



BANGKOK SHRINE BLAST 'Turkey national' charged Police say suspect 'unlikely' int'l terrorist

Thai police yesterday charged a foreign man over last week's deadly Bangkok bombing, the first arrest connected to an attack that has rattled the junta-run kingdom and damaged its tourist-haven reputation.



These photos show supporters of pro-democracy group "Bersih" (Clean) gather as they prepare to march to Dataran Merdeka in Malaysia's capital city of Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Tens of thousands joined a peaceful protest in Kuala Lumpur yesterday to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Najib Razak...



Former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad (pictured in bottom right) attended the rally.

Jazeera journos get 3 years jail in Egypt

TV station says verdict a 'attack on press freedom'

An Egyptian court sentenced three Al-Jazeera reporters to three years in prison yesterday, in a shock ruling following global demands for their acquittal.

Canadian Mohamed Fahmy and Egyptian producer Baher Mohamed were in court for the verdict. Australian journalist Peter Greste was tried in absentia after his deportation early this year.

Several co-defendants, accused of working with Al-Jazeera, received similar sentences. Qatar-based Al-Jazeera denounced the verdict against the trio, who were accused of broadcasting false news, as a "deliberate attack on press freedom".

Their retrial was ordered after an appeals court overturned an initial sentence of seven years in prison, saying the prosecution had presented scant evidence against them.

Fahmy's lawyer, London-based Amal Clooney, told reporters after the verdict she would press the Egyptian presidency for a pardon.

"It's a dangerous precedent in Egypt that journalists can be locked up simply for reporting the news and courts can be used as political tools," she said.

Greste described the jail terms as "devastating". The journalists were arrested in December 2013, months after the military overthrew Islamist president Mohamed Morsi and launched a deadly crackdown on his supporters.

At the time, Qatar, which owns Al-Jazeera, was supportive of Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood movement. Judge Hassan Farid said yesterday that it was clear to the court that the reporters "were not journalists" and had broadcast "false news".

Turkey launches Syria raids with US-led coalition

AFP, Ankara

Turkish warplanes have for the first time joined raids by the US-led coalition against Islamic State positions in Syria, the foreign ministry said Saturday, after Washington urged Ankara to play a full role in the battle against the jihadists.

"Our fighter planes ... along with planes from the coalition yesterday (Friday) evening began joint operations against (ISIS) targets which pose a threat to the security of our country," the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement.

Turkey, which had been accused of complacency towards the ISIS fighters in neighbouring Syria, last month launched what it called a war on terror on two fronts: targeting ISIS jihadists in Syria and also Kurdish PKK rebels and their bases in northern Iraq.

US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter last week called on Turkey to commit to a full part in the US-led air campaign and take better control of its border with Syria.

Carter said Ankara had agreed in principle to join the anti-ISIS coalition but should add its own fighter planes to the "air tasking order," the military structure coordinating strikes.



Al Jazeera television journalists Mohamed Fahmy, C, and Baher Mohamed, L, talk to the media with lawyer Amal Clooney (R) in Cairo, Egypt, yesterday.

that sound the death knell for freedom of expression in Egypt," Amnesty International said in a statement.

Washington and the United Nations had called for the journalists' release, and their trial was seen as damaging to the country's international standing.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists said at least 18 reporters are imprisoned in Egypt.

MIGRANT EXODUS TO EUROPE

Austria migrant tragedy suspects remanded

AFP, Kecskemet

Four suspects in Austria's migrant truck tragedy were remanded in custody for another month in Hungary yesterday, as a "horrified and heartbroken" UN chief called for concerted action to end Europe's refugee crisis.

Police believe the three Bulgarians and one Afghan held over the 71 deaths to be low-ranking members of one of the numerous human trafficking gangs that many of the tens of thousands of migrants coming to Europe pay for help.

The abandoned truck, found Thursday on an Austrian motorway in the baking sun near the Hungary border, contained the tightly packed, decomposing bodies of 59 men, eight women and four children.

Sparking revulsion across Europe, the tragic discovery highlighted the dangers faced by people fleeing conflict and hardship in the Middle East and Africa even once they reach Europe, with many putting their fate in the hands of profit-hungry people smugglers.

The United Nations estimates 300,000 people have fled conflict and hardship in the Middle East and Africa for a better life in Europe this year, and 2,500 more have died in the attempt, mostly in the Mediterranean.

In Hungary, the four men remanded in custody until September 29 include the truck's owner and drivers who allegedly picked up the migrants near the Hungarian town of Kecskemet, some 100 kilometres (60 miles) north of the Serbian border, last week.

The four suspects -- the Bulgarians are 29, 30, 50 and the Afghan 28 -- yesterday declared their innocence and said they would appeal the court decision. Only one had legal residence in Hungary.



EU parliament chief attacks 'cynical' states

REUTERS, Berlin

The "glaring failures" of some European countries to take in refugees are turning the Mediterranean into a mass grave and creating gruesome scenes at borders, the head of the European Parliament has said.

Martin Schulz, a German Social Democrat, said those European governments that have resisted European Union proposals to agree a common plan must do more to deal with the crisis, which is intensifying due to a surge in migrants fleeing war and poverty.

The International Organisation for Migration estimates a third of a million people have crossed the Mediterranean so far this year to wash up in southern Europe.

"We are not dealing with a failure of the EU, but rather with a glaring failure of some governments, who don't want to take responsibility and thereby impede a joint European solution," Schulz told Germany's Die Welt newspaper.

NEWS IN brief

Tropical Storm Erika kills 20 in Dominica

Erika broke up as it raked Cuba Saturday, bringing the drought-parched island heavy rains after the tropical storm left at least 20 dead in the tiny island nation of Dominica the day before. The storm dumped heavy rains on the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Floods and mudslides unleashed by the storm left scenes of devastation in the island of about 72,000 people.

US names first envoy for hostages

The United States named a senior envoy Friday to work for the safe return of hostages after criticism of its response to the kidnap and murder of Americans held in Syria. President Barack Obama ordered a review of US policy in hostage cases that led to new protocols for coordinating the national response and helping victims' families.

Turkey PM forms polls- time govt

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday approved the makeup of the provisional government that will run the country until November 1 elections, including for the first time pro-Kurdish MPs. The two pro-Kurdish lawmakers are from the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), marking the first time a Kurdish party has been represented in the government.

Air strikes kill 14 Pak militants

At least 14 militants were killed yesterday in air strikes in northwest Pakistan near the Afghan border, the military said. The strikes targeted militant hideouts in the Shalwal area of the lawless North Waziristan tribal region, where the army has been waging an offensive against the Taliban since June last year.



These undated photos show several Palestinian women and children fighting to stop an Israeli soldier from detaining a young boy. The boy, whose arm is in a sling, is seen being pinned to the ground beneath an Israeli Defence Force (IDF) soldier's legs while two Palestinian women and children try to rescue him. Eventually, another IDF soldier comes to break up the melee. The boy was not detained.

Lebanese hold 'You Stink' rally against politicians

AFP, Beirut

Tens of thousands of protesters from across Lebanon flocked to a mass rally yesterday in downtown Beirut against a political class accused of corruption and failing to provide basic services.

Waving Lebanese flags, men, women and children gathered at the iconic Martyrs Square. "Today, we're expecting more than 50,000 protesters," said Assaad Thebian of the "You Stink" organising campaign, which has stressed the non-partisan nature of the show of contempt for Lebanon's leaders.

The crowd carried banners bearing blunt messages. "Ali Baba and the 128 thieves," read one, referring to parliament speaker Nabih Berri and the 128-member house.

The "You Stink" campaign began in response to a trash crisis that started with the closure of Lebanon's largest landfill in mid-July, resulting in garbage piling up on the streets of Beirut and beyond. Since then there have been small protests which have broadened to include demands for a political overhaul of government institutions seen as corrupt and ineffective by many Lebanese.



Brooks to return as News Corp UK CEO: report

AFP, London

British former tabloid news editor Rebekah Brooks is to return to Rupert Murdoch's News Corp as chief executive of its UK division, the Financial Times reported on Friday.

Brooks, who formerly edited The Sun and The News of the World, resigned as chief executive in 2011 at the height of a scandal over the hacking of phone voice mails by journalists.

She was arrested on suspicion of being involved, but was cleared of all charges last year. Speculation has grown in recent months that Brooks, 47, might return to the Murdoch empire.

Brooks was initially reluctant but was persuaded to take the chief executive job by the Australian-born business magnate, with whom she has a close relationship, the Financial Times reported citing people familiar with the matter.

The idea was criticised by campaign group Hacked Off, which represents victims of phone hacking. "This is a major misjudgment of the public's mood by a company still ethically out of control," said joint executive director Evan Harris.

No asteroid apocalypse in September, assures Nasa

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Conspiracy theorists and others keep saying that we are going to be killed by an asteroid, and Nasa has been forced to point out that it is very, very unlikely that it's going to happen. This week, news reports of "prophet" Efrain Rodriguez's claim that an asteroid is about to hit Puerto Rico and destroy the Earth resurface, ahead of the expected apocalypse sometime between September 15 and 28. But Nasa has already denied that anything is headed for us any time in September.

"If there were any object large enough to do that type of destruction in September, we would have seen something of it by now," said Paul Chodas — manager of Nasa's Near-Earth Object Office, which is charged with spotting such asteroids — said in a statement.

The office has spotted no asteroids or comets that could cause such damage coming for us, it said. And there is a less than 0.01 per cent chance of any "Potentially Hazardous Asteroids" hitting us in the next 100 years. Nasa had already responded to the rumours last week, making clear that there was "not one shred of evidence" that the asteroid was coming. But news outlets and conspiracy theorists have continued to publish the speculation, with a new set of sites publishing stories on our imminent destruction in recent days.

A rare happy story from Syria crisis

CNN ONLINE

It was almost another tragedy. But with a boost from social media, an anonymous pen seller with #BuyPens, after a two-day search and lots of help, Simonarson located Abdul.

The social media campaign immediately made good on its promise to help Abdul, who fled from his home in Yarmouk, one of the most beleaguered places in Syria. In 24 hours, nearly 3,000 people had raised more than \$80,000.

It was rare to see a success story growing out of the civil war in Syria that has left at least 250,000 people dead and much of the country decimated.

"When he (Abdul) heard the amount, he just broke down and started crying," Simonarson says. "He was so thankful and he kept saying thank you for all your generosity." Abdul says he can finally send his two children to school with the money. The 35-year-old, who once worked at a chocolate factory before war broke out in his native Syria, also says he wants to help other refugees with the donated money.

