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Chattanooga Times Free Press

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MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2019

TIMESFREEPRESS.COM

VOL. 150 | NO. 87 | \$1.00

Ethiopian Airlines crash kills 157

BY ELIAS MESERET AND YIDNEK KIRUBEL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia — An Ethiopian Airlines jet faltered and crashed Sunday shortly after takeoff from the country's capital, carving a gash in the earth and spreading global grief to 35 countries that had someone among the 157 people who were killed.

There was no immediate indication why the plane went down in clear weather while on a flight to Nairobi, the capital of neighboring Kenya. The crash was strikingly similar to that of a Lion Air jet that plunged into the sea off Indonesia minutes after takeoff last year, killing 189 people. Both accidents involved the Boeing 737 Max 8.

The crash shattered more than two years of relative calm in African skies, where travel had long been chaotic. It also was a serious blow to state-owned Ethiopian Airlines, which has expanded to become the continent's largest and best-managed carrier and turned Addis Ababa into the gateway to Africa.

"Ethiopian Airlines is one of the safest airlines in the world. At this stage we cannot rule out anything," CEO Tewolde Gebremariam told reporters. He visited the crash site, standing in the gaping crater flecked with debris.

Black body bags were spread out nearby while Red Cross and other workers looked for remains. As the sun set, the airline's chief operating officer said the plane's flight data recorder had not yet been found.

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SUNSHINE WEEK

Cutbacks in local news leave some in the dark

BY DAVID BAUDER AND DAVID A. LIEB
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WAYNESVILLE, Mo. — Five minutes late, Darrell Todd Maurina sweeps into a meeting room and plugs in his laptop computer. He places a Wi-Fi hotspot on the table and turns on a digital recorder. The earplug in his left ear is attached to a police scanner in his pants pocket.

Maurina, who posts his work to Facebook, represents the press — in its entirety.

He is the only person who has come to the Pulaski County courthouse to tell residents what their commissioners are up to, the only one who will report on their deliberations about how to satisfy the Federal Emergency Management Agency so it will pay to repair

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Shock and despair

On what would have been his wedding weekend, family of slain Chattanooga man gather at his burial site



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG STRICKLAND

Clad in a wedding dress, Sara Baluch mourns while visiting the grave of her fiancé, Mohammad Sharifi, at Harpeth Hills Memory Gardens in Nashville on Sunday, the day after they were supposed to be married. Sharifi, a UTC student, was shot and killed two weeks before their wedding by a man to whom he was trying to sell an Xbox One.

BY ROSANA HUGHES
STAFF WRITER

NASHVILLE — Saturday was going to be their wedding day. But instead of getting ready for her nuptials, Sara Baluch was planning a visit to her fiancé's grave.



Mohammad Sharifi

Mohammad Sharifi, 24, was shot and killed in the parking lot of a Hixson Pike apartment complex while trying to sell his Xbox One gaming system Feb. 19, just more than two weeks before the wedding, police say. D'Marcus White, 20, has

THE TOLL

TRACKING CHATTANOOGA'S HOMICIDES

TIMESFREEPRESS.COM/THE TOLL

been charged with criminal homicide.

Up until Friday evening, 22-year-old Baluch remained steadfast in her plan to visit Sharifi's grave at Harpeth Hills Memory Gardens on the outskirts of Nashville. But the promise of thunderstorms forced her to postpone the visit until the next day.

The Times Free Press was given per-

mission to attend the small gathering.

So when Sunday came, she put on her ivory chiffon wedding dress and a white tulle veil fastened by a pearl hair piece.

But instead of walking down the aisle, she walked up a rain-saturated hill to her would-be husband's gravesite.

Without a cloud in sight and surrounded by their families, she knelt by his grave and began to cry. Her sequin bodice glistened in the sunlight.

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See a gallery of images on timesfreepress.com

Free health clinics fill need in small communities

More than 500 turn out for treatment in Rhea County

BY MARK PACE
STAFF WRITER

EVENSVILLE, Tenn. — Most of the 500-plus people who attended a free health clinic at Rhea County Middle School this weekend were gone before its final hour Sunday.

Some who remained sat in chairs surrounding long white tables near the entrance of the gymnasium. Nurses finished the last several examinations: checking blood pressure and taking patients' pulses. About 400 volunteers worked over three days. Most are from the area, but others came from Florida and as far away as New Hampshire.

More patients lined the hall to the school's locker room to get a pair of glasses



STAFF PHOTO BY ERIN O. SMITH

Oliver Austria gets utensils to work on a patient during a free clinic hosted by Remote Area Medical on Sunday at Rhea County Middle School in Evensville, Tenn. Austria said he is a dentist in the Philippines, but is currently a student at Tufts University, so he can get his license to practice dentistry in the United States.

before they left. The coach's office next door doubled as a dim eye-examination room.

Others were given eye tests on the green bleachers.

But in the center of the

The next clinic

Another clinic will take place at Cleveland High School in Bradley County on June 1-2. For more information, visit ramusa.org.

gymnasium, the most popular service of the weekend remained bustling.

A dentist pulled another tooth, his 41st of the weekend by one volunteer's count. Hygienists and assistants worked on patients who needed to be seen before the clinic packed up and rolled out of town to its next stop.

"The dental problems have been huge," registered nurse Kayla Marzullo said. "They are debilitating on every

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Today's Online Poll

OPENED AT MIDNIGHT

Should parents limit digital screen time for children?

○ TIMESFREEPRESS.COM

Yesterday's Poll Results

AS OF 9 P.M. SUNDAY

Would you stay in a "haunted" room at The Read House?

YES: 59% NO: 41%

Funeral

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"We were supposed to be together," she sobbed, tears cascading from already exhausted eyes. "I'm so sorry, Mohammad." "I'm so sorry." "So sorry."

For about a month after they first met, Baluch said Sharifi kept trying to ask her on a date. She kept turning him down because she was focused on school and didn't want to be in a relationship.

But he never gave up, and finally, she accepted.

"I know this sounds like a movie and that it can't be true," she told the Times Free Press in an interview Feb. 27, "but that night, I knew he was it. And so did he!"

She said they fell in love within two weeks.

"It was perfect," she said.

He was so patient, she said, recalling a time when she accidentally burned his neck with a candle.

"I just looked at it, 'cause I was in shock," she said. "Then he got up, and I was waiting for him to yell at me, waiting for something. But he just looked at me. He said, 'It's OK, baby. I love you.'"

He never raised his voice at her, she said. When she was feeling anxious, he would calmly talk her through it until she felt grounded again.

"When you came to him with a problem, it became his problem," she said. "... He would sit there and try to tell you how you can fix it. He wouldn't just sit there and be like, 'Oh, I'm sorry.'"

Both Baluch's father and Sharifi's father echoed her words, noting that many of his friends made the trip from Chattanooga to attend his funeral on Feb. 22.

They stood in the rain until the ceremony was over, Mohammad's father, Mohssen Sharifi, said, and they all talked about how his son always tried to be of help.

"So [it's] no wonder we had a lot of people that came here at that moment," Mohssen Sharifi said.

Sara's father, Masoud Baluch, said the couple was "full of joy."

"Every time they came to my home, they brought joy everywhere," he said. "It was happy. I'm just waiting for them to come back."

For Mohssen Sharifi, Mohammad wasn't just his son.

"He was my adviser for finances, taxes, organizing. Recently, he was my teacher. ... [Now], I can't see him and ask him for his advice. 'What do you think, my son, about this?' What am I supposed to do?" he said tearfully.

Mohssen Sharifi said there hasn't been a day that he, his wife and the rest of the family haven't cried.

Everywhere they go, something reminds them of him, Mohssen Sharifi said.

"Until we go to the grave, we will not forget Mohammad," he said.

"He always tried to please us," Mohssen Sharifi said. "He always asked me, 'Are you happy? Are you OK?'"

And every time he went home, Mohammad Sharifi always told his parents he loved them.

It was just one of Mohammad Sharifi's many characteristics Sara Bal-



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG STRICKLAND

Sara Baluch poses with a picture of her fiancé, Mohammad Sharifi, in her dorm room on the campus of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in February.

"All he wanted to do was make people smile. He would say anything just to make people laugh. ... You don't find that kind of care in people. People our age are just so selfish now. But him, he was nothing like that."

— SARA BALUCH

uch said she loved about him. His selflessness, his eagerness to help others, his ambition.

"He was so organized," she said. "He was so motivated. He wanted to make a life. He wanted to make a life for us so bad."

In fact, he had already renovated a small house for them, Baluch said. It was just his parent's mother-in-law suite, but it was something they could call home.

"He worked really hard to make that place ready for them to move in," Masoud Baluch said.

"He was so excited to move in," Sarah Baluch said. "We were going to get married ... and he was going to graduate in two months."

But Mohammad Sharifi didn't show care only for her, she said.

"All he wanted to do was make people smile," she said. "He would say anything just to make people laugh. ... You don't find that kind of care in people. People our age are just so selfish now. But him, he was nothing like that."

"You'd have half a cup, and he would fill that cup for you. ... Somehow, he would give you the world. Oh my God, he was perfect."

He loved surprising people, Sara Baluch said, and she loved seeing the joy he got from making people happy.

Her birthday was Feb. 27 — a week after his death — but he'd bought her birthday gifts early.

"He was so excited to give it to me. He said, 'Whenever you have it, you have to promise me that you're gonna wear it for our aghd,' she said. Aghd is an Iranian wedding ceremony.

So when she went home to Nashville for the funeral, his mother gave her the gifts. There were

several presents, one of which was the Rolex watch he promised to get her while on vacation once in Hawaii.

"I had no idea he kept his promise," she said through tears. "That's why he was so excited to give it to me. ... It was the hardest thing because he got them for me. He's not here and he's still surprising me. He's not here and he's still giving me the world!"

She was the first to arrive at the hospital Feb. 19.

She asked hospital staff for Mohammad Sharifi, but they told her he wasn't in the system.

"I had the worst feeling," she said.

Then a detective and two police officers approached her and asked if she knew anyone in Hixson and why Mohammad Sharifi would be there. She kept asking them what happened, but they told her they weren't allowed to tell her.

"And then the nurse came in," she said, sobbing. "She sat down next to me. She held my hand, and she said, 'I'm so sorry. He was shot. He didn't make it.'"

"It was like the world was ripped from underneath me. It felt like I was falling and it wasn't stopping. I fainted. When I woke up, I was like, 'No. This is a dream. We were getting married in two weeks. I just saw him last night. I just saw him.'"

They took her to his room.

"He was lying there so peacefully," she said. "It wasn't fair. I told him, 'I'm so sorry I couldn't protect you.' He protected me every day, and I failed to protect him."

She memorized his face. "He has one freckle on his left ear, and his right

ear is perfectly clean," she said. "And in his beard, he has a few strands of hair that were longer. He was so handsome."

He comes to her in dreams, Sara Baluch said.

"But he won't talk to me," she said. "I begged him. I made him a promise. I said, 'I promise I'll love you forever if you promise just to come to my dreams so we can make memories together.'"

"He won't talk to me. He just comes to me and he holds me. That's all he does. I'm happy. I'm so grateful. That's the closest thing I've been getting to holding him. But I want to ask him, 'Are you OK?'"

She said people have told her they think her and Mohammad Sharifi's love "was so powerful that it couldn't exist on this Earth, that the only way to separate us was through death."

"Our love had to exist in a different world," she said tearfully. "It couldn't exist here. ... It was too perfect it seemed unnatural."

At the cemetery Sunday, tearful family members took turns comforting her, reciting prayers and reading from the Quran. Toward the end, Sara's mother, Sona Baluch, draped a black veil over her daughter's head, exchanging it for the white wedding veil.

Then, as a far-off clock struck 1 p.m., Sara Baluch, tears still in her eyes, picked herself up, helped by her father and Mohammad Sharifi's father, and started the short walk back down the hill to the car.

Flowers covered Mohammad Sharifi's grave, which has yet to have a headstone.

"We were so happy," she said just before she left. "... I want to be with him. Why do I have to wait?"

Contact staff writer Rosana Hughes at rhughes@timesfreepress.com or 423-757-6327 with tips or story ideas. Follow her on Twitter @HughesRosana.

Crash

› CONTINUED FROM A1

Around the world, families were gripped by grief. At the Addis Ababa airport, a woman called a mobile number in vain. "Where are you, my son?" she said, in tears. Others cried as they approached the terminal.

Henom Esayas, whose sister's Nigerian husband was killed, told The Associated Press they were startled when a stranger picked up their frantic calls to his mobile phone, told them he had found it in the debris and promptly switched it off.

Shocked leaders of the United Nations, the U.N. refugee agency and the World Food Program announced that colleagues had been on the plane. The U.N. migration agency estimated some 19 U.N.-affiliated employees were killed. Both Addis Ababa and Nairobi are major hubs for humanitarian workers, and many people were on their way to a large U.N. environmental conference set to begin Monday in Nairobi.

The Addis Ababa-Nairobi route links East Africa's two largest economic powers. Sunburned travelers and tour groups crowd the Addis Ababa airport's waiting areas, along with businessmen from China, Gulf nations and elsewhere.

A list of the dead released by Ethiopian Airlines included passengers from China, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Israel, India and Somalia. Kenya lost 32 citizens. Canada, 18. Several countries including the United States lost four or more people.

Ethiopian officials declared Monday a day of mourning.

At the Nairobi airport, hopes quickly dimmed for loved ones. "I just pray that he is safe or he was not on it," said Agnes

Muilu, who had come to pick up her brother.

The crash is likely to renew questions about the 737 Max, the newest version of Boeing's popular single-aisle airliner, which was first introduced in 1967 and has become the world's most common passenger jet.

Indonesian investigators have not determined a cause for the October crash, but days after the accident Boeing sent a notice to airlines that faulty information from a sensor could cause the plane to automatically point the nose down.

The Lion Air cockpit data recorder showed the jet's airspeed indicator had malfunctioned on its last four flights, though the airline initially said problems had been fixed.

Safety experts cautioned against drawing too many comparisons between the two crashes until more is known about Sunday's disaster.

The Ethiopian Airlines CEO "stated there were no defects prior to the flight, so it is hard to see any parallels with the Lion Air crash yet," said Harro Ranter, founder of the Aviation Safety Network, which compiles information about accidents worldwide.

The Ethiopian plane was new, delivered to the airline in November. The Boeing 737 Max 8 was one of 30 meant for the airline, Boeing said in July. The jet's last maintenance was on Feb. 4, and it had flown just 1,200 hours.

The plane crashed six minutes after departure, plowing into the ground at Hejere near Bishoftu, or Debre Zeit, some 31 miles outside Addis Ababa, at 8:44 a.m.

In the U.S., the Federal Aviation Administration said it would join the National Transportation Safety Board in assisting Ethiopian authorities with the crash investigation.

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