

Obama Speaks To Iran's Rouhani

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States and Iran took a historic step toward ending more than three decades of estrangement on Friday when President Barack Obama and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani spoke by phone and agreed to work on resolving global suspicions that Tehran is trying to build a nuclear weapon.

The 15-minute call capped a week of seismic shifts in the relationship that revolved around Rouhani's participation in the annual U.N. meeting of world leaders. The night before the two leaders spoke, U.S. and European diplomats hailed a "very significant shift" in Iran's attitude and tone in the first talks on the nuclear standoff since April.

The diplomatic warming began shortly after Rouhani's election in June. But it is rooted in both presidents' stated campaign desires — Obama in 2008 and Rouhani this year — to break through 34-year-old barriers and move toward diplomacy.

Iran is also seeking quick relief from blistering economic sanctions that the U.S. and its Western allies have imposed on Tehran to punish it for refusing to scale back its nuclear activities. Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, but years of stonewalling inspections and secrecy about its activities have fueled fears it is seeking to build warheads.

Rouhani and Obama spoke while the Iranian president was in his car and headed to the airport to fly back to Tehran, with Obama at his desk in the Oval Office. Rouhani's aides initially reached out to arrange the conversation, and the White House placed the call.

Senate Votes To Avert Govt. Shutdown

WASHINGTON (AP) — Time running short, the Democratic-controlled Senate passed urgent legislation Friday to avert a government shutdown early next week, and President Barack Obama lectured House Republicans to stop "appeasing the tea party" and quickly follow suit.

Despite the presidential plea — and the urgings of their own leaders — House GOP rebels showed no sign of retreat in their drive to use the threat of a shutdown to uproot the nation's three-year-old health care law.

"We now move on to the next stage of this battle," said Sen. Ted Cruz, the Texas Republican who is a face of the "Defund Obamacare" campaign in the Senate and is in close contact with allies in the House.

First effects of a shutdown could show up as early as Tuesday if Congress fails to approve money to keep the government going by the Monday-midnight start of the new fiscal year.

"Think about who you are hurting" if government services are interrupted, the president said at the White House, as House Speaker John Boehner pondered his next move in a fast-unfolding showdown — not only between Republicans and Democrats but between GOP leaders and conservative insurgents.

Official: Military Caused Mall Collapse

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Kenya's military caused the collapse of three floors of the Westgate Mall in the deadly terrorist siege, a top-ranking official disclosed Friday, while the government urged patience with the pace of an investigation that has left key questions unanswered.

Seven days after 67 people were killed in the attack on the upscale shopping center, there is still no clear word on the fate of dozens who have been reported missing and no details on the terrorists who carried it out.

The account of the roof collapse raises the possibility that the military may have caused the death of hostages in its rescue attempt. An undisclosed number of people are feared to be buried in the rubble.

The official said autopsies will be conducted on any bodies found to determine the cause of death — from the militants or the structural collapse. The high-ranking government official spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to divulge sensitive information.

The official also confirmed that Kenyan troops fired rocket-propelled grenades inside the mall, but would not say what caused the floors to collapse, if the action was intentional, or if it was an accident.

'Breaking Bad' Tourism Spike Remains

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — The southwestern New Mexico city that's played home to "Breaking Bad" is preparing for the end, with the Emmy-award winning series airing its last episode on Sunday.

As the AMC finale approaches, Albuquerque is planning on celebrating with watch parties and red carpet casting events in a city still benefiting from a tourism boost thanks to the drama's popularity.

Despite the show's dark themes of drug trafficking and violence, tourism officials say "Breaking Bad" highlighted neighborhoods around the city and gave viewers a sense of Albuquerque. The show displayed the city's downtown Route 66, its various stores and restaurants, and even took audiences to Latino barrios and nearby American Indian Pueblos — places rarely seen in Hollywood.

"Before the show, Albuquerque didn't have an image," said Ann Lerner, Albuquerque's film liaison. "When I started this job in 2003 and I mentioned New Mexico, people would say, 'Oh, I love Santa Fe.' No one thought of Albuquerque."

That has changed in the five seasons that "Breaking Bad" has aired on AMC, growing its reputation and buzz as Netflix users raced to catch up on previous episodes. Since then, trolley and private limo tours of scenes from the show have sold out and created waiting lists that go on for weeks. A city-run website detailing locations of scenes — from seedy motels to the one-time headquarters of a now deceased drug lord — has seen tens of thousands of visitors.

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