



A boom floats in the water as contract workers from BP use skimmers to clean oil from a marsh on June 1. "Flotels" have been set up to provide housing for workers who are helping with the clean up. WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES

'Flotels' established for BP cleanup crews

By IAN RITZ
Epoch Times Staff

"Flotels" have been set up to provide housing for workers who have embarked on the mission of stopping and cleaning up what is now being called the worst oil spill in American history.

Flotels look similar to a freight box used by the steel industry to ship materials on trains but the insides

have been converted into bunks. The bare bones sleeping quarters are temporary living spaces for BP workers who are continuing the arduous task of ending the massive oil spill in the Gulf Of Mexico, reported the Associated Press.

The flotels are located on a 5.26 square km area on the water close to the shore on Port Fourchon in Louisiana. More than 500 workers are stationed in the temporary

living quarters. Multiple independent contract workers are staying in the flotels, along with BP workers who have been in the area for over a month.

BP released an official report on their efforts to bring a halt to the oil spill Tuesday but have not given any indication that they have a solid plan to do that. The spill started on April 21 after an explosion led to the sinking of the Transocean oil rig that

was connected to oil lines.

BP is currently working with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Coast Guard to stop the well from spilling oil. The crews are also looking for new methods to block the pipes that are leaking the oil. Thousands of gallons of oil have been spilling into the ocean for more than a month, surpassing the severity of the Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska in 1989.

Ash cloud sets back airline industry recovery

By ANDREY VOLKOV
Epoch Times Staff

European and international passenger traffic slumped by 2.4 percent in April as a result of massive flight cancellations across Europe due to the ash cloud from Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano.

"The ash crisis knocked back the global recovery—impacting carriers in all regions," Giovanni Bisignani, director of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), said in a statement on Thursday.

"Europe's slow recovery from the global financial crisis and its currency crisis are already a huge burden on the profitability of its airlines," reported IATA.

Eyjafjallajökull started erupting in mid-April creating a giant ash cloud that drifted across European airspace. It led to more than 100,000 flight cancellations and affected over 10 million passengers. The aviation industry lost billions of euros during the disruption.

European carriers bore the worst of the volcano's impact in April with passenger traffic dropping 11.7 percent, which "could not have come at a worse time," said Bisignani.

By March, the airline industry had pulled to within 1 percent of pre-economic crisis traffic levels.

"In April, that was pushed back to 7 percent," Bisignani said.

In May, a new ash plume again caused flights to be cancelled and

closed airports in the European air zone.

The impact of the eruptions went beyond Europe. North American carriers reported a 1.9 percent decline in April compared to 7.8 percent growth in March with the disruption of their transatlantic routes.

International cargo traffic was less affected by the ash cloud, showing a slowdown in growth from 28.1 percent in March to 25.2 percent in April.

"The ash crisis was a shock.

While there is always a danger of the consequences of renewed volcanic eruptions, the impact on passenger confidence should be limited," Bisignani said.

The Icelandic Meteorological Office reports that volcano Eyjafjallajökull is no longer emitting

any ash, but there remains a steam plume rising up to 3,000 metres.

Meanwhile, experts say that another eruption could occur in the future from Iceland's Katla volcano, a far more active one that erupts more frequently.

"An eruption in the short term is a strong possibility," says a report from the University College London institute for risk and disaster reduction.

"The time for Katla to erupt is coming close. It is high time to start planning for the eventual Katla eruption," said Iceland's President Olafur Ragnar Grimsón, according to the report.

European carriers bore the worst of the volcano's impact in April with passenger traffic dropping 11.7 percent

Gaza flotilla carried 40 al-Qaeda members, says Israel

By JOSHUA PHILIPP & GENEVIEVE LONG
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JERUSALEM—A special meeting of the Israeli Security Cabinet in Jerusalem disclosed on Tuesday that 40 people with the Gaza flotilla are members of al-Qaeda. The individuals, who have not been identified, were aboard the Mavi Marmara and had bulletproof vests, night-vision goggles, and weapons including knives, clubs, axes, and mace.

The 40 individuals had no identification papers, and a spokesperson for the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) did not explain

commandos who descended by rope onto the ship deck from helicopters were beaten with metal poles, ambushed by groups of 10 to 15 people at a time, and shot at.

No video or detailed information has been released showing or describing how passengers on the Marmara were injured and killed. Nine passengers have been confirmed dead by official and unofficial sources.

"This was not a flotilla for peace, but instead was a violent and organized force," said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday. "We have films and photographs which show what our soldiers faced, but the last thing that can be said about this ship is that it was a flotilla of peace."

All nine protesters who were killed on the Mavi Marmara are believed to be Turkish nationals backed by the IHH, an Islamist Turkish group with connections to

al-Qaeda. The organization has been investigated by the intelligence operations of several countries including the United States, France, and Turkey.

Of the several activist organizations that participated in the flotilla, the IHH is the only one that has been linked to terrorist activities.

An estimated 30 people were injured aboard the Marmara, including seven IDF personnel. The injured were taken to Israeli hospitals, while the estimated 700 flotilla activists were taken to a prison in Be'er Sheva, Israel. After identifying themselves to immigration authorities, 45 members of the group were released.

It is estimated that 400 of the 700 individuals aboard the ships were Turkish; 76 were journalists.

With reporting from New York and Jerusalem

Poland releases final 37 minutes of cockpit transcript

By ANDREY VOLKOV
Epoch Times Staff

Pilots of the ill-fated Polish plane that crashed on April 10 ignored repeated warnings from the plane's automatic warning systems that it was on a dangerous collision course, according to the black box transcript.

The Polish government on Tuesday released the much-anticipated transcript of the black box from the cockpit of then-President Lech Kaczynski's plane that crashed in a Russian forest, killing all 95 on board.

Several minutes before catching the top of the trees and then crashing, the plane's terrain awareness and warning systems had warned the pilots to pull up the plane eight times.

The transcript reveals that the pilots knew the conditions were dangerous for landing. It is unclear why they waited until it was too late to manoeuvre the aircraft out of danger.

The recording begins at 10:04 a.m. and ends 37 minutes later at 10:41 a.m., the time of the crash.

"At this moment, under these conditions, which exist at this moment, we won't be able to land. We will try to make an approach, we're going to make one attempt, but most likely, it's not going to work out," a pilot said at 10:26 a.m.

A few minutes before the crash,



BLACK BOX: The flight recorders from the plane of Polish President Lech Kaczynski sit on a table at the headquarters of the Interstate Aviation Committee in Moscow on May 19. The committee investigating the April 10 crash, Poland's worst post-World War II disaster, revealed that the aircraft's crew had ignored repeated warnings that weather conditions were not suitable for landing. NATALIA KOLESNIKOVA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

warnings of "terrain ahead" and "pull up" were repeatedly sounded but for some reason went unheeded by the pilots. The pilots proceeded to attempt a landing despite weather warnings, heard on the black box recordings, from Russian air traffic controllers.

The Polish government published the 41-page transcript to stem media

speculation over reasons for the crash. Official investigations have concluded that pilot error was to blame. The audio version of the transcript will be available in two to three weeks.

The transcripts include conversations between the cabin crew, dispatchers, and the crew of the Polish Air Force Yak-40 aircraft which had

landed successfully at the same airport earlier in the day.

The transcript confirms that a non-crew passenger was in the cockpit talking to the pilots. Last week, Polish officials had said one of the unidentified persons was Polish Air Force Gen. Andzej Blasik.

There is no agreement between Polish and Russian officials as to whether the non-crew passengers influenced the pilots to make the final decision to land. The Polish media has widely speculated that the president may have ordered the pilot to land. There is no direct evidence of this in the transcript. Much of the recorded conversation is one-sided and ambiguous.

"Right now we don't have the president's decision about what to do next," an unidentified speaker said at 10:26 a.m.

Poland's then-President Lech Kaczynski, his wife, and the plane full of top officials were killed in the crash in foggy weather in a forest near Smolensk, Russia, on April 10.

The delegation had been heading to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the mass execution of Polish elite during World War II at Katyn forest, 19 km from the tragedy site.

The full document is published on the Ministry of the Interior and Administration's website.

Georgia local elections marked by voting violations

By ANDREY VOLKOV
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International observers have concluded that serious violations occurred during Sunday's vote to elect municipal politicians across Georgia.

"Yesterday's municipal elections in Georgia marked evident progress toward meeting international standards, but significant shortcomings remain to be addressed," observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said at a press conference on Monday.

The OSCE stated that during the vote, there had been "systematic irregularities" in some regions, including ballot box stuffing and procedural violations during vote counting.

The OSCE report also noted a lack

of electoral laws or their implementation, a situation that favoured the ruling party. Low levels of public confidence in the voting process also persisted, the report said.

International observers recorded serious voting fraud in the 2008 presidential elections when President Mikheil Saakashvili won his second and final term as president.

According to Georgia's Central Electoral Commission (CEC), over 3 million people were registered to vote in the municipal polls to elect members to 64 local councils. The turnout was about 49 percent, which is considered high in the former soviet republic of 4 million people.

Most eyes were on the mayoral race in the capital Tbilisi, an influential position that often serves as a springboard to the presidency. The

post is currently held by Georgian President Saakashvili's ally Giorgi "Gigi" Ugulava.

CEC officials declared Ugulava the winner of the mayoral race based on preliminary election results. So far, Ugulava has 55 percent of votes and his nearest rival, Irakli Alasania, a former ambassador to the United Nations, has 20 percent.

Although results will not be finalized until June 23, the CEC stated that returns from the remaining ballots would not significantly impact the outcome.

The American Embassy in Georgia said in a statement that it welcomed the improvement made by the government compared to past polls, but it also noted violations similar to the ones mentioned by the OSCE, including excessive use

of administrative power.

The U.S. Embassy fielded 19 teams of observers throughout the country.

Opposition politicians accuse the president's party of authoritarianism, monopolizing power, and pressuring voters, according to News Georgia.

The elections are being seen by analysts as a test for Saakashvili's ruling party. The reputation of the pro-American leader suffered damage when the European Union found him responsible for the seven-day war with Russia in 2008.

In August that year, Saakashvili launched a military offensive against South Ossetia to re-establish control over the breakaway region. Russia then intervened on behalf of South Ossetia leading to the war.