

Stocks Fall As Spain Enters Another Recession

NEW YORK (AP) — News that Spain had entered another recession renewed worries about the fragility of Europe’s finances Monday and nudged stocks lower. The market ended its first losing month this year.

Disappointing economic reports and weak corporate earnings also weighed on stocks. The Standard & Poor’s 500 index slipped 5.45 points to close at 1,397.91. For April, it was down 0.8 percent, its first month in the red since November.

The Spanish government said that the country’s economy shrank in the first three months of the year, the second straight quarter of contraction.

The worry is that Spain’s economy could be too big to rescue. It’s twice as big as the combined economies of Greece, Portugal and Ireland, the three countries that have received bailout loans.

In the U.S., a drop in an index of Midwestern manufacturing and a slowdown in consumer spending last month added to worries that the economy is losing steam.

Fresh Attacks Target Symbols Of Syrian Power

BEIRUT (AP) — In fresh attacks on symbols of state power, twin suicide bombs exploded Monday near a government security compound in northern Syria and rockets struck the central bank in Damascus, killing nine people and wounding 100.

The regime and the opposition traded blame, accusing each other of dooming a United Nations plan to calm violence that has largely failed so far. The head of the U.N. observer mission acknowledged that his force cannot solve the country’s crisis alone and urged both sides to stop fighting.

The attacks are the latest in a series of suicide bombings that started in December and have mostly targeted Syrian military and intelligence positions.

The regime routinely blames the opposition, which denies having a role or the capability to carry out such attacks. After other similar bombings, U.S. officials suggested al-Qaida militants may be joining the fray, and an al-Qaida-inspired Islamist group has claimed responsibility for previous attacks in Syria.

The powerful blasts, which blew two craters in the ground and ripped the facade off a multistory building, came a day after Maj. Gen. Robert Mood, the head of the observer mission, took up his post in Damascus.

AP: Afghan Attacks Under-Reported By Military

WASHINGTON (AP) — The military is under-reporting the number of times that Afghan soldiers and police open fire on American and other foreign troops.

The U.S.-led coalition routinely reports each time an American or other foreign soldier is killed by an Afghan in uniform. But The Associated Press has learned it does not report insider attacks in which the Afghan wounds — or misses — his U.S. or allied target. It also doesn’t report the wounding of troops who were attacked alongside those who were killed.

Such attacks reveal a level of mistrust and ill will between the U.S.-led coalition and its Afghan counterparts in an increasingly unpopular war. The U.S. and its military partners are working more closely with Afghan troops in preparation for handing off security responsibility to them by the end of 2014.

In recent weeks an Afghan soldier opened fire on a group of American soldiers but missed the group entirely. The Americans quickly shot him to death. Not a word about this was reported by the International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, as the coalition is formally known. It was disclosed to the AP by a U.S. official who was granted anonymity in order to give a fuller picture of the “insider” problem.

ISAF also said nothing about last week’s attack in which two Afghan policemen in Kandahar province fired on U.S. soldiers, wounding two. Reporters learned of it from Afghan officials and from U.S. officials in Washington. The two Afghan policemen were shot to death by the Americans present.

No. Of Newborns With Drug Withdrawal Rises

CHICAGO (AP) — Less than a month old, Savannah Dannelley scrunches her tiny face into a scowl as a nurse gently squirts a dose of methadone into her mouth.

The infant is going through drug withdrawal and is being treated with the same narcotic prescribed for her mother to fight addiction to powerful prescription painkillers.

Disturbing new research says the number of U.S. babies born with signs of opiate drug withdrawal has tripled in a decade because of a surge in pregnant women’s use of legal and illegal narcotics, including Vicodin, OxyContin and heroin, researchers say. It is the first national study of the problem.

The number of newborns with withdrawal symptoms increased from a little more than 1 per 1,000 babies sent home from the hospital in 2000 to more than 3 per 1,000 in 2009, the study found. More than 13,000 U.S. infants were affected in 2009, the researchers estimated.

The newborns include babies like Savannah, whose mother stopped abusing painkillers and switched to prescription methadone early in pregnancy, and those whose mothers are still abusing legal or illegal drugs.

Delta Air Lines Buys Its Own Fuel Refinery

NEW YORK (AP) — Delta Air Lines said on Monday that it will buy a refinery near Philadelphia in the hope of slicing \$300 million a year from its jet fuel bill.

Delta said a subsidiary will buy the Trainer, Pa. refinery from Phillips 66, a refining company being spun off from ConocoPhillips. Delta is paying \$150 million, including \$30 million in job-creation assistance it expects to get from the state of Pennsylvania.

Delta estimates the deal will cut its fuel bill by \$300 million a year. Delta’s Monroe Energy LLC subsidiary will spend \$100 million to make changes to the refinery to maximize the production of jet fuel. Even though Delta will make as much jet fuel as possible at the refinery, the oil refining process still produces other products such as gasoline and diesel fuel. Delta said it will exchange those other products for jet fuel, so in effect the Trainer refinery would cover about 80 percent of its U.S. jet fuel needs.

Delta Air Lines Inc. burned almost 3.9 billion gallons of jet fuel last year at a cost of \$11.78 billion. Fuel was 36 percent of its operating expense — its biggest single expense. Most other airlines also have fuel as their biggest bill.

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China

Group: Dissident Asylum Likely

BY ALEXA OLESEN
Associated Press

BEIJING — U.S. and Chinese officials are ironing out a deal to secure American asylum for a blind Chinese legal activist who fled house arrest, with an agreement likely before Secretary of State Hillary Clinton arrives this week, a U.S. rights campaigner said Monday.

Bob Fu of the Texas-based rights group ChinaAid said that China and the U.S. want to reach agreement on the fate of Chen Guangcheng before the annual high-level talks with Clinton and other U.S. officials begin in Beijing on Thursday.

“The Chinese top leaders are deliberating a decision to be made very soon, maybe in the next 24 to 48 hours,” Fu said, citing a source close to the U.S. and Chinese governments. Both sides are “eager to solve this issue,” said Fu, a former teacher at a Communist Party academy in Beijing whose advocacy group focuses on the rights of Christians in China and who maintains a network of contacts in the country.

“It really depends on China’s willingness to facilitate Chen’s exit,” Fu said.

Chen, a well-known dissident who angered authorities in rural China by exposing forced abortions, made a surprise escape from house arrest a week ago into what activists say is the protection of U.S. diplomats in Beijing, posing a delicate diplomatic crisis for both governments.

At a briefing in Washington on Monday, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland declined to comment on Chen’s case.

She gave the first U.S. government confirmation that Assistant

Seeking refuge

Blind Chinese activist Chen Guangcheng is believed to have taken refuge in the U.S. Embassy in China.

Secretary of State Kurt Campbell is currently in Beijing, but described his visit as preparation for Clinton’s trip.

She said the U.S.-China Strategic Dialogue is planned to go ahead.

Both sides want the annual talks to provide ballast to a relationship that is often rocky and to provide ways of working out disputes on trade, Taiwan, Syria, Iran and North Korea.

In a video made after Chen escaped from his village and released last Friday, the activist made no mention of wanting to go abroad. Instead he beseeched Premier Wen Jiabao to investigate the beatings, harassment and other mistreatment he, his wife and daughter suffered at the hands of local officials during 20 months of house arrest.

If Chen were willing to leave China, Washington could ill afford to turn him away. Clinton and other senior officials have repeatedly raised his case in meetings with Chinese officials. President Barack Obama is already under fire from Republicans over a case in which an aide to a senior Chinese leader

Fu, who has been a point of contact for people helping Chen, said he offered to help the dissident leave China through “a sort of underground railroad” shortly after he made a daring nighttime escape from his heavily guarded farmhouse on April 22. Fu had made such arrangements previously, helping the wife and two young children of another dissident lawyer, Gao Zhisheng, flee to the U.S. after they’d exited China overland from Beijing to Thailand.

But Fu said that Chen refused the offer and chose instead to go to Beijing. Despite Chen’s initial resistance to exile, Fu said that might now be the only option.

“My sense is that at the end of the day, after China is willing to facilitate it in a face-saving way with the U.S., he and his family may have to choose to travel to the U.S. in whatever way that China agrees,” he said.

Chen is widely admired by rights activists in China who last year publicized his case among ordinary Chinese and encouraged them to go to Dongshigu village and break the security cordon. Even Hollywood actor Christian Bale tried to visit, but was roughed up by locals paid to keep outsiders away.

A self-taught lawyer blinded by fever in infancy, Chen served four years in prison on what activists say were trumped-up charges after exposing forced abortions and sterilizations in his and surrounding villages. Since his release in September 2010, local officials confined him to his home. Amnesty International and other human rights groups say he was abused over the last 18 months.

Chen entered the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu but then left, turning himself over to Chinese investigators.

The European Union has also repeatedly raised Chen’s case and its office in Beijing issued a statement Monday calling for China to extend legal protections to him, his family and supporters.

“We call on the Chinese authorities to exercise utmost restraint in dealing with the matter, including avoiding harassment of his family members or any person associated with him,” the statement said.

For Beijing, the issue is sensitive because Chen enjoys broad sympathy among the Chinese public for persevering in his activism despite being blind and despite repeated reprisals from local officials. And though Beijing dislikes bargaining with Washington over human rights, allowing Chen to go abroad would remove an irritant in relations with Washington. It would also prevent him from becoming a bargaining chip in an already bumpy transition of power under way from President Hu Jintao’s administration to a younger group of leaders.

May Day Protests Planned Across The U.S.

BY MARCUS WOHLSEN
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — May Day protests may disrupt the morning commute in major U.S. cities Tuesday as labor, immigration and Occupy activists rally support on the international workers’ holiday.

Demonstrations, strikes and acts of civil disobedience are being planned around the country, including the most visible organizing effort by anti-Wall Street groups since Occupy encampments came down in the fall.

While protesters are backing away from a call to block San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge, bridge district ferry workers said they’ll strike Tuesday morning to shut down ferry service, which brings commuters from Marin County to the city. Ferry workers have been in contract negotiations for a year and have been working without a contract since July 2011 in a dispute over health care coverage, the Inlandboatmen’s Union said.

A coalition of bridge and bus workers said they will honor the picket line, which may target an area near the bridge’s toll plaza. Occupy activists from San Francisco and Oakland are expected to join the rally.

“We ask supporters to stand with us at strike picket lines on May Day and to keep the bridge open,” said Alex Tonisson, an organizer and co-chair of the Golden Gate Bridge Labor Coalition.

In anticipation of the strike, the agency that operates the Golden Gate Bridge and related public transportation systems canceled Tuesday’s morning ferries from Marin County to San Francisco and urged regular riders to make alter-

nate travel plans.

Police say they are working with other area law enforcement agencies and have a plan in place for potential disruptions. They would not discuss specifics.

Across the bay in Oakland, where police and Occupy protesters have often clashed, officers are preparing for a long day as hundreds of “General Strike” signs have sprouted across town.

In New York City, where the first Occupy camp was set up and where large protests brought some of the earliest attention — and mass arrests — to the movement, leaders

plan a variety of events, including picketing, a march through Manhattan and other “creative disruptions against the corporations who rule our city.”

Organizers have called for protesters to block one or more bridges or tunnels connecting Manhattan, the city’s economic engine, to New Jersey and other parts of the city.

The Occupy movement began in September with a small camp in a lower Manhattan plaza that quickly grew to include hundreds of protesters using the tent city as their home base. More than 700 people were arrested Oct. 1 as they tried to cross

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