

Pipe bomb attack hits NYC subway

By COLLEEN LONG
Associated Press

NEW YORK — A would-be suicide bomber inspired by Islamic State extremists strapped on a crude pipe bomb, slipped unnoticed into the nation's busiest subway system and set the device off at rush hour Monday in a scenario that New York has dreaded for years, authorities said.



Akayed Ullah

In the end, the only serious wounds were to the suspect identified as Akayed Ullah, a 27-year-old Bangladeshi immigrant and former cab driver. But the attack sent terrified commuters fleeing through a smoky passageway, and three people suffered headaches and ringing ears from the first bomb blast in the subway in more than two decades.

"This was an attempted terrorist attack," Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio said. "Thank God the perpetrator did not achieve his ultimate goals."

The suspect had looked as Islamic State propaganda online and told investigators he acted alone in retaliation for U.S. military aggression, law enforcement officials said.

In Washington, President Donald Trump said the explosion highlighted the need to change immigration policies, including the type of family-based visa Ullah obtained to come to the U.S. in 2011. Such visas are "incompatible with national security," the Republican president said in a statement.

"America must fix its lax immi-



AP Photo/Andres Kudacki

Police stand guard inside the Port Authority Bus Terminal following an explosion near Times Square on Monday, in New York. Police said a man with a pipe bomb strapped to his body set off the crude device in a passageway under 42nd Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues.

gration system, which allows far too many dangerous, inadequately vetted people to access our country," said Trump, who campaigned on cracking down on immigration.

The attack near Times Square came less than two months after eight people died near the World Trade Center in a truck attack authorities said was carried out by an Uzbek immigrant who admired the Islamic State group.

Law enforcement officials said Ullah was inspired by IS but apparently did not have any direct contact with the group. Gov.

Andrew Cuomo said there was no evidence, so far, of other bombs or a larger plot. He said officials were exploring whether Ullah had been on authorities' radar, but there was no indication yet that he was.

Cuomo said there was reason to believe the attacker looked at bomb-making instructions online.

Investigators described the bomb as a low-tech explosive device attached to Ullah with "Velcro and plastic ties." It was ignited with a Christmas light, matches and a nine-volt battery. The short pipe was packed with explosive powder

but did not work as intended. It was not powerful enough to turn the pipe into deadly shrapnel, the officials said.

Investigators said the suspect was seen on surveillance footage putting the circuits together with his hands and igniting the bomb.

Some of the bomb-making materials may have been bought commercially. The pipe may have been obtained from his job where he worked as an electrician, one official said.

Authorities were searching Ullah's Brooklyn home and a nearby

rented space, interviewing witnesses and relatives, reviewing his subway fare card and looking for surveillance footage that might show his movements in the moments before the 7:20 a.m. attack.

Security cameras captured the attacker walking casually through a crowded passageway under 42nd Street between Seventh and Eighth avenues when the bomb went off amid a plume of white smoke, which cleared to show the man sprawled on the ground and commuters scattering.

"All we could hear was the chaos," said Elrana Peralta, a Greyhound customer-service worker who was working at the Port Authority bus terminal near the blast, though she did not hear it. Instead, she heard people yelling, "Get out! Get out! Get out!"

Port Authority police said officers found the man injured on the ground, with wires protruding from his jacket to his pants and the device strapped to his torso under his coat. They said he was reaching for a cellphone and they grabbed his hands.

A photo published by the New York Post showed a bearded man crumpled on the ground with his shirt apparently blown off and black soot covering his bare midriff.

Law enforcement officials said the suspect was speaking with investigators from the hospital bed where he was being treated for burns to his hands and abdomen.

He was "all over the place" on the question of motive, but indicated he wanted to avenge U.S. aggression against the Islamic State, one official said.

The officials spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the blast.

Alabama foes make final push before big Senate vote

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Facing voters at last after the year's most bitter U.S. campaign, Alabama Republican Roy Moore cast himself Monday as the victim of a national barrage of unjust allegations of sexual misconduct with teenagers. Rival Doug Jones, hoping to become the state's first Democratic senator in two decades, declared their race was Alabama's referendum on "who we are and what we're going to tell our daughters."

Allegations aside, President Donald Trump said in a robocall to Alabama voters that he badly needs Moore's own vote in the U.S. Senate. Former President Barack Obama and his vice president, Joe Biden, recorded calls for Jones seeking to break the GOP's lock on statewide office in Alabama.

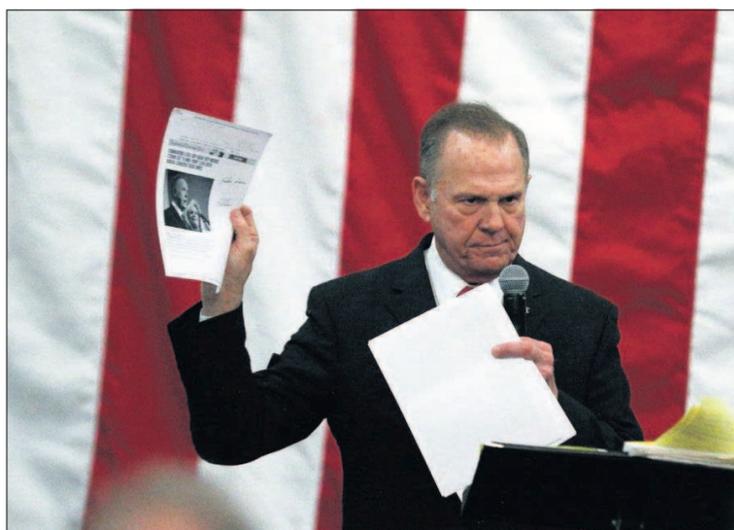
Whether the calls would sway anyone so late in such a highly publicized campaign was an open question. So was the impact of a rash of false news stories that have appeared on social media spreading misinformation.

One website wrongly claimed that one of the women who have accused Moore of sexual misconduct had recanted. Meanwhile, Moore's detractors took to social media to claim he had written in a 2011 textbook that women shouldn't hold elected office. He didn't.

On election eve, Moore called in to a conservative talk radio show in Alabama to lament the tone of the campaign and portray himself as the victim of the sexual misconduct allegations.

"We've seen things happen in this campaign that I can't believe to this day," said Moore, who has denied all wrongdoing in contacts with the women who said he behaved inappropriately when they were in their teens and he was a local prosecutor in his 30s. One said he initiated sexual contact when she was 14.

"It's just been hard, a hard campaign," said Moore, a former Alabama Supreme



AP Photo/Brynn Anderson

U.S. Senate candidate Roy Moore holds up pages with a news story about himself as he speaks at a campaign rally, Monday, in Midland City, Ala.

Court chief justice who was twice removed from that post for violating judicial ethics.

At an evening rally in the state's rural southeast, Moore told voters, "If you don't believe in my character, don't vote for me."

Former White House strategist Steve Bannon, who also spoke at the Moore rally, argued that the election is "greater than Judge Moore and even greater than the people of Alabama," casting it as a referendum on Trump's agenda.

Meanwhile, Moore's wife, Kayla, stirred up another ruckus while defending him against claims of being anti-Semitic. "Well, one of our attorneys is a Jew," she said. "We have very close friends who are Jewish and rabbis."

Alabama has been a solidly Republican state for years, and Moore said he is much more in tune with the issues that matter to voters — and to the president.

Jones acknowledged Monday in Montgomery, "Look, I'm not going to be the senator that everybody in the state can agree with 100 percent of the time." But he added: "They'll know I'm somebody that will sit down with them. I will learn from them. ... I will try to be the public servant I think a U.S. senator ought to be."

Former professional basketball star Charles Barkley, speaking at a Jones rally Monday night, urged voters not to embarrass his home state by electing Moore. "I love Alabama, but at some point we've got to draw a line in the sand and say, 'We're not a bunch of damn idiots,'" Barkley said.

Following Barkley's remarks, Jones urged Alabama voters to say, "Enough is enough."

Voters seemed as divided as ever, including young Alabamians, some going to the polls for the first time.

#MeToo spotlight increasingly pointed at past Trump conduct

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump sailed past a raft of allegations of sexual misconduct in last year's presidential election.

Now the national #MeToo spotlight is turning back to Trump and his past conduct. Several of his accusers are urging Congress to investigate his behavior, and a number of Democratic lawmakers are demanding his resignation.

With each day seeming to bring new headlines that force men from positions of power, the movement to expose sexual harassment has forced an unwelcome conversation on the White House. In a heated exchange with reporters in the White House briefing room on Monday, press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders steadfastly dismissed accusations against the Republican president and suggested the issue had already been litigated in Trump's favor on Election Day.

But to Trump's accusers, the rising #MeToo movement is an occasion to ensure he is at last held accountable.

"It was heartbreaking last year. We're private citizens and for us to put ourselves out there to try and show America who this man is and how he views women, and for them to say, 'Eh, we don't care,' it hurt," Samantha Holvey said

Monday. The former beauty queen claimed that Trump ogled her and other Miss USA pageant contestants in their dressing room in 2006.

Holvey was one of four women to make her case against Trump on Monday, both in an NBC interview and then in a news conference. Rachel Crooks, a former Trump Tower receptionist who said the celebrity businessman kissed her on the mouth in 2006 without consent, called for Congress to "put aside party affiliations and investigate Trump's history of sexual misconduct."

"If they were willing to investigate Sen. Franken, it's only fair that they do the same for Trump," Crooks said.

Franken, the Democratic senator from Minnesota, announced last week that he would resign amid an ethics probe into accusations that he sexually harassed several women. Reps. John Conyers, D-Mich., and Trent Franks, R-Ariz., also resigned after misconduct accusations.

But a Capitol Hill investigation into Trump's conduct appears unlikely. The Senate and House Ethics Committees investigate members of Congress, not presidents, and Republican-led committees are not apt to investigate Trump on sexual misconduct unless there is some sort of connection to the ongoing Russia probe.

BRIEFLY

Ash falls like snow as celebrities flee California community

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ash fell like snow and heavy smoke had residents gasping for air Monday as a huge Southern California wildfire exploded in size again, becoming the fifth largest in state history and driving celebrities from a wealthy hillside enclave.

Tens of thousands have fled their homes as flames churn through foothill towns near Santa Barbara, the latest flare-up after a week of wind-fanned wildfires throughout the region.

With acrid smoke thick in the air, even residents not under evacuation orders were leaving, fearing another shutdown of a key coastal highway that was closed intermittently last week.

Officials handed out masks to those who stayed behind in Montecito, an exclusive community about 75 miles northwest of Los Angeles that's home to stars such as Oprah Winfrey, Jeff Bridges and Drew Barrymore.



Kenneth Song/Santa Barbara News-Press via AP

Firefighters keep watch on a wildfire blaze burning the mountain-side Sunday near the Cate School campus in Carpinteria, Calif.

Some glitches seen in deadline week for 'Obamacare' sign-ups

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumer advocates reported some glitches Monday in the final days for "Obamacare" sign-ups,

although the Trump administration largely seemed to be keeping its promise of a smooth enrollment experience.

In Illinois, some consumers who successfully completed an application for financial assistance through HealthCare.gov got a message saying they would likely

be eligible to buy a health plan, "but none are available to you in your area."

That information was incorrect because every county in the nation currently has at least one health insurer offering plans under the Affordable Care Act for next year.

Friday is the last day to enroll for subsidized private coverage in 39 states served by the federal HealthCare.gov website. Consumer interest has remained brisk, even as the Trump administration cut the sign-up season in half, reducing it from roughly from 90 days to 45 days.

Former President Barack Obama offered encouragement Monday for the closing push, posting on social media and joining a conference call with enrollment counselors.

Pentagon to allow transgender people to enlist in military

WASHINGTON (AP) — Transgender recruits will be allowed to

enlist in the military beginning Jan. 1, the Pentagon said Monday, as President Donald Trump's ordered ban suffered more legal setbacks.

The new policy reflects the difficult hurdles the federal government would have to cross to enforce Trump's demand earlier this year to bar transgender individuals from the military.

Three federal courts have ruled against the ban, including one Monday in Washington state.

In October, U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly barred the Trump administration from proceeding with its plan to exclude transgender people from military service. Part of the effect of the ruling was that the military would be required to allow transgender people to enlist beginning Jan. 1.

The government had asked Kollar-Kotelly to put the Jan. 1 date on hold while they appealed her full ruling but she declined Monday, reaffirming the Jan. 1 start date. The Department of Justice is now asking a federal appeals court to intervene and put the Jan. 1 requirement on hold.