

China Poultry Fire Kills 119

BY CHRISTOPHER BODEEN
Associated Press

BEIJING — Fire swept through a poultry processing plant in northeastern China on Monday, trapping workers inside a slaughterhouse with only a single open exit and killing at least 119 people in one of the country's worst industrial disasters in years.

Survivors described panic as workers, mostly women, struggled through smoke and flames to reach doors that turned out to be locked or blocked.

One worker, 39-year-old Guo Yan, said the emergency exit at her workstation could not be opened and she was knocked to the ground in the crush of workers searching for a way to escape.

"I could only crawl desperately forward," Guo was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua News Agency. "I worked alongside an old lady and a young girl, but I don't know if they survived or not."

The accident highlights the high human costs of China's lax industrial safety standards, which continue to plague workplaces despite recent improvements in the country's work safety record. It also comes amid growing international concern over factory safety across Asia following the collapse in April of a garment factory in Bangladesh that killed more than 1,100 people.

Besides the dead, dozens were injured in the blaze in Jilin province's Mishazi township, which appeared to have been sparked by three early morning explosions, Xinhua said. The provincial fire department attributed the blasts to an ammonia leak. The chemical is kept pressurized as part of the cooling system in meat processing plants.

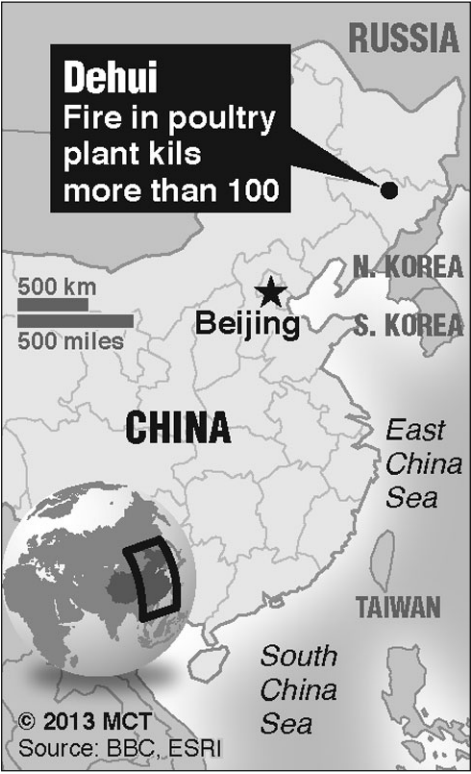
It was one of China's worst recent industrial disasters, with the death toll the highest since a September 2008 mining cave-in that claimed 281 lives.

State broadcaster CCTV quoted workers as saying the fire broke out during a shift change when about 350 workers were at the plant, owned by Jilin Baoyuanfeng Poultry Co.

Some employees raised the alarm shortly after the shift began at 6 a.m., and then the lights went out, causing panic as workers scrambled to find an exit, 44-year-old Wang Fengya told Xinhua.

"When I finally ran out and looked back at the plant, I saw high flames," she said.

The fire broke out in a factory building where chickens were being dismembered, and spread rapidly, with industrial boilers exploding, the Southern Metropolis Daily re-



ported on its microblog. Only a side door to the building was open with the rest of the exits locked, the newspaper said.

It quoted an unidentified worker as saying the fire engulfed the building in three minutes, leaving too little time for many to flee.

The disaster killed 119 people, and 54 people were being treated in hospitals, the provincial government said on its microblog. Most of the injured were being treated for inhalation of toxic gases, such as ammonia, while others had burns. It wasn't immediately clear if the workers were local residents or migrants from other areas.

A provincial government media official, who refused to give his name, said he expected the death toll to rise as more bodies were recovered from the charred building.

By noon, the fire had been mostly extinguished by some 500 firefighters, and bodies were being recovered from the charred buildings. CCTV footage showed dark smoke billowing from the prefabricated cement structures topped with corrugated iron roofs.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and other top leaders ordered that no effort be spared to rescue and treat survivors, as well as to investigate the cause of the disaster.

It was the third major industrial blaze to be reported in China in the past four days.

The two earlier fires were an oil tank explosion in Liaoning province that caused another oil tank to catch fire, killing two, and a blaze in a large granary in Heilongjiang province that wiped out 1,000 tons of grain.

Many of China's factories have sprung up in recent decades to drive the country's rapid economic growth, and accidents and chemical spills are common, often blamed on lax enforcement of safety rules and poor worker training.

The government has tightened checks on factories and mines to improve compliance with safety requirements, and deaths from workplace accidents fell nearly 5 percent last year from the previous year, according to Yang Dongliang, head of the State Administration of Work Safety.

Even in China's notoriously deadly coal mines, the death toll fell by more than 30 percent last year because of stricter management.

Jason Yan, technical director in Beijing of the U.S. Grains Council, said safety considerations usually take a back seat in China to features designed to maximize production and energy efficiency.

"I'm sure they consider some aspects of safety design. However, I think safety ... is not the first priority in their design plan," Yan said.

The poultry plant is one of several in the area where chickens are slaughtered and then quickly cut up into pieces and shipped to market. The process takes place in near-freezing conditions and plants are usually built with large amounts of flammable foam insulation to maintain a constant temperature.

Established in 2009, Jilin Baoyuanfeng produces 67,000 tons of processed chicken per year and employs about 1,200 people. It serves markets in 20 cities nationwide and has won numerous awards for its contribution to the local economy, according to online postings. The plant is located outside the city of Dehui, about 500 miles (800 kilometers) northeast of China's capital, Beijing.

The area is an agribusiness center, especially for poultry. Nearby is one of the biggest producers of broiler chickens in China, Jilin Deda Co., which is partly owned by Thailand-based conglomerate Charoen Pokphand Group.

Monday's fire hit a company that is much smaller than Jilin Deda. Though it's unlikely to have an impact on China's chicken supply, the accident came as chicken producers were seeing sales recover after an outbreak of a deadly new strain of bird flu, H7N9, briefly scared the public in April and early May.

Obama Orders New Iranian Economic Sanctions

BY JOSH LEDERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Turning the screw on Iran and its nuclear program, the Obama administration imposed new sanctions Monday on Iran's currency and auto industry, seeking to render Iranian money useless outside the country and to cut off the regime from critical revenue sources.

The executive order from President Barack Obama broadens an already concerted and multifaceted sanctions campaign aimed at crippling Iran's economy, forcing it to comply with international demands that it prove its nuclear program is peaceful. The U.S. believes Iran is working to develop nuclear weapons, a charge that Iran denies.

Officials described the move as part of a dual-track effort to offer meaningful negotiations to the Iranian regime while continually upping the economic stakes.

"Even as we intensify our pressure on the Iranian government, we hold the door open to a diplomatic solution that allows Iran to rejoin the community of nations if they meet their obligations. However, Iran must understand that time is not unlimited," said White House press secretary Jay Carney, adding that more sanctions will follow if the regime doesn't change course.

The new sanctions marked the first time Iran's currency, the rial, has been targeted directly with sanctions, the White House said. The sanctions apply to foreign financial institutions that purchase or sell significant amounts of the rial, and to those who hold significant amounts of the rial in accounts outside Iran.

Senior administration officials said the sanctions were designed to make the rial essentially unusable outside of Iran. The hope is that banks and businesses

holding Iranian currency will dump the funds, making the rial weaker. The value of the rial has dropped by half since the start of 2012, the White House said.

Officials would not specify what constitutes a "significant" transaction. The officials were not authorized to speak on the record about the sanctions and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Another set of sanctions will ban the sale or transfer of goods or services to be used in Iran's auto sector. Officials said the auto sector is a key source of revenue for the regime. Many of the auto parts and components from subsidiaries are dual-use and can be used in centrifuges or missiles.

Also subject to penalties will be anyone who provides material support to Iranians and others who have been blacklisted under previous U.S. sanctions. An exception will be made for some activities related to a pipeline project to move natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe and Turkey.

The appetite has been growing on Capitol Hill for even tougher measures against Iran, fueled in part by lawmakers' concerns about key U.S. ally Israel, which considers a nuclear-armed Iran to be an existential threat. Last month the House Foreign Affairs Committee approved legislation that would impose stricter sanctions against Tehran, while the Senate resolved the U.S. should back Israel if it's forced to take military action against Iran.

"The clock is clearly ticking," Secretary of State John Kerry said last month on a visit to Israel.

Harsher steps to isolate Iran were on the agenda Tuesday at a Senate Banking Committee hearing, where officials from the Treasury, Commerce and State departments were set to testify. An amendment being pushed by two of the panel's members, Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Mark

Kirk, R-Ill., would go even further than Monday's announcement by targeting all Iranian foreign assets overseas — such as euros Tehran might be holding in Japan.

The U.S. has already targeted other major sectors, most prominently Iranian oil exports, and last week added Iranian petrochemicals — the largest source of funding for Iran's nuclear program after oil. Although Iranian officials have tried to downplay the effectiveness of the U.S. efforts, the Obama administration says they have had devastating effects. Crude oil production in Iran has fallen about 700,000 barrels per day since 2012, the White House said last week, and exports have dropped even more dramatically, costing Iran about \$3 billion to \$5 billion in revenue.

The damage inflicted to Iran's economy, while aimed at undermining the regime, has had inevitable consequences for the Iranian public, forcing the U.S. to strike a balance between isolating Iran's hard-line government and making life uncomfortable for those who live under its rule.

"The administration is trying to walk that fine line, but there's a recognition they don't have a choice between good and bad options. It's between bad and worse options," said Mark Dubowitz of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, which supports an aggressive stance on Iran.

To that end, the U.S. last week eased restrictions on exports of advanced communications equipment to Iranian civilians, aiming to help Iranians interact with the outside world and shed light on what U.S. officials described as the regime's oppressive attempts to stifle dissent.

S.C.: Police Can Take DNA Without Warrants

WASHINGTON (AP) — A sharply divided Supreme Court on Monday cleared the way for police to take a DNA swab from anyone they arrest for a serious crime, endorsing a practice now followed by more than half the states as well as the federal government.

The justices differed strikingly on how big a step that was. "Taking and analyzing a cheek swab of the arrestee DNA is, like fingerprinting and photographing, a legitimate police booking procedure that is reasonable under the Fourth Amendment," Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote for the court's five-justice majority. The ruling backed a Maryland law allowing DNA swabbing of people arrested for serious crimes.

But the four dissenting justices said the court was allowing a major change in police powers, with conservative Justice Antonin Scalia predicting the limitation to "serious" crimes would not last.

"Make no mistake about it: Because of today's decision, your DNA can be taken and entered into a national database if you are ever arrested, rightly or wrongly, and for whatever reason," Scalia said in a sharp dissent which he read aloud in the courtroom. "This will solve some extra crimes, to be sure. But so would taking your DNA when you fly on an airplane — surely the TSA must know the 'identity' of the flying public. For that matter, so would taking your children's DNA when they start public school."

Prosecutor: Manning Let Enemy Have Secrets

FORT MEADE, Md. (AP) — Pfc. Bradley Manning put U.S. military secrets into the hands of Osama bin Laden himself, prosecutors said Monday as the Army intelligence analyst went on trial over leaking hundreds of thousands of classified documents.

Manning's lawyers countered by arguing that he was a "young, naive but good-intentioned" soldier whose struggle to fit in as a gay man in the military made him feel he "needed to do something to make a difference in this world."

Manning, 25, has admitted turning over the material to the anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks, pleading guilty earlier this year to charges that could bring 20 years behind bars. But the military pressed ahead with a court-martial on more serious charges, including aiding the enemy, which carries a potential life sentence.

Prosecutors said they will present evidence that bin Laden requested and obtained from another al-Qaida member Afghanistan battlefield reports and State Department cables published by WikiLeaks.

"This is a case about a soldier who systematically harvested hundreds of thousands of documents from classified databases and then dumped that information onto the Internet into the hands of the enemy," prosecutor Capt. Joe Morrow said.

Obama To Nominate Three To Appeals Court

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama plans to jointly name three nominees to the federal appeals court in Washington, a White House official said Monday, setting up a Senate battle with Republicans who say the influential court doesn't need more judges.

The official said Obama plans to announce his nomination of Patricia Ann Millett, Cornelia Pillard and Robert Leon Wilkins on Tuesday in the Rose Garden, a joint announcement that is part of an aggressive new push in a years-long partisan fight to make his imprint on the court. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity discuss the nominees ahead of the announcement without clearance to do so on the record.

Pillard is a Georgetown University law professor, Millett is an appeals lawyer in Washington and Wilkins is a judge on the U.S. District Court in Washington. They would fill three vacancies currently on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, often called the second-highest court in the nation because of its influence.

The court has nationwide and even international impact, since many cases relate to the balance of power in Washington and review of actions by federal agencies that affect health, safety and the environment. The D.C. circuit also is grooming grounds for the Supreme Court, with four current justices having served on it.

The nominees might not raise partisan rancor on their own — Millett worked in the George W. Bush administration, while Wilkins was confirmed without opposition in Obama's first term. But the D.C. Circuit is at the center of a years-long struggle between Obama and Senate Republicans.

Deaths Of Pro Storm Chasers Raise Questions

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — While most people take shelter when a tornado approaches, a growing throng heads for the prairies, be they scientists hoping to protect the public from a twister's fury or amateurs armed with little more than a smartphone, a digital camera and a desire to sell 15 seconds of video to the nightly news.

But the deaths of three respected researchers near Oklahoma City have renewed questions over whether the risk of dashing off into violent storms in Tornado Alley is too great — regardless of the adrenaline rush.

"I think there will be some who will step back and say: 'Am I really doing something safe here?'" said Michael Armstrong, a meteorologist for KWTN in Oklahoma City. "I think you'll probably have others ... that just feel that invincibility that they've always felt and they'll keep doing what they're doing and basically look at it as though it was an aberration or an outlier."

Longtime storm chasers Tim Samaras, his son Paul and colleague Carl Young were killed Friday when a powerful tornado near El Reno, Okla., turned on them as they were conducting research. The National Weather Center issued a statement saying they are likely the first "storm intercept fatalities" among researchers.

Oklahoma is considered the "mecca of storm chasing." Tim Samaras told National Geographic just last month, and there are often hundreds of storm chasers lining the roads. Seasoned storm trackers provide critical field data that can't be gleaned from high-powered Doppler radar, veteran meteorologists say. But they're increasingly competing with storm-chasing tours, amateur weather enthusiasts inspired by cable TV shows and tornado paparazzi speeding from storm to storm.

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U.S. Officials Decide Which Nonbanks To Term Threats

BY MARCY GORDON
AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON — Federal regulators have proposed a group of firms that aren't banks to be deemed potential threats to the financial system that need stricter government oversight.

The regulators didn't name the firms or say how many it wants to designate as so big and interconnected that their potential troubles could imperil the financial system.

The Financial Stability Oversight Council, which includes Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew and Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, acted Monday in a closed meeting. It was the most significant step by the council, which was created by the financial overhaul law to help prevent another meltdown.

Nonbank financial firms include insurers, hedge funds, mutual fund companies and private equity firms. Those deemed "systemically important" would have to increase their cushion against losses, limit their use of borrowed money and submit to inspections by Fed examiners.

These firms would have 30 days to notify the council that they're contesting the designation. The council would have to vote again to finalize each designation. If at least two-thirds of the 10 voting members agreed, the council would formally put the firm under the Fed's supervision. Lew, the council's chairman, would have to be among the two-thirds.

The near-collapse of a huge nonbank, American International Group Inc., helped trigger the 2008 financial crisis. AIG had sold guarantees on mortgage securities that forced it to pay billions of dollars after the subprime mortgage bubble burst in 2007. The government stepped in with a \$182 billion bailout — the largest for any single company in the crisis.

AIG was intertwined with the financial system through its sale of mortgage-related investments to big Wall Street banks, which themselves eventually received bailouts.

The federal thrift agency had regulated AIG. But the company's mushrooming business involving complex investments called derivatives was run out of London and elsewhere. This business fell through the regulatory cracks.

It's the first of the month...

JUNE

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