

US: No Direct Link With Russia, Crash

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senior U.S. intelligence officials said Tuesday that Russia was responsible for “creating the conditions” that led to the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, but they offered no evidence of direct Russian government involvement.

The intelligence officials were cautious in their assessment, noting that while the Russians have been arming separatists in eastern Ukraine, the U.S. had no direct evidence that the missile used to shoot down the passenger jet came from Russia.

The officials briefed reporters Tuesday under ground rules that their names not be used in discussing intelligence related to last week’s air disaster, which killed 298 people.

The plane was likely shot down by an SA-11 surface-to-air missile fired by Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, the intelligence officials said, citing intercepts, satellite photos and social media postings by separatists, some of which have been authenticated by U.S. experts.

But the officials said they did not know who fired the missile or whether any Russian operatives were present at the missile launch. They were not certain that the missile crew was trained in Russia, although they described a stepped-up campaign in recent weeks by Russia to arm and train the rebels, which they say has continued even after the downing of the commercial jetliner.

Some In Gaza Prefer Fight To Alternative

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Ibrahim Zain was driven from his home by Israeli tank fire this week, but says he’d rather endure more Israel-Hamas fighting than accept an unconditional cease-fire he fears will leave in place the blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Like Zain, many Gaza residents say the closure, imposed by Israel and Egypt after Hamas seized Gaza in 2007, is like a slow death: It prevents them from traveling, from importing cement to build homes and increasingly from earning enough to feed their families.

“We want a good life or no life,” said the unemployed 44-year-old father of nine whose small scrap metal business fell victim to the blockade last year.

Disagreement over whether and how to lift the Gaza closure is a key stumbling block to ending more than two weeks of fighting between the Islamic militant Hamas and Israel.

And in a way, it is emerging as the Gazan equivalent of what is single-mindedly driving the Israelis — the rocket fire from Gaza, which they feel must stop at almost any cost. For the Gazans, it is the blockade that must stop, and the fact that Hamas is demanding this appears to have gained its tactics genuine support.

Many Fear Contamination At Crash Site

HRABOVE, Ukraine (AP) — When international monitors and Malaysian aviation experts arrived Tuesday at the two main sites where the wreckage of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 smashed into the undulating countryside of eastern Ukraine, there was almost no perimeter tape.

The only security consisted of two armed men who did not stop reporters from walking across the fields to the twisted metal.

Amid the stench of decay and buzzing flies, one piece of the Boeing 777’s fuselage that had previously been lying on the ground was propped up against a post.

The lack of security and images of separatist rebels rifling through the wreckage in the days after last Thursday’s crash killed all 298 people aboard are an investigator’s worst nightmare and have stirred fears that vital evidence was contaminated or may have disappeared altogether, hampering efforts to piece together exactly what happened to the doomed flight.

“We are keeping a very close eye on that,” said Michael Bocurkiw, a spokesman for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. “Looking at the fuselage now compared to what it was on Day One. And we have noted some differences.”

Chicago Tries New Idea To Fight Crime

CHICAGO (AP) — Desperate to curb the gun violence wracking their city, Chicago lawmakers are leading the way toward a counterintuitive idea — fighting crime by making it easier for young people to wipe away minor arrest records.

The goal is to give tens of thousands of teens a better chance to find work or get into college, rather than letting a minor episode with police possibly doom them to a life on the gang-dominated streets of some of the city’s most troubled neighborhoods.

A law recently passed by the state Legislature made Illinois one of the few states to automatically expunge the criminal records of juveniles who were arrested but never charged.

Mariama Bangura, 17, was arrested last year after she was accused of threatening a teacher. Though she was never charged, she worries that the incident could sink her adult ambitions.

“I want to be a nurse or massage therapist, and what if the whole thing keeps coming up?” she asked. “I want a career.”

Squatters In Venezuelan Slum Evicted

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The first of thousands of squatters who transformed a half-built skyscraper into a vertical slum were moved out by armed soldiers Tuesday, marking the beginning of the end for the Tower of David’s haphazard community.

Police in riot gear and soldiers with Kalashnikov assault rifles stood on side streets as dozens of residents boarded buses for their new government-provided apartments in Cua, a town about 23 miles (37 kilometers) south of Caracas.

Ernesto Villegas, the government minister overseeing Caracas’ redevelopment, told reporters that the eviction was necessary because the 45-story building in the heart of the capital is unsafe.

He said children have fallen to their deaths from the tower, which in some places is missing walls or windows. The damp, foul-smelling concrete lobby attested to the lack of working plumbing.

Villegas said the tower, initially a symbol of failed capitalism, had gone on to represent community. The squatters’ invasion was part of a larger appropriation of vacant buildings encouraged by the late former President Hugo Chavez.

Congress Faces Pressure Before Recess

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pressure is on Congress to act in the next two weeks on several problems, from keeping highway projects on track and easing wait time for veterans seeking health care to the humanitarian crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border.

“Pass a bill or don’t come back from recess,” William A. Thien, the national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, warned lawmakers pondering the Department of Veterans Affairs legislation. “America’s veterans are tired of waiting — on secret waiting lists at the VA and on their elected officials to do their jobs.”

With the monthlong August recess looming, progress has been decidedly mixed on several must-past items as congressional partisanship — only fiercer in an election year — and the Obama administration’s conflicting signals to Capitol Hill complicate prospects for legislation.

Lawmakers have been struggling to find about \$10 billion to keep highway projects on track through next spring, produce legislation to speed up health care for veterans and address how to deal with some 57,000 unaccompanied immigrant children who have entered the U.S. along the southern border since last fall.

Things look promising for legislation to “patch” the highway trust fund after an overwhelming House vote last week. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., told reporters on Tuesday that a vote is possible this week, with the Senate widely expected to accept the House measure keeping highway and transit money flowing through May 2015.

Dueling Rulings: Courts Split On Health Law Clash

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama’s health care law is snarled in another big legal battle, with two federal appeals courts issuing contradictory rulings on a key financing issue within hours of each other Tuesday.

But the split rulings don’t necessarily mean another trip to the Supreme Court for the Affordable Care Act.

And White House spokesman Josh Earnest immediately announced that millions of consumers will keep getting financial aid for their premiums — billions of dollars in all — as the administration appeals the one adverse decision.

In that first ruling, a divided three-judge panel in Washington called into question the subsidies that help millions of low- and middle-income people afford their premiums, saying financial aid can be provided only in states that have set up their own insurance markets, or exchanges.

About 100 miles to the south in Richmond, Virginia, another appeals court panel unanimously came to the opposite conclusion, ruling that the Internal Revenue Service correctly interpreted the will of Congress when it issued regulations allowing health insurance tax credits for consumers in all 50 states.

Split appeals court decisions are a classic route to the Supreme Court. But in this situation, it’s far from clear what will happen because the administration still has a legal card to play.

Since the Washington case was decided by a three-judge panel, the administration will ask the full 11-member appeals court to hear the case. The full U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit has seven judges appointed by Democratic presidents, including four by Obama.

If the full court comes out in favor of the administration, the prospect of Supreme Court involvement would be greatly diminished. On the other hand, if the full Washington court stays out of it or, after a hearing,

essentially leaves the panel’s decision in place, then the Supreme Court would almost certainly weigh in.

Democratic appointees also constitute a majority of the full appeals court in Richmond.

Both cases are part of a long-running political and legal campaign to overturn Obama’s signature domestic legislation by Republicans and other opponents of the law.

In the Washington case, Halbig v. Burwell, a group of small business owners argued that the law authorizes subsidies only for people who buy insurance through markets established by the states — not by the federal government.

That’s no mere technical distinction, since the federal government is running the markets, or exchanges, in 36 states.

The Washington court agreed with that objection, in a 2-1 decision that could mean premium increases for more than half the 8 million Americans who have purchased taxpayer-subsidized private insurance under the law.

Two judges appointed by Republican presidents voted against the administration’s interpretation of the law while one appointed by a Democratic president dissented.

The majority opinion concluded that the law, as written, “unambiguously” restricts subsidies to consumers in exchanges established by states. That would invalidate an IRS regulation that tried to sort out confusing wording in the law by concluding that

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EMILY PIERCE

Congress intended for consumers in all 50 states to have subsidized coverage.

“At least until states that wish to can set up exchanges, our ruling will likely have significant consequences both for the millions of individuals receiving tax credits through federal exchanges and for health insurance markets more broadly,” wrote Judge Thomas Griffith.

“But, high as those stakes are, the principle of legislative supremacy that guides us is higher still,” he added.

Justice Department spokeswoman Emily Pierce said the Washington court got it wrong.

“We believe that this decision is incorrect, inconsistent with congressional intent ... and at odds with the goal of the law: to make health care affordable no matter where people live,” Pierce said in a statement.

In Richmond, the three-judge 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel was unanimous in its decision upholding the law’s financing. That court said the IRS did a reasonable job of interpreting legal language that is “ambiguous and subject to multiple interpretations.”

In a concurring opinion, Judge Andre Davis used pizza as an analogy. He wondered what would happen if he were to ask a friend for ham and pepperoni pizza from Pizza Hut, adding that Domino’s would be fine as well. If the friend came back with Domino’s, that would fulfill his request, he wrote.

Ukraine

Plane Crash Bodies Removed From War Zone

BY SERGEI CHUZAVKOV AND JUERGEN BAETZ
Associated Press

KHARKIV, Ukraine — A train bearing the dead from the downed Malaysian airliner reached Ukrainian government-held territory at long last Tuesday, but the pro-Russian separatists in control of the crash site showed little willingness to allow the full-scale investigation demanded by world leaders.

Despite anger over the rebels’ handling of the wreckage and suspicions they shot the plane down, the European Union spared Russia sweeping new sanctions Tuesday.

The EU imposed punitive measures against Russian individuals but didn’t target entire sectors of the economy, preferring to wait for a clearer picture of last week’s disaster and Moscow’s suspected role.

Five days after the plane was blown out of the sky, a refrigerated train bearing victims’ bodies — gathered up after several days in the sun — finally rolled out of the war zone and into a weedy railway yard in the government-held city of Kharkiv.

It was unclear how many of the 282 corpses found so far were on the train. The crash killed all 298 people aboard the jumbo jet.

A team from Interpol along



with three Dutch specialists started the identification process by labeling and numbering the remains, brought in body bags.

Then the bodies were to be flown to the Netherlands, the homeland of most of the victims, for identification using information from families.

Despite these and other indications of progress — the black boxes were handed over to Malaysia Airlines, and three airline investigators were given access to the site Tuesday — there was still no sign of a full investigation, and it was unclear when one could take place.

Rebel leader Andrei Purgin, deputy prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic, was quoted by Russia’s Interfax news agency as saying the insurgents are willing to guarantee the secu-

urity of all international experts. It was not clear if that meant the unfettered access world leaders are demanding.

The wreckage lay unguarded across a wide stretch of farmland in the rebel-held east — a source of frustration for officials around the world eager to establish the facts. Even the red-and-white tape that had sealed off the fields had been torn away.

International observers, who have been allowed visit only when accompanied by armed separatists, warned there were signs that the debris was being mishandled or even tampered with. The fighting, meanwhile, went on in eastern Ukraine. And Russian President Vladimir Putin lashed out at Ukraine’s military for trying to dislodge the rebels.

Ukraine and Western gov-

ernments say that the plane was shot down Thursday by a missile fired from a Russian-made mobile launcher in rebel hands. Russia denies supplying the Buk air defense system.

The Dutch government declared Wednesday a day of national mourning as the country prepared for the arrival of the first bodies in the afternoon.

After a 17-hour journey from the town of Torez in rebel territory, the train carrying the dead arrived at a Kharkiv factory where Ukrainian authorities have set up their crash investigation center.

The train gave a low-pitched blast from its horn as the gray corrugated refrigerator cars slowly rolled past.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte warned grieving families that the identification of some victims could take weeks or even months.

Separately, the flight data recorders will be examined by British air accident investigators.

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