

Israel Launches Airstrike Into Syria

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israel launched an airstrike into Syria, apparently targeting a suspected weapons site, U.S. officials said Friday night.

The strike occurred overnight Thursday into Friday, the officials told The Associated Press. It did not appear that a chemical weapons site was targeted, they said, and one official said the strike appeared to have hit a warehouse.

The U.S. officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Israel has targeted weapons in the past that it believes are being delivered to the Lebanon-based militant group Hezbollah. Earlier this

week, Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah said his group would assist Syrian President Bashar Assad if needed in the effort to put down a 2-year-old uprising.

Israeli Embassy spokesman Aaron Sagui would not comment Friday night specifically on the report of an Israeli strike into Syria.

“What we can say is that Israel is determined to prevent the transfer of chemical weapons or other game-changing weaponry by the Syrian regime to terrorists, specially to Hezbollah in Lebanon,” Sagui said in an email to the AP.

In 2007, Israeli jets bombed a suspected nuclear reactor site along the Euphrates River in northeastern Syria, an attack that embarrassed

and jolted the Assad regime and led to a buildup of the Syrian air defense system. Russia provided the hardware for the defense systems upgrade and continues to be a reliable supplier of military equipment to the Assad regime.

The new strike came hours before President Barack Obama told reporters at a news conference in Costa Rica on Friday that he didn’t foresee a scenario in which the U.S. would send troops to Syria. More than 70,000 peoples have died and hundreds of thousands have fled the country as the Assad regime has battled rebels.

Pressure On Bangladesh, Retailers To Fix Factories

BY STEPHEN WRIGHT AND FARID HOSSAIN
Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh — In the aftermath of a building collapse that killed more than 530 people, Bangladesh’s garment manufacturers may face a choice of reform or perish.

Home to five factories that supplied clothing to retailers in Europe and the United States, the shoddily constructed building’s collapse has put a focus on the high human price paid when Bangladeshi government ineptitude, Western consumer apathy and global retailing’s drive for the lowest cost of production intersect.

Officials said Saturday that more than 530 bodies have been pulled from the wreckage of the eight-story Rana Plaza building that collapsed nine days ago, sparking desperate rescue efforts, a national outpouring of grief and violent street protests.

The tragedy followed the deaths of 112 people five months ago in a blaze that swept through the Tazreen Fashions garment factory in Dhaka and the death of seven in a January blaze.

With three disasters in quick succession, the reputation of Bangladesh’s \$20 billion garment industry, already notorious for its low wages and dismal safety record, has plummeted. International clothing brands and retailers that said they could ensure worker safety in developing countries through self-regulation such as factory inspections have also suffered a blow to their credibility.

Now, Bangladesh’s garment manufacturers fear that a backlash has been set in motion that threatens fortunes and livelihoods in a business that employs more than 3 million people

“We are doing our best to improve the safety measures in the factories. We expect our buyers to bear with us and help us to overcome the current crisis. It’s not the time to turn away from us. That will hurt the industry and many of the workers will lose jobs.”

ATIQUIL ISLAM

and accounts for about 80 percent of the impoverished country’s exports.

“It’s a crucial time for us,” said Atiqul Islam, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association. “We are doing our best to improve the safety measures in the factories. We expect our buyers to bear with us and help us to overcome the current crisis. It’s not the time to turn away from us. That will hurt the industry and many of the workers will lose jobs.”

The most potent warning so far has come from the European Union, which said it could restrict Bangladesh’s access to the crucial EU market if it fails to immediately take steps to ensure that basic labor standards are enforced.

Bangladesh is a member of Europe’s “Everything But Arms” program for the world’s poorest nations that exempts it from quotas and tariffs on all exports to the 27-nation EU except armaments. The EU is Bangladesh’s single biggest market with exports of 8 billion euros in 2011, the bulk of which was garments shipped for European retailers.

“The sheer scale of this disaster and the alleged criminality around the building’s construction is finally becoming clear to the world,” EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and trade commissioner Karel De Gucht said in an April 30 statement. They said they want any EU action to “incentivize” responsible management of the garment industry in Bangladesh.

The United States is reviewing Bangladesh’s preferential trade status, a lengthy process that gained urgency after the killing last year of a Bangladeshi labor rights organizer who had campaigned for years to improve factory safety. Garments are not included in the American trade preferences for Bangladesh but loss of its special market access would further taint its reputation in the U.S., its second largest export market.

As a U.S. decision nears, the building collapse gives additional momentum to members of Congress who wrote to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina to protest a climate of fear created by the killing of Aminul Islam, the labor organizer, and lobbied then-U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk to speed up a review of Bangladesh’s trade access following the Tazreen fire.

Signs of dissension are also emerging among clothing brands and retailers who as a group have usually sought to distance themselves from industry disasters.

The chief executive of Canada’s Loblaw Inc., which owns the Joe Fresh clothing line that was being made in Rana Plaza, decried the response of “deafening silence” from what he said were more than two dozen other international retailers who used garment factories in the collapsed building.

Following the Tazreen fire where Walt Disney Co. branded clothing was found, the company in March added Bangladesh to a list of countries where it prohibits any of its clothing or mer-

chandize from being produced.

The Bangladeshi garment association met earlier this week with representatives of 40 garment buyers including H&M, JC Penny, Gap, Nike, Li & Fung and Tesco. It said the companies have doubts about whether the industry can meet their production deadlines because of the disasters and political turmoil.

“The reality is that buyers are seriously thinking about their sourcing from Bangladesh,” said Jenefa Jabbar, regional director of JC Penny, according to a garment association statement.

“Bangladesh government has laws, but there is no implementation of those laws. Buyers’ community wants to see credible action,” she was quoted as saying.

The retailers themselves are criticized by labor groups for allegedly shoveling blame and making token efforts to ensure worker safety.

A report by the AFL-CIO umbrella group of American unions published a day before the building collapse says retailers’ intermittent factory inspections and corporate social responsibility reports have failed, and hold “eerie parallels” with the financial self-regulation that helped precipitate the global financial crisis.

The Bangladesh government, however, may be the least willing of all to accept any responsibility.

“I am not worried,” Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith said Friday. “These are individual cases of ... accidents. It happens everywhere.”

US Orders New Visa Reviews For Arriving Students

BY ALICIA A. CALDWELL
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Homeland Security Department ordered border agents to verify that every international student who arrives in the U.S. has a valid student visa, according to an internal memorandum obtained Friday by The Associated Press. The new procedure is the government’s first security change directly related to the Boston bombings.

The order, effective immediately, was issued by a senior official at U.S. Customs and Border Protection, David J. Murphy. It was circulated Thursday, a day after the Obama administration acknowledged that a student from Kazakhstan accused of hiding evidence for one of the Boston bombing suspects was allowed to return to the U.S. in January without a valid student visa.

The student visa for Azamat Tazhayakov had been terminated when he arrived in New York on Jan. 20. But the border agent in the airport did not have access to the information in the Homeland Security Department’s Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, called SEVIS.

Tazhayakov was a friend and

classmate of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev’s at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Tazhayakov left the U.S. in December and returned Jan. 20. But in early January, his student-visa status was terminated because he was academically dismissed from the university.

Tazhayakov and a second Kazakh student were arrested this week on federal charges of obstruction of justice. They were accused of helping to get rid of a backpack containing fireworks linked to Tsarnaev. A third student was also arrested and accused of lying to authorities.

A spokesman for the department, Peter Boogaard, said earlier this week that the government was working to fix the problem, which allowed Tazhayakov to be admitted into the country when he returned to the U.S.

Under existing procedures, border agents could verify a student’s status in SEVIS only when the person was referred to a second officer for additional inspection or questioning. Tazhayakov was not sent to a second officer when he arrived, because, Boogaard said, there was no information to indicate Tazhayakov was a national security threat. Under the new procedures, all border agents were expected to be able to access

SEVIS by next week.

The government for years has recognized as a problem the inability of border agents at primary inspection stations to directly review student-visa information. The Homeland Security Department was working before the bombings to resolve the problem, but the new memo outlined interim procedures until the situation was corrected.

Under the new procedures, border agents will verify a student’s visa status before the person arrives in the U.S. using information provided in flight manifests. If that information is unavailable, border agents will check the visa status manually with the agency’s national targeting data center.

It is unclear what impact the new procedure will have on wait times at airports and borders. Customs officials will be required to report any effect, including longer waits, on a daily basis.

A Buffalo, N.Y., college has advised student-visa holders from Canada to add two hours to their daily commute. In an email sent to D’Youville College students, staff and faculty, International Student Office Director Laryssa S. Petryshyn said the security change “is causing and will cause numerous delays for

all international students entering the United States.”

The Obama administration announced an internal review earlier this week of how U.S. intelligence agencies shared sensitive information before the bombings and whether the government could have prevented the attack. Republicans in Congress have promised oversight hearings, which begin Thursday.

Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, asked Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano on Thursday for details from the student-visa applications of Tazhayakov and Dias Kadyrbayev, the Kazakhstan students implicated in helping Tsarnaev after the bombings, including information about how Tazhayakov re-entered the United States.

Lawmakers and others have long been concerned about terrorists exploiting the student visa system to travel to the United States. A 20-year-old college student from Saudi Arabia was arrested in Texas in 2011 on federal charges of attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction. Authorities accused him of plotting to blow up dams, nuclear plants or the Dallas home of former President George W. Bush. He was later convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

Festival

From Page 1

ing at us from all sides, and it’s a really bad deal,” Stukel said. “During the summer, the adult zebra mussels will keep spitting out babies. They can live out of the water for a week or more.”

As a result, boat owners are urged to keep the zebra mussel from being transported upstream by their crafts. The annual “Clean Boat” information campaign will begin its run next week at boat ramps in the Yankton area.

Another invasive species, the Asian carp, lies just below Gavins Point Dam in the Missouri and James rivers, Stukel said. He showed a video of the silver carp, or “flying” fish, jumping into boats and even hitting a passenger in the head.

“We don’t want them to get into Lewis and Clark Lake,” Stukel said.

At the neighboring station, Wayne Nelson-Stastny with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) operated the large fish tank. The feature has become so popular that a second tank was added this year.

Nelson-Stastny explained the various species and the ways in which they adapt to the Missouri River and to each other.

“It’s fun (to run the fish tank) because get the kids touching endangered species, which they can rarely do,” he said. “There are more than 150 different species in the Missouri River, because there’s a lot of habitat out there. We have the muddy water, back waters, main channels and side channels.”

The exhibits impressed Newcastle, Neb., teacher Robin Mohr and student Wyatt Blatchford.

“I think it’s pretty interesting,” Blatchford said, noting he had just seen the Asian carp presentation.

Wynot, Neb., freshman Cody Stratman said he lives near the river and is familiar with the fish. However, he still gained new information.

“I enjoyed learning all the new stuff about wildlife,” he said.

Yankton Middle School eighth grader Jordan Kuipers enjoyed learning about cottonwoods and also viewing the fish tank. “I learned that fish are slimy,” he said with a laugh.

Vermillion Middle School students Ammara Khizar and Grace Kjelden enjoyed the historical re-enactor and the game-show format for learning about cottonwoods.

VMS seventh grader Dylan Endorhorn became a bit more interactive as he accepted the invitation to kiss the fish in the tank. He didn’t appear ready to repeat the experience.

“I tried not to kiss the fish with my full lips,” he said.

Marcia Olnes, a middle school science instructor at Sacred Heart School in Yankton, said her school has attended all five years of the river festival.

“The event has continued to grow and expand the range of educational experiences the students engaged in throughout the morning,” she said.

Olnes appreciated the wide range of presenters.

“As an science instructor, I especially appreciated the high level of expertise from the instructors,” she said. “In one morning, students had the opportunity to see our biological, geological and environmental worlds working together and then develop and ask questions of all these experts on the spot.

“It’s authentic learning at its best and in the best classroom ... the great outdoors!”

The Sacred Heart seventh grade students offered comments in their passports on a wide variety of sub-

jects, from the importance of life jackets to learning about amphibians, invasive species, tern and plovers, and even the area’s glacial erosion for more than 2 million years.

“We’ve got to stop the spreading of Asian Carp So let’s all Clean, Drain and Dry!” one student wrote. Another added, “Girls really scream loud when they hold a fish!”

Not all of the presentations dealt with wildlife. Friday’s festival also featured the cultural and historical ties to the Missouri River.

Gary Robinette of Niobrara, Neb., provided a presentation on the Ponca Tribe.

“I spoke about our history. I talked about our Trail of Tears, which was the removal of the Ponca Tribe to Oklahoma in the 1800s,” he said, and he spoke of Chief Standing Bear’s importance in tribal history.

The Ponca were reinstated as a federally recognized tribe in 1990 and operate their headquarters out of Niobrara, Robinette said. Besides seeking to bring back its cultural traditions, the tribe is dealing with issues brought by the Missouri and Niobrara rivers, including the aftermath of the 2011 flooding, he said.

National Park Service (NPS) re-enactor John Rokosz portrayed a purser of the steamboat Far West in 1877.

“There was a great deal of excitement and romance about life on the Missouri River. But there were also many hazards about the river,” he said. “I hope the students are interested and keep enjoying the history and feel of it.”

TransCanada spokesman Rob Latimer presented \$2,500 to the river festival organizers and also participated in Friday’s activities.

“It’s a well organized event, and they do an effective job of educating the kids to the right level at each station,” he said.

TransCanada considers the river festival to be an important event, Latimer said.

“We see this as a good environmentally focused thing that works well with our environmental and educational support,” he said.

“And we see (the festival organizers) are great stewards of money. When you provide outreach to 400 kids, that’s amazing.”

The following presentations and presenters were part of Friday’s program:

- “Playing In The Water,” Karla Zeutenhorst, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;
- “Cottonwoods” by Carol Smith, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service;
- “Stream Table,” Missouri River Institute;
- “Wetland Ecology,” Missouri River Institute;
- “National Park Service’s Role,” NPS Ranger Dugan Smith
- “Rain Simulator,” Jeff Hemenway, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- “Terns and Plovers,” Galen Jons, Corps of Engineers;
- “Pallid Sturgeon,” Dane Pauley, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (GPC);
- “Fish Of The Missouri River” (two sections), Nebraska GPC and the USFWS, Gavins Point Hatchery crew;
- “Invasive Species” (two sections), Sam Stukel and Mike Smith, South Dakota GF&P;
- “Portrayal of a Steamboat Clerk,” John Rokosz, NPS;
- South Dakota Canoe and Kayak Association, Jarett Bies;
- Ponca Tribal Cultural Presentation, Ponca Tribe;
- “Missouri River Geology,” Sarah Chadima, South Dakota Geological Survey (SDGS).


You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf

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