



Syrian Prime Minister Escapes Bombing

BY ALBERT AHI AND RYAN LUCAS
Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syria's prime minister narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in the heart of the heavily defended capital Monday, state media said, laying bare the vulnerability of President Bashar Assad's regime.

The bombing, which killed several other people, highlights an accelerating campaign targeting government officials, from mid-level civil servants to the highest echelons of the Syrian regime.

State television said Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi was not hurt in the bombing, which struck his convoy as it drove through the posh Mazzeh neighborhood — home to embassies, government officials and business elites with close ties to the regime. Footage of the scene broadcast on state TV showed the charred hulks of cars and the burnt-out shell of a bus in a street littered with rubble.

The attack on al-Halqi punctuated a series of attacks on government officials in recent weeks. On April 18, gunmen shot dead the head of public relations at the Ministry of Social Affairs while he dined at a Mazzeh restaurant. A day later, a Syrian army colonel was killed in Damascus, and five days after that a bomb killed an official from the Electricity Ministry.

Then there are the larger attacks that have shaken the regime to its core.

Last month, a suicide bombing at a Damascus mosque killed Sheik Mohammad Said Ramadan al-Buti, a leading Sunni Muslim preacher and outspoken supporter of Assad. That followed a blast last July that killed four top

regime officials, including Assad's brother-in-law and the defense minister, at the Syrian national security building in the capital.

Eager to assure the public that al-Halqi survived Monday's attack, the state-run Al-Ikhbariya station said the prime minister attended a regular weekly meeting with an economic committee immediately after the bombing. The station broadcast video of al-Halqi sitting at a table with several other officials.

Later, in its evening news program, state TV showed video of al-Halqi denouncing the attack, calling it a "terrorist and criminal act" and wishing the wounded a speedy recovery.

A government official said two people were killed and 11 wounded in the blast, while the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights activist group put the death toll at five, including two of al-Halqi's bodyguards and one of the drivers in his convoy.

The government official spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to give official statements to reporters.

The bombings and assassinations are part of the wider violence wracking Syria as the nation's conflict enters its third year. The crisis began with largely peaceful anti-government protests in March 2011, but has since morphed into a civil war that has killed more than 70,000 people, according to the United Nations.

State TV quoted Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoubi as saying that targeting al-Halqi, who is in charge of carrying out a political program to end the nation's crisis, shows that some in the opposition "reject a political solution."

Recent major bombings in Damascus

April 29, 2013 Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi's convoy hit by car bomb in Damascus; he reportedly survives; others, including bodyguard, killed

April 8 Car bomb kills at least 15 people, wounds 53

March 21 Leading Sunni Muslim cleric Sheik Mohammad al-Buti, supporter of President Bashar Assad, killed by suicide bomber, along with 41 others

Dec. 12, 2012 Car bomb hits Interior Ministry, wounding Interior Minister Mohammad al-Shaar, killing several others

July 18 Bombing at national security building kills four top officials, including Assad's brother-in-law and the defense minister

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Source: ESRI, BBC, AP

FDA Will Investigate Added Caffeine In Foods

BY MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Trail mix. Potato chips. And now gum.

With a growing number of foods boasting added caffeine for an energy boost, the Food and Drug Administration says it's time to investigate their safety.

The FDA's new look at added caffeine and its effects on children and adolescents is in response to a caffeinated gum introduced this week by Wrigley. Called Alert Energy Gum, it promises "The right energy, right now." The agency is already investigating the safety of energy drinks and energy shots, prompted by consumer reports of illness and death.

Michael Taylor, FDA's deputy commissioner of foods, said Monday that the only time FDA explicitly approved the added use of caffeine in a food or drink was in the 1950's for colas. The current proliferation of caffeine added to foods is "beyond anything FDA envisioned," Taylor said.

"It is disturbing," Taylor said in an interview with The Associated Press. "We're concerned about whether they have been adequately evaluated."

Taylor said the agency will look at the potential impact these "new and easy sources" of caffeine will have on children's health and will take action if necessary. He said that he and other FDA officials have held meetings

with some of the large food companies that have ventured into caffeinated products, including Mars Co., which owns Wrigley.

Wrigley and other companies adding caffeine to their products have labeled them as for adult use only. A spokeswoman for Wrigley, Denise M. Young, said the gum is for "adults who are looking for foods with caffeine for energy" and each piece contains about 40 mg, or the equivalent amount found in half a cup of coffee. She said the company will work with FDA.

"Millions of Americans consume caffeine responsibly and in moderation as part of their daily routines," Young said.

Food manufacturers have added caffeine to candy, nuts and other snack foods in recent years. Jelly Belly "Sport Beans," for example, have 50 mg of caffeine in each 100-calorie pack, while Arma Energy Snx markets trail mix, chips and other products.

Critics say it's not enough for the companies to say they are marketing the products to adults when the caffeine is added to items like candy that are attractive to children. Major medical associations have warned that too much caffeine can be dangerous for children, who have less ability to process the stimulant than adults. The American Academy of Pediatrics says caffeine has been linked to harmful effects on young people's developing neurologic and cardiovascular systems.



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT
President Barack Obama nominates Charlotte Mayor Anthony Foxx as the new Secretary of Transportation Monday in the White House in Washington.

Obama Taps N.C. Mayor To Run DOT

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama on Monday tapped rising Democratic politician Anthony Foxx to lead the Department of Transportation, an agency at the center of Washington's fiscal fights.

Foxx, the mayor of Charlotte, N.C., is the first black nominee among the president's picks for open spots in his second term Cabinet. The president had faced questions, including from the Congressional Black Caucus, about a lack of diversity in his first round of nominations after winning re-election.

Obama said that as a mayor, Foxx knows how to use infrastructure

spending to create jobs and boost economic growth. The White House cited Foxx's work on Charlotte's electric tram service, an expansion of a light rail system and the opening of a third runway at the city's airport as experience that qualifies him for the Cabinet post.

"Charlotte made one of the largest investments in transportation," Obama said during a nomination ceremony in the East Room of the White House. "All of that has not only helped create new jobs, it's helped Charlotte become more attractive to business."

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Judy Clarke Appointed For Bombing Suspect

BOSTON (AP) — Prominent death penalty lawyer Judy Clarke is joining the team representing the suspect in the Boston Marathon bombings.

The appointment of Clarke, based in San Diego, Calif., was approved Monday by U.S. Magistrate Judge Marianne Bowler.

Bowler denied a request from Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's public defender to appoint a second death penalty lawyer. Bowler says Tsarnaev's lawyers could renew their motion to appoint another death penalty expert if Tsarnaev is indicted.

The 19-year-old Tsarnaev has been charged with using a weapon of mass destruction during the April 15 marathon. Three people were killed and more than 260 injured when two bombs exploded near the finish line.

Clarke's clients have included Unabomber Ted Kaczynski; Susan Smith, who drowned her two children; and most recently Tucson, Ariz., shooter Jared Loughner. All received life sentences instead of the death penalty.

S&P's 500 Edges Above Previous Record High

NEW YORK (AP) — Technology companies are leading the stock market higher, pushing the Standard & Poor's 500 index to another record high.

A pair of strong economic reports also encouraged investors Monday. Wages and spending rose in the U.S. last month, and pending home sales hit their highest level in three years.

The S&P 500 closed at 1,593, a fraction above its previous record high reached on April 11. It rose 11 points Monday, or 0.7 percent.

The Dow Jones industrial average closed up 106 points at 14,818, a gain of 0.7 percent.

Major tech companies had the biggest gains in the Dow: Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft and IBM.

Man Accused Of Stabbing Choir Is Charged

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — The man accused of stabbing four churchgoers during Sunday Mass told police that he was after the choir leader because he thought the man was a member of a secret society.

According to a criminal complaint, Lawrence Capener, 24, said he was going after the choir leader at St. Jude Thaddeus Catholic Church because his "speech was different" and he was "99 percent sure he was a Mason."

He told the investigator that Masons are a group involved "in a conspiracy that is far more reaching than I could or would believe."

Capener said he stabbed the others who tried to subdue him because he thought they might be Masons, too.

The affidavit said Capener apologized for stabbing the others after he was read his rights and agreed to speak to police.

NBA Veteran Jason Collins Comes Out As Gay

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the simplest of sentences, NBA veteran Jason Collins set aside years of worry and silence to become the first active player in one of four major U.S. professional sports leagues to come out as gay.

In a first-person article posted Monday on Sports Illustrated's website, Collins begins: "I'm a 34-year-old NBA center. I'm black. And I'm gay."

Collins has played for six teams in 12 seasons, most recently as a reserve with the Washington Wizards after a midseason trade from the Boston Celtics. He is now a free agent and wants to keep playing in the NBA.

"I didn't set out to be the first openly gay athlete playing in a major American team sport. But since I am, I'm happy to start the conversation. I wish I wasn't the kid in the classroom raising his hand and saying, 'I'm different,'" Collins writes. "If I had my way, someone else would have already done this. Nobody has, which is why I'm raising my hand."

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*For screening purposes. If further tests are needed, standard charges will be applied.

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