

## Maine Earthquake Rattles New England

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — An earthquake in southern Maine rattled nearby New England states Tuesday.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the epicenter of the 4.6 magnitude quake was about 3 miles west of Hollis Center, Maine, and about 3 miles deep. That location is about 20 miles west of Portland.

The quake was felt in Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts, including Boston, and as far south as Rhode Island and Connecticut.

The Maine Emergency Management Agency had no immediate reports of damage. The York County Communications Center near the epicenter was inundated with emergency calls, and dispatchers were too busy to talk.

## Rebels In Syria's Aleppo Mostly Poor, Pious

ALEPPO, Syria (AP) — Most of the rebels fighting government forces in the city of Aleppo fit a specific mold: They're poor, religiously conservative and usually come from the underdeveloped countryside nearby.

They bring to the battle their fury over years of economic marginalization, fired by a pious fervor, and they say their fight in the civil war is not only against President Bashar Assad but also the elite merchants and industrialists who dominate the city and have stuck by the regime. The rebels regard this support for the government to be an act of betrayal.

The blend of poverty, religious piety and anger could define the future of Aleppo, and perhaps the rest of Syria, if the rebels take over the country's largest city, which is also its economic engine. They may be tempted to push their own version of Islam, which is more fundamentalist than what is found in the city. Their bitterness at the business class may prompt them to seek ways of redistributing the wealth.

"Those who have money in Aleppo only worry about their wealth and interests when we have long lived in poverty," said Osama Abu Mohammed, a rebel commander who was a car mechanic in the nearby town of Beyanon before he joined the fight.

"They have been breast-fed cowardice and their hearts are filled with fear. With their money, we could buy weapons that enable us to liberate the entire city in a week," he said.

## Students' Blackface Parody Criticized

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — A pep rally skit by three white high school students who wore blackface and parodied Chris Brown's arrest for assaulting Rihanna has officials in a largely white New York district vowing to set clearer expectations for school events.

The skit was one of several pop culture parodies performed Friday at Waverly High School as part of an annual "Mr. Waverly" competition, Superintendent Joseph Yelich said. The one in question had a male student portraying Brown standing over another cowering actor playing Rihanna; a third male student played an arresting officer.

A picture from the skit posted to social media and other sites including Facebook, Tumblr and CNN iReport drew thousands of views and dozens of comments, many calling the skit blatantly racist and blasting the idea of drawing laughs from domestic violence.

Brown was sentenced to five years of probation after pleading guilty to felony assault on the attack on Rihanna in 2009. Both singers are black.

Yelich said he has not kept track of the number of complaints to the small district in southern New York's Tioga County but said the "Mr. Waverly" tradition is being re-examined. Other skits featured Tarzan chasing a gorilla, hockey players brawling, and Spider-Man.

## Thieves Grab Picasso, Monets From Museum

AMSTERDAM (AP) — Thieves broke into a Rotterdam museum on Tuesday and walked off with works from the likes of Picasso, Monet, Gauguin and Matisse potentially worth hundreds of millions.

Police haven't said how they pulled off the early hours heist, but an expert who tracks stolen art said the robbers clearly knew what they were after.

"Those thieves got one hell of a haul," said Chris Marinello, who directs the Art Loss Register.

The heist at the Kunsthil museum is one of the largest in years in the Netherlands, and is a stunning blow for the private Triton Foundation collection, which was being exhibited publicly as a group for the first time.

"It's every museum director's worst nightmare," said Kunsthil director Emily Ansenk, who had been in Istanbul on business but returned immediately.

# Social Security Benefits To Rise 1.7 Percent

BY STEPHEN OHLEMACHER  
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than 56 million Social Security recipients will see their monthly payments go up by 1.7 percent next year.

The increase, which starts in January, is tied to a measure of inflation released Tuesday. It shows that inflation has been relatively low over the past year, despite the recent surge in gas prices, resulting in one of the smallest increases in Social Security payments since automatic adjustments were adopted in 1975.

Social Security payments for retired workers average \$1,237 a month, or about \$14,800 a year. A 1.7 percent increase will amount to about \$21 a month, or \$252 a year, on average.

Social Security recipients received a 3.6 percent increase in benefits this year after getting none the previous two years.

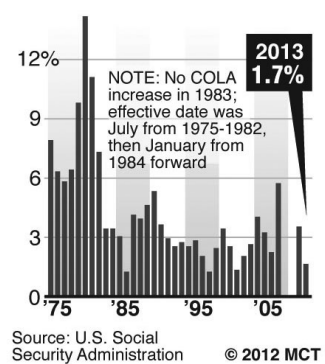
About 8 million people who receive Supplemental Security Income will also receive the cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, meaning the announcement will affect about 1 in 5 U.S. residents.

Social Security also provides benefits to millions of disabled workers, spouses, widows, widowers and children.

"The annual COLA is critically important to the financial security of the (56) million Americans

## A raise for retirees

Social Security recipients will get a modest cost-of-living increase in benefits in 2013; raises pegged to inflation began in 1975, and were not given for 2010 and 2011 because inflation was low.



receiving Social Security benefits today," said Nancy LeaMond, AARP's executive vice president. "Amid rising costs for food, utilities and health care and continued economic uncertainty, the COLA helps millions of older Americans maintain their standard of living, keeping many out of poverty."

The amount of wages subjected to Social Security taxes is going up, too. Social Security is supported by a 12.4 percent tax on wages up to \$110,100. That

threshold will increase to \$113,700 next year, resulting in higher taxes for nearly 10 million workers and their employers, according to the Social Security Administration.

Half the tax is paid by workers and the other half is paid by employers. Congress and President Barack Obama reduced the share paid by workers from 6.2 percent to 4.2 percent for 2011 and 2012. The temporary cut, however, is due to expire at the end of the year.

Some of next year's COLA could be wiped out by higher Medicare premiums, which are deducted from Social Security payments. The Medicare Part B premium, which covers doctor visits, is expected to rise by about \$7 per month for 2013, according to government projections.

The premium is currently \$99.90 a month for most seniors. Medicare is expected to announce the premium for 2013 in the coming weeks.

"If seniors are getting a low COLA, much of their increase will go to pay off their Medicare Part B premium," said Mary Johnson, a policy analyst at The Senior Citizens League.

By law, the increase in benefits is based on the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers, or CPI-W, a broad measure of consumer prices generated by the Bureau

of Labor Statistics. It measures price changes for food, housing, clothing, transportation, energy, medical care, recreation and education.

Over the past year, housing costs have gone up 1.4 percent but home energy costs have dropped by 3.8 percent, according to the CPI-W. Medical costs, which tend to hit seniors harder than younger adults, have increased by 4.4 percent.

Gasoline prices have gone up by 6.8 percent, but much of that increase happened in the past month, so it is not fully reflected in the COLA for Social Security.

To calculate the COLA, the Social Security Administration compares the average price index for July, August and September with the price index for the same three months in the previous year. The price index for September — the final piece of the puzzle — was released Tuesday.

If consumer prices increase from year to year, Social Security recipients automatically get higher payments, starting the following January. If prices drop, the payments stay the same, as they did in 2010 and 2011.

Since 1975, the annual COLA has averaged 4.2 percent. Only five times has it been below 2 percent, including the two times it was zero. Before 1975, it took an act of Congress to increase Social Security payments.

# Cuba To Allow Citizens To Travel Freely

BY ANDREA RODRIGUEZ  
 AND PETER ORSI  
 Associated Press

HAVANA — The Cuban government announced Tuesday that it will eliminate a half-century-old restriction that requires citizens to get an exit visa to leave the country.

The decree that takes effect Jan. 14 will eliminate a much-loathed bureaucratic procedure that has kept many Cubans from traveling or moving abroad.

"These measures are truly substantial and profound," said Col. Lamberto Fraga, Cuba's deputy chief of immigration, at a morning news conference. "What we are doing is not just cosmetic."

Under the new measure announced in the Communist Party daily Granma, islanders will only have to show their passport and a visa from the country they are traveling to.

It is the most significant advance this year in President Raul Castro's five-year plan of reforms that has already seen the legalization of home and car sales and a big increase in the number of Cubans owning private businesses.

Migration is a highly politicized issue in Cuba and beyond its borders.

Under the "wet foot, dry foot" policy, the United States allows

nearly all Cubans who reach its territory to remain. Granma published an editorial blaming the travel restrictions imposed in 1961 on U.S. attempts to topple the island's government, plant spies and recruit its best-educated citizens.

"It is because of this that any analysis of Cuba's problematic migration inevitably passes through the policy of hostility that the U.S. government has developed against the country for more than 50 years," the editorial said.

It assured Cubans that the government recognizes their right to travel abroad and said the new measure is part of "an irreversible process of normalization of relations between emigrants and their homeland."

The decree still imposes limits on travel by many Cubans. People cannot obtain a passport or travel abroad without permission if they face criminal charges, if the trip affects national security or if their departure would affect efforts to keep qualified labor in the country.

Doctors, scientists, members of the military and others considered valuable parts of society currently

face restrictions on travel to combat brain drain.

"The update to the migratory policy takes into account the right of the revolutionary State to defend itself from the interventionist and subversive plans of the U.S. government and its allies," the newspaper said. "Therefore, measures will remain to preserve the human capital created by the Revolution in the face of the theft of talent applied by the powerful."

On the streets of Havana, the news was met with a mixture of delight and astonishment. Officials over the years often spoke of their desire to lift the exit visa, but talk failed to turn into concrete change.

"No! Wow, how great!" said Mercedes Delgado, a 73-year-old retiree when told of the news that was announced overnight. "Citizens' rights are being restored."

"Look, I ask myself how far are we going to go with these changes. They have me a little confused because now all that was done during 50 years, it turns out we're changing it," said Maria Romero, a cleaning worker who was headed to her job Tuesday morning. "Everything

they told us then, it wasn't true. I tell you, I don't understand anything."

Cuba-born U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen referred to the measure as "so-called reforms" that are "nothing more than Raul Castro's desperate attempts to fool the world into thinking that Cuba is changing."

"But anyone who knows anything about the communist 53-year-old Castro dictatorship knows that Cuba will only be free when the Castro family and its lackeys are no longer on the scene," the South Florida Republican said.

The Cuban government's decision to eliminate exit visas won't mean that Cubans can just get on a plane to the United States.

Kathleen Campbell Walker, an immigration lawyer in El Paso, Texas, said Cubans who fly to the United States are still required to get a State Department-issued visa. Homeland Security officials who review passenger lists for U.S.-bound flights are likely to order an airline to deny boarding to anyone who doesn't have that permission.

Cubans who do make it to the U.S., regardless of whether or not they have a visa, are generally admitted to the country.

"Our own visa requirements remain unchanged," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters Tuesday.

## In A Surprise, Citigroup CEO Steps Down

BY DANIEL WAGNER  
 AP Business Writer

Vikram Pandit, who steered Citigroup through the 2008 financial crisis and the choppy years that followed, abruptly left the bank on Tuesday, stepping down as CEO and as a director.

The move shocked Wall Street, and Citigroup offered no explanation. There had been no hint of the departure Monday, when the bank discussed its strong third-quarter earnings in lengthy calls with analysts and reporters.

A second top executive resigned as part of the shake-up: President and Chief Operating Officer John Havens, who was also CEO of Citi's Institutional Client Group, which serves global companies, banks and governments.

Pandit was replaced immediately by Michael Corbat, 52, a Citigroup lifer who had been CEO of its Europe, Middle East and Africa division. Corbat joined the bank in 1983, just after graduating from Harvard.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the departures followed a clash between Pandit and the company's board over strategy and business performance, including at the group run by Havens.

In a conference call late Tuesday with financial analysts and reporters, Corbat and Citigroup chairman Michael O'Neill remained vague about the sudden change.

"What happened is that Vikram submitted his resignation and we accepted it," O'Neill said more than once. Corbat said the changes do not reflect any desire to change Citigroup's strategic direction.

Analysts suspected there was more to the story. Pandit's departure from the board is a clear in-

dications that "this was a complete and unexpected break" between Pandit, 55, and Citi directors, said Chris Whalen, a bank analyst and senior managing director of Tangent Capital Partners in New York.

"This shows how dysfunctional this organization is, to have this event unfold this way," Whalen said. "They should have told us yesterday, unless they didn't know."

If Pandit's disagreements with the board were recent, his trouble with shareholders had been brewing far longer. They rejected his 2011 pay package in a non-binding vote this spring.

Since joining the bank in December 2007, Pandit has made at least \$56.4 million, according to data compiled for The Associated

Press by Equilar, an executive pay research firm.

That includes salary, bonuses, benefits and perks and stock awards. Pandit also made about \$165 million from a buyout of his ownership stake in Old Lane Partners, a hedge fund he founded that was acquired by Citi.

Many shareholders were also frustrated by Pandit's failure to boost Citigroup's stock price, which was decimated during the 2008 financial crisis and remains far below where it was when Pandit took over.

The day Pandit was named CEO, Citi's stock closed at \$332.30, after adjusting for a reverse stock split last year that reduced the number of shares in circulation. It closed Tuesday at \$37.25, up 59 cents for the day.

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