



AP Photo/Marco Ugarte
A woman waits for the start of an anti-violence against women protest in Mexico City on Friday.

Wave of Mexico violence reveals hidden graves, severed heads

ACAPULCO, Mexico (AP) — Soldiers and police fanned out Friday across the southern Mexican state of Guerrero, chasing a wounded gang leader and trying to quell a wave of violence that included the discovery of hidden graves holding dozens of bodies and a camp where gunmen stored the severed heads of nine rivals in a cooler.

The clashes between drug gangs were complicated by the fact that townspeople fed up with the violence had formed “community police” vigilante squads in many places. The squads often prevent police and soldiers from moving freely and sometimes act on behalf of the gangs.

Gov. Hector Astudillo announced that federal authorities would return to patrol areas where dozens of often-dismembered bodies have been dumped on roadsides in recent weeks.

The state has been riven, not just by the killings, but by the kidnapping of about a dozen people in the town of Ajuchitlan. Residents there announced they would create a vigilante force to look for the kidnap victims, an idea that threatened to create yet another armed group.

The Ajuchitlan residents were apparently kidnapped last week by a fugitive gang leader known as “El Tequilero,” who was believed to be wounded and hiding out with his kidnap victims in the mountains.

The state attorney general headed up a massive manhunt using helicopters and ground troops to look for him. But Astu-

dillo warned that the vigilantes would have to withdraw to allow police and soldiers to do their jobs.

“The army, the state police, they can’t be there with armed groups,” Astudillo said. “Withdraw, and we will enter immediately. But for the two to be there at the same time, that is not possible.”

The governor also announced the creation of mixed army-police patrols in parts of the state torn apart by cartel turf battles. One such area is Zitlala, where a drug gang had set up a rural camp where it held kidnap victims and disposed of bodies.

When one of the joint military-police patrols happened upon the camp earlier this week, it found a kidnapped man and what appeared to be clandestine burial pits. Investigators initially reported finding a dozen bodies. After days of digging, they discovered 32 bodies in 17 pits.

The camp is near the area where nine decapitated bodies were found dumped last week. The nine heads found in coolers at the camp may belong to those bodies, investigators said. The bodies and heads were taken to forensic labs.

The area has been the scene of turf battles between two rival drug gangs — the Rojos and the Ardillos — who engage in extortion, kidnappings and killings. That rivalry has resulted in hundreds of deaths and disappearances in recent years.

In recent weeks the violence has spread to other areas, apparently a turf battle between two or three other gangs.

Stores woo savvy Black Friday shoppers

NEW YORK (AP) — Even people who said they’d already done their shopping online came out for Black Friday to spend time with family members or just for the fun of looking.

But it’s those very shoppers retailers are trying to keep as loyal customers, working to improve their own online sites and letting people pick up purchases in the store as the retailers try to fend off the Amazon juggernaut. Even as retailers kick off the shopping season earlier each year, the day after Thanksgiving is still one of the busiest sales days of the year. It’s also becoming an American export to other countries.

Shoppers were on the hunt for deals and were at the stores for entertainment Friday. Store executives say they see customers doing more research online before they go shop. That can mean more browsers turn into buyers, but also that they are visiting fewer stores in person.

“If I’ve seen it on the internet and I find a better deal than I saw on the internet, I’ll buy it,” said Dianna Ramirez, who was looking for a television at the Crossgates Mall in suburban Albany, New York.

Shamika Malloy of Albany was also there shopping for her four teenage children. Her must-have item a laptop for a daughter in college. Malloy said she hadn’t yet shopped online but usually does so.

“It’s better than coming in the store. If you do it online, you save and you can get it delivered right to the house for free. Can’t beat that.” But she said she wouldn’t shop at as many places as last year. “Whoever’s got the best deals, that’s where I go.”

This weekend is crucial to set the tone for the holiday season. Around 137 million people plan to or are considering doing their shopping during the Thanksgiving weekend, according to a survey conducted for the National Retail Federation trade group. That includes online and store shopping.

The Black Friday mentality and marketing approach has even crossed the Atlantic and is shaping shopping habits in much of Britain. Many big box stores opened early Friday morning while others focused on cutting online prices or combining the two. Some Swiss stores that have started offering American-style “Black Friday” discounts online have seen their sites freeze, slow down or crash under a surge in traffic.

With the competition for customers so intense, many stores were open Thursday evening in what



AP Photo/Elise Amendola
Hunter Harvey, 2, helps his dad, C.J., wheel a big screen TV at Target on Black Friday in Wilmington, Mass.

they hope will be a new holiday tradition. Retailers have also been spreading deals out more throughout the week which may have diluted the shopping.

“It was a really good start. But I have never seen Black Friday morning so calm,” said Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst at NPD Group, a market research firm, who visited malls on Long Island on Friday. He believes the weekend’s sales will likely rise from last year because shoppers did lots of buying, including pricey flat-screen TVs.

The National Retail Federation, the nation’s largest retail trade group, expects holiday sales to rise 3.6 percent to \$655.8 billion for November and December, better than the 3 percent growth seen for those months last year. That excludes car sales, gas and restaurant receipts, but includes online spending and other non-store sales such as catalog spending. Online sales are expected to be up 7 percent to 10 percent to as much as \$117 billion, compared to a 9 percent growth rate last year. That means that online sales could account for 18 percent of overall holiday sales.

While many major retailers reported strong online sales for Thursday and Friday, they acknowledge they also are working harder to lure shoppers to stores.

Macy’s has been offering exclusive deals for its app users. Target will be pushing its Cyber Monday deals on Sunday and spreading them to the stores as well as online, and CEO Brian Cornell thinks those days could be the busiest of the year. Saks Fifth Avenue has started offering concierge help on its website.

J. C. Penney, a laggard in the

online arena, is quickly catching up under CEO Marvin Ellison. After Penney resumed selling major appliances this year in time for the holidays, Ellison, a former executive at Home Depot, says shoppers come into the stores very informed about the products. He also said a focus on toys for the holidays has also helped fuel traffic in stores and online.

Penney also started its Black Friday online sales on Wednesday instead of Thursday to compete better with online-only companies.

Kohl’s, too, has also been heavily investing in sprucing up its shopping app and pulling forward some online deals. Chief Executive Kevin Mansell says online sales broke records for Thanksgiving, but store visits showed solid growth as well. And Toys R Us, which saw strong traffic at stores and online, will be doing more online flash sales.

Both kinds of customers were at the Mall of America in Minnesota — which was closed on Thanksgiving this year — on Friday morning. Jennifer Cleveland was hoping to tackle a shopping list of gifts for in-laws and some winter gear. It’s her second Black Friday shopping trip, and she came back to score some big deals.

“I came last year and discovered sales are better than online,” she said.

But Julie Singewald, 44, said she was there merely as the vehicle — “and sometimes the credit card” — as her daughters shopped. Singewald is doing more of her own shopping online.

“I’m a point-and-click person,” she said. “If it were up to me, I would be in my pajamas and on my computer at home.”

BRIEFLY

Death toll in Iraq bombing claimed by IS rises to 73

MOSUL, Iraq (AP) — The death toll from a car bombing south of Baghdad claimed by the Islamic State group rose to 73 on Friday, including about 40 Iranian pilgrims, as Iraqi forces fought house to house to dislodge the extremist group from the northern city of Mosul in a five-week-old campaign slowed down by stiff IS resistance and fears of massive civilian casualties.

Iraqi police and hospital officials said 65 other people were wounded in the Thursday night attack at a gas station on a major highway near the city of Hilla, about 95 kilometers (60 miles) south of the Iraqi capital.

It was the deadliest IS attack in Iraq since July, when a car bomb killed about 300 in a commercial district in Baghdad.

IS claimed the attack in a brief statement on its Amaq media arm, saying it was a suicide truck bomb. Earlier, Iraqi officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media, had put the death toll at 56.

In Mosul, where an Iraqi government campaign to retake the city began last month, fighting continued in the eastern sector on Friday, with Iraqi special forces seizing another

neighborhood, Masaref, and advancing in the densely populated Zohour district, according to Brig. Gen. Haider Fadhil. The offensive to capture Zohour began earlier this week, but troops are facing spirited IS resistance, he added.

Sister ecstatic over return of missing California woman

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The older sister of a Northern California mother who was missing for three weeks said Friday the return of her sibling made for the best Thanksgiving ever.

The comments by Sheila Koester came as authorities searched for two armed women they believe abducted 34-year-old Sherri Papini on Nov. 2 then released her alongside an interstate early Thursday.

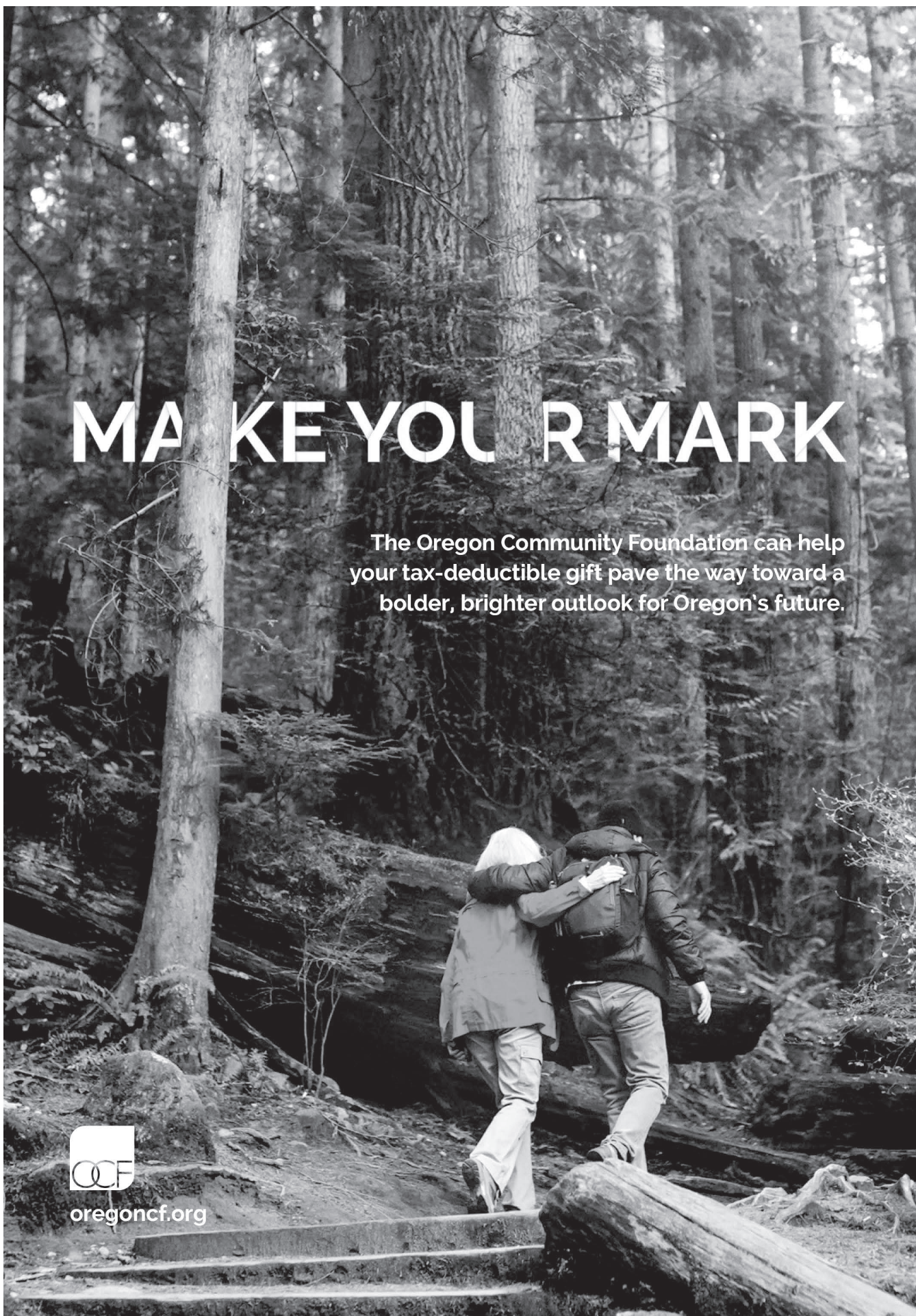
Papini was found near Interstate 5 about 150 miles south of the site where she disappeared while jogging near Redding.

Authorities have released few details about what happened to her.

Koester said she does not know what happened during the three weeks her sister was gone or the details of the police investigation.

She said she reunited with Papini and is giving her space and time with her husband to heal.

Papini was found bound by restraints after she flagged down a driver, Bosenko said.



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