

ISIS Video Unleashes Anger, Grief

CAIRO (AP) — The horrific fate of a captured Jordanian pilot, burned to death by the Islamic State group, unleashed a wave of grief and rage on Wednesday across the Middle East, a region long riven by upheavals and violence. Political and religious leaders united in outrage and condemnation, saying the slaying of the airman goes against Islam's teachings.

The gruesome militant video of the last moments in the life of 26-year-old Lt. Muath Al-Kaseasbeh, whose F-16 crashed in Syria in December during a U.S.-led coalition raid on the extremist group, crossed a line — beyond the beheadings of Western hostages at the hands of Islamic State extremists.

From the world's most prestigious seat of Sunni Islam learning, Cairo's Al-Azhar Mosque, Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayeb said the IS militants deserve the Quranic punishment of death, crucifixion or the chopping off of their arms for being enemies of God and the Prophet Muhammad.

"Islam prohibits the taking of an innocent life," al-Tayeb said. By burning the pilot to death, he added, the militants violated Islam's prohibition on the immolation or mutilation of bodies — even during wartime.

Under many Mideast legal systems, capital punishment is usually carried out by hanging. In Iran and Pakistan, stoning to death as punishment for adultery exists in the penal code but is rarely used. Beheadings are routinely carried out in Saudi Arabia, and Gaza's militant Hamas rulers have on occasion publicly shot to death Palestinians suspected of spying for Israel.

Amish Measles Outbreak Is Largest

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The largest U.S. measles outbreak in recent history isn't the one that started in December at Disneyland. It happened months earlier in Ohio's Amish country, where 383 people fell ill after unvaccinated Amish missionaries traveled to the Philippines and returned with the virus.

The Ohio episode drew far less attention, even though the number of cases was almost four times that of the Southern California outbreak, because it seemed to pose little threat outside close-knit religious communities.

The Disneyland outbreak has already spread well beyond the theme parks that attract tens of thousands of visitors from around the globe, who could then return home with the virus. Disease investigators for weeks raced to identify measles-stricken patients, track down potential contacts and quarantine them if necessary.

Public health experts say success at containing the outbreak will largely depend on how many unvaccinated people get the measles shot.

"This was a wake-up call," said Dr. James Cherry, a pediatric infectious disease expert at the University of California, Los Angeles. "It could continue to smolder" if not enough people get vaccinated.

SUV Driver Behavior Under Scrutiny

VALHALLA, N.Y. (AP) — Federal investigators looking into a fiery commuter train wreck that killed six people zeroed in Wednesday on what they called the big question on everyone's mind: Why was the driver of an SUV stopped on the tracks, between the lowered crossing gates?

A team from the National Transportation Safety Board arrived to examine the blackened and mangled wreckage and the Metro-North train's data recorders the morning after the rush-hour collision with the sport utility vehicle about 20 miles north of New York City.

The Tuesday evening crash was the deadliest accident in the 32-year history of one of the nation's busiest commuter railroads — one that has come under a harsh spotlight over a series of accidents in recent years. The SUV driver and five men on the train were killed, burned so badly that authorities were using dental records to identify them.

"The big question everyone wants to know is: Why was this vehicle in the crossing?" said Robert Sumwalt, NTSB vice chairman.

The wreck happened after dark in backed-up traffic in an area where the tracks are straight but driving can be tricky. Motorists exiting or entering the adjacent Taconic Parkway have to turn and cross the tracks near a wooded area and a cemetery.

Obama Deficit Cuts Claim Questioned

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama's budget is relying on a series of familiar accounting tricks to show \$1.8 trillion in deficit reduction over a decade, an amount that would shrink by almost half if they were excluded.

But so-called "pay-go" rules officially require tax cuts and new spending on the mandatory side of the ledger to be balanced by new revenues or spending cuts elsewhere. Mandatory spending, like fees that Medicare pays to doctors, runs on autopilot.

The accounting steps essentially inflate the White House's "baseline" predictions of future deficits. Then the White House claims greater deficit savings than it otherwise could if it played by the budget rules followed by the Congressional Budget Office, whose estimates lawmakers have to follow.

That's according to a study by the budget sleuths at a Washington think tank called the Committee For a Responsible Federal Budget, a business-funded group that advocates cutting deficits.

Death Toll Climbs To 31 In Taiwan Plane Crash

BY RALPH JENNINGS

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — Rescuers were searching for 12 people Thursday morning after using a crane to hoist the fuselage of a wrecked TransAsia Airways plane from a shallow river in Taiwan's capital following a crash that killed at least 31 others.

Flight 235 with 58 people aboard — many of them travelers from China — banked sharply on its side Wednesday shortly after takeoff from Taipei, clipped a highway bridge and then careened into the Keelung River.

Rescuers in rubber rafts pulled 15 people alive from the wreckage during daylight. After dark, they brought in the crane, and the death toll was expected to rise once crews were able to search through submerged portions of the fuselage, which came to rest a few dozen meters (yards) from the shore.

Dramatic video clips apparently taken from cars were posted online and aired by broadcasters, showing the ATR 72 propjet as it pivoted onto its side while zooming toward a traffic bridge over the river. In one of them, the plane rapidly fills the frame as its now-vertical wing scrapes over the road, hitting a vehicle before heading into the river.

Speculation cited in local media said the crew may have turned sharply to follow the line of the river to avoid crashing into a high-rise residential area, but Taiwan's aviation authority said it had no evidence of that.

Taiwanese broadcasters repeatedly played a recording of the plane's final contact with the control tower in which the crew called out "Mayday" three times. The recording offered no direct clues as to why the plane was in distress.

It was the airline's second French-Italian-built ATR 72 to crash in the past year. Wednesday's flight had taken off at 11:53 a.m. from Taipei's downtown Sungshan Airport en route to the outlying Taiwanese-controlled Kinmen islands. The crew issued the mayday call shortly after takeoff, Taiwanese civil aviation authorities said.

TransAsia director Peter Chen said contact with the plane was lost four minutes after takeoff. He said weather conditions were suitable for flying and the cause of the accident was unknown.

"Actually this aircraft in the accident was the newest model. It hadn't been used for even a year," he told a news conference.

Thirty-one passengers were from China, Taiwan's tourism bureau said. Kinmen's airport is a common link between Taipei and China's Fujian province.

Taiwan's Civil Aeronautics Administration said 31 people were confirmed dead, 15 were rescued with injuries and 12 were still missing. It said two people on the ground were hurt.

Part of the freeway above the river where the plane crashed was littered with debris and was closed after the accident.

Relatives of the victims had not reached the scene by dusk Wednesday but some were expected to arrive Thursday, including some flying from Beijing.

The plane's wing hit a taxi on the freeway, and the driver and a passenger were injured, Chen said.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense said it had sent 165 people and eight boats to the riverside rescue scene, joining fire department rescue crews.

Another ATR 72 operated by the same Taipei-based airline crashed in the outlying Taiwan-controlled islands of Penghu last July 23, killing 48 at the end of a typhoon for reasons that are still under investigation.

ATR, a French-Italian consortium based in Toulouse, France, said it was sending a team to Taiwan to help in the investigation.

The ATR 72-600 that crashed Wednesday is manufacturer's best plane model, and the pilot had 4,900 hours of flying experience, said Lin Chih-ming of the Civil Aeronautics Administration.

It has a generally good reputation for safety and reliability and is known among airlines for being cheap and efficient to operate.

While it's too early to say what caused the crash, engine trouble or weight shifting were unlikely to be causes, Waldron said. Other possible factors include pilot error, weather or freak incidents such as bird strikes.



PHOTOMALL/XINHUA/ZUMA PRESS/TNS

Combined photos taken by an automobile data recorder shows an airplane crashing over a bridge in Taipei, southeast China's Taiwan. A plane of the Taiwan TransAsia Airways came down into a Taipei river Wednesday, with more than 50 people on board, confirmed the civil aviation authorities of Taiwan.

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— Dennis Daugaard, South Dakota Governor

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