

US drone kills top Pak militant

REUTERS, Peshawar

The second US drone attack in two days in Pakistan's North Waziristan region killed five people yesterday, including a senior militant commander with links to al Qaeda, Pakistani intelligence and Taliban sources said.

Badar Mansoor, leader of a faction of the Pakistani Taliban with close ties to al Qaeda, was one of the five killed in the strike in Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan, near the Afghan border, intelligence officials and Pakistani Taliban sources said.

"Badar Mansoor was living in a rented house here. He died in the drone strike this morning, and we have confirmation of five deaths," a Pakistani intelligence official told Reuters.

Officials said the death toll could rise because buildings next to the one targeted were also damaged.



Iraqi supporters of Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr wave their national flag during a celebration marking the departure of US troops from Iraq in the Shia stronghold of Sadr City in northern Baghdad yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Maldives' ex-president awaits arrest

AFP, Male

The ousted former president of the Maldives Mohamed Nasheed, who claims he was forced from office in a coup, said he expected to be arrested yesterday as protests and violence escalated in the holiday paradise.

Nasheed, the Indian Ocean country's first democratically elected president, told AFP at his modest family home in the capital that a court order had been issued for his detention and he anticipated being sent to jail.

"They have issued a warrant to arrest me now and said that I will be the first former president to spend the rest of his life in jail," he said. "I hope the international community will take note and do something right now."

While dozens of supporters surrounded the home, elsewhere in the country the police and army struggled to take control after a night described by a presidential aide as "anarchy".

"What happened is utterly disgraceful and it is the saddest day in the modern history of Maldives," newly appointed Home



Mohamed Nasheed

Minister Mohammed Jamil Ahmed told AFP.

Maldives police commissioner Abdulla Riyas said police had received the order for Nasheed's arrest, but they had not yet carried it out.

The violence began spiraling out of control on Wednesday when thousands of Nasheed supporters massed in the capital Male following his resignation the day before.

18 police stations had been attacked on outlying islands in the archipelago, while numerous court and government buildings had been looted and torched.

Nasheed himself was beaten and briefly detained.

As the violence spread, sweeping across at least eight islands outside the capital, Nasheed said he had sent his wife and one of his two daughters to neighbouring Sri Lanka.

In Washington, the State Department called for calm and said a senior US envoy would visit the Maldives on Saturday, but stopped short of describing events there as a coup -- a designation requiring a cutoff of all aid under US law.

Greeks agree on austerity, unions call general strike

AFP, Athens

Greek leaders did a last minute deal on austerity cuts yesterday, clearing the way for the eurozone to decide on a bailout package, but unions called a new strike against the terms.

A 'final agreement' has been reached among Greek political leaders on additional austerity measures demanded by EU-IMF creditors in return for a loan bailout, a government source said yesterday.

"There is a final agreement on the measures," the source told AFP hours before eurozone finance were set to decide on a new bailout worth 130 billion euros (\$171 billion), averting a default and ending a chapter in the eurozone crisis.

A deal by banks to write-down Greek debt was also at hand, an EU diplomat said.

The Greek government coalition parties had balked overnight at cutting 650 million euros in supplementary pensions, and argued until almost the last minute yesterday over finding savings in other areas of the budget.

The message from Brussels meanwhile was that the shortfall in cuts, however small, had to be bridged, by whatever means.

European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi told reporters in Frankfurt that he had received a phone call from Greek Prime Minister Lucas Papademos just minutes earlier and "he told me that agreement has been reached and has been endorsed by major parties."

An EU diplomat told AFP there is also "consensus" on the voluntary writedown by private creditors of their holdings of Greek bonds -- "the biggest debt restructuring ever."

Private creditors, who are negotiating an exchange of bonds that will save Greece at least 100 billion euros, are to meet yesterday in Paris before the Eurogroup meeting, according to a spokesman.

Greece has run up total debt of about 350 billion euros, roughly 160 percent of its gross domestic product, and the IMF has insisted that level be brought down to a maximum of 120 percent of GDP in 2020 in order for a further bailout to go ahead.

Egypt PM dismisses US aid threat

BBC ONLINE

Egypt has said it will not be persuaded by the potential loss of US aid to end an ongoing investigation into foreign-funded non-governmental organisations.

Prime Minister Kamal Ganzouri said his government would "apply the law" in the case of the NGOs and "not back down".

Forty-three pro-democracy activists, 19 of them Americans, are to be put on trial for setting up groups without licences and receiving illegal funding.

A judge meanwhile said their work constituted "pure political activity".

On Tuesday, three leading US senators warned that the risks of a "disastrous" rupture in bilateral relations had "rarely been greater".



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FALKLANDS DISPUTE Argentina to seek UN help

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina's President Cristina Kirchner yesterday slammed Britain for its "militarisation" of their conflict over the Falklands, saying she would lodge a formal complaint with the United Nations.

"We will present a complaint to the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly, as this militarization poses a grave danger to international security," Kirchner told a group of politicians and Falklands war veterans.

The two sides have ramped up the rhetoric in the run-up to the 30th anniversary of the war, which broke out on April 2, 1982, when the ruling junta in Buenos Aires invaded the disputed islands in a bid to end British rule.

Britain has held the islands, home to about 3,000 inhabitants, since 1833.

Argentine officials have been seething in recent weeks, denouncing the deployment of a British warship and the dispatch of Prince William, second in line to the throne, for a tour of duty as a helicopter pilot.

Buenos Aires has also reacted sharply to a report that Britain had moved a nuclear submarine to the region, even though British officials have not confirmed the report in the Daily Mail newspaper.



Cristina Kirchner

NEWS IN brief

Car blast kills 15 in Somalia

AFP, Mogadishu

At least 15 people were killed by a suicide bomber from the al-Qaeda linked Shebab, officials said yesterday, as details emerged of the heavy blast in Somalia's war-torn capital Mogadishu.

"The horrible suicide blast, carried out by desperate and violent criminals, killed at least 15 innocent civilians, while 20 others are injured," said Mogadishu mayor Mohamed Ahmed Nur, updating an initial toll of 11.

Nur said two lawmakers were also slightly injured in the blast Wednesday afternoon at a small cafe where people had gathered to drink tea, in the heart of the government quarter and close to the presidential palace.

Prince Harry set for Afghan duty

AFP, London

Britain's Prince Harry could return to Afghanistan, the Ministry of Defence said yesterday, after he qualified as an Apache attack helicopter pilot with a special award for his gunnery skills.

The 27-year-old -- the grandson of Queen Elizabeth II and third in line to the throne -- has completed 18 months of "intensive" training including a stint in the United States.

Harry received a prize for being the best co-pilot gunner at a dinner on Wednesday to celebrate the completion of training by around 20 pilots, St James's Palace said in a statement.

He was given a polished 30-millimetre round from an Apache cannon, mounted on a stand, at the dinner at Wattisham Air Station in Suffolk, eastern England, where he has been training.

\$3.3m aid for threatened species

AFP, Geneva

Gorillas, cockatoos and frogs are among a list of threatened species to benefit from a \$3.3 million aid award, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) said yesterday.

The conservation fund Save Our Species (SOS), set up by the IUCN, the World Bank and others, has announced to allocate the cash to more than 20 projects.

SOS is involved in the protection of the Cross River Gorilla and Black Rhino in Africa and the Snow Leopard in Pakistan.

The body was established in 2010 by IUCN, the World Bank and the GEF (Global Environment Facility) with more than \$10 million funding to help protect threatened species.

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