

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Pope's Preacher Speaks Out On Allegations

VATICAN CITY (AP) — At a solemn Good Friday service, Pope Benedict XVI's personal preacher likened the tide of allegations that the pontiff has covered up sex abuse cases to the "more shameful aspects of anti-Semitism." But within hours, facing a storm of criticism at the comparison, the Vatican felt it necessary to distance the pope from the preacher's remarks.

Both Jewish and victims' groups responded that it was inappropriate to compare the discomfort being experienced by the church leadership in the sex abuse scandal to the violence that culminated in the Holocaust. The Vatican has been on the defensive in recent days, saying the church has been singled out and collectively stereotyped for the problem of pedophilia, which it says is a society-wide issue.

As the pope listened in a hushed St. Peter's Basilica, the Rev. Raniero Cantalamessa likened accusations against the pontiff and the Catholic church in sex abuse scandals in Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere to "collective violence" suffered by the Jews.

Subway Bomber Was 17-Year-Old Widow

MOSCOW (AP) — The image is striking: a sultry teenager, partly veiled, in the embrace of a bearded man — both grasping handguns. The photo appeared Friday in a leading Russian newspaper, which reported that the teen was one of the two female suicide bombers who struck Moscow's subway. The paper indicated that she may have been out to avenge her husband, an Islamic militant killed by Russian forces.

Russian investigators said one of the attackers was a 17-year-old widow named Dzhanet Abdurakhmanova. They did not confirm that the photo published in the Kommersant newspaper was that of the bomber. Kommersant published what it said was a picture of Abdurakhmanova, also known as Abdullayeva, dressed in a black Muslim headscarf and holding a Makarov pistol. The image was broadcast on all nationwide television networks.

Russia, Venezuela Could Prep Space Industry

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Russia has offered to help Venezuela set up its own space industry, including a satellite launch site, as Prime Minister Vladimir Putin made his first visit to the South American country on Friday.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez announced the offer by Russia hours before Putin arrived, saying officials would discuss the possibility of setting up a "satellite launcher and a factory."

"Russia offers help so that Venezuela can have its own industry for the use of its outer space," Chavez said Thursday night. He didn't give details or say how much that might cost.

The two countries are also discussing new weapons deals, Chavez said in televised remarks, without giving details.

Chavez's government has already bought more than \$4 billion in Russian weapons since 2005, including helicopters, fighter jets and 100,000 Kalashnikov rifles. Chavez said last year that Russia agreed to loan Venezuela up to \$2.2 billion for additional arms deals.

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ECONOMY

U.S. Adds 162,000 Jobs During March

Fastest Increase In Three Years, Unemployment Rate 9.7 Percent For Third Month

BY JEANNINE AVERSA
AND CHRISTOPHER S. RUGABER
AP Economic Writers

WASHINGTON — The nation added jobs at the fastest pace in three years last month as factories, stores, hospitals and the census all brought workers on board — the surest sign yet that the worst employment market in a generation has finally snapped back.

The unemployment rate stayed at 9.7 percent for the third month in a row, the Labor Department said Friday. Economists actually consider that a hopeful sign because it means more people are encouraged and starting to look for work.

"This recovery is for real," said Chris Rupkey, economist at the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi.

Overall, the economy added 162,000 jobs for the month. About a third of the gains came from the census, with much more to come: About 700,000 head-counters will be hired to tally the nation's population this spring.

Economists took heart that even aside from the population count, the private sector added 123,000 jobs for the month, the most since May 2007.

Hiring is not expected to be robust enough anytime soon to significantly bring down the unemployment rate. Economists think unemployment will probably still be above 9 percent by the November midterm elections, making Democratic and Republican incumbents in Congress vulnerable, particularly in hard-hit states such as Michigan, Nevada and Rhode Island.

President Barack Obama seized on the positive numbers in the jobs report and took partial credit for them. But with 15 million people still out of work, he also acknowledged that the economy will be recuperating for a long time to come.

"We are beginning to turn the corner," he told workers at a battery plant in Charlotte, N.C., that received government stimulus



TODD SUMLIN/CHARLOTTE OBSERVER/MCT
President Barack Obama speaks before a crowd at Celgard in Charlotte, North Carolina on Friday.

money. But he added: "We shouldn't underestimate the difficulties we face."

House Republican leader John Boehner of Ohio said a jobless rate near 10 percent is "no cause for celebration." The unemployment rate peaked at 10.1 percent in October, a 26-year high.

No one disputes that the job market is still bleak. Counting people who have given up looking for work and part-timers who would prefer to be working full-time, the so-called underemployment rate rose to 16.9 percent in March.

But Friday's report from the Labor Department at least provides firm evidence that the job market is on the right track, even

if it will be a long journey for the millions of Americans who want work but cannot yet find any.

"The economy is moving in the right direction, albeit at a tortuously slow pace," said Paul Ashworth of Capital Economics.

Economists do not expect the jobless rate to drop to something more normal — like 5.5 percent to 6 percent — until the middle of this decade.

In the meantime, economists are concerned that hiring now appears to be concentrated among large companies — a sign that small businesses, which typically lead job creation in the early stages of a recovery, are having difficulty getting financing from banks.

In March, the education industry led job creation, followed by health services and government. Those sectors, plus others like the hospitality industry, manufacturing and retail, will continue hiring as the recovery picks up, economists say.

Although construction companies added jobs last month, it was seen as a temporary snapback from February, when snowstorms along the East Coast idled many construction jobs. The real estate market is still fragile in much of the country.

Other pockets of weakness include financial services, publishing and state and local governments, which are grappling with budget crises from coast to coast.

Nationwide, average hourly earnings fell by 2 cents in March to \$22.47. Stagnant wages are a big reason people are still hesitant to spend money, a drag on the overall economy.

The number of people out of work six months or longer reached 6.5 million in March, a new high. The number of people forced to take part-time work in March rose by 263,000, to 9.1 million.

The worst recession since the 1930s has wiped out 8.2 million jobs, making the competition for any openings fierce. On average, there are five or six unemployed people competing for each opening, according to government data.

3 Adults, 3 Children Dead In Minneapolis Fire

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A fire swept through a two-story Minneapolis building that housed several apartments and an Irish pub Friday, killing six people, including three children, authorities said.

Friends and relatives said they believed those who died included a bartender who lived above McMahon's Pub and five members of his girlfriend's family, who had been visiting the bartender the night before.

Firefighters arrived shortly after 6 a.m. to find heavy flames and smoke pouring from the building, where the roof eventually collapsed, authorities said. The blaze began in a second-floor apartment, but the cause hadn't been determined Friday evening, said Assistant Minneapolis Fire Chief John Fruetel.

One woman died at a hospital early Friday and the bodies

of two men and three children were later recovered from the building, city and fire officials said. Shortly after removing the last body — the third child — from the ruins, authorities said they did not expect to find more victims.

While authorities did not immediately identify the victims, the bartender's girlfriend said her mother, her brother

and his three young children had been visiting the bartender, Ryan Richner, Thursday night.

Before all the bodies had been recovered, the bartender's mother, Denise Schmidt, said she also feared her 25-year-old son was dead.

"He would have called by now if he was OK," Schmidt said by phone from Long Prairie, a town about 100 miles

north of Minneapolis.

Authorities found eight violations during a fire code inspection March 15 on the commercial part of the building. Among them, the pub's fire alarm system hadn't been tested in more than a year and there weren't enough fire extinguishers, said Minneapolis Fire Marshal Bryan Tyrner.

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