidents.

Jumping from more than three times the height of the average cruising altitude for jetliners, Baumgartner hopes to become the first person to break the sound barrier outside of an airplane. His team has calculated that to be 690 mph based on the altitude of his dive.

His medical director Dr. Jonathan Clark, a NASA space shuttle crew surgeon who lost his wife, Laurel Clark, in the 2003 Challenger accident, says no one knows what happens to a body when it breaks the sound barrier.

“That is really the scientific essence of this mission,” said Clark, who is dedicated to improving astronauts’ chances of survival in a high-altitude disaster.

Syria’s Salvos Send Message To Turkey, West

BEIRUT (AP) — Syria’s cross-border attacks on Turkey in the past week look increasingly like they could be an intentional escalation meant to send a clear message to Ankara and beyond, that the crisis is simply too explosive to risk foreign military intervention.

With Turkey eager to defuse the crisis, the spillover of fighting is giving new life to a longshot political solution, with the Turks floating the idea of making President Bashar Assad’s longtime vice president, Farouk al-Sharaa, interim leader if the president steps aside.

A military option — which would involve foreign powers that already have expressed a deep reluctance to getting involved in the crisis — is still not on the table, analysts say, despite six consecutive days of Turkish retaliation against bombardment from inside Syria.

“Syria is aware that Turkey cannot go a step further,” said Ali Tekin, assistant professor of International Relations at Ankara’s Bilkent University. “The Turkish people don’t want a war and there are no vital national interests at stake to warrant a war. Syria sees this.”

The Syrian conflict has taken a prominent role in the U.S. presidential election at a time when the U.S. and its allies have shown little appetite for getting involved.

Panel Leery Of Security Of China Tech Giants

WASHINGTON (AP) — American companies should avoid sourcing network equipment from China’s two leading technology firms because they pose a national security threat to the United States, the House Intelligence Committee warned Monday.

The panel said in a report that U.S. regulators should block mergers and acquisitions in this country by Huawei Technologies Ltd. and ZTE Corp, among the world’s leading suppliers of telecommunications gear and mobile phones.

Reflecting U.S. concern over cyber-attacks traced to China, the report also recommends that U.S. government computer systems not include any components from the two firms because that could pose an espionage risk.

“China is known to be the major perpetrator of cyber-espionage, and Huawei and ZTE failed to alleviate serious concerns throughout this important investigation. American businesses should use other vendors,” the committee’s chairman, Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich, told a news conference. He said the Chinese companies could not be trusted with access to computer networks that support everything from power grids to finance systems.

The recommendations are the result of a yearlong probe, including a congressional hearing last month in which senior Chinese executives of both companies denied posing a security threat and being under Beijing’s influence.

Sandusky, Victims Expected To Speak Today

BELLEFONTE, Pa. (AP) — Jerry Sandusky and at least some of his victims plan to address the judge at his sentencing, a proceeding that may last less than two hours, lawyers said after a closed-door meeting to iron out logistics ahead of the Tuesday hearing.

Sandusky lawyer Joe Amendola said “it’s as certain as certain can be” that the former Penn State assistant football coach will speak to Judge John Cleland and assert his innocence before he is sentenced on 45 counts of child sexual abuse.

“What I anticipate he’ll say is he’s innocent,” Amendola said outside the courthouse Monday afternoon.

Amendola said he did not expect any others to speak on Sandusky’s behalf, although friends and family members — including his wife, Dottie — have written letters of support. Dottie Sandusky plans to attend the hearing, he said.

Given the number of charges, the serious nature of his crimes and his age, the 68-year-old Sandusky faces the likelihood of a sentence that will send him to state prison for the rest of his life. Sandusky was convicted in June of abusing 10 boys over 15 years, including some attacks inside Penn State athletic facilities.

Texas Mom To Be Sentenced In Gluing Case

DALLAS (AP) — The mother of a woman accused of beating her 2-year-old daughter and gluing her hands to a wall says she too was abused by the defendant.

The mother of Elizabeth Escalona testified Monday that she was assaulted several times by her daughter as she was growing up. Nevertheless, Ofelia Escalona says she still loves her daughter and has been caring for her children since December.

A doctor testified earlier that the child’s mother had beaten the girl so badly that she suffered significant brain trauma and bleeding.

Police say Elizabeth Escalona was mad about potty training problems.

Escalona pleaded guilty July 12 to injury to a child. A sentencing hearing for the 23-year-old began Monday. She faces up to life in prison. A state district judge will decide her punishment.

Decision 2012

Campaigns Press As Polls Tighten

BY JULIE PACE  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the White House race shows signs of tightening nationally, President Barack Obama’s campaign is banking on a massive get-out-the-vote operation and state-by-state shades of economic improvement to maintain its apparent polling edge in battlegrounds from Ohio to Virginia.

Republican Mitt Romney, re-energized by last week’s debate, is flashing new confidence on the campaign trail and pressing toward the political center on both foreign and domestic issues. But aides have outlined no clear path to winning the 270 Electoral College votes required to gain the White House.

“Things are going pretty good,” the usually cautious Romney said Monday with a smile.

Among Democrats, the swagger of the previous few weeks has all but vanished since the debate.

“Ultimately this is a tight race, and it’s going to remain a tight race until the end,” said Bill Burton, who runs Priorities USA Action, a pro-Obama super political action committee.

Indeed, one month from Election Day, polls show a close race. And with millions of Americans already voting and the potential for game-changing moments diminishing, the candidates have little room for error as they seek to sway a narrow swath of undecided voters.

Obama aides acknowledge Romney’s strong turn on the debate stage helped him shift gears from a rocky September. But they also argue that Romney’s momentum was arrested somewhat by a Friday jobs report showing the unemployment rate declined to 7.8 percent, the lowest level of Obama’s presidency.

They say the president was thrown during the debate by what they call Romney’s willingness to abandon his previous positions, including his \$5 trillion tax cut proposal. In the next debate — and in television advertisements before then — the Democrat and his aides are expected to accuse Romney of lying about his own plans.

Romney’s team, meanwhile, is tempering expectations that tightening national polls will translate into success on the ground in the key states most likely to decide the race. Things may be moving in the right direction, they say, but significant work remains.

Still, they’re seeking to paint Obama’s campaign as desperate.

“It seems pretty clear that their new strategy



SANGJIB MIN/NEWPORT NEWS DAILY PRESS/MCT  
Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney greets supporters after speaking at a campaign rally at Victory Landing Park in Newport News, Va., on Monday.

is basically just call us liars, to descend down into a mud pit and hopefully, with enough mudslinging back and forth and distortion, people will get demoralized and they can win by default,” said Romney running mate Paul Ryan.

Both Democrats and Republicans say internal campaign surveys following last week’s debate show Romney has cut into the lead Obama had built up in many key battleground states. But they say Obama still has an advantage in most of the nine or so critical states, including Ohio and Virginia. A lack of independent polling makes it difficult to know whether that’s true. Romney pulled ahead of Obama, 49 to 45 percent nationally, among likely voters according to a Pew Research Center poll conducted after the debate.

In a foreign policy speech at Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Va., on Monday, Romney cast himself as a statesman who would be part of a long, bipartisan tradition of American leadership in the world. He said the U.S. should use its power “wisely, with solemnity and without false pride, but also firmly and actively.”

At the same time, he is moving away from some of the more conservative positions he pressed during the GOP primary. The shift is aimed at appealing to the independents and disaffected members of both parties who could

swing the race. He is to deliver at least two more policy speeches in the coming weeks focused on job growth and debt and spending.

As Obama’s aides worked to poke holes in Romney’s foreign policy address, Obama declared a national monument at the Keene, Calif., home of Latino labor leader Cesar Chavez, the United Farmworkers Union founder who died in 1993.

Sure to appeal to some Hispanic voters in swing states, Obama’s move came at the start of a day in which he also was raising political cash at events in San Francisco, as his campaign closed in on \$1 billion in donations. Democrats said the \$181 million they raised in September would allow Obama to keep advertising heavily on television in all battleground states and fully fund major registration and early voting efforts in the campaign’s crucial final weeks.

The president has more get-out-the-vote offices than Romney in every competitive state; some offices never closed after the 2008 campaign. Democrats say that network helped them register more than 130,000 new voters — most in battleground states in the week before the debate. There are more registered Democrats than Republicans in nearly every competitive state with party registration, including Florida and Nevada.

13,000 Got Suspect Steroid Shots; Risk Is Uncertain

NEW YORK (AP) — As many as 13,000 people received steroid shots suspected in a national meningitis outbreak, health officials said Monday. But it’s not clear how many are in danger.

Officials don’t know how many of the shots may have been contaminated with meningitis-causing fungus tied to the outbreak. And the figure includes not only those who got them in the back for pain — who are most at risk — but also those who got the shots in other places, like knees and shoulders.

Those injected in joints are not believed to be at risk for fungal meningitis, said Curtis Allen, a spokesman for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He said there was no breakdown available of how many had the shots in the back or in joints.

The CDC count of cases reached 105 on Monday, including eight deaths. A ninth death was reported late Monday by a Nashville, Tenn., hospital.

Tennessee has the most cases, followed by Michigan, Virginia, Indiana, Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina and Ohio.

All had received shots for back pain, and investigators suspect a steroid medication made by a specialty pharmacy. About 17,700 single-dose vials of the steroid sent to 23 states have been recalled. Inspectors found at least one sealed vial contaminated with fungus, and

tests were being done on other vials.

The first known case of the rarely seen fungal meningitis was diagnosed last month in Tennessee. The steroid maker, New England Compounding Center of Framingham, Mass., recalled the drug, and over the weekend recalled everything else it makes.

Meningitis is an inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord, and a back injection would put any contaminant in more direct contact with that lining.

Symptoms on meningitis include severe headache, nausea, dizziness and fever. The CDC said many of the cases have been mild and some people had strokes. Symptoms have been appearing between one and four weeks after patients got the shots.

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