

# Sierra Leone to lock down 2.5m people

AFP, Freetown

Sierra Leone yesterday said it will confine around 2.5 million people to their homes across the capital and in the north in a three-day shutdown aimed at stemming the Ebola epidemic.

The worst-ever outbreak of the virus has claimed almost 3,700 lives in the impoverished west African nation, one of three countries that have seen their economies wrecked and healthcare systems obliterated in the crisis.

"The lockdown will be conducted from March 27 to March 29 and will be like the one we conducted in September last year," said Palo Conteh, head of the country's National Ebola Response Centre.

"The government and partners are hopeful that latent cases that are now not being reported or recorded will come out."



Clockwise from left, A woman holds a placard reading in French "Tunisia will remain standing" during a rally organised a few hours after an attack on the National Bardo Museum in Tunis on Wednesday; a relative reacts after visiting the crime scene; and police evacuate tourists during the siege.



PHOTO: AFP

# Obama slams Netanyahu's 'deeply divisive rhetoric'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Barack Obama has criticised the "divisive rhetoric" used by Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu in the closing stages of the country's parliamentary election, shortly before the swept to victory ahead of the Zionist Union party.

Netanyahu's Likud party returned 30 seats in the Knesset to the Zionist Union's 24 - and is now likely to form the next coalition government with partners on the right and the centre.

But on the eve of the polls, the Likud leader made controversial remarks about the high turnout among Israeli Arab voters, warning that they were being bussed to the polls "in droves".

Obama, who has not yet called Netanyahu to congratulate him following his success, according to The Guardian, condemned the incendiary remarks - saying that they sought to "marginalise Arab Israeli citizens".

The US president's response came after the Israeli PM appeared in a video posted to his Facebook page where he urged his supporters to go out and vote, saying: "The right-wing government is in danger. Arab voters are heading to the polling stations

in droves. Left-wing NGOs are bringing them in buses."

He also ruled out the creation of an independent Palestinian state and vowed to strengthen construction of settlements in occupied east Jerusalem.

In response, the White House said that it was now preparing to 're-evaluate' its policy on the Middle East process.

A statement issued by the president's press secretary, Josh Earnest, reiterated his hopes for a two-state solution in the Middle East.

"The United States and this administration is deeply concerned about rhetoric that seeks to marginalise Arab Israeli citizens," Earnest said.

"It undermines the values and democratic ideals that have been important to our democracy and an important part of what binds the United States and Israel together."

It comes as the US excluded Iran and Lebanese militant group Hezbollah from its terror threat list in an annual security assessment.

It was published by The Times of Israel, which said it had described Tehran's assistance in preventing ISIS from gaining "large swaths of additional territory" in Iraq.



# CHEMICAL WEAPONS US destroying its largest cache

AP, Denver

The US Army has begun destroying the nation's largest remaining stockpile of chemical weapons, using explosives to rip open a container of mustard agent inside a sealed chamber and then flooding it with another chemical to neutralise it.

It was the first few pounds of 2,600 tons of mustard agent that will be destroyed at Pueblo Chemical Depot in southern Colorado, most of it contained in about 780,000 shells. Mustard agent can maim or kill by damaging skin, the eyes and airways. It's being destroyed under a 1997 international treaty banning all chemical weapons. It will take four years to destroy the Pueblo stockpile.

Another 523 tons of mustard and deadly nerve agents are stored at Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky. Blue Grass isn't expected to start destroying its weapons until 2016 or 2017, finishing in 2023.

The destruction process is safe, officials said. Most of Pueblo's stockpile will be dismantled and neutralised in a highly automated USD 4.5 billion plant built at the depot.

About 1,400 damaged shells and a dozen metal bottles of mustard agent are considered unsuitable for that plant. They'll be opened with explosives and neutralised in the sealed chamber, which sits inside an airtight structure near the larger automated plant. The metal bottles contain mustard that was extracted from the shells for testing.

Mustard agent is a thick liquid, not a gas as commonly believed. It has no colour and almost no odour, but it got its name because impurities made early versions smell like mustard.

# ISIS claims attack on Tunis museum

AFP, Tunis

The Islamic State jihadist group yesterday claimed responsibility for an attack on foreign tourists at Tunisia's national museum that killed 21 people, as the security forces swooped on suspects.

The authorities said they had identified the two dead gunmen behind Wednesday's assault, which prompted calls for a show of national unity against extremism in the birthplace of the Arab Spring.

In an audio message posted online, ISIS said that "two knights from the Islamic State... heavily armed with automatic weapons and grenades, targeted the Bardo Museum."

It threatened more attacks, saying: "What you have seen is only the start."

Trade unions and other civil society groups called for a silent demonstration outside the Tunis museum where the attack killed 20 foreigners and at least one Tunisian.

"The security forces were able to arrest four people directly linked to the (terrorist) operation and five suspected of having ties to the cell," the president's office said in a statement.

Authorities say as many as 3,000 Tunisians have gone to Iraq, Syria and Libya to fight in jihadist ranks, including with ISIS, raising fears of battle-hardened mili-

tants returning home to plot attacks.

The presidency said soldiers would be deployed to beef up security in major cities following the museum assault.

But "we are not under siege", a presidential source said.

As international outrage grew over the worst post-revolution attack in the cradle of the Arab Spring, President Beji Caid Essebsi vowed to fight extremists "without mercy to our last breath".

The leader of the Islamist opposition party Ennahda, Rached Ghannouchi, said he was convinced that "the Tunisian people will stay united in the face of barbarity".

The media also called for solidarity, with newspaper La Presse appealing for "total unity and a sense of responsibility shared by all".

Panic had broken out as gunmen in military uniforms opened fire at visitors as they got off a bus and then chased them inside the museum.

The dead included three Japanese, two Spaniards, a Colombian, an Australian, a British woman, a Belgian woman, two French, a Pole and an Italian, Health Minister Said Aidi said.

He said a policeman was also killed but did not mention a second Tunisian victim initially reported by the authorities. Dozens more people were wounded in the assault.

# ODDLY enough

## Con artists 'sold' US embassy, FAO HQ in Rome

PTI, London

Four con artists have gone on trial for allegedly duping a German businessman of 1.3 million by pretending to sell him key buildings in Rome, including the US embassy and the UN food agency headquarters.

Wolfgang Kroll, 57, appeared in a court along with three accomplices last week, according to Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera. The group is accused of tricking the businessman to shelling out 1.3 million in a series of fake deals to buy key buildings in Rome.

Kroll, also German, and his accomplice Donato Perazzolo were able to convince their victim to send 400,000 to buy the Porta di Roma shopping centre.

The duo then took the help of Walter Baccini, who impersonated a government official, and Anna Lisa Morganti to "sell" the US embassy building for 580,000, and the headquarters of FAO for 600,000. The businessman transferred a further 900,000 to the group.



A young boy sells fresh peanuts in a village near the Vanuatu capital of Port Vila yesterday after Cyclone Pam ripped through the island nation.

PHOTO: AFP

# Vanuatu says food running out

ARFP, Port Vila

Vanuatu has hit out at aid groups swarming the cyclone-ravaged Pacific nation over a lack of coordination, which it said cost precious time getting help to those in need, while warning food will run out in a week.

Relief agencies have been battling logistical challenges in the sprawling archipelago with a lack of landing strips and deep water ports hampering their efforts to reach distant islands and get a better grip on the full scale of the disaster.

They continue to paint a bleak picture, detailing large-scale property and crop destruction, and an urgent need for clean water, medical supplies, tents, bedding and hygiene kits.

Aid finally reached the badly hit island of Tanna on Wednesday, five days after Severe Cyclone Pam roared ashore on Friday night, but many of

the 80 islands that make up Vanuatu remain without help.

National disaster committee deputy chair Benjamin Shing said while the country appreciated the aid, the initial response could have been handled better with many groups and NGOs working on their own rather than in cooperation with the government.

"I do apologise but I have to state the facts. We have seen this time and time again," he said at a briefing late Wednesday in the capital Port Vila.

"In nearly every country in the world where they go in they have their own operational systems, they have their own networks and they refuse to conform to government directives."

"We had to spend the first three days trying to get some form of coordination in place. That was much precious time that could have been spent doing the assessments instead."

Colin Collett van Rooyen denied any disorganisation.

"Our position is that we will continue to work with the government, as we have been, and as we always do, to address the best interests of those in need," he told AFP.

In a situation update, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) noted: "Coordination with the ministry of health regarding flights to provinces is critical."

There is also confusion over the death toll. Early reports from OCHA on Friday evening announced an unconfirmed 44 dead, which then dropped to 24 confirmed, only to be revised down again to 11.

The Vanuatu government said in fact only seven people were confirmed dead and that the four others were patients already in hospitals whose deaths were not directly related to the storm.

# Pakistan halts teenager's execution after outcry

BBC ONLINE

A Pakistani man convicted of manslaughter as a minor and due to be hanged yesterday has been granted a stay of execution, a charity fighting his case says.

Shafqat Hussain's lawyers say he was 14 when found guilty of killing a child in 2004 and a confession was extracted by torture.

The authorities said they had no proof he was underage when convicted.

There is no official word from the government on the stay of execution.

Maya Foa, the director of the death penalty team with the charity Reprieve, said the news was "hugely welcome".

She added: "It is, however, a shame that it took an outcry and the weight of civil society to push the [Interior] Minister into doing the right thing".

Earlier, Shafqat Hussain's mother made a plea for "a new life for her son" at a press conference.

Makhani Begum, said her son was innocent.

"For God's sake don't deprive me of Shafqat, he is my last child," she told the



Shafqat's mother and sister celebrate after receiving the news.

news conference.

Reprieve says the latest stay of execution was in order for officials to investigate whether Shafqat Hussain was underage when he was convicted.

Pakistan lifted its moratorium on the death penalty in all capital cases earlier this month, after restarting executions for terrorism offences in the wake of the Taliban school massacre in Peshawar last December.

Human rights groups say Pakistan has the world's largest number of death row inmates, with more than 8,000 people awaiting execution.

# Two killed in Sweden pub shooting

AFP, Stockholm

Two men were killed and more than 10 were wounded after gunmen burst into a pub firing automatic weapons in a suspected gang-related attack in the Swedish city of Gothenburg late Wednesday.

Customers in the bar were watching football on television when at least two gunmen, reportedly wearing skeleton masks and yellow high visibility vests, launched their shooting spree.

"We are assuming that this is gang-related and not a terrorist attack," police spokesman Bjoer Blaxter told AFP.

Congratulations!

## Bangladesh International Tutorial

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