

TERROR ATTACKS

Germany plans major security overhaul

AFP, Berlin

Germany's interior minister yesterday outlined plans for a security services overhaul, seeking greater federal powers on domestic intelligence and quicker expulsions of illegal migrants following the Berlin truck attack.

Thomas de Maiziere also called for giving federal police wider oversight across the country's 16 states, and for a new national crisis management centre to be set up.

Policing and domestic intelligence services in Germany are currently decentralised and controlled by the country's 16 states.

The plans for a sweeping reform come after a series of embarrassing security failures, with the December 19 attack training a spotlight on the gaps.

After Tunisian suspect Anis Amri allegedly rammed a truck into a crowded Christmas market, killing 12, it swiftly emerged that the asylum seeker had slipped through the net of security services.

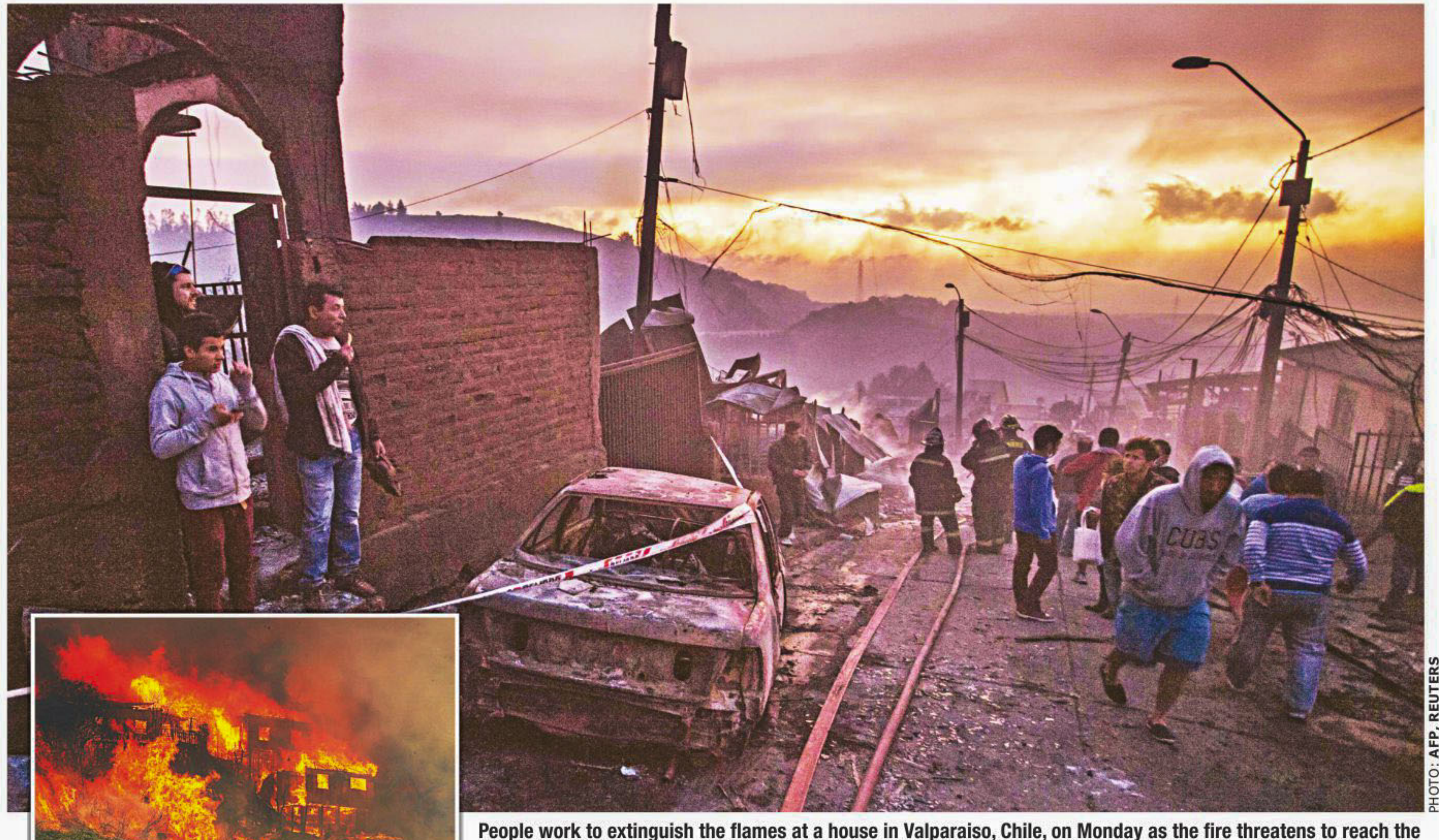
Amri, 24, who was days later shot dead by Italian police, had been under surveillance since March, but German police dropped their watch in September thinking he was a small-time drug dealer.

The failed asylum seeker should also have been deported months ago but Tunisia did not provide the necessary paperwork until after the attack.

De Maiziere also said federal detention centres should be set up to hold rejected asylum seekers and illegal immigrants in the period leading up to their expulsion.

In order to close security gaps, federal police must be given wider powers, the minister said.

The federal government should also take charge of domestic intelligence services, he said, noting that trouble-makers do not seek to disrupt only one state but the country as a whole.



People work to extinguish the flames at a house in Valparaiso, Chile, on Monday as the fire threatens to reach the city's port. Inset, Fire burns a house on a hill in the area, where more than 100 homes were burned due to forest fire but there have been no reports of death, local authorities have declared a red alert in the area.



Netanyahu grilled over graft charges

AFP, Jerusalem

Police grilled Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for three hours on Monday evening as part of a graft probe that has shaken the country's politics.

Investigators quizzed Netanyahu at his residence in central Jerusalem under caution "on suspicion of receiving benefits", a police spokesman said afterwards, adding there were no further details to give.

Ahead of the questioning, Netanyahu denied any wrongdoing and told his political opponents to put any "celebrations" on hold.

Police had been expected to question Netanyahu over whether he illegally accepted gifts from wealthy supporters.

The long-running graft inquiry has looked into whether Israeli and foreign businessmen have offered gifts worth tens of thousands of dollars as well as another unspecified issue, according to media reports.

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit has reportedly decided to upgrade the inquiry to a criminal probe, although he has yet to confirm this. Police have carried out the probe in secret over some eight months and recently made an important breakthrough, reports said. About 50 witnesses are said to have been questioned.

Netanyahu has also come under scrutiny over an alleged conflict of interest in the purchase of submarines from a German firm.

Media reports have alleged a conflict of interest over the role played by the Netanyahu family lawyer, David Shimron, who also acts for the Israeli agent of Germany's ThyssenKrupp.

Beyond those issues, Israel's state comptroller released a critical report in May about Netanyahu's foreign trips, some with his wife and children, between 2003 and 2005.

Suspect 'fought for IS'

Manhunt intensifies; 16 arrested so far including foreigners

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish authorities yesterday intensified efforts to identify and detain a suspected jihadist who killed 39 people at an Istanbul nightclub, and who reportedly fought in Syria alongside Islamic State jihadists.

Police released pictures of the suspect who went on the rampage at the plush Reina nightclub on New Year's night, spraying some 120 bullets at terrified guests before slipping away into the night.

So far, 16 people are being held over the attack, including two foreigners detained by Turkish police at Istanbul's main airport. But the killer remains on the run.

Of the 39 dead, 27 were foreigners, mainly from Arab countries, with coffins repatriated overnight to countries including Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.

The Islamic State (IS) group on Monday claimed the massacre, the first time it has clearly stated being behind a major attack in Turkey.

The suspect -- who has not been named but was reportedly from Central Asia -- was staying in a rented flat in Konya before moving to Istanbul to carry out the attack, press reports said.

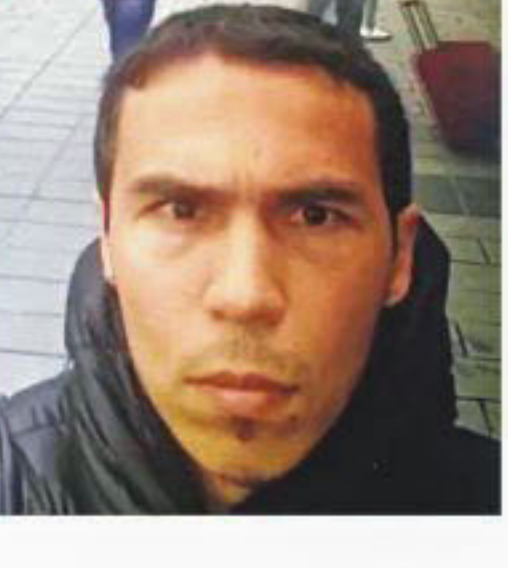
The Dogan news agency said those detained included a woman suspected of being his wife with whom he had

stayed in Konya along with two children.

Reports said police have made progress in the investigation after speaking to the taxi driver who drove the attacker to the club and tracing calls he had made on the driver's mobile phone.

The Hurriyet daily said the attacker showed signs of being well trained in the use of arms and had fought in Syria for IS jihadists.

TURKEY MASSACRE



Hurriyet's well-connected columnist Abdulkadir Selvi he had been trained in street fighting in residential areas in Syria and used these techniques in the attack, shooting from the hip rather than as a sniper.

The attacker had been "specially selected" to carry out the shooting, he said. According to Hurriyet, just 28 bullets failed to hit a target.

He said an IS strike was also planned in Ankara on New Year's eve but that it had been prevented after eight IS suspects were arrested in the capital. There were no further details.

Police meanwhile released the first clear images of the attacker, including one taken by security cameras on the night of the attack.

The shooting took place just 75 minutes into 2017 after a bloody year in Turkey in which hundreds of people were killed in violence blamed on both IS jihadists and Kurdish militants.

CIVILIAN DEATH TOLL IN IRAQ WAR 6,878 killed in 2016, says UN

AP, Baghdad

Violence claimed the lives of at least 6,878 civilian Iraqis last year, the United Nations said on Monday, as the Iraqi government struggles to maintain security nationwide and to dislodge Islamic State group militants from areas under their control.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, known as UNAMI, said its numbers "have to be considered as the absolute minimum" as it has not been able to verify casualties among civilians in conflict areas, and of those who lost their lives due to "secondary effects of violence... due to exposure to the elements, lack of water, food, medicines and health care."

UNAMI said in a statement that 12,388 other civilians were wounded in 2016. It added that last year figures didn't include casualties among civilians in Iraq's western Anbar province for the months of May, July, August and December.

According to UNAMI figures, at least 7,515 civilians were killed in 2015.

The monthly UN casualty report for December 2016 showed that a total of 386 civilians were killed and another 1,066 were wounded. The worst affected area was the northern province of Ninevah, where government forces are fighting to retake the IS-held city of Mosul, with 208 civilians killed and 511 injured. The capital, Baghdad, came next with 109 civilians killed and 523 injured.

'It won't happen!'

Trump says N Korea's ICBM will never reach US, attacks China

AFP, Washington

President-elect Donald Trump took to Twitter again on Monday evening to promise North Korea would not develop a nuclear missile capable of reaching US territory.

His comments come a day after the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-Un, appeared to try to put pressure on Trump by announcing his country is in the "final stages" of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

"North Korea just stated that it is in the final stages of developing a nuclear weapon capable of reaching parts of the US," Trump tweeted. "It won't happen!"

Although Washington has repeatedly vowed that it would never accept North Korea as a nuclear state, Trump has not previously clearly stated his policy on the isolated Stalinist state.

The Republican billionaire has

already upended precedent by routinely taking to Twitter since his election last month to lambast critics and issue statements -- sometimes about the most serious national security issues.

He launched a solo bid to restart the Cold War arms race last month, tweeting



that the United States must "greatly strengthen and expand" its nuclear capabilities.

He has also angered China by tweeting accusations of military expansionism and currency manipulation.

But he will need Beijing,

Pyongyang's closest ally, to deal with North Korea's mounting confrontation.

However, he appeared to complicate that prospect with his latest criticism on Monday evening following his vow about North Korea.

"China has been taking out massive amounts of money & wealth from the US in totally one-sided trade, but won't help with North Korea," he tweeted. "Nice!"

In a 30-minute televised New Year's speech on Sunday, Kim said Pyongyang had "soared as a nuclear power," adding that it is now a "military power of the East that cannot be touched by even the strongest enemy."

Although he did not make a specific reference to the incoming Trump administration, he called on Washington to make a "resolute decision to withdraw its anachronistic hostile North Korea policy."



People waded through a flooded street in Malaysia's northeastern town of Rantau Panjang, which borders Thailand, yesterday. Emergency services in Malaysia yesterday deployed boats and trucks, as thousands of villagers were stranded after four days of heavy rain caused flooding in east coast states, officials said.

'Western dress' to blame for sex attacks: Indian minister

AFP, Bangalore

An Indian minister faced a severe backlash yesterday after he criticised women for dressing "like westerners" at a New Year's eve celebration where a mob allegedly carried out a series of sex assaults.

Although police have yet to charge anyone in connection with the violence on Saturday night in Bangalore, local media have carried testimony and photos of victims cowering from their attackers or fleeing for safety.

Police say they are now trawling through CCTV footage to see if they can identify any of the attackers.

But a minister with responsibility for policing in the southern state of Karnataka, whose largest city is Bangalore, said the "unfortunate" attacks were a consequence of women

wearing western clothing. "A large number of youngsters gathered -- youngsters who are almost like westerners," Karnataka's Home Minister G Parameshwara told The Times Now television network, speaking in English.

"They try to copy westerners not only in mindset, but even the dressing, so some disturbance, some girls are harassed, these kind of things do happen."

Parameshwara, who later claimed to have been misquoted, was widely condemned for his televised comments, with the central government's junior home minister Kiren Rijju describing them as "irresponsible".

Lalitha Kumaramangalam, who heads India's National Commission for Women, said Parameshwara should resign over his comments.



FOREIGN WORKERS' UNREST OVER UNPAID WAGE Dozens get flogging, jail in Saudi Arabia

AFP, Riyadh

Dozens of foreign workers have been sentenced to flogging and jail for unrest during protests over unpaid wages by Saudi Binladin Group several months ago, reports said yesterday.

Al-Watan newspaper and Arab News did not give the nationalities of the 49 workers, and foreign embassy staff contacted by AFP could not immediately provide details.

Al-Watan, which has followed the Binladin case since early last year, said an unidentified number were sentenced to four months' jail and 300 lashes for destroying public property and inciting unrest.

Others were jailed for 45 days by the court in Makkah. Construction sector workers, chiefly at the Binladin Group and another firm Saudi Oger, were left waiting for salaries after a collapse in oil revenues left the kingdom unable to pay private firms it had contracted.

Arab News reported in May that "unpaid workers" had torched several Binladin Group buses in Makkah. The company, which developed landmark buildings in Saudi Arabia, was founded more than 80 years ago by the father of deceased al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Binladin Group late last year said it had completed payment to 70,000 laid-off employees.

Mamata furious as CBI arrests TMC leader

AGENCIES

The CBI yesterday arrested Trinamool Congress MP Sudip Bandyopadhyay in connection with the Rose Valley chit fund scam evoking strong reactions from Mamata Banerjee, who alleged political vendetta.

Sudip Bandyopadhyay was arrested after being quizzed by the CBI at its office in Kolkata.

Another Trinamool MP Tapas Pal is already in police custody in connection with the scam. Bandyopadhyay alleged political vendetta against him and the Trinamool Congress party by the NDA-ruled Central government.

West Bengal chief minister and Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee reacted strongly to the news and attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Narendra Modi is using CBI, ED, IT to

scare those who raise voice against demonetisation," Mamata alleged and dared PM Modi to arrest her.

The TMC chief has called an emergency meeting on Sudip's arrest and said, Modi may arrest "all of us" but our protest will continue.

Mamata announced that Trinamool Congress will launch dharnas from today to protest against Sudip's arrest. Mamata said that she will take the legal battle forward and will seek justice from the court.

The CBI has already filed a chargesheet in the Rose Valley chit fund scam in January 2016 naming the CMD of the company Gautam Kundu as main accused. It has claimed that Rose Valley duped crores of investors in West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Jharkhand, Punjab, Delhi, Rajasthan, MP, Tripura and Andhra Pradesh of nearly Rs 17,000 crore, almost seven times higher than the Saradha scam.

CHIT FUND SCAM

