

FBI Conducts Child Prostitution Raids

WASHINGTON (AP) — Declaring child prostitution a “persistent threat” in America, the FBI said Monday that authorities had rescued 105 young people and arrested 150 alleged pimps and others in a three-day sweep in 76 cities.

The agency said it had been monitoring Backpage.com and other websites as a prominent online marketplace for sex for sale. Backpage.com said that it was “very, very pleased” by the raids and that if the website were shut down to the advertisements, the ads would be pushed to sites that wouldn’t cooperate with law enforcement.

The young people in the roundup, almost all of them girls, ranged in age from 13 to 17.

The largest numbers of children rescued in the weekend initiative, Operation Cross Country, were in San Francisco, Detroit, Milwaukee, Denver and New Orleans. The operation was conducted under the FBI’s decade-long Innocence Lost National Initiative. The latest rescues and arrests were the largest such enforcement action to date.

“Child prostitution remains a persistent threat to children across the country,” Ron Hosko, assistant director of the bureau’s criminal investigative division, told a news conference. “We’re trying to put this spotlight on pimps and those who would exploit.”

Experts: US Likely Didn’t Aid N. Zealand

WASHINGTON (AP) — If the National Security Agency monitored phone conversations between a New Zealand journalist and his Afghan sources, as reported this weekend, it was more likely to have been done under standard military intelligence monitoring of enemy communications in war zones, intelligence officials and experts said Monday.

The Obama administration brushed off new allegations of NSA surveillance overreach, this time focusing on freelance reporter Jon Stephenson, who was in Kabul, Afghanistan, working for American news service McClatchy and other media outlets when his phone records were reportedly seized.

It was the latest revelation, if greeted with less outrage, in the ongoing debate over government snooping since NSA leaker Edward Snowden in June revealed two top secret U.S. programs that monitor millions of Americans’ telephone and Internet communications each day.

It’s not clear what actually happened. The Sunday *Star-Times* reported that the New Zealand military conspired with U.S. spy agencies to monitor a Stephenson’s communications with sources in Afghanistan. New Zealand officials denied the new allegations and U.S. intelligence authorities and the White House declined immediate comment Monday.

But experts and former intelligence officials said if Stephenson’s phone records were collected, they would have been gathered in a military intelligence sweep that is shared among allies — and has for years monitored most communications in war zones, where there is little expectation of privacy in the hunt for enemy combatants and suspected terrorists.

Obama, Clinton Meet For D.C. Lunch

WASHINGTON (AP) — When is a lunch more than just a midday meal? When the two diners are President Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton, and inquiring minds want to know who, if anyone, the president will endorse in 2016.

A summertime meal shared by Obama and his rival-turned ally threw the political speculation machine into overdrive Monday, highlighting how closely both are being watched for signs of their intentions in the next presidential race.

For Clinton, it’s a question of whether the former first lady will take the plunge, launching another campaign eight years after she lost to Obama in a hard-fought primary. For Obama, it’s about dueling loyalties to two of his closest advisers who would both covet his endorsement: Clinton and Vice President Joe Biden, who is also said to be eyeing the Oval Office.

Such questions set the table for a midday powwow over salad, grilled chicken and pasta jambalaya whipped up by the White House chef and served al fresco on the patio just outside the Oval Office.

Police: Woman Busted In DC Vandalism

WASHINGTON (AP) — A woman was arrested Monday after green paint was found splattered inside two chapels at the Washington National Cathedral, and police were investigating her in connection with two similar incidents on the National Mall, authorities said.

Jiamai Tian, 58, was arrested inside the cathedral shortly after the paint was found and charged with defacing property, police and cathedral officials said. Investigators were hoping to question her about the vandalism on the Mall, including at the Lincoln Memorial, but a language barrier was complicating those efforts, Assistant D.C. Police Chief Peter Newsham said soon after the arrest.

It was not immediately clear if Tian had an attorney. Police believed she was homeless. No motive was given.

Green paint was found early Friday morning on the Lincoln Memorial, and symbols were found painted in green later Friday on another statue on the Mall. The Lincoln Memorial was closed temporarily but reopened later Friday.

Officials at the cathedral discovered the paint inside two chapels Monday afternoon. It was still wet, which led them to believe the vandalism had just occurred. Officials called police immediately and closed the cathedral to visitors while authorities searched the grounds. The paint was splashed onto an organ and on the floor inside the cathedral’s historic Bethlehem Chapel on the basement level, officials said. It was also found inside Children’s Chapel in the nave of the cathedral.

Also Monday, U.S. Park Police said green paint was found on the statue of Joseph Henry outside the headquarters of the Smithsonian Institution on the Mall. Henry was the Smithsonian’s first secretary.

Panel Eyes Screenings For Some Smokers

By The Associated Press

For the first time, government advisers are recommending screening for lung cancer, saying certain current and former heavy smokers should get annual scans to cut their chances of dying of the disease.

If it becomes final as expected, the advice by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force would clear the way for insurers to cover CT scans, a type of X-ray, for those at greatest risk.

That would be people ages 55 through 79 who smoked a pack of cigarettes a day for 30 years or the equivalent, such as two packs a day for 15 years. Whether screening would help younger or lighter smokers isn’t known, so scans are not advised for them. They also aren’t for people who quit at least 15 years ago, or people too sick or frail to undergo cancer treatment.

“The evidence shows we can prevent a substantial number of lung cancer deaths by screening” — about 20,000 of the 160,000 that occur each year in the United States, said Dr. Michael LeFevre, a task force leader and family physician at the University of Missouri.

Public comments will be taken until Aug. 26, then the panel will give its final advice. Reports on screening were published Monday in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

The recommendation is a

big deal for many reasons. The task force, an independent group of doctors appointed by the government, in recent years has urged less frequent screening for breast and cervical cancers, and no screening for prostate cancer, saying PSA blood tests do men more harm than good. There are no good ways to screen for ovarian cancer or other less common types.

But lung cancer is the top

cancer killer worldwide. Nearly 90 percent of people who get it die from it, usually because it’s found too late for treatment to succeed. About 85 percent of lung cancers in the U.S. are attributable to smoking, and about 37 percent of U.S. adults are current or former smokers. The task force estimates that 10 million Americans would fit the smoking and age criteria for screening.

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Pope Francis Says He Won’t Judge Gay Priests

BY NICOLE WINFIELD

Associated Press

ABOARD THE PAPAL AIRCRAFT — Pope Francis reached out to gays on Monday, saying he wouldn’t judge priests for their sexual orientation in a remarkably open and wide-ranging news conference as he returned from his first foreign trip. “If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?” Francis asked.

His predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, signed a document in 2005 that said men with deep-rooted homosexual tendencies should not be priests. Francis was much more conciliatory, saying gay clergymen should be forgiven and their sins forgotten.

Francis’ remarks came Monday during a plane journey back to the Vatican from his first foreign trip in Brazil.

He was funny and candid during his first news conference that lasted almost an hour and a half. He didn’t dodge a single question, even thanking the journalist who raised allegations reported by an Italian newsmagazine that one of his trusted monsignors was involved in a scandalous gay tryst.

Francis said he investigated and found nothing to back up the allegations.

Francis was asked about Italian media



Pope Francis

reports suggesting that a group within the church tried to blackmail fellow church officials with evidence of their homosexual activities. Italian media reported this year that the allegations contributed to Benedict’s decision to resign.

Stressing that Catholic social teaching that calls for homosexuals to be treated with dignity and not marginalized, Francis said it was something else entirely to conspire to use private information for blackmail or to exert pressure.

Francis was responding to reports that a trusted aide was involved in an alleged gay tryst a decade ago. He said he investigated the allegations according to canon law and found nothing to back them up. But he took journalists to task for reporting on the matter, saying the allegations concerned matters of sin, not crimes like sexually abusing children.

And when someone sins and confesses, he said, God not only forgives but forgets.

“We don’t have the right to not forget,” he said.

The directness of his comments suggested that he wanted to put the matter of the monsignor behind him as he sets

about overhauling the Vatican bank and reforming the Holy See bureaucracy.

Speaking in Italian with occasional lapses in his native Spanish, Francis dropped a few nuggets of other news:

— He said he was thinking of traveling to the Holy Land next year and is considering invitations from Sri Lanka and the Philippines as well.

— The planned Dec. 8 canonizations of Popes John Paul II and John XXIII will likely be postponed — perhaps until the weekend after Easter — because road conditions in December would be dangerously icy for Poles traveling to the ceremony by bus.

— And he solved the mystery that has been circulating ever since he was pictured boarding the plane to Rio carrying his own black bag, an unusual break from Vatican protocol.

“The keys to the atomic bomb weren’t in it,” Francis quipped. Rather, he said, the bag merely contained a razor, his breviary prayer book, his agenda and a book on St. Terese of Lisieux, to whom he is particularly devoted.

“It’s normal” to carry a bag when traveling, he said. “We have to get used to this being normal, this normalcy of life,” for a pope, he added.

President: Toughest Work Ahead In Peace Talks

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama says the relaunch of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks is a promising step forward. But he adds that the most difficult work is yet to come.

With senior Israeli and Palestinian negotiators en route to Washington, Obama says he hopes both parties will approach negotiations with good faith, determination and sustained focus. He’s praising Secretary of State John Kerry for bringing the parties together and former U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk for agreeing to shepherd the talks.

Obama says he saw the profound desire Palestinians and Israelis both have for peace when he visited the region in March.

Obama and Kerry will meet Monday afternoon before the talks get underway in the evening.

The White House is also welcoming the Israeli Cabinet’s decision Sunday to free 104 long-held Palestinian prisoners in four stages, linked to progress in talks. The release was part of an agreement Kerry brokered bring the sides back to the table.



Three rowhouses have been seriously damaged and a number of people have been injured following an apparent gas explosion along the 400 block of Daly Street in South Philadelphia, Pa., Monday.

Philadelphia

Row House Collapse Injures 8

BY KEITH COLLINS AND JOANN LOVIGLIO

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — A natural-gas explosion on a densely populated city block on Monday razed a row house and injured eight people, including two babies and a contractor, and sent dozens of neighbors pouring out of their homes.

Some of the neighbors fled for safety while others immediately set to work helping rescuers locate victims in the rubble.

The explosion and house collapse, which critically injured the contractor, came less than two months after the city was stunned by a collapse that killed six people at a downtown demolition site when a large wall fell on an adjacent thrift store.

Inspectors spent several hours at the scene of Monday’s explosion and concluded that a gas leak was to

blame for leveling the unoccupied home, which was remodeled in the middle of the south Philadelphia street of connected two-story brick homes.

Bricks showered onto the small street and crushed a car parked out front. The houses on either side of the destroyed home were standing but badly damaged, with large sections of their masonry walls gone.

Neighbor Christie Scibblo feared the worst.

“I was in the shower, and I thought my house was about to fall down,” said Scibblo, a 26-year-old mother of four who lives four houses down from the collapsed home. “I ran outside, and I saw a firefighter rescuing an infant.”

Scibblo said she also saw firefighters hosing down a man who had been burned.

The blast, which occurred late Monday morning, stunned neighbor Joseph Szymborski.

“When I heard the big explosion, I got knocked off my bed,” Szymborski said. “I threw on my shoes — instantly, you know something bad had to happen — came out, ran down the street.”

Szymborski ran outside to find “the house was in the street” and helped get three people to safety, though he was worried about debris from damaged buildings falling on him.

“It’s situations like this, you just come together as a neighborhood,” Szymborski said.

Rescue crews said by early Monday afternoon that the search was complete and no one was unaccounted for.

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