

Rush-hour Bangkok bombing at busy shrine kills 18, hurts 117

Associated Press

BANGKOK — Police combed through shattered glass and other debris Tuesday from a bomb blast in central Bangkok that killed at least 18 people and injured more than 100 the night before, trying to determine who set off the most devastating single attack in the capital’s recent history.

The explosion at a popular shrine next to one of the city’s busiest intersections went off around 7 p.m. during Monday’s evening rush hour, as the upscale area was filled with tourists, office workers and shoppers.

Defense Minister Prawit Wongsuwan said the attack, which no one immediately claimed responsibility for, was aimed at destroying the country’s economy by targeting a major tourist area.

“It is much clearer who the bombers are, but I can’t reveal more right now,” Prawit said, as he headed into a Cabinet meeting Tuesday morning. “We haven’t ruled out terrorism.”

He acknowledged that authorities had no idea an attack was planned.

“We didn’t know about this ahead of time. We had no intelligence on this attack,” the defense minister said.

With a powerful flash caught on security video and a boom heard blocks away, the blast from the improvised explosive device scattered body parts across Rachaprasong intersection, spattered blood, blasted windows and



AP Photo/Sackchai Lalit

Explosive Ordnance Disposal officers enter the Erawan Shrine after an explosion in Bangkok, Monday. A large explosion rocked a central Bangkok intersection during the evening rush hour, killing a number of people and injuring others, police said.

burned motorbikes to the metal.

“Suddenly there was a big boom, and the whole room just shook, like someone dropped a wrecking ball on top of our ceiling,” said Pim Niyomwan, an English instructor working on the eighth floor of the building right next to the shrine. “The whole building just shook. My four students were hysterical.”

Video shortly after the blast showed a scene of shock and desperation: people running for their lives and crying amid the debris. An emergency worker in an ambulance, frantically pounding the chest of a victim.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha promised to “hurry and find the bombers.”

“This is the worst incident that has ever happened in Thailand,” he said. “There have been minor bombs or just noise, but this time they aim for innocent lives. They want to destroy our economy, our tourism.”

National chief of police Somyot Poompanmoung said the perpetrators aimed to kill “because everyone knows that at 7 p.m. the shrine is crowded with Thais and foreigners. Planting a bomb there means they want to see a lot of dead people.”

Early Tuesday morning,

Somyot was among those surveying the damage as police and soldiers guarded the area. The normally busy intersection that was closed off to traffic and eerily empty aside from onlookers standing behind police tape to take pictures. Barricades were set up outside five-star hotels in the neighborhood and security stopped cars to inspect trunks before letting them pass.

More than 12 hours after the blast, onlookers dashed for safety as shards of glass torpedoed to the ground from windows of a nearby building. Nobody appeared to have been injured.

Portland business group quietly works to shape wage debate

By HILLARY BORRUD
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A group of Portland business leaders wants to shape the debate over raising Oregon’s minimum wage ahead of the 2016 legislative session.

New Seasons Market co-founder Stan Amy formed North Star Civic Foundation earlier this year with his wife Christy Eugenis, who is a partner in a real estate development company, and Rejuvenation Hardware founder Jim Kelly.

The group plans to work on solutions to income inequality and climate change, and it is quietly arranging a statewide listening tour to learn what Oregonians think about the state’s minimum wage. The tour appears to be an effort to develop a minimum wage proposal with support from rural areas as well as urban centers.

“Oregon has one of the strongest track records of bipartisanship in the country, but in recent years we’ve seen more polarization,” North Star Civic Foundation executive director Caitlin Baggott wrote in an email. Baggott helped launch the Portland get-out-the-vote nonprofit Bus Project in 2002 and served as its executive director from 2011 to 2013.

Amy said part of the group’s strategy was to work “in the background,” and he referred questions to Baggott.

Oregon’s minimum wage is currently \$9.25 an hour and two existing coalitions, 15 Now Oregon and Raise the Wage, are promoting competing proposals to increase it. Both coalitions include unions, and both plan to seek ballot measures in 2016.

Raise the Wage wants a ballot measure that would increase the minimum wage

to \$13.50 by 2018, and 15 Now Oregon has filed paperwork for a measure that would raise the wage gradually to \$15 per hour by 2019. Raise the Wage also plans to push for legislation next year that would increase the minimum wage to \$13.50 an hour.

North Star Civic Foundation has not yet put forward its own minimum wage proposal, and Baggott said the group wants to first gather input from people around the state. However, the group is concerned about “the growing share of low-wage



Baggott

workers who cannot earn enough to support themselves without government assistance,” Baggott wrote in an email.

“It is clear that the minimum wage will be a major focus in next legislative session and that if it is not resolved in that session expectations are it will be on the ballot the following November — where current polling shows strong support for an increased wage,” Baggott wrote. “We’re in the process of organizing a series of “kitchen table” conversations around the state with rural and urban business owners, farmers, non-profit leaders, and community groups this fall.”

As North Star Civic Foundation planned the conversations, the group sought recommendations from newspaper executives around the state. Publishers of the *Daily Astorian* and *East Oregonian* newspapers were among those that helped North Star Civic Foundation connect with local business leaders and other community members.

Baggott said North Star Civic Foundation wants to engage “people on all sides of this issue. We are optimistic that there is an opportunity to find common ground and a path forward that works for all of Oregon’s communities, and for all the parts of Oregon’s economy.”

BRIEFLY

Judge gives clerk time to appeal before issuing same-sex marriage licenses

MOREHEAD, Ky. (AP) — A federal judge on Monday gave a Kentucky county clerk room to continue denying marriage licenses to gays and lesbians while she takes her religious objections case to a higher court.

U.S. District Judge David Bunning ordered Rowan County Clerk Kim Davis last week to issue licenses to two gay couples, and ruled Monday that she is not entitled to any more delays. But because “emotions are running high on both sides of this debate,” he also stayed his decision while she takes her case to the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeal.

Attorneys on both sides disagreed about the implications. Dan Canon, representing the gay couples, said Davis remains under the judge’s order. But Mat Staver, who represents Davis and is the founder of Florida-based Liberty Counsel, said the convoluted order essentially grants her request for more time.

What is clear is that Davis will continue refusing to issue marriage licenses to anyone in this county of about 23,000 people, home to Morehead State University in the Appalachian foothills of eastern Kentucky. Until the case is resolved, no new wedding can be legally recognized in Rowan County unless the couple obtains a marriage license somewhere else.

“This is not something I decided because of this decision that came down,” Davis testified in federal court last month. “It was thought-out and, you know, I sought God on it.”

Bad weather prevents rescuers from reaching wreckage of Indonesian plane

JAYAPURA, Indonesia (AP) — Rugged, forested terrain and bad weather Tuesday have prevented rescuers from reaching the site where an Indonesian plane with 54 people on board crashed two days ago.

Smoldering wreckage of the Trigana Air Service turboprop plane was spotted from the air Monday morning in a rugged area of the easternmost province of Papua, rescue officials said. There was no immediate word of any survivors from Sunday’s crash, which happened in bad weather.

“Steep ravines and bad weather have slowed rescuers,” said Henry Bambang Soelistyo, the National Search and Rescue Agency chief. “They haven’t reached it yet, so we don’t know yet if anyone survived.”

He said a helicopter was on standby to lower two rescuers by rope into a valley about 300 meters (yards) from the wreckage but visibility when the search resumed Tuesday was just one meter (yard) due to heavy fog.

The ATR42-300 twin turboprop plane was flying from Jayapura to the city of Oksibil when it lost contact, and its passengers included four postal workers aboard the plane were escorting four bags of cash totaling \$468,750 in government aid for poor families to help offset a spike in fuel prices, Francisus Haryono, the head of the post office in Jayapura, the provincial capital, told The Associated Press.

Pentagon plans to increase drone flights by 50 percent

JOINT BASE LANGLEY-EUSTIS, Va. (AP) — Faced with escalating aggression from Russia and China, the Pentagon is planning to increase its use of drones by about 50 percent over the next several years, using the Army and civilian contractors to put more of the unmanned aircraft in the air.

The decision to add Army and civilian-operated missions to the mix was triggered because the Air Force — which had been running about 65 combat air patrol missions a day — asked to decrease that number to 60 because of stress on the force. But 60 patrols don’t come close to meeting the demands of top military commanders facing growing security threats around the world.

Senior U.S. officials said that while drones have been used largely to target terrorists and collect intelligence over combat zones, those needs may shift in the coming years.

Top military leaders, including the incoming chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford, have named Russia as the nation’s most serious security threat. And China’s rising military power and island-building program in the South China Sea have increased tensions and prompted a greater demand for U.S. surveillance and intelligence across the Pacific.

One senior defense official said Pentagon leaders are taking those security challenges into account as they decide how armed and unarmed drones will be used across Europe and the Pacific. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity

because they weren’t authorized to discuss the issue publicly.

Pentagon leaders have been wrestling with the problem for some time, as the need for more airstrikes and surveillance by drones over Iraq and Syria to battle the Islamic State group offsets a decline in unmanned flights over Afghanistan as the war there winds down. Under the plans laid out by senior defense officials, the Air Force would continue to provide 60 daily drone missions, while the Army would conduct about 16, and U.S. Special Operations Command and civilian contractors would do up to 10 each.

“It’s the combatant commanders, they need more. They’re tasked to do our nation’s business overseas so they feel that stress on them, and it’s not getting better,” said Air Force Maj. Gen. J.D. Harris, Jr., vice commander of Air Combat Command at Joint Base Langley-Eustis. “There’s just not enough of the Air Force to go around.”

The civilian contractors would fly surveillance drones, not the armed aircraft. But senior defense officials said they need at least a small contractor contribution in order to reach the total of 90 combat air patrols per day.



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