

NEWS DIGEST

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Investigation turns to co-pilot

WASHINGTON (AP) — A relief co-pilot alone in the EgyptAir cockpit said, "I made my decision now. I put my faith in God's hands" just before the jetliner began its fatal plunge, officials close to the investigation said Wednesday.

Moments after the plane began to dive, the pilot returned to struggle — futilely — to pull out.

As Egyptian officials won time to send their own experts to review the cockpit voice recorder tape, a federal law enforcement official and other sources close to the investigation described the evidence on Wednesday that led the United States to the verge of putting the FBI in charge of the inquiry as a potential criminal matter.

The current theory of the fate of EgyptAir 990, the Boeing 767 that plunged into the Atlantic Ocean off Massachusetts killing 217 people, is both tentative and incomplete, the law enforcement official stressed. Further electronic enhancement of the tape recording and input from the Egyptian experts could alter the sketchy understanding of what went on.

The law enforcement official, commenting only on condition of anonymity, and other sources close to the case gave this account of what those recorders show:

Relief co-pilot Capt. Gameel el-

Batouty, scheduled to take over much later in the 11-hour New York-to-Cairo flight, enters the cockpit and asks to fly. His request is accepted.

The cockpit door is opened later, after which there is no conversation, leading investigators to conclude el-Batouty is alone.

He says in Arabic: "I made my decision now. I put my faith in God's hands."

Shortly thereafter, the autopilot is turned off, and the jet begins to descend steeply from 33,000 feet.

The cockpit door opens again. Investigators believe the pilot, Capt. Ahmed Mahmoud el-Habashy, has returned because he is heard to ask what's going on. They believe he tries to regain control because he is heard to say, "Pull with me. Help me. Pull with me." There is no sound of struggle, but some investigators believe that phrase is said in an argumentative tone.

The National Transportation Safety Board reported Wednesday that 35 seconds after the autopilot was turned off at 33,000 feet, there was an unusual split in the plane's elevators: The pilot's side elevator moved down, which would push the nose up, but the co-pilot's side elevator was in the nose-down position. These flaps on either side of the tail usually move up

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I made my decision now. I put my faith in God's hands.”

GAMEEL EL-BATOUTY
EgyptAir 998 co-pilot

or down in unison to lower or raise the plane's nose.

Boeing has told investigators crew members must apply 50 pounds of pressure in opposite directions on the pilot's and co-pilot's control yokes to achieve this split outcome. Investigators surmise this may be evidence of a struggle between two crew members over how to respond to the steep dive.

Also, 35 seconds after the autopilot was turned off, the jet's two engines were turned off, the NTSB said Wednesday. The plane then regained some altitude, stalled and dropped into the sea 50 seconds after the autopilot was turned off.

In Egypt, relatives angrily rejected any notion that el-Batouty planned to commit suicide, described him as a loving father of five and denied the family had financial problems. Family members said el-Batouty had

just bought two automobile tires in the United States for his son's car, and they believed the tires were on Flight 990.

Married for 27 years, el-Batouty joined EgyptAir in 1987 after training pilots at Egypt's Civil Aviation Authority and the air force. The 59-year-old aviator had more than 5,000 flight hours in a Boeing 767 and was to have retired in March.

His 10-year-old daughter, Aya, suffers from the immune disorder lupus erythematosus and had been treated in the United States.

"She was everything to him," his brother-in-law Essam Dahi said.

Dahi said el-Batouty was "a man of experience, honor and, most importantly, faith." He was Muslim, and it is strictly against his faith to commit suicide, something relatives referred to amid suggestions el-Batouty might be responsible for the crash.

Hurricane Lenny defies odds

■ The storm's late appearance mystifies meteorologists, as it reaches a Category 4 level.

CHRISTIANSTED, U.S. Virgin Islands (AP) — Hurricane Lenny's winds climbed to 150 mph Wednesday after its leading gusts and rains ripped off roofs, hurled boats onto shore and flooded homes in Caribbean islands as it roared toward the Virgin Islands.

St. Croix and the Virgin Islands were expected to bear the brunt of the storm's fury. Officials warned that the storm could spawn tornadoes and drench the islands with up to 15 inches of rain.

Hundreds of tourists in the region were stranded as airlines canceled flights and airports closed.

Feeding off the warm Caribbean waters, Lenny's winds strengthened to 150 mph Wednesday, making it a Category 4 hurricane capable of extreme damage. That is 5 mph short of a Category 5 — the top category.

The storm was about 35 miles southeast of St. Croix late Wednesday afternoon, heading northeast at 9 mph. Hurricane winds extended 70

miles from its center and tropical storm-force winds extended another 205 miles.

Lenny's lateness in the season and easterly path left even experienced observers agape. "It's unheard of," said veteran meteorologist John Toohey on San Juan's WOSO-AM radio. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime event."

The storm's first winds cut power and telephone service to many St. Croix homes. It ripped up trees and debris that blocked roads, kicked up dangerous waves that battered the shore and carried a steady rain that flooded extensive areas hours before the main impact was expected.

"All through the night the police were busy helping evacuate a number of individuals who sought assistance after their mobile homes and homes in low-lying areas became threatened by flood waters," said Police Chief Novell Francis.

Battering waves smashed over the 8-foot sea wall at Frederiksted, tore away the wooden fishermen's pier and a small part of the concrete Ann Abramson Pier where cruise ships dock.

A curious tourist who went out to experience the force of the storm was trapped by battering waves and clung

to a rock outside a beach resort for more than an hour before divers rescued him, authorities said.

A half dozen people suffered fractures and other injuries when they were hit by waves on St. Kitts' concrete pier. Storm surges in Grenada swept away four houses, washed away asphalt roads, damaged runway lights at the airport and flooded roads and the business district.

U.S. Virgin Islands Gov. Charles Turnbull declared a state of emergency Tuesday night, installed a curfew to prevent looting and deployed the National Guard. He also asked President Clinton to declare St. Croix a disaster area, making it eligible for federal emergency funds.

Officials urged people to be vigilant, because most hurricane deaths occur after a storm passes.

There was one fatality: a man who fell off a ladder he was using to board up windows against the storm.

On Tuesday, Lenny passed south of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, staying on an unusual west-to-east course. It then veered northeast, sparking a last-minute rush at grocery stores and gas stations throughout the islands in its path.

Lenny was blamed for damage as far off as South America.

Pakistan curbing corruption

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — The military government rounded up hundreds of Pakistan's most powerful and wealthy people Wednesday, making good on its promise to try and rid the country's political ranks of rampant corruption.

The raids — which brought in landowners, industrialists, athletes and politicians from all parties — began hours after a deadline expired for debtors to repay loans or face charges.

According to Pakistan television, \$138 million had been recovered when the deadline expired — just 3 percent of the estimated \$4 billion outstanding.

Soldiers in green army Jeeps roared up to the palatial home of Nawaz Kokhar, a member of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's party, on the outskirts of Islamabad to arrest him.

He was just one of hundreds taken in during army Chief Gen. Pervez Musharraf's crackdown on corruption, which he promised to carry out last month after seizing power in a bloodless coup.

There were conflicting reports on the exact number of arrests, but police and intelligence officials said the nationwide raids brought in as many as 450 people. An official statement named 21 people who were arrested.

Deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his brother, Shahbaz Sharif, were among those charged, though the family reportedly repaid nearly \$6 million in loans by the Tuesday deadline.

The former prime minister, who has been in army custody since his Oct. 12 ouster, had earlier been accused of treason and hijacking. He was handed over to police late Wednesday, and within 24 hours was due in court to be formally charged. If convicted of either charge, he would face the death penalty or life in prison.

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■ Washington Clinton agrees to cut agency spending

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Clinton has agreed to a small across-the-board cut in agency spending, House Speaker Dennis Hastert said Wednesday, and Republicans hope to quickly complete bargaining on a near-\$400 billion budget package.

Hastert, R-Ill., had two late-night telephone calls with Clinton, who is in Turkey, finally agreeing with him on a 0.38 percent reduction in agency spending planned for this year. A fight over the proposal has been a hindrance to completing a budget deal.

Hastert said Clinton told him that before he could finalize the agreement, he would first have to speak to House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, D-Mo.

■ Turkey Survivor found in Turkey four days after quake

DUZCE, Turkey (AP) — Four days after being buried in rubble by a devastating earthquake, a woman was pulled barely conscious from the remains of her apartment house Wednesday, even as rescuers prepared to end their search for survivors.

Sefa Cebeci, 42, was buried 105 hours in a mountain of crumbled concrete that was once a six-story building. Discovered by Israeli rescuers and ferried by helicopter to Istanbul, 130 miles to the west, she faced amputation of her crushed right arm and was fighting for her life.

■ Netherlands Rwanda urged to resume cooperation with U.N.

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A U.N. prosecutor urged Rwanda to resume cooperation with a U.N. international tribunal on Wednesday, calling the recent release of a genocide suspect "a hiccup" in the judicial process.

Rwanda suspended cooperation in protest after an appeals chamber in The Hague ordered Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, a top Hutu official accused in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, to be released on procedural grounds.

Nevertheless, Deputy Prosecutor Graham Blewitt said he expected "a working relationship" to emerge during the two-week visit to Rwanda and Tanzania by chief prosecutor, Carla del Ponte.

■ Washington Government says Y2K could cost country billions

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government pinned a \$100 billion price tag Wednesday on the nation's repair bills for the Year 2000 technology problem, or \$365 for each man, woman and child.

For all that, the Commerce Department predicted the impact of Y2K computer failures on the economy would be merely "something like a tangled shoelace for a world-class marathon runner."

In a new report, the government said America's booming economy was sufficiently "stable, large and resilient" that failures will not seriously affect the nation's gross domestic product.