

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Times Square Bomb Suspect Appears In Court

NEW YORK (AP) — The suspect in a botched car bombing in Times Square appeared in court Tuesday on terrorism and weapons charges for the first time since his arrest two weeks ago, muttering one word about an affidavit on his finances.

Faisal Shahzad, a Pakistan-born U.S. citizen, said "yes" when asked to confirm the affidavit. Shahzad, 30, appeared in court wearing a gray sweat suit and looked calm. He was led out of court Tuesday after a 10-minute appearance and entered no plea to five felony charges against him.

Assistant public defender Julia Gatto identified herself as his attorney. She asked during the hearing if Shahzad could be provided with halal meals in custody. She didn't comment afterward.

Shahzad has been held at an undisclosed location since his May 3 arrest on charges he abandoned a bomb-laden SUV in Times Square near several restaurants and a Broadway theater showing "The Lion King."

GOP's Rep. Souder To Resign Over Affair

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Indiana Rep. Mark Souder, an eight-term Republican who promoted abstinence education, said Tuesday he'll resign from Congress after admitting an extramarital affair with a part-time staff member.

Souder won a bruising primary just two weeks ago, and the resignation effective Friday would hurt the GOP's chances of holding onto the Republican-leaning district in November in a year that many expect will favor the party.

Souder, an evangelical Christian who has championed family values and traditional marriage, apologized for his actions but provided no details during an emotional news conference at his Fort Wayne office.

"I am so ashamed to have hurt the ones I love," he said as he batted tears. "I am sorry to have let so many friends down, people who have worked so hard for me."

The announcement stunned many in political circles.

Militant Says He Plotted World Cup Attacks

BAGHDAD (AP) — An alleged al-Qaida militant detained in Iraq said Tuesday he had talked to friends about attacking Danish and Dutch teams at the World Cup in South Africa next month to avenge insults against the Prophet Muhammad.

Iraqi security forces holding Saudi citizen identified as Abdullah Azam Saleh al-Qahtani arranged for The Associated Press to interview him at an unidentified government building in Baghdad. He said he initially came to Iraq in 2004 to fight Americans and was recruited by al-Qaida.

An Iraqi security official with knowledge of the investigation said al-Qahtani was arrested after a joint U.S.-Iraqi operation in Iraq that killed the two top al-Qaida in Iraq figures — Abu Ayub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. The official asked not to be identified because he was not authorized to discuss details of the case.

Documents found in the house where they were killed, including a note written by al-Qahtani detailing a plan to launch attacks at the World Cup, led to his arrest on May 3. Iraqi authorities made it public on Monday.

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GULF OIL SPILL

Interior Secretary Admits Law Regulation

BY H. JOSEF HEBERT
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Associated Press Writers

WASHINGTON — Grilled by skeptical lawmakers, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar on Tuesday acknowledged his agency had been lax in overseeing offshore drilling activities and that may have contributed to the disastrous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

"There will be tremendous lessons to be learned here," Salazar told a Senate panel in his first appearance before Congress since the April 20 blowout and explosion on the Deepwater Horizon rig.

His appearances before two of the three Senate panels holding hearings Tuesday on the giant oil spill came as federal officials kept a wary eye on the expanding dimensions of the problem. The government increased the area of the Gulf where fishing is shut down to 46,000 square miles, or about 19 percent of federal waters. That's up from about 7 percent before.

Government scientists were anxiously surveying the Gulf to determine if the oil had entered a powerful current that could take it to Florida and eventually up the East Coast. Tar balls that washed up on Florida's Key West were shipped to a Coast Guard laboratory in Connecticut to determine if they came from the Gulf spill.

Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen told the Senate Commerce Committee the growing size and scattershot nature of the oil spill was creating "severe challenges" in containing it and cleaning it up. He called it more complicated than any spill he's ever seen.

"What we're basically trying to do is protect the whole coast at one time," Allen said.

New underwater video released by BP PLC, the oil giant that owns a majority interest in the blown well, showed oil and gas erupting under pressure in large, dark clouds from its crippled blowout preventer safety device on the ocean floor. The leaks resembled a geyser on land. The five-minute clip apparently was recorded late Saturday and Sunday afternoon from aboard a remotely operated submarine.

Salazar, testifying before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, promised an overhaul of federal regulations and said blame for the BP spill rests with both industry and the government, particularly his agency's Minerals Management Service.

"We need to clean up that house," Salazar said of the service. While most of the agency's 1,700 employees are reliable and trustworthy, he said, there were "a few bad apples."

President Barack Obama, who has decried the "cozy relationship" between government regula-

tors and the energy industry, has proposed splitting the agency into two parts to separate regulatory duties from those who collect royalty fees from oil and gas companies.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., the committee chairman, said the panel's mission was to decipher "the cascade of failures that caused the catastrophic blowout." In addition, he said, Congress needs to figure what must be done to make sure it never happens again.

While the cause of the accident at the well has yet to be pinpointed, information uncovered so far raises the question of where the Minerals Management Service was, Bingaman said.

"It is long past time to drain the safety and environmental swamp that is MMS," declared Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore. "This agency has been in denial about safety problems for years."

Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., pointed to an AP investigation that found that rig that exploded was allowed to operate "without safety documentation required by government regulations" and that the government conducted fewer oil rig inspections than it initially claimed and less than its policy requires.

BP said Tuesday it was collecting about 84,000 gallons a day from a mile-long tube drawing oil from the blown-out well to a ship on the surface. But it cautioned that increasing the flow through the tube would be difficult.

Bankers Get Partial Win On State Consumer Rules

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate voted to roll back efforts to give states more consumer powers Tuesday — a partial victory for federally chartered banks that don't want state regulators meddling in their business.

At the same time, Senate Banking Committee Chairman Christopher Dodd offered a potential compromise that could, at least temporarily, resolve a stand-off over how to regulate the complex securities known as derivatives. Dodd's proposal would require a two-year delay in the implementation of a contentious provision that would force banks to spin off their lucrative derivatives business.

Tuesday's maneuvers came a day before the Senate was set to vote to end debate on sweeping

changes to federal financial regulations, the biggest overhaul of Wall Street rules since the Great Depression. Still, several issues remained unresolved and tempers were running short on the Senate floor among Democrats who were unable to get votes on their amendments.

Even if Wednesday's vote succeeds, final action on the bill might not come until Friday.

On the consumer front, the Senate voted 80-18 to rein in the underlying bill's provisions permitting states to write and execute tougher consumer financial laws and to let state attorneys general enforce federal laws.

Under current law, federal regulators have been able to issue a blanket rule overriding state laws concerning licensing, credit terms

and loan disclosures. The result has been an inability by state regulators to impose those rules on national banks and a rash of dismissed lawsuits brought by homeowners claiming national banks or their subsidiaries violated state consumer rules.

John Thibault, a 60-year-old Vietnam veteran living in Manteca, Calif., is among those facing such a legal thicket. According to his lawsuit, when he sought to refinance his two-story house in 2006, a subsidiary of now-defunct Countrywide Financial offered him an adjustable rate mortgage with a 1.5 percent initial interest rate.

The following month, his interest rate ballooned to 7.5 percent. While his payment remained the same, the additional \$2,200 he owed a month got tacked on to

the balance of his loan, ultimately increasing the size of his mortgage to twice the value of his house.

"Just to try to keep the payments going I've had to sell my stock, use up all my savings and am maxing out on my credit cards trying to maintain the bills, including utility bills and even putting food on the table for my family," Thibault said in an interview.

Thibault sued Countrywide Bank, a federally chartered institution, and its affiliates claiming they failed to disclose all the terms of the loan in violation of California consumer laws. If recent history is any guide, his case against the bank will be dismissed on the ground that federal law preempts state law when it comes to federally chartered banks.

Toyota Pays Record \$16.4M Gov't Fine

WASHINGTON (AP) — Toyota Motor Corp. paid a record \$16.4 million fine on Tuesday for a slow response to its accelerator pedal recall.

A Transportation Department official said the Japanese automaker paid the fine after reaching an agreement with the government on April 19. Toyota had 30 days to pay it.

Toyota faced the maximum penalty allowed under law after it was accused of hiding earlier defects involving gas pedals, a contention that Toyota rejected even though it agreed to pay the fine.

The world's largest car manufacturer has recalled more than 8 million vehicles worldwide for safety defects affecting some of its best-selling models. The company still faces hundreds of state and federal lawsuits in the U.S. and the recalls have prompted the first major review of U.S. auto safety laws in Congress since tire recalls by Bridgestone/Firestone Inc. in 2000.

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