

NYC Economy Lost \$200M From Fizzled Storm, Transit Shutdown

BY COLLEEN LONG AND MEGHAN BARR
Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York City lost an estimated \$200 million in economic activity in the fizzled snowstorm and decision to shut down the transit system — a loss that wasn't crippling overall but had the biggest impact on small businesses and hourly workers.

Consumers who would have otherwise bought cars or made other major purchases will likely do so a day or two later, said Adam Kamins, an economist with Moody's Analytics, which came up with the preliminary loss estimate. He noted that many employees forced to stay home Tuesday were able to telecommute.

"For example, a holiday where people aren't working would have a greater impact on the economic output than this storm," Kamins said.

Evan Gold, senior vice president for Planalytics, a firm that advises companies on weather issues, estimated the economic losses for the total Northeast, including New York, Philadelphia and Boston, at \$500 million.

"Now that does sound like a lot of money, but when you think about last year, where we had a polar vortex, several weeks of that, more population centers impacted as well as above-normal snowfall, last year's overall economic impact is pegged at anywhere from \$15 billion to \$50 billion," he said. "So in comparison, this is actually a relatively small event."

In New York, small businesses and hourly workers who rely on tips, such as taxi drivers and restaurant workers, were keenly affected by the loss of work time.

Lenice Ferguson, a baker



BRAD HERRIGAN/HARTFORD COURANT/TNS
A New York City Department of Transportation - Manhattan Street Maintenance employee spreads calcium chloride near Times Square to melt the ice on Tuesday.

at Insomnia Cookies said the shop is usually open until about 3 a.m. making deliveries. The bakery closed at about 10 p.m. Monday.

"It's a big deal, because I only work three nights out of the week," the 26-year-old said. "My check is going to be short, and I have bills that I have to pay."

Subways, rail lines, bridges and tunnels were all closed Monday night. Residents were told to stay off the streets after 11 p.m. or face fines. Transportation reopened Tuesday morning after it was clear the storm was a bust in New York City, with most areas getting about 8 inches instead of the predicted 2 feet.

Fausto Cabrera opened his Upper West Side barber shop Tuesday morning but wasn't expecting many customers.

"There was nobody here

yesterday and today, just look," he said, pointing to six empty barber chairs. "All I can do is wait."

Mayor Bill de Blasio said economic loss was much less than it would have been had the storm hit in full force, and that taking precautions helped the city get back online faster.

Moody's economist Kamins said that for the Northeast overall, the storm would have done about \$16 billion in damage had it hit full force. Instead, the impact will likely reach just \$1.25 billion.

"I will always err on the side of safety and caution," de Blasio said Tuesday. "We had consistently been getting reports talking about two feet or more of snow. To me it was a no-brainer, we had to take precautions to keep people safe."

Shaon Chowdhury, a man-

ager of Arthur Cab Leasing Corp., in Queens, said he didn't have a problem with the city's actions even though he lost about \$60,000 in revenue and expenses.

"If they did get 28 inches it would be a problem, so shutting down is a good idea," he said. "What happens if we did get 28 inches? It would have been hell."

New York City's 24,000 restaurants probably lost millions in revenue in total, said Chris Hickey, regional director of New York City for the New York State Restaurant Association.

For the first time in the decade since it first opened a block north of Times Square, the TSQ brasserie deserted at mid-afternoon Monday. Business was down about 70 percent.

"Never in my life was it like this — empty," said manager Mohi Hassan.

United States Sees Kobani As Significant

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Kurdish recapture of Kobani in northern Syria appears to have provided a blueprint for defeating the Islamic State, bringing together U.S. air power with an effective ground force and protected routes for the movement of fighters and weaponry. Taking back the key Iraqi city of Mosul may be an entirely different matter.

As Kurdish fighters, buoyed by their success after months of fighting near Syria's Turkish border, expanded their offensive Tuesday, American officials were able to point at long last to a victory in the battle against the Islamic State. The takeover of Kobani, which the U.S. says is now 90 percent complete, has put the extremists on the defensive.

U.S. efforts were part of the story.

American air strikes killed more than 1,000 Islamic State members in and around Kobani, including major figures in the militia's command structure and many of its most battle-hardened fighters, a senior State Department official said. Kurdish peshmerga forces and Syrian rebels were able to reverse momentum on the ground by reaching Kobani through Turkey, a corridor established after much U.S.-Turkish diplomacy.

Similar efforts are occurring right now in Iraq, said the official, who briefed reporters on condition he not be quoted by name. He cited operations in the western Iraqi town of Haditha, where local tribes and Iraqi forces have slowed the Islamic State's advances across a Sunni-dominated area of the country.

Obama: Laws Needed For Drone Use

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama says the wayward quadcopter that crashed on the White House grounds — flown by an off-duty intelligence employee — shows that the U.S. must take steps to ensure commercial and consumer drones are used safely.

It's his own administration that has lagged on the matter. Both Congress and the drone industry have pressed for rules and clarification as the technology of civilian drone use grows apace and the small unmanned craft become ever cheaper.

Obama, in a CNN interview from India, likened the 2-foot-long quadcopter that crashed on the White House lawn to one that could be bought at Radio Shack, which lists them from \$50 to \$700.

"We don't yet have the legal structures and the architecture both globally and within individual countries to manage them the way that we need to," Obama said Tuesday. Part of his job in his final two years in office "is seeing if we can start providing some sort of framework that ensures that we get the good and minimize the bad."

The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency said Tuesday the man, still unidentified, is one of its employees. His work has nothing to do with drones, the agency said in a statement, adding, "Even though the employee was using a personal item while off duty, the agency takes the incident very seriously and remains committed to promoting public trust and transparency."

Obama Pays His Respects To Saudis

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — In a show of solidarity with Saudi Arabia, President Barack Obama led a parade of American dignitaries to the ultraconservative desert kingdom Tuesday to pay respects after King Abdullah's death and take measure of the new monarch.

Obama's presence here underscored the key role Saudi Arabia plays in U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and highlighted Washington's willingness to put national security priorities ahead of concerns about human rights issues. Hours before arriving in Riyadh, Obama spoke at length about the importance of women's rights during an address in India, setting up a jarring contrast with his warm embrace of Saudi Arabia, a country where there are strict limits on women's freedom.

Obama, like his recent predecessors, defended his willingness to forge close ties with the kingdom despite its array of human rights issues.

"Sometimes we need to balance our need to speak to them about human rights issues with immediate concerns we have in terms of counterterrorism or dealing with regional stability," Obama said in an interview with CNN.

First lady Michelle Obama accompanied the president during his four-hour visit to Riyadh. She dressed conservatively in black pants and a long jacket, but did not cover her head, which is often standard for Western women visiting the kingdom but forbidden for Saudi women. Some members of the all-male Saudi delegation shook her hand as they greeted the Obamas, while others simply nodded to her as they passed by.

Secret Talks Sought To Release Hostages

BEIRUT (AP) — Japanese officials were tightlipped Wednesday as secret talks in Jordan sought to secure the freedom of a Japanese journalist and a Jordanian pilot captured by Islamic State extremists and purportedly threatened with death within 24 hours.

The global efforts to free Japanese freelance journalist Kenji Goto and Jordanian Lt. Mu'ath al-Kaseasbeh gained greater urgency with the release of the apparent ultimatum from the Islamic State group.

In the message, the extremists say the two hostages will be killed within 24 hours — late Wednesday night Japan time — unless Jordan frees Sajida al-Rishawi, an Iraqi woman sentenced to death in Jordan for her involvement in a 2005 terrorist attack on a hotel that killed 60 people.

The pilot's father, Safi al-Kaseasbeh, made a last-ditch appeal for Jordan "to meet the demands" of the Islamic State group.

"All people must know, from the head of the regime to everybody else, that the safety of Mu'ath means the stability of Jordan, and the death of Mu'ath means chaos in Jordan," he told The Associated Press.

CEO Spinning Off Yahoo's Stake

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer is spinning off the company's \$39 billion stake in China's Alibaba Group Holding in a move that wards off a potential shareholder rebellion.

The highly anticipated decision announced Tuesday will enable Yahoo to avoid paying billions of dollars in future taxes while intensifying the pressure on Mayer to prove she can rejuvenate one of the Internet's oldest and best-known companies.

A newly formed entity called SpinCo will inherit ownership of Yahoo's 384 million Alibaba shares when the tax-free spinoff is completed toward the end of this year.

Existing Yahoo shareholders will receive stock in SpinCo, which will be designated as a registered investment company. The breakup is an attempt to ensure most SpinCo shareholders profiting from future sales of Alibaba stock will be taxed at a lower rate than Yahoo Inc. would have paid had it held on to the stake, said Mark Luscombe, principal federal tax analyst for Wolters Kluwer Tax & Accounting.

Leader Warns Jews Are Targets Again

BY VANESSA GERA
Associated Press

BRZEZINKA, Poland — A Jewish leader stood Tuesday before 300 survivors of the Nazis' most notorious death camp and asked world leaders to prevent another Auschwitz, warning of a rise of anti-Semitism that has made many Jews fearful of walking the streets, and is causing many to flee Europe.

Ronald Lauder, the president of the World Jewish Congress, made his bleak assessment on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, speaking next to the gate and the railroad tracks that marked the last journey for more than a million people murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

He said his speech was shaped by the recent terrorist attacks in France that targeted Jews and newspaper satirists.

"For a time, we thought that the hatred of Jews had finally been eradicated. But slowly the demonization of Jews started to come back," Lauder said. "Once again, young Jewish boys are afraid to wear yarmulkes on the streets of Paris and Budapest and London. Once again, Jewish businesses are targeted. And once again, Jewish families are fleeing Europe."

The recent attack in Paris, in which four Jews were killed in a kosher supermarket, is not the first deadly attack on Jews in recent years. Last May a shooting killed four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels and in 2012 a rabbi and three children were murdered in the French city of Toulouse.

Europe also saw a spasm of anti-Semitism last summer during the war in Gaza, with protests in Paris turning violent and other hostility across the continent.

"This vilification of Israel, the only Jewish state on earth, quickly became an opportunity to attack Jews," Lauder said. "Much of this came from the Middle East, but it has found fertile ground throughout the world."

Gunmen Storm Libya Hotel, Killing American, 9 Others

BY ESAM MOHAMED
Associated Press

TRIPOLI, Libya — In the latest sign of Libya's descent into chaos, gunmen stormed a luxury hotel used by diplomats and businessmen in the capital on Tuesday, killing 10 people, including an American, a French citizen and three people from Asia.

Two attackers were killed following an hourslong standoff that included a car bomb that exploded in the parking lot of the seaside Corinthia Hotel. It was unclear if other gunmen were involved in the attack, which also killed five Libyan guards.

In Twitter posts and a statement on social media, a Tripoli affiliate of the Islamic State group was said to be behind the attack, but there was little evidence to back up the claims in a country that has been awash in armed extremist groups who would be equally suspect.

The SITE intelligence group reported that the two dead gunmen were identified online as sympathizers of IS and said the militants said the hotel was targeted because it houses diplomatic missions and "crusader" security companies. However, The Associated Press was unable to independently confirm the claims, which didn't conform with the group's earlier postings from Libya.

Militants claiming the attack on behalf of a group called the Islamic State of the Tripoli Province posted a brief video showing burned cars in the hotel's parking lot and said it was to avenge the 2013 abduction by American commandos of a Libyan al-Qaida operative, Nazih Abdul-Hamed al-Ruqai, also known as Abu Anas al-Libi. Al-Ruqai died earlier this month in a New York hospital of complications from liver surgery while awaiting trial for the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

The assault highlights the growing threat from militant groups that operate with near impunity in a country torn between rival governments since the 2011 toppling and killing of dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

Since Gadhafi's ouster, the country has been torn among competing militias and tribes vying for power. Libya's post-Gadhafi transition has collapsed, with two rival governments and parliaments

— each backed by different militias — ruling in the country's eastern and western regions.

Amid the bloody political rivalry, multiple armed groups have emerged, including radical Islamist militias who have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, including one based in the eastern city of Derna, a stronghold of radical groups, as well as regional militias and groups loyal to the former regime.

Tripoli, which has been controlled by Islamist militiamen mostly from the western city of Misrata since the summer, has been hit with a series of car bombs and shootings. The internationally recognized government has been forced to relocate to the country's east, where a former general has waged an offensive against Islamist militias, including Ansar al-Shariah, blamed for the 2012 attack on the U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi that left the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans dead.

A senior U.S. State Department official confirmed that a U.S. citizen was among those killed in Tuesday's attack, but did not provide further details. Cliff Taylor, the CEO of a Virginia security company, Crucible LLC, identified the slain American as David Berry, a contractor with his company.

A French national and three citizens of a former Soviet republic were also among the dead, according to a spokesman for a Tripoli security agency, Essam al-Naas.

The Malta-owned Corinthia hotel, among the most luxurious in Tripoli, is frequented by diplomats and foreign businessmen visiting Libya, and is also where the United Nations support mission in Libya usually holds its meetings. The mission is currently hosting political talks with rival Libyan groups in Geneva, trying to resolve the country's political and security crisis.

The hotel had Italian, British and Turkish guests but was largely empty at the time of the attack, according to hotel staff members. There was also a visiting American delegation.

The militia-backed government in Tripoli said the target was Prime Minister Omar al-Hassi, who normally resides at the hotel but was not there at the time of the attack. Spokesman Amr Baiou told reporters al-Hassi was un-

harmed.

A security official in Tripoli, Omar al-Khadrawi, said initial investigations pointed to a group of former Gadhafi loyalists.

Reports about how the attack unfolded were conflicting and it was not immediately possible to reconcile the different accounts.

Hotel staffers initially said that five masked gunmen stormed the Corinthia after security guards at the hotel's gate tried to stop them, firing randomly at the staff in the lobby as guests fled out the hotel's back doors into the parking lot.

One staffer said a car bomb exploded in the parking lot after a protection force entered the lobby and opened fire on the gunmen. Two guards were immediately killed, according to the staffer, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he feared being targeted by militants.

The car bomb incinerated at least five cars in the parking lot and damaged windows in the hotel's facade, he said.

Al-Naas, the security agency spokesman, said after a standoff of several hours, the attackers threw a grenade at the security forces on the hotel's 24th floor, killing themselves and a security guard. Ten people were also wounded in the attack, including security guards and guests.

"The operation is over," al-Naas said but added that the streets around the Corinthia remained closed. He said an investigation was underway and the car used by the gunmen is believed to be the same one used in an assault on the Algerian embassy 10 days ago that wounded three guards.

The U.N. Security Council condemned the attack "in the strongest terms" and urged all countries to help bring "the perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice." In a statement approved by all 15 members, the council also urged all parties in Libya "to engage constructively" with U.N. envoy Bernardino Leon and resume "an inclusive political process aimed at addressing the political and security challenges" facing Libya.

The Corinthia previously came under attack in 2013 when gunmen abducted then prime minister Ali Zeidan, who was living there. He was released several hours later.

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