

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Twin Suicide Bombings Kill 38 In Moscow

MOSCOW (AP) — Terror returned to the heart of Russia, with two deadly suicide bombings on the Moscow subway at rush hour, including an attack at the station beneath the headquarters of the secret police.

At least 38 people were killed and more than 60 wounded in Monday morning's blasts, the first such attacks in Moscow in six years.

Russian police have killed several Islamic militant leaders in the North Caucasus recently, including one last week in the Kabardino-Balkariya region, which raised fears of retaliatory strikes and escalating bloodshed by the militants.

As smoke billowed through the subway tunnels not far from the Kremlin and dazed survivors streamed out of the vast transportation system, al-Qaida-affiliated Web sites were abuzz with celebration of the attacks by the two female suicide bombers.

The bombings showed that the beleaguered rebels are still strong enough to inflict harm on an increasingly assertive Russia, and they followed a warning last month from Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov that "the war is coming to their cities."

U.S. Transit Agencies Beef Up Security

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. transit agencies beefed up security as a precaution Monday following the suicide bombing in Moscow's subway system, sending more police into stations and having officers conduct random inspections of rail yards.

In New York, caravans of police vehicles were dispatched to transit hubs, and officers assigned to subways overnight were held in place so they overlapped with the day tour. Special units distinguished by their special black uniforms, helmets and body armor also were assigned to transit facilities.

In Washington, D.C., Metro police were conducting random inspections of stations and rail yards, officials said. Atlanta's public transit system said its police department was increasing the number of officers and patrols throughout the system.

Russian authorities said two women blew themselves up in Moscow on Monday in a subway jam-packed with rush-hour passengers, killing dozens. They blamed the carnage on rebels from the Caucasus region.

The federal government did not immediately make any recommendations for increased security at mass transit systems, but authorities were monitoring the situation, a U.S. official said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Man Pleads Guilty In Plot To Kill Obama

JACKSON, Tenn. (AP) — A Tennessee man authorities say is a white supremacist has pleaded guilty to plotting to kill then-presidential candidate Barack Obama and dozens of other black people in 2008.

Twenty-one-year-old Daniel Cowart of Bells, Tenn., pleaded guilty Monday to eight of 10 counts in an indictment accusing him of conspiracy, threatening a presidential candidate and various federal firearms violations. Under a plea agreement, he faces 12 to 18 years in prison, but a federal judge could choose a longer sentence.

Co-defendant, 19-year-old Paul Schlesselman of Helena-West Helena, Ark., pleaded guilty in January and will be sentenced April 15.

Authorities have described the two as skinheads who planned a cross-country robbing and killing spree that would end with an attack on Obama.

Treasury To Begin Selling Stake In Citigroup

NEW YORK (AP) — The Treasury Department said Monday it will begin selling the stake it owns in Citigroup Inc., which could result in a profit to the government of about \$7.5 billion.

The government received 7.7 billion shares of Citigroup in exchange for \$25 billion it gave the bank during the 2008 credit crisis. It said it will sell the shares over the course of this year, depending on market conditions.

Like any investor, the government will likely hold on to its shares if prices fall steeply. However, Citi shares have steadily been rising with the broader market in recent months, which means the Treasury Department stands to pocket a hefty profit.

The government has been trying to unravel the investments in made in banks under the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP, that came in at the height of the financial crisis. Citi, one of the hardest hit banks during the credit crisis and recession, received a total of \$45 billion in bailout money, one of the largest rescues in the program. Of the \$45 billion, \$25 billion was converted to the government's ownership stake in the bank. The Treasury paid \$3.25 a share for its stake.

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USPS Pushes To Cut Saturday Mail Delivery In Early 2011

WASHINGTON (MCT) — The long talked about demise of Saturday mail delivery would become a reality early next year under a wide-ranging U.S. Postal Service cost-cutting blueprint unveiled Monday that would also slash thousands of front-line jobs.

"Given the fact that we're facing such a huge deficit, we'd like to move as quickly as possible," Postmaster General John E. Potter told a news conference.

Faced with a projected \$238 billion deficit over the next decade, the Postal Service board of governors approved the cuts last week and ordered Potter to submit the proposal to the Postal Regulatory Commission on Tuesday.

In addition to cutting one day a week from the delivery schedule, the proposal would eliminate the equivalent of 49,000 full- and part-time jobs, about 8 percent of the current work force of 600,000. Officials said the changes would save the Postal Service a projected \$3.3 billion in the first year and about \$5.1 billion annually by 2020.

Under the plan, mail carriers would stop street deliveries to U.S. homes and businesses on Saturdays as well as pickups from blue collection boxes. Mail would still be accepted at post offices on Saturdays but wouldn't be processed until after the weekend. Express mail and remittance mail services would continue to run seven days a week.

If approved by Congress and the regulatory commission, officials said they hoped to implement this plan by the first half of 2011. Potter said the Postal Service would eliminate about 26,000 positions through employee attrition and lay off 13,000 part-time workers,

Mail delivery five days a week?

How Americans view the proposed five-day mail delivery and what their mail and e-mail habits are:

Percent who favor
Your local post office open five days instead of six days a week
71%

Mail delivery reduced from six to five days a week
68%

Federal funding provided for Postal Service
47%

Increase stamp prices
39%

Close your local post office branch
12%

Electronic vs. snail
Percent who did the following in the past two weeks

E-mailed family, friend or business associate
67%

Used the mail to pay a bill
66%

Sent text message to family, friend or business associate
54%

Used the mail to send letter
53%

ers, most of whom carry the mail once a week as substitutes. He said the high attrition rates are only possible because mail carriers on average are 53 years old and most have pension arrangements that would allow them to retire at 55. About 10,000 mail carriers retire each year.

Militia Accused Of Plotting Uprising

Group Had Planned To Kill Police Officers, Then Slaughter More At Later Funeral

BY COREY WILLIAMS
AND DEVLIN BARRETT
Associated Press Writers

DETROIT — Nine alleged members of a Christian militia group that was girding for battle with the Antichrist were charged Monday with plotting to kill a police officer and slaughter scores more by bombing the funeral — all in hopes of touching off an uprising against the U.S. government.

Seven men and one woman believed to be part of the Michigan-based Hutaree were arrested over the weekend in raids in Michigan, Indiana and Ohio. The ninth suspect was arrested Monday night after a search in rural southern Michigan.

FBI agents moved quickly against Hutaree because its members were planning an attack sometime in April, prosecutors said. Authorities seized guns in the raids but would not say whether they found explosives.

The arrests have dealt "a severe blow to a dangerous organization that today stands accused of conspiring to levy war against the United States," Attorney General Eric Holder said.

Authorities said the arrests underscored the dangers of homegrown right-wing extremism of the sort seen in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 people.

In an indictment, prosecutors said the group began military-style training in the Michigan woods in 2008, learning how to shoot guns and make and set off bombs.

David Brian Stone, 44, of Clayton, Mich., and one of his



MICHAEL TERCHA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/MCT

Authorities check a home in Whiting, Ind., in connection with the weekend FBI arrest of Thomas Piatek on Monday. Nine militia members were indicted on charges of attempted use of weapons of mass destruction in connection with his membership in a Lenawee County, Mich., Christian militia group.

sons were identified as ringleaders of the group. Stone, who was known as "Captain Hutaree," organized the group in paramilitary fashion and members were assigned secret names, prosecutors said. Ranks ranged from "radoks" to "gunners," according to the group's Web site.

"It started out as a Christian thing," Stone's ex-wife, Donna Stone, told The Associated Press. "You go to church. You pray. You take care of your family. I think David started to take it a little too far."

Donna Stone said her ex-husband pulled her son into the movement. Another of David Stone's sons was arrested Monday night about 30 miles from the site of the weekend raid at a home where he was found with five other adults and a child.

Joshua Matthew Stone surrendered about 8 p.m., said Andrew Arena, head of the FBI's field office in Detroit. Stone's friends and relatives had recorded messages, urging him to surrender, that the FBI played over loudspeakers outside the home before he and the others came out willingly, Arena said.

"We're guessing he's been in there at least a day," Arena said. Arena said the other adults at the home were taken into custody and will be interviewed. A determination will be made later about whether they might face charges, he said. The child was 1 or 2 years old, Arena said.

Other details, including whether those in the house had weapons or were affiliated with Hutaree, weren't immediately released.

Prosecutors said David Stone had identified certain law

enforcement officers near his home as potential targets. He and other members discussed setting off bombs at a police funeral, using a fake 911 call to lure an officer to his death, killing an officer after a traffic stop, or attacking the family of an officer, according to the indictment.

After such attacks, the group allegedly planned to retreat to "rally points" protected by trip-wired explosives for a violent standoff with the law.

"It is believed by the Hutaree that this engagement would then serve as a catalyst for a more widespread uprising against the government," the indictment said.

The charges against the eight include seditious conspiracy — plotting to levy war against the U.S. — possessing a firearm during a crime of violence, teaching the use of explosives, and attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction — homemade bombs.

Hutaree says on its Web site its name means "Christian warrior" and describes the word as part of a secret language few are privileged to know. The group quotes several Bible passages and declares: "We believe that one day, as prophecy says, there will be an Anti-Christ. ... Jesus wanted us to be ready to defend ourselves using the sword and stay alive using equipment."

The nature of the organization's alleged grudge against law enforcement and the government was unclear. The Web site does not list specific grievances.

The site features a picture of 17 men in camouflage, all holding large guns, and includes videos of armed men running through the woods. Each wears a shoulder patch that bears a cross and two red spears.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Insurance Industry Agrees To Fix Kids Coverage Gap

WASHINGTON (AP) — After battling President Barack Obama's health care overhaul the better part of a year, the insurance industry said Monday it won't try to block his efforts to fix a potentially embarrassing glitch in the new law.

In a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, the industry's top lobbyist said insurers will accept new regulations to dispel uncertainty over a much-publicized guarantee that children with medical problems can get coverage starting this year.

Quick resolution of the doubts was a win for Obama — and a sign that the industry has no stomach for another war of words with a president who deftly used double-digit rate hikes by the companies to revive his sweeping health care legislation from near collapse in Congress.

"Health plans recognize the significant hardship that a family faces when they are unable to obtain coverage for a child with a pre-existing condition," Karen Ignagni, president of America's Health Insurance Plans, said in a letter to Sebelius. Ignagni said that the industry will "fully comply" with the regulations, expected within weeks.

The industry's response followed a sternly worded letter from Sebelius earlier in the day. In it, the administration's top health care official tried to put an end to questions about the law's intent and wording.

"Health insurance reform is designed to prevent any child from being denied coverage because he or she has a pre-existing condition," Sebelius wrote to Ignagni. "Now is not the time to search for nonexistent loopholes that preserve a broken system."

Sebelius specified that a child with a pre-existing medical problem may not be denied

access to parents' coverage under the new law. Furthermore, insurers will not be able to insure a child but exclude treatments for a particular medical problem.

"The term 'pre-existing condition exclusion' applies to both a child's access to a plan and his or her benefits once he or she is in the plan," Sebelius wrote. The new protections will be available starting in September, she said.

The fine print of the law was less than completely clear on whether kids with health problems were guaranteed coverage starting this year — as Obama had repeatedly claimed in extolling the legislation that he signed last week.

If the problem had persisted, some parents and their children may have had to wait a long time for coverage. The law's broad ban on denying coverage to any person on account of a health condition doesn't take effect until 2014.

CHURCH

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included the ability for people in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as pastors or other rostered leaders.

"When the churchwide assembly made its decision related to gay clergy, we think it was a re-interpreting or ignoring of the Bible," Bryant said. "We felt it was so clear that same-gender sexual behavior was sinful. That was the bigger issue."

However, that doesn't mean the congregation rejects people of a same-sex orientation, Bryant said.

"We firmly believe in loving our neighbor, and that would include anybody, including people in same-gender relationships," he said. "But we didn't feel that we needed to endorse what the churchwide assembly, in our mind, endorsed, and that was same-gender sexual behavior or action. That was where we drew the line."

The Rev. Bill Van Gerpen, an ordained Baptist minister who co-pastors East Lake Andes Lutheran, agreed that the congregation was pretty unified on the issue of gay clergy.

"Maybe some (parishioners) felt the ELCA would have

changed its view, and they wanted to work within the ELCA," he said. "Then, there were others who thought it was good to send a signal and separate from the ELCA."

Van Gerpen said he personally opposed the churchwide assembly's resolution.

"I indicated to the congregation that I could not pastor in that environment, where the group would send a gay pastor behind the pulpit," he said.

Van Gerpen said he drew a distinction between welcoming gay members and approving clergy in same-sex relationships.

"When you look at a gay minister, you have someone who is actually teaching the Scriptures, and that is where there are issues," he said.

ELCA congregations are allowed — but not required — to seek pastors who are in committed same-sex relationships, Zellmer told a January gathering of about 100 persons at Trinity Lutheran Church in Vermillion. The gathering drew both pastors and laymen from southeastern South Dakota.

East Lake Andes Lutheran has not rejected the idea of rejoining the ELCA down the road, Bryant said.

After leaving the ELCA, East Lake Andes Lutheran can retain its property and pastors, Bryant said.

"Our constitution says our church property is contingent on

going with another Lutheran church body, and the LCMC fits the bill," he said.

"We will retain Bill Van Gerpen as our minister. He splits time for us with Brad Veurink, a lay pastor with a Christian Reformed background."

However, one change must be made, Bryant said. An East Lake Andes Lutheran parishioner now attending an ELCA seminary will need to find another ELCA congregation to support her, Bryant said.

Sunday's 86 percent votes in favor of the resolutions provide a solid foundation for moving forward, Bryant said. However, the church also recognizes those who disagreed with the vote.

"There are mixed feelings. We know that we had eight or nine people who did not agree with us," he said. "Our focus is on healing and unity for the congregation. We need to bring everyone into the fold and continue on."

Some of the dissenting parishioners have continued attending the church, while oth-

ers have not, Bryant said.

"We are concerned, because we are a big family," he said. "Most of them have been with the church for many years."

Now, the church with 150 regular members is ready to turn a new page in its history spanning more than a century, Bryant said.

The two votes on Palm Sunday were not intentionally timed to coincide with Holy Week, but they provide a powerful symbol, he said.

"The rebirth that we celebrate at Easter can be a new chapter for our congregation," he said.

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