

World News Roundup

Weather

'Winter not over'

At least '23' dead in Alabama tornadoes

BEAUREGARD, Ala., March 4, (Agencies): Rescuers sifted through rubble looking for more dead and wounded after two back-to-back tornadoes touched down in Alabama, killing at least 23 people, authorities said.

The storms inflicted their worst damage on Lee County, Alabama Sunday, destroying numerous homes and businesses.

More than 50 people were reported injured and the death toll is expected to rise.

Meanwhile, about 10 inches of snow was expected to fall in the New York City area by Monday morning with the arrival of another arctic blast, prompting all schools in the city to be closed and New Jersey to declare a state of emergency.

Punishing cold winds will make it feel 15 degrees below zero Fahrenheit in Chicago Monday with the windchill effect, the National Weather Service said. Actual temperatures will hover around 15 degrees Fahrenheit Monday.

Classes in schools across Boston were also cancelled or delayed as about 7 inches will fall by morning before turning into icy sleet, said Bob Oravec, a forecaster with the weather service.

"Winter is definitely not over," Oravec said.

In Alabama, Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones said that rescue and recovery operations overnight were difficult.

"The challenge is the sheer volume of the debris where all the homes were located," Jones said in an interview with CNN on Sunday. "It's the most I've seen that I can recall."



Jones

Urged

On Twitter, US President Donald Trump urged residents of Alabama and other areas affected by the storms to be "careful and safe."

"Tornadoes and storms were truly violent and more could be coming," Trump wrote. "To the families and friends of the victims, and to the injured, God bless you all!"

As thousands faced a night without power, temperatures in Alabama looked set to fall to near freezing following the storm.

"Colder air will sweep into the Southeast behind the severe weather with temperatures dropping into the 30s (1 C) southward to central Georgia and across most of Alabama by Monday morning," AccuWeather meteorologist Kristina Pydynowski said.

"Those without power who rely on electric heat need to find ways to stay warm," she added.

The trail of destruction was at least half a mile wide and overwhelmed rural Lee County's coroners' office, forcing it to call in help from the state.

"The devastation is incredible," Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones said.

Drones flying overhead equipped with heat-seeking devices had scanned the area for survivors, but the dangerous conditions halted the search late Sunday, Sheriff Jones said. Rescuers planned to resume the search at daylight Monday.

The Sunday tornado, which had winds that appeared to be around 160 mph (257 kph) or greater, was part of a powerful storm system that also slashed its way across parts of Georgia, South Carolina and Florida.

Levi Baker, who lives near the hard-hit area in Alabama, took a chain saw to help clear a path for ambulances and other first-responder vehicles. He said he saw bodies of dead people and dead animals.

He said some houses were demolished and trees were uprooted or snapped in half. One house was swept off its foundation and was sitting in the middle of the road.

"It was just destruction," Baker said. "There were mobile homes gone. Frames on the other side of the road."

Jones said the twister traveled straight down a county road in the rural community of Beauregard reducing homes to slabs.

Scott Fillmer was at home when the storm hit in Lee County.

"I looked out the window and it was nothing but black, but you could hear that freight train noise," Fillmer said.

The National Weather Service confirmed late Sunday a tornado with at least an F3 rating caused the destruction in Alabama. Although the statement did not give exact wind estimates, F3 storms typically are gauged at wind speeds of between 158-206 mph (254-331 kph).

After nightfall Sunday, the rain had stopped and pieces of metal debris and tree branches littered roadways in Beauregard.

Two sheriff's vehicles blocked reporters and others from reaching the worst-hit area. Power appeared to be out in many places.

Great

In a tweet late Sunday, President Donald Trump said: "To the great people of Alabama and surrounding areas: Please be careful and safe. Tornadoes and storms were truly violent and more could be coming. To the families and friends of the victims, and to the injured, God bless you all!"

Rita Smith, spokeswoman for the Lee County Emergency Management Agency, said about 150 first responders had quickly jumped in to help search the debris after the storm struck in Beauregard. At least one trained canine could be seen with search crews as numerous ambulances and emergency vehicles, lights flashing, converged on the area.

At the R&D Grocery on Monday morning in Beauregard, residents were constantly asking each other if they were okay.

"I'm still thanking God I'm among the living," said John Jones, who has lived in Beauregard for most of his life.

No deaths had been reported Sunday evening from storm-damaged Alabama counties other than Lee County, said Gregory Robinson, spokesman for the Alabama Emergency Management Agency. But he said crews were still surveying damage in several counties in the southwestern part of the state.

Numerous tornado warnings were posted across parts of Alabama, Georgia, Florida and South Carolina on Sunday afternoon as the storm system raced across the region. Weather officials said they confirmed other tornadoes around the region by radar alone and would send teams out Monday to assess those and other storms.

In rural Talbotton, Georgia, about 80 miles (130 km) south of Atlanta, a handful of people were injured by either powerful straight-line winds or a tornado that destroyed several mobile homes and damaged other buildings, said Leigh Ann Erenheim, director of the Talbot County Emergency Management Agency.



This photo provided by James Lally shows a funnel-shaped cloud on I-10 near Marianna, Fla., on March 3. Numerous tornado warnings were posted across parts of Alabama, Georgia, Florida and South Carolina on Sunday afternoon as the powerful storm system raced across the region. (AP)

Politics

Counties imitating liberals on immigration

Defiant sheriffs push gun sanctuaries

By Daniel Trotta

A rapidly growing number of counties in at least four states are declaring themselves Second Amendment sanctuaries, refusing to enforce gun-control laws that they consider to be infringements on the US constitutional right to keep and bear arms.

Organizers of the pro-gun sanctuaries admit they took the idea from liberals who have created immigration sanctuaries across the United States where local officials defy the Trump administration's efforts to enforce tougher immigration laws.

Now local conservatives are rebelling against majority Democratic rule in the states. Elected sheriffs and county commissioners say they might allow some people deemed to be threats under "red flag" laws to keep their firearms. In states where the legal age for gun ownership is raised to 21, authorities in some jurisdictions could refuse to confiscate guns from 18- to 20-year-olds.

Democrats took control of state governments or widened leads in legislative chambers last November, then followed through on promises to enact gun control in response to an epidemic of mass shootings in public spaces, religious sites and schools.

Resistance to those laws is complicating Democratic efforts to enact gun control in Washington, Oregon, New Mexico and Illinois, even though the party holds the governorship and both chambers of the state legislature in all four states.

The sanctuary movement is exposing the rift between rural and urban America as much as the one between the Republican and Democratic parties, as small, conservative counties push back against statewide edicts passed by big-city politicians.

"If they want to have their own laws, that's fine. Don't shove them on us down here," said Dave Campbell, a member of the board of Effingham County, Illinois, about 215 miles (350 km) south of Chicago.

Backers of the sanctuary movement say they want to take it nationwide.

Leaders in all four states where it has taken hold have formed a loose alliance, sometimes sharing strategies or texts of resolutions. They also say they are talking with like-minded activists in California, New York, Iowa and Idaho.

As it grows, the rebellion is setting up a potential clash between state and local officials.

In Washington, nearly 60 percent of the voters in November approved Initiative 1639, which raises the minimum age to purchase a semiautomatic rifle to 21, enhances background checks and increases the waiting period to buy such guns to 10 days.

The law is due to take effect in July, but sheriffs in more than half of Washington's 39 counties have pledged not to enforce it, pro-gun activists say, and five counties have passed resolutions to the same effect.

Advised

Governor Jay Inslee has firmly backed I-1639 and Attorney General Bob Ferguson has advised sheriffs "they could be held liable" if they allow a dangerous person to acquire a firearm later used to do harm.

Sheriff Bob Songer of Klickitat County, population 22,000, called Ferguson's warning a "bluff" and said he would not enforce I-1639 because he considered it unconstitutional.

"Unfortunately for the governor and the attorney general, they're not my boss. My only boss is the people that elected me to office," Songer said.

Support for Second Amendment sanctuaries has gained momentum in recent weeks, especially among county boards in New Mexico and Illinois.

Sixty-three counties or municipalities in Illinois have passed some form of a firearms sanctuary resolution and more are likely to, Campbell said.

Twenty-five of New Mexico's 33 counties have passed resolutions to support sheriffs who refuse to enforce any firearms laws that they consider unconstitutional, according to the New Mexico Sheriffs Association. In some cases hundreds of pro-gun activists have packed county commissioner meetings.

In Oregon, voters in eight counties approved Second Amendment Preservation Ordinances last November that allow sheriffs to determine which state gun laws to enforce.

Organizers in Oregon plan to put even more defiant "sanctuary ordinance" measures on county ballots in 2020 that will direct their officials to resist state gun laws.

Such sanctuary resolutions could face legal challenges but backers say they have yet to face a lawsuit, in part because the Washington initiative has yet to take effect and the Illinois and New Mexico legislation has yet to pass. The chief counsel for a leading US gun-control group questioned the legality of the sanctuary movement, saying state legislatures make laws and courts interpret them, not sheriffs.

"It should not be up to individual sheriffs or police officers deciding which laws they personally like," said Jonathan Lowy of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. "This attitude shows a disrespect for the way our system of government is supposed to operate."

In New Mexico, the legislature is moving forward with a slate of gun-control bills. One would enhance background checks and another would create a red-flag law keeping guns out of the hands of people deemed dangerous by a judge.

The New Mexico Sheriffs Association is leading the resistance, saying the red-flag law would violate due process rights and was unnecessary given current statutes.

Tony Mace, sheriff of Cibola County and chairman of the statewide group, said the background check law would impose regulations on hunting buddies or competitive shooters every time they share guns, and he refuses to spend resources investigating such cases.

New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham accused the rebellious sheriffs of falsely promoting the idea that "someone is coming for their firearms," saying none of the proposed laws infringe on Second Amendment rights. (RTRS)



This undated online missing persons poster provided by the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office shows Leia Carrico, 8, (left), and her sister Caroline Carrico, 5, as they seek the public's help in locating them. (AP)



Hickenlooper



Nadler

America

Hickenlooper joins race: Former Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper said on Monday he's running for president, casting himself as a can-do unitarian who's used to overcoming adversity and accomplishing liberal goals in a politically divided state.

"I'm running for president because we need dreamers in Washington, but we also need to get things done," Hickenlooper, 67, said in a video announcing his campaign. "I've proven again and again I can bring people together to produce the progressive change Washington has failed to deliver."

He becomes the second governor to enter the sprawling field, after Washington Gov. Jay Inslee announced last week, and is trying to cast himself as a pragmatist who can also take on President Donald Trump. Though as governor Hickenlooper prided himself for staying above partisan fights, he has argued his record as a former governor and big-city mayor distinguishes him from a broad field of Democratic presidential aspirants who are backing ambitious liberal plans on health care, taxes and the climate.

Hickenlooper has hedged on supporting Democratic rallying cries like Medicare for All and the Green New Deal to combat climate change. He once worked as a geologist for a petroleum company and was roundly criticized for telling a congressional panel he drank fracking fluid while arguing for the safety of the energy extraction technique.

It was after Hickenlooper was laid off from his geologist position during the energy bust of the 1980s that he inadvertently started on his road to politics. He opened a brewpub in a then-desolate stretch of downtown Denver that unexpectedly took off. That enabled Hickenlooper to become wealthy by building a mini-empire of restaurants and bars. It also led to him making a quixotic run for Denver mayor in 1993. Campaign ads featured Hickenlooper feeding quarters into parking meters to protest the city's charging for Sunday parking downtown. He won handily.

As mayor, Hickenlooper helped persuade dozens of suburban cities, sometimes led by Republicans, to back a tax hike to fund a light-rail network. He was filmed diving out of an airplane to advocate for a statewide ballot measure to suspend an anti-tax measure passed in the 1990s and allow the state budget to grow. When he ran for governor in 2010, he featured an ad of himself fully dressed, walking into a shower to scrub off negative attacks. (AP)

Dems expand Russia probe: Declaring

it's "very clear" President Donald Trump obstructed justice, the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, says the panel is requesting documents Monday from more than 60 people from Trump's administration, family and business as part of a rapidly expanding Russia investigation.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-NY, said the House Judiciary Committee wants to

review documents from the Justice Department, the president's son Donald Trump Jr and Trump Organization chief financial officer Allen Weisselberg. Former White House chief of staff John Kelly and former White House counsel Don McGahn also are likely targets, he said.

"We are going to initiate investigations into abuses of power, into corruption and

obstruction of justice," Nadler said. "We will do everything we can to get that evidence."

Asked if he believed Trump obstructed justice, Nadler said, "Yes, I do."

Nadler isn't calling the inquiry an impeachment investigation but said House Democrats, now in the majority, are simply doing "our job to protect the rule of law" after Republicans during the first two years of Trump's term were "shielding the president from any proper accountability." (AP)

Rescuers find missing sisters: Armed with some outdoor survival training, granola bars and pink rubber boots, 5- and 8-year-old sisters survived 44 hours in rugged Northern California wilderness before they were found dehydrated and cold but in good spirits on Sunday, authorities said.

A fire chief and firefighter from a local volunteer department found Leia and Caroline Carrico in a wooded area about 1 1/2 miles (2.3 kilometers) from their home in the small community of Benbow, where they had last been seen Friday afternoon, Humboldt County Sheriff William Honsal said.

Benbow is about 200 miles (320 kilometers) northwest of Sacramento. The girls were "safe and sound" and uninjured, thanks in part to survival training they got with their local 4-H club, Honsal said.

"This is an absolute miracle," he said. "This is rugged territory, this is an extreme environment. How they were out there for 44 hours is pretty amazing." (AP)



First Lady Melania Trump boards an aircraft on March 4 at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., en route to Tulsa, Okla., to begin a two-day, three-state swing to promote her 'Be Best' campaign. (AP)