

Pastor Stands By German Pilot, Family

MONTABOUR, Germany (AP) — The pastor of the Lutheran church in Andreas Lubitz's hometown said Sunday that the community stands by him and his family, despite the fact that prosecutors blame the 27-year-old co-pilot for causing the plane crash that killed 150 people in southern France.

The town of Montabaur has been rattled by the revelation that Lubitz, who first learned to fly at a nearby glider club, may have intentionally caused Tuesday's crash of Germanwings Flight 9525.

"For us, it makes it particularly difficult that the only victim from Montabaur is suspected to have caused this tragedy, this crash — although this has not been finally confirmed, but a lot is indicating that — and we have to face this," pastor Michael Dietrich said.

He spoke to The Associated Press after holding a church service Sunday to commemorate the crash victims and support their families.

"The co-pilot, the family belong to our community, and we stand by this, and we embrace them and will not hide this, and want to support the family in particular," Dietrich said.

Officials: Iran Nuclear Talks Progress

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (AP) — Iran is considering demands for further cuts to its uranium enrichment program but is pushing back on how long it must limit technology it could use to make atomic arms, Western officials involved in the nuclear talks said Sunday.

Iran's potential movement on enrichment reflected the intense pressure to close a deal. But substantial differences between the sides may prove too difficult to bridge before Tuesday's deadline for a preliminary agreement, which is meant to set the stage for a further round of negotiations toward a comprehensive deal in June.

The goal is a long-term curb on Iran's nuclear activities. In return, Tehran would gain relief from the burden of global economic penalties.

Foreign ministers and other representatives of Iran and the six powers in the talks have said there is a chance of succeeding by the deadline despite significant obstacles.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said it was up to Iran to make that happen.

Nigerians Vote Despite Violence, Protests

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Boko Haram fighters attacked poll stations in northeast Nigeria and a governor demanded elections be canceled in an oil-rich southern state Sunday as the count started for a presidential election too close to call.

Two electoral workers were killed Saturday in Boko Haram's campaign to disrupt the elections, chairman At-tahiru Jega of the Independent National Electoral Commission told reporters.

Voting continued in certain areas on Sunday after technical glitches with new biometric card readers prevented some people from casting ballots on Saturday.

The high-stakes contest to govern Africa's richest and most populous nation has come down to a critically close contest between President Goodluck Jonathan, a 57-year-old Christian from the south, and former military dictator Muhammadu Buhari, 72, from the predominantly Muslim north.

Results are expected by late Monday. If there is no clear winner, a runoff must be held.

Another Body Found After Gas Explosion

NEW YORK (AP) — Emergency workers found a second body Sunday in the mass of rubble left behind by an apparent gas explosion three days earlier in Manhattan's East Village, police said.

The names of the two dead were not immediately released; a medical examiner was to determine the identifications.

Authorities had been looking for signs of two missing men, both believed to have been inside a ground floor sushi restaurant at the time of the explosion: 26-year-old Moises Lucon, who worked at the restaurant, and 23-year-old Nicholas Figueroa, a bowling alley worker who had been there on a date.

During the day, workers raked through piles of loose brick and wood; rescue workers sent search dogs over debris where three apartment buildings once stood.

Several members of Figueroa's family visited the blast site Sunday, holding flowers and crying.

Air Canada Plane Skids Off Runway

HALIFAX, Nova Scotia (AP) — An Air Canada plane made a hard landing in bad weather at the Halifax airport, skidding off a runway, shearing off its nose and crumpling an engine. The airline said Sunday that 25 people were taken to hospitals for observation and treatment of minor injuries.

The airline said Flight AC624, an Airbus 320 that left Toronto late Saturday, had 133 passengers and five crew members. Air Canada said the aircraft landed in stormy conditions at 12:43 a.m. Sunday.

"It came down pretty hard and then skidded off the runway," airport spokesman Peter Spurway said. He said he didn't know whether runway conditions at Halifax Stanfield International Airport played a role.

Air Canada Chief Operating Officer Klaus Goersch said 25 people were taken to local hospitals and all but one of them were released.

"All of us at Air Canada are greatly relieved that there have been no critical injuries as a result of this incident," he said.

Northeast Resists Natural Gas Expansion

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — There is near universal agreement that the Northeast has to expand its energy supply to rein in the nation's highest costs and that cheap, abundant, relatively clean natural gas could be at least a short-term answer. But heels dig deep when it comes to those thorniest of questions: how and where?

Proposals to build or expand natural gas pipelines are met with an upswell of citizen discontent. At the end of last year, a Massachusetts route selected by Texas-based Kinder Morgan generated so much venom that the company nudged it north into New Hampshire — where the venom is also flowing freely. During this winter's town meetings, a centuries-old staple of local governance in New England, people in the nine towns touched by the route voted to oppose the project.

Officials Crack Down On Spring Breakers

PANAMA CITY BEACH, Fla. (AP) — A house party that dissolved into a hail of gunfire and left seven young people hurt has officials on the Florida Panhandle pondering what to do with a spring break season they say has gotten out of control.

The raucous parties in the spring break capital of Panama City Beach have had politicians, police and businesses tussling for years over how much to crack down on a key economic force.

That debate was revived again when a packed gathering of dancing 20-somethings turned into a sprawling crime scene early Saturday.

"This is what we've been trying to warn people about," said Bay County Sheriff Frank McKeithen. "It was only a matter of time and it's only a matter of time until it happens again if we don't address it."

The city council held an emergency meeting Saturday to address spring break, allocating up to \$200,000 in additional spending for increased police patrols. But motions introduced by Councilman Keith Curry to ban alcohol on the beach and to roll back the last-call on alcohol sales two hours earlier to midnight were unsuccessful.

Arab League Unveils Joint Military Force Amid Yemen Crisis

BY HAMZA HENDAWI
Associated Press

SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt — A two-day Arab summit ended Sunday with a vow to defeat Iranian-backed Shiite rebels in Yemen and the formal unveiling of plans to form a joint Arab intervention force, setting the stage for a potentially dangerous clash between U.S.-allied Arab states and Tehran over influence in the region.

Arab leaders taking turns to address the gathering spoke repeatedly of the threat posed to the region's Arab identity by what they called moves by "foreign" or "outside parties" to stoke sectarian, ethnic or religious rivalries in Arab states — all thinly-veiled references to Iran, which has in recent years consolidated its hold in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and now Yemen.

The summit's final communique made similarly vague references, but

the Arab League chief, Nabil Elaraby, was unequivocal during a news conference later, singling out Iran for what he said was its intervention "in many nations."

A summit resolution said the newly unveiled joint Arab defense force would be deployed at the request of any Arab nation facing a national security threat and that it would also be used to combat terrorist groups.

The agreement came as U.S. and other Western diplomats were pushing to meet a Tuesday deadline to reach a deal with Iran that would restrict its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

The Saudis and their allies in the Gulf fear that a nuclear deal between Washington and Tehran will free Iran's hands to bolster its influence in places like Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and in Sunni-ruled Bahrain, which has a Shiite majority. They believe the air campaign in

Yemen and a joint Arab force would empower them to stand up to what they see as Iran's bullying. The United States has sought to offer reassurances that a nuclear deal does not mean that Washington will abandon them, but they remain skeptical.

The Houthis swept down from their northern strongholds last year and captured Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in September. Embattled Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, a close U.S. ally against a powerful local al-Qaida affiliate, first fled to the southern city of Aden before fleeing the country last week as the rebels closed in.

Speaking at the summit on Saturday, Hadi accused Iran of being behind the Houthi offensive, raising the specter of a regional conflict. Iran and the Houthis deny that Tehran arms the rebel movement, though both acknowledge the Islamic Republic is providing humanitarian and other aid.

Cesar Chavez March



JAY JANNER/AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN/TNS
Arthur Rios Moreno chants slogans during the 14th Annual Cesar E. Chavez Si Se Puede March on Cesar Chavez Street in Austin, Texas, Saturday. Hundreds marched in the mile-long route to City Hall for a rally.

Tsunami Warning Issued For Parts Of Pacific After Earthquake

SYDNEY (AP) — A powerful earthquake struck near the South Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea, on Monday, prompting officials to warn that hazardous tsunami waves could affect some coastlines in the Pacific.

The magnitude-7.7 earthquake struck Monday at a depth of 65 kilometers (40 miles), about 50 kilometers (30 miles) southeast of the town of Kokopo in northeastern Papua New Guinea, the U.S. Geological Survey said.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said hazardous tsunami waves were possible for coasts located

within 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) of Kokopo. That includes Papua New Guinea and the nearby Solomon Islands.

The tsunami warning center said tsunami waves reaching 1 to 3 meters (3 to 10 feet) were possible for Papua New Guinea's coastlines.

Officials in the capital, Port Moresby, were working to contact their counterparts in the outer provinces, but there had been no reports of damage or injuries within an hour of the quake rattling the country, said Martin Mose, acting director for Papua New

Guinea's National Disaster Center. No one had reported seeing any tsunami waves, he added.

"The situation seems to be under control at this stage," he said.

Tsunami waves of less than 0.3 meters (1 foot) could hit other Pacific island nations, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Hawaii later Monday, the tsunami warning center said.

Earthquakes are common in Papua New Guinea. The country lies on the "Ring of Fire" — an arc of earthquake and volcanic activity that stretches around the Pacific Rim.

Tax

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than bunts and singles," said Sen. Mike Gloor of Grand Island, chairman of the Revenue Committee. "But the state budget is such that for the next couple of years, we don't have the kind of money coming into the state that's going to allow us to do that."

Lawmakers have about \$41 million at their disposal for legislative items that aren't already part of the two-year budget, but senators are vying for the money to pay for their priorities. Gloor said major spending cuts are unlikely because of Medicaid programs and K-12 education, which are politically popular and account for two of the largest pieces of the state budget.

Passing major tax cut legislation could prove more difficult this year and in the future because of recent bills that are slowing the growth of state revenue, said Sen. Paul Schumacher of Columbus.

Schumacher pointed to a 2014 law that ensures the state tax brackets move in tandem with inflation. Previously, taxpayers who received a cost-of-living increase would get bumped into a higher tax bracket where they end up paying more. The law is expected to reduce state revenues by roughly \$100 million over the next decade.

"We've got to pay the bills," Schumacher said. "You cannot commit to reducing revenue and then assume the bills will naturally go down. That can put you in a real jam."

Gloor said his personal

property tax measure would benefit Nebraska farmers who live and work on their land rather absentee owners. The latest version of his personal property tax measure would provide a credit on up to \$15,000 for items used in business, such as tractors, combines and computers. The bill would lower future state revenue by roughly \$26 million.

"You're talking about a big chunk of property tax relief," he said. "That's a lot in any one year. Whether we can afford all of it remains to be seen."

Some senators say the Legislature hasn't done enough. Sen. Jim Smith of Papillion said it's looking less likely that lawmakers will pass major tax packages this year. Smith sponsored legislation to lower

both income and property taxes, but the idea faced criticism because it would have forced lawmakers to cut millions in spending in future years.

"The challenges appear to be multiplying," Smith said. "I'm going to continue to work for it, but with every day that passes I think it becomes less likely we're going to get something meaningful this year."

A property tax measure backed by Gov. Pete Ricketts stalled in the committee earlier this month, with opponents arguing it wouldn't help farmers as many believe.

The proposal would have lowered the taxable value of farmland from 75 percent to 65 percent. Ricketts and the Nebraska Farm Bureau supported the measure, but oppo-

Two Dead After Plane Crashes Near Airport

WEST CHESTER, Pa. (AP) — A small plane crash near a southeastern Pennsylvania airport Sunday took the lives of the only two people aboard the aircraft, authorities said.

Emergency officials said the crash was reported just after 1:30 p.m. near Brandywine Airport, located about 20 miles west of Philadelphia. The Federal Aviation Administration said the Piper PA28 took off from the airport and went down about two miles away then burst into flames. It appeared the pilot lost control of the plane before it went down in a field in West Goshen, officials said.

Brandywine Airport officials declined comment on the crash, citing the ongoing investigation.

"There were two lives lost; our hearts go out to the families," said Jeff Suveg, the airport's assistant manager.

The crash site was close to two residences and Harrison Hills Apartments, a new senior citizen complex, The Philadelphia Inquirer reported.

A nearby resident told the newspaper he saw smoke and fire but heard nothing. Frank Kraus, a resident at the apartment complex, said he heard a "big bang" and was concerned with how close the plane came to the apartments.

"Very close — thank God for the pilot, but then the pilot and his passenger didn't make it," Kraus told the paper. "It's sad."

The FAA will investigate the cause of the crash.

nents said it would shift the tax burden to residential homeowners. The bill received only two votes of support on the eight-member committee.

Ricketts has argued that soaring values of agricultural land have created an unsustainable situation for farmers and ranchers.

Nebraska has no direct control over property tax levies, which are set by counties, school boards and other local governments, but the state can indirectly influence the taxes in a variety of ways. Last year they added \$25 million annually to a state fund that offsets property taxes, for a yearly tax credit of \$74.11 on property valued at \$100,000.

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