

Dozens Killed In Market Attack In China

URUMQI, China (AP) — Attackers hurled bombs from two SUVs that plowed through shoppers at a busy street market in China's volatile northwestern region of Xinjiang on Thursday, killing 31 people and wounding more than 90.

The early morning attack in the city of Urumqi was the bloodiest in a series of violent incidents over recent months that Chinese authorities have blamed on radical separatists from the country's Muslim Uighur minority.

The Xinjiang region is home to the native Turkic-speaking Uighurs (pronounced WEE'-gurs) but has seen large inflows from China's ethnic Han majority in recent decades. Uighur activists contend that restrictive and discriminatory policies favoring the Chinese migrants are fueling the bloodshed. The knowledge that Muslims elsewhere are rising up against their governments also seems to be contributing to the increased militancy.

The two vehicles crashed through barriers at 7:50 a.m. and drove right into the crowds while setting off explosives, according to a statement by the Xinjiang regional government. It was unclear how many assailants were in the cars.

The SUVs then crashed head-on and one of them exploded, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. It quoted an eyewitness as saying there were up to a dozen blasts in all and that at one point one of the vehicles stopped because it was blocked by bodies and handcars.

"I heard four or five explosions. I was very scared. I saw three or four people lying on the ground," Fang Shaoying, the owner of a small supermarket near the scene of the attack, told The Associated Press by phone.



House Approves Curbs On NSA Surveillance

BY KEN DILANIAN
AP Intelligence Writer

WASHINGTON — The House on Thursday passed legislation to end the National Security Agency's bulk collection of American phone records, the first legislative response to the disclosures by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.

Although the compromise measure was significantly "watered down," in the words of Democrat Jan Schakowsky of Illinois, it passed by a vote of 303 to 120, with 9 members not voting.

"We must not let the perfect be the enemy of the good," Schakowsky, an intelligence committee member, said in summing up the feelings of many Republicans and Democrats who voted for the measure but wanted tougher provisions. Dropped from the bill was a requirement for an independent public advocate on the secret intelligence court that oversees the NSA.

The USA Freedom Act would codify a proposal made in January by President Barack Obama, who said he wanted to end the NSA's practice of collecting the "to and from" records of nearly every American landline telephone call under a program that searched the data for connections to terrorist plots abroad.

The bill instructs the phone companies to hold the records for 18 months—

which they already were doing—and lets the NSA search them in terrorism investigations in response to a judicial order. The phone program was revealed last year by Snowden, who used his job as a computer network administrator to remove tens of thousands of secret documents from an NSA facility in Hawaii.

The measure now heads to the Senate. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., the chairwoman of the intelligence committee, has said she is willing to go along with a similar idea.

NSA officials were pleased with the bill because under the existing program, they did not have access to many mobile phone records. Under the new arrangement, they will, officials say.

"I believe this is a workable compromise that protects the core function of a counter terrorism program we know has saved lives around the world," said Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., the House Intelligence Committee chairman.

Privacy and civil liberties activists denounced the measure, saying it had been "gutted" to win agreement from lawmakers such as Rogers who supported the NSA phone records program.

"This legislation was designed to prohibit bulk collection, but has been made so weak that it fails to adequately protect against mass, untargeted collection of Americans' private information," Nuala O'Connor, president and CEO of

the Center for Democracy and Technology, said in a statement.

Technology companies such as Google and Facebook also withdrew their support, saying they were concerned about language they fear could allow bulk collection of Internet data. Proponents say that concern is misplaced.

"Those who say this bill will legalize bulk collection are wrong," said Rep. C. A. "Dutch" Ruppersberger, the ranking Democrat on the Intelligence Committee. "They are trying to scare you by making you think there are monsters under the bed."

The White House endorsed the measure.

"The bill's significant reforms would provide the public greater confidence in our programs and the checks and balances in the system," the Office of Management and Budget said in a statement Wednesday.

House Intelligence Committee member Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., said the bill is perhaps the most significant action Congress will take in response to the Snowden leaks. The former NSA contractor handed journalists documents that revealed a host of once-secret NSA surveillance programs, including some that sweep in the personal information of Americans even as they target foreigners.

Remembering The Fallen



Members of the Third U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) place American flags in front of the more than 220,000 graves Thursday in advance of Memorial Day, at Arlington Cemetery in Arlington, Va.

Botched Nuclear Drill Revealed

WASHINGTON (AP) — An Air Force security team's botched response to a simulated assault on a nuclear missile silo has prompted a blistering review followed by expanded training to deal with the nightmare scenario of a real attack.

The Air Force recognized the possibility of such an intrusion as more worrisome after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. But an internal review of the exercise held last summer at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana said the security forces were unable to speedily regain control of the captured silo, and called this a "critical deficiency."

The Associated Press obtained a copy of the report through a Freedom of Information Act request.

The previously unreported misstep was the reason the 341st Missile Wing flunked a broader safety and security inspection. The unit, which has been beset with other problems in recent months, including an exam-cheating scandal that led its commander to resign in March, passed a do-over of the security portion of the inspection last October.

The failure was one of a string of nuclear missile corps setbacks revealed by the AP over the past year. The force has suffered embarrassing security, leadership and training lapses, discipline breakdowns and morale problems. Earlier this year, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel ordered two reviews, still underway, to address his concern that the lapses could erode public trust in the security of the nation's nuclear weapons.

16 Killed In Ukraine Ahead Of Election

BLAHODATNE, Ukraine (AP) — In the deadliest raid yet on Ukrainian troops, pro-Russia insurgents attacked a military checkpoint Thursday, killing 16 soldiers, and the interim prime minister accused Moscow of trying to disrupt the upcoming election for a new president to lead the divided country out of its crisis.

A rebel commander said one of his fighters also died in the raid in eastern Ukraine, which left a gruesome scene of charred military vehicles and scorched bodies near the town of Volnovakha, 30 kilometers (20 miles) south of the city of Donetsk.

Witnesses, including a medical worker, said more than 30 Ukrainian troops were wounded, with some in grave condition. Fighting also raged in at least two other villages.

The armed uprising and the government's offensive to put it down have cast a shadow over Sunday's election, with Kiev acknowledging it will be impossible to hold the vote in some areas. In the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, where separatists have declared independence and pledged to derail the vote, election workers reported threats and interference from gunmen.

Interim Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk accused Russia of escalating the conflict and trying to disrupt the election. In a post on Facebook, he called for an urgent session of the U.N. Security Council and said Ukraine would present evidence of Moscow's involvement.

New York's Jail System Under Scrutiny

NEW YORK (AP) — The grisly deaths of two inmates — one who "baked to death" in his overheated cell, another who sexually mutilated himself while locked up alone for seven days — have raised new questions about the New York City jail system's ability to deal with a burgeoning number of mentally ill people.

The two cases — both exposed by The Associated Press — have prompted a city lawmaker to schedule oversight hearings next month.

"No inmate should be treated that way, especially those with mental health needs. The city has to do more to protect them," City Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley said Thursday. "A lot of people who are in Rikers Island should be in a hospital, in a clinical setting, not in a jail."

Bradley Ballard, a 39-year-old inmate whose family members said had been diagnosed as schizophrenic, died in September after he was confined to his cell in a mental observation unit at Rikers for seven days for making a lewd gesture at a female guard, according to interviews and documents obtained by the AP.

Denied some of his medication, the agitated inmate tied a rubber band tightly around his genitals. During that period, guards repeatedly peered through the window in his cell but didn't venture inside until it was too late, according to corrections officials' account.

Nigerians Protest Government Inaction

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Scores of protesters chanting "Bring Back Our Girls!" marched Thursday to Nigeria's presidential villa to demand more action to find and free nearly 300 schoolgirls abducted by Islamic militants, but President Goodluck Jonathan did not meet with them, leaving an aide to deliver a lecture that further angered the demonstrators.

"Another small window for Jonathan and he refuses to use it!" one protester yelled. "What a stupid move!"

The protesters complained of the insensitivity of Jonathan, who did not even meet parents of some of the abducted children when they came to Nigeria's capital earlier this month.

Many schools across the country were closed Thursday to protest the abductions, the government's failure to rescue the girls and the killings of scores of teachers by Islamic extremists in recent years.

Protesting teachers in Abuja also demanded compensation for the families of slain colleagues.

Veteran Health Care Woes Become Campaign Issue

BY MATTHEW DALY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The growing furor over veterans' health care moved to the political campaigns Thursday as congressional candidates from both parties called for Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki to be fired.

Democrat Alison Lundergan Grimes, who is challenging Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell in Kentucky, was among those calling for Shinseki's removal amid investigations of VA patients dying while awaiting treatment and falsified appointment records.

Democrat Rick Weiland, who is running for South Dakota's open Senate seat, also called for Shinseki's ouster, as did a Democrat running for an open House seat in New Jersey and two Republicans challenging vulnerable Democrats in northern Minnesota House districts.

House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., added to the calls for Shinseki's resignation, saying the VA crisis was "a national embarrassment" that requires new leadership.

Shinseki, 71, said Thursday that he intends to remain on the job. "I serve at the pleasure of the president," he told reporters at the Capitol. The former Army general and chief of staff added that "this is not the first time" he has faced controversy in his career.

Grimes, the Kentucky Senate candidate, said the government had defaulted on a "solemn obligation to our veterans. I don't see how that breach of trust with our veterans can be repaired if the

current leadership stays in place," she said.

Grimes has tried to distance herself at times from President Barack Obama, who is largely unpopular in her state, and she demonstrated her independence by calling for a cabinet member's removal.

McConnell said earlier this week that the predicament at the VA was "a management problem, not a money problem," adding, "it's obvious that the management team needs to be changed."

The inspector general at the Veterans Affairs Department says 26 VA facilities nationwide are under investigation, including the Phoenix hospital at the center of allegations about treatment delays and secret waiting lists intended to hide delays in care.

The allegations have raised fresh concerns about the Obama administration's management of a department that has been struggling to keep up with the influx of veterans returning home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and Vietnam veterans needing more care as they age.

McConnell campaign spokeswoman Allison Moore said the campaign was pleased Grimes had joined in calling for a change in VA management. Moore criticized Senate Democrats for blocking a House-passed bill that would have made it easier to fire or demote senior VA executives.

Senate Democrats said they are working on their own legislation to make it easier to fire or demote executives at VA.

"I think what the House has done is not unreasonable," Senate Majority Leader

Harry Reid told reporters Thursday, adding that he is confident the Senate will act quickly on a measure being pushed by Independent Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

The political maneuvering came as the Senate Appropriations Committee added language to a military construction spending bill that, like the House proposal, would give the VA secretary broader authority to remove low-performing officials.

"The veterans are not get-

ting the medical care they need," said Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "Some heads need to roll."

White House spokesman Jay Carney, meanwhile, said Thursday the Obama administration supports the goal of the House bill, but added, "We do have some concerns that some provisions could result in significant litigation."

The administration is working with Congress on better language, Carney told reporters.

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We thank the brave men and women of our Armed Forces for their dedication and sacrifice. As we mark Memorial Day, we also honor and remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our nation. God Bless America.

United we stand behind our veterans and those currently serving our country.

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