

AP News in Brief at 5:58 a.m. EDT

Tributes honor Boston Marathon bomb victims on anniversary; cautious police blow up backpacks

BOSTON (AP) — Survivors, first responders and relatives of those killed in the Boston Marathon bombing marked the anniversary Tuesday with tributes that combined sorrow over the loss of innocent victims with pride over the city's resilience in the face of a terror attack.

"This day will always be hard, but this place will always be strong," former Mayor Thomas Menino told an invitation-only audience of about 2,500 people at the Hynes Convention Center, not far from the finish line, where two pressure cooker bombs hidden in backpacks killed three people and injured more than 260 others a year ago.

Vice President Joe Biden, who attended the ceremony, said the courage shown by survivors and those who lost loved ones is an inspiration for other Americans dealing with loss and tragedy.

"You have become the face of America's resolve," he said.

Biden also praised the 36,000 runners who plan to run the marathon next week, saying they will send a message to terrorists.

South Korea government says 293 missing several hours after ferry sinks; 2 dead

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A multi-story ferry carrying 459 people, mostly high school students on an overnight trip to a tourist island, sank off South Korea's southern coast Wednesday, leaving nearly 300 people missing despite a frantic, hours-long rescue by ships and helicopters. At least two people were confirmed dead and seven injured.

The high number of people unaccounted for — likely trapped in the ship or floating in the ocean — raised fears that the death toll could rise drastically, making it one of South Korea's biggest ferry disasters since 1993 when 323 people died.

One student, Lim Hyung-min, told broadcaster YTN after being rescued that he and other students jumped into the ocean wearing life jackets and then swam to a nearby rescue boat.

"As the ferry was shaking and tilting, we all tripped and bumped into each another," Lim said, adding that some people were bleeding. Once he jumped, the ocean "was so cold. ... I was hurrying, thinking that I wanted to live."

Local television stations broadcast live pictures of the ship, Sewol, listing to its side and slowly sinking even as passengers were jumping out or being winched up by helicopters. Dozens of coast guard ships, other boats and helicopters swarmed around the stricken ship. Rescuers clambered over its sides, pulling out passengers wearing orange life jackets. But the ship overturned completely and continued to sink slowly. Within a few hours only its blue-and-white bow was seen sticking out of the water. Very soon that too had disappeared.

10 Things to Know for Today

Your daily look at late-breaking news, upcoming events and the stories that will be talked about today:

1. NEARLY 300 PEOPLE ARE MISSING AFTER KOREAN BOAT SINKS

The accident involving a ferry that was headed to a tourist island killed two passengers and many more are feared dead.

Combat vehicles in east Ukraine city fly Russian flags

SLOVYANSK, Ukraine (AP) — A column of armored personnel carriers flying Russian flags drove into a Ukrainian city controlled by pro-Russia demonstrators on Wednesday. Some of the troops aboard said they were Ukrainian soldiers who had switched allegiance.

An Associated Press reporter saw the six vehicles with troops in camouflage sitting atop enter the city of Slovyansk, a hotbed of unrest against Ukraine's acting government. Insurgents in Slovyansk have seized the local police headquarters and administration building, demanding broader autonomy for their eastern Ukraine region and closer ties with Russia.

Eastern Ukraine was the support base for Russia-friendly President Viktor Yanukovich, who was ousted in February after months of protests in the capital, Kiev, that were ignited by his decision to back away from closer relations with the European Union and turn toward Russia. Opponents of the government that replaced him alleged the new authorities will repress eastern Ukraine's large Russian-speaking population.

The vehicles stopped near the city administration building and flew Russian flags while residents chanted "Good job! Good job!"

One of the men who came in the vehicles, who identified himself only as Andrei, said the unit was part of Ukraine's 25th Brigade of Airborne Forces and that they have switched to the side of the pro-Russian forces.

China's economic growth slows to 7.4 percent, raising risk of job losses, impact on trade

BEIJING (AP) — China's economic growth slowed further in the latest quarter but appeared strong enough to satisfy Chinese leaders who are trying to put the country on a more sustainable path without politically dangerous job losses.

The world's second-largest economy grew 7.4 percent from a year earlier in the January-March quarter, down from the previous quarter's 7.7 percent, government data showed Wednesday. It matched a mini-slump in late 2012 for the weakest growth since the 2008-09 global crisis.

Beijing is trying to guide China's economy toward growth based on domestic consumption instead of trade and investment following the past decade's explosive expansion. The top economic official, Premier Li Keqiang, last week ruled out new stimulus and said leaders will focus on "sustainable and healthy development."

"Chinese growth held up better than expected last quarter and there are signs that downwards pressure on growth has eased somewhat," said analyst Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics in a report.

Retail sales and factory output were weaker than in the previous quarter but improved in March. On a quarter-to-quarter basis, economic growth from January to March slowed to 1.4 percent from the previous period's 1.8 percent.

Missing Malaysian airliner lawsuits, if filed, face dismissal by American courts

BEIJING (AP) — Since Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 went missing, some lawyers have claimed they can get several millions of dollars in damages for each lost passenger by taking the cases to the United States. But past lawsuits show U.S. federal courts are more likely to throw such cases out if the crashes happened overseas.

Major disasters draw lawyers looking to sign up clients for big lawsuits, and the missing Malaysian plane, which was carrying mostly Chinese passengers, has been no exception. Lawyers from various firms have descended on a Beijing hotel where relatives of the passengers have been staying, and have even traveled around China to visit them in their homes.

The Chinese relatives have said their main focus remains on the search for the plane, so lawyers have had little luck so far in signing up clients here, despite dangling the potential of major damage awards.

"This is not the right point in time to discuss legal matters because nothing has been found yet and everybody has no idea what exactly happened to the plane," said Steve Wang, a representative of some of the Chinese relatives.

Relatives can expect to get at least about \$175,000 from Malaysia Airlines for each lost passenger under terms of the Montreal Convention, an international treaty governing air travel compensation. The relatives can also sue the carrier in Malaysia or their home countries for further damages.

Muslim groups, civil liberties advocates applaud end of NYPD Muslim surveillance program

NEW YORK (AP) — Muslim groups and civil liberties advocates applauded the decision by New York Police Department officials to disband a controversial unit that tracked the daily lives of Muslims as part of efforts to detect terror threats, but said there were concerns about whether other problematic practices remained in place.

The Demographics Unit, conceived with the help of a CIA agent working with the NYPD, assembled databases on where Muslims lived, shopped, worked and prayed. Plainclothes officers infiltrated Muslim student groups, put informants in mosques, monitored sermons and catalogued Muslims in New York who adopted new, Americanized surnames. NYPD spokesman Stephen Davis confirmed Tuesday that detectives assigned to the unit had been transferred to other duties within the department's Intelligence Division.

Linda Sarsour, the executive director of the Arab American Association of New York, said she was among a group of advocates at a private meeting last week with police at which the department's new intelligence chief, John Miller, first indicated the unit — renamed the Zone Assessment Unit — wasn't viable. She applauded the decision but said there's still concern about the police use of informants to infiltrate mosques without specific evidence of crime.

"This was definitely a part of the big puzzle that we're trying to get dismantled," Sarsour said. But, she added, "This doesn't necessarily prove to us yet that these very problematic practices are going to end."

Another person at the meeting, Fahd Ahmed, legal and policy director of Desis Rising Up and Moving, called the decision "a small step." He questioned what had happened to the information gathered by the unit.

Supreme Court to consider challenge to Ohio law that bars lying about political candidates

WASHINGTON (AP) — Negative campaigning and mudslinging may be a fact of life in American politics, but can false accusations made in the heat of an election be punished as a crime?

That debate makes its way to the Supreme Court next week as the justices consider a challenge to an Ohio law that bars false statements about political candidates during a campaign. The case has attracted national attention, with groups across the political spectrum criticizing the law as a restriction on the First Amendment right to free speech.

Even Ohio's attorney general, Republican Mike DeWine, says he has serious concerns about the law. His office filed two briefs in the case, one from staff lawyers obligated to defend the state and another expressing DeWine's personal view that the law "may chill constitutionally protected political speech."

"The thing we see time and time again in political campaigns is that candidates use the law to game the system by filing a complaint," DeWine said in an interview with The Associated Press.

In an attempt at humor, satirist P.J. O'Rourke and the libertarian Cato Institute filed a widely circulated brief ridiculing the law and defending political smear tactics as a cornerstone of American democracy.

Police: University grad fatally stabs 5 people in worst mass slayings in Calgary's history

CALGARY, Alberta (AP) — A recent graduate of the University of Calgary was charged in the fatal stabbing of five people at a house party that the police chief called the worst mass slaying in the western Canadian city's history.

Matthew Douglas de Grood, the son of a 33-year veteran of the Calgary police force, picked up a large knife shortly after arriving at the party and stabbed the victims one by one shortly after 1 a.m. Tuesday, said police Chief Rick Hanson.

De Grood, 22, was charged with five counts of murder late Tuesday.

"This is the worst murder — mass murder — in Calgary's history," Hanson said at a news conference Tuesday. "We have never seen five people killed by an individual at one scene. The scene was horrific."

The Calgary attack came nearly a week after a teenage boy in the U.S. stabbed and wounded 21 students at his high school outside Pittsburgh.

Amid crackdown on Islamists, Egypt clamps control over mosques and preachers' message

CAIRO (AP) — In his weekly sermon, Muslim cleric Ali Abdel-Moati preached to his congregation in a southern Egyptian city about the evils of making hasty judgments. That prompted a complaint to authorities from a judge, who accused him of criticizing a recent mass death sentence issued against supporters of ousted Islamist President Mohammed Morsi.

Days later, Abdel-Moati was suspended from the mosque in Assiut, replaced by a new preacher, and put under investigation by the Religious Endowments Ministry.

Egyptian authorities are tightening control on mosques around the country, purging preachers and seeking to control the message, as the military-backed government cracks down on Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood following his ouster last summer.

Some 12,000 freelance preachers have been barred from delivering sermons. The Religious Endowments Ministry, or Awqaf in Arabic, now sets strict guidelines for sermons, and anyone who strays from them in Egypt's more than 100,000 mosques risks removal.

The aim, officials say, is to prevent mosques from spreading extremism and becoming a platform for political groups, after widespread criticism that the Brotherhood and its more ultraconservative allies used them to build support, recruit new followers and sway voters. During elections the past three years, Islamist clerics would often tout a vote in the Brotherhood's favor as a vote for Islam or supported by God.