

Missing Malaysia Plane Debris Found

WASHINGTON (AP) — Air safety investigators have a “high degree of confidence” that a photo of aircraft debris found in the Indian Ocean is of a wing component unique to the Boeing 777, the same model as the Malaysia Airlines plane that disappeared last year, a U.S. official said Wednesday.

Air safety investigators — one of them a Boeing investigator — have identified the component as a “flap-eron” from the trailing edge of a 777 wing, the U.S. official said.

A French official close to an investigation of the debris confirmed Wednesday that French law enforcement is on site to examine a piece of airplane wing found on the French island of Reunion, in the western Indian Ocean. A French television network was airing video from its Reunion affiliate of the debris.

The last primary radar contact with Malaysia Airlines flight 370 placed its position over the Andaman Sea about 230 miles northwest of the Malaysian city of Penang. The French island of Reunion is about 3,500 miles southwest of Penang, according to a Google map.

The U.S. and French officials spoke on condition that they not be named because they aren't authorized to speak publicly.

Officer Who Shot Driver Charged

CINCINNATI, Ohio (AP) — A University of Cincinnati officer who shot a motorist during a traffic stop over a missing front license plate was indicted Wednesday on a murder charge, with a prosecutor saying the officer “purposely killed him” and “should never have been a police officer.”

Hamilton County Prosecutor Joe Deters announced the grand jury indictment at a news conference to discuss developments in the investigation into the July 19 shooting of 43-year-old motorist Samuel DuBose by Officer Ray Tensing.

Authorities have said Tensing spotted a car driven by DuBose and missing the front license plate, which is required by Ohio law. They say Tensing stopped the car and a struggle ensued after DuBose refused to provide a driver's license and get out of the car.

Tensing, 25, has said he was dragged by the car and forced to shoot at DuBose. He fired once, striking DuBose in the head.

But Deters dismissed Tensing's claim that he was dragged by the car and suggested that he shouldn't have pulled DuBose over to begin with.

3 UVA Graduates Sue Rolling Stone

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Three University of Virginia graduates and members of a fraternity profiled in a debunked account of a gang rape in a retracted Rolling Stone magazine story filed a lawsuit against the publication and the article's author Wednesday, court records show.

The three men, George Elias IV, Stephen Hadford and Ross Fowler, filed suit U.S. District Court in New York. They are also suing Rolling Stone's publisher, Wenner Media.

A lawyer for the men said they suffered “vicious and hurtful attacks” because of inaccuracies in the November 2014 article, which was written by journalist Sabrina Rubin Erdely.

In their lawsuit, the three 2013 graduates said the article “created a simple and direct way to match the alleged attackers” from the alleged gang rape to them based on details provided in the story.

For instance, Elias' room at the fraternity house was “the mostly likely scene of the alleged crime” based on the details in the Rolling Stone article.

House Votes To Provide Money For Aid

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted overwhelmingly on Wednesday to shore up federal highway aid and veterans' health care before heading out of town for its August recess, leaving unresolved an array of sticky issues that are sure to complicate an autumn agenda already groaning under the weight of indecision.

In one of their last decisions before adjourning for a month, the House backed a bill that would extend spending authority for transportation programs through Oct. 29, and replenish the federal Highway Trust Fund with \$8 billion. That's enough money to keep highway and transit aid flowing to states through mid-December.

The vote was 385-34.

The Senate plans to take up the House bill before a midnight Friday deadline, when authority for the Transportation Department to process aid payments to states will expire.

Lawmakers said they were loath to take up yet another short-term transportation funding extension — this will be the 34th extension since 2009. But Republicans and Democrats don't want to see transportation aid cut off, and they are eager to pass an amendment attached to the extension bill that fills a \$3.4 billion hole in the Department of Veterans Affairs' budget. The money gap threatens to force the closure of hospitals and clinics nationwide.

Brady Files Suit To Stop Suspension

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (AP) — Tom Brady took the fight over his “Deflategate” suspension to social media and federal court on Wednesday, and New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft backed the three-time Super Bowl MVP, saying “I was wrong to put my faith in the league.”

One day after NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell rejected Brady's appeal, the star quarterback posted a 507-word statement on Facebook with his firmest denial yet, writing: “I did nothing wrong.” Kraft followed with an unscheduled address to the media gathered at Gillette Stadium for the opening of training camp and the team's defense of its fourth Super Bowl championship.

“It is completely incomprehensible to me that the league continues to take steps to disparage one of its all-time great players, and a man for whom I have the utmost respect,” the Patriots owner said. “I have come to the conclusion that this was never about doing what was fair and just.”

Afghanistan Says Taliban Leader Mullah Omar Died 2 Years Ago

BY LYNNE O'DONNELL

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghanistan asserted Wednesday that the Taliban's reclusive leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, died more than two years ago in a Pakistani hospital — an announcement that injects new uncertainty into the country's fragile peace process.

If confirmed, the surprising news of the death of Mullah Omar would remove a unifying figure for the insurgents, who are believed to be split on whether to continue the war or negotiate with the government of President Ashraf Ghani.

In Washington, the U.S. government said they considered the report of the Taliban leader's death credible, though it was not confirmed by the Taliban or Pakistan.

The Afghan government's announcement came just two days before a second round of peace talks between the government and negotiators claiming to speak for the Taliban leadership. It also raises questions about the authority of Taliban representatives who attended a first round of talks in Pakistan on July 7, as well as earlier informal meetings in Qatar and Norway.

Abdul Hassib Sediqi, the spokesman for Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security, said Mullah Omar died at a hospital in the Pakistani city of Karachi in April 2013.

“We confirm officially that he is dead,” Sediqi told The Associated Press.

“He was very sick in a Karachi hospital and died suspiciously there,” he said, without elaborating.

A statement later Wednesday from the office of the president said it had confirmed the death based on what it called “accurate information” and insisted that Mullah Omar's demise would benefit peace efforts.



AHMAD MASSOUD/XINHUA/ZUMA PRESS/TNS

Sayed Zafar Hashemi, a deputy spokesman for Afghan President Ashraf Ghani speaks during a press conference in Kabul, Afghanistan on Wednesday. The Afghan government said Wednesday it has “credible information” that Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar died in 2013.

“The Afghan government believes that the ground for the Afghan peace talks is more solid now than before and thus calls on all armed opposition groups to seize the opportunity to join the peace process,” the statement said.

The one-eyed, secretive head of the Taliban sheltered Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida in the years leading up to the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, and then waged a decade-long insurgency against U.S. troops after the 2001 invasion that ended Taliban rule. He fled into Pakistan on a motorcycle and was never seen again.

Mullah Omar was born in the southern Uruzgan province in the early 1960s and became a mullah, or preacher, in Kandahar, the southern city that would later become the capital of the Taliban movement he went on to lead.

In 1979, when the former Soviet Union sent in troops to support a leftist government, Mullah Omar took up arms. When civil war erupted after the anti-Soviet war ended in 1989, Mullah Omar became leader of the Taliban movement that took power in 1996 and spread a severe interpretation of Islam across the country.

Sediqi said the Afghan government had been aware of Mullah Omar's death for two years and said it had made it public on a number of occasions.

However, the earlier claims lacked the authority and detail of Wednesday's announcement by Kabul officials. They usually came from second-hand sources, were made behind closed doors, or lacked direct confirmation from the government. The Taliban denied previous claims.

It was not immediately clear why his death was only announced now. Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said it had no information about the announcement.

A White House spokesman, Eric Schultz, said the U.S. had concluded the reports were credible and said U.S. intelligence agencies were looking into the circumstances.

A former Taliban minister who was once close to Mullah Omar said he died of tuberculosis and was “buried somewhere near the border on the Afghan side.” He spoke on condition of anonymity so as not to jeopardize his standing with the Taliban, who do not want individual members to speak to the media.

A Pakistani security official, also speaking on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to brief journalists, had earlier dismissed the reports of Mullah Omar's death as “speculation” designed to disrupt peace talks.

It is widely believed that the Taliban has split between supporters and detractors of the peace talks as their war on the Afghan government has intensified in recent months. Many observers believe that the war is being directed on the battlefield by leaders who believe they can defeat government forces.

The Taliban, or at least a faction of the insurgent group, released a statement on July 15 purportedly made by Mullah Omar in support of the peace process.

“Whether he is dead or alive is important because he is the collective figure for the Taliban,” said a Western diplomat with connections to the Taliban leadership. “If he is dead, it would be much more difficult to get negotiations with the Taliban because there would be no collective figure to rally around and take collective responsibility for entering peace talks.”

The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief journalists.

Taliban insurgents have spread their war from their traditional southern and eastern heartlands bordering Pakistan to northern Afghanistan this year.

In recent weeks, the insurgents have taken control of remote districts in Badakhshan province, and continue to launch mass attacks on districts in Kunduz province, a strategically located region bordering Tajikistan.

The strategy has spread Afghan military resources thin after U.S. and NATO forces ended their combat mission at the end of last year.

Israeli Bulldozers Start Demolishing West Bank Settlement

BY DANIEL ESTRIN

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israeli bulldozers began demolishing a contested housing complex in a West Bank settlement on Wednesday as the prime minister's office announced the “immediate construction” of some 300 new units at another location in the same settlement and advanced plans for about 500 new units in east Jerusalem.

The move, which is likely to draw international rebuke, comes amid a standoff in the Beit El settlement, to the north of Jerusalem in the West Bank.

The standoff escalated sharply Wednesday, after the Israeli Supreme Court rejected a petition to overturn its initial ruling to demolish a complex in Beit El and ordered the destruction completed no later than Thursday. The complex was deemed illegal because it was under construction without prior Israeli authorization.

The military moved in and removed protesters holed up inside, but hundreds of Jewish settlers gathered at the scene and some fought with Israeli forces, who responded by firing water cannons at the protesters.

Temperatures are high among some in the settler community as it marks a decade since Israel's “disengagement” from the Gaza Strip, when Israel in the summer of 2005 withdrew all its civilians and soldiers from all of the settlements there and also from two in the West Bank.

Israel initially promised to build the 300 housing units in Beit El three years ago, when it ordered the removal of other buildings constructed on private Palestin-

ian land.

The new units announced by Benjamin Netanyahu's office are both in Beit El and elsewhere, including areas in east Jerusalem, which Israeli leaders say are inseparable neighborhoods of Jerusalem.

They say these neighborhoods will remain a part of Israel under any future peace agreement, but the Palestinians consider them settlements and say construction there is illegal, a position backed by the international community.

In Washington, the U.S. State Department said it was deeply concerned by the new settlement activity and urged “the Israeli government to refrain from unhelpful actions that undercut possibility of a two-state solution.”

“The United States continues to view settlements as illegitimate and we strongly oppose steps to advance construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem,” Deputy Spokesperson Mark Toner said in a statement.

At the United Nations, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the announcement of the construction of the new units, “as well as the planning and construction of nearly 500 housing units in a number of settlements in East Jerusalem,” his spokesman's office said. Ban urged Israel's government to halt and reverse such decisions “in the interest of peace and a just final status agreement.”

Israel captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem in 1967, and annexed east Jerusalem in a move that is not recognized internationally.

Israeli Education Minister Naftali Bennett, head of a pro-settler party, welcomed the announcement of the new units even as he criticized the top court's

decision.

“The court's role is to judge; the government's role is to build,” he said in a written statement. “We will build up the land of Israel, but in a legal and appropriate way.”

But Lior Amichai of Israeli settlement watchdog Peace Now criticized the announcement, saying it was intended to “appease the settlers.”

Also Wednesday, Israel's Shin Bet security agency and the Israeli police said they filed indictments against two young Israeli activists in connection with last month's arson attack of the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish, a famous Catholic church near the Sea of Galilee. Three additional activists are under arrest in connection with the arson attack.

The Shin Bet and police said the activists were part of an extremist group of Israeli settler youth seeking to bring about religious “redemption.” The group vandalized a number of Christian religious sites in the past two years, tried to disrupt Pope Benedict XVI's 2014 visit to the Holy Land, and in the past year committed “more significant terrorist attacks of arson” against Palestinian homes in the West Bank, according to the Shin Bet and Israeli police.

A month before the attack on the church, the head of the extremist group, Meir Ettinger, called on his blog for more attacks on Christian religious sites, Israeli authorities said. Israeli authorities have banned him from the West Bank settlements and from Jerusalem for a year.

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