

MANCHESTER ATTACK

World leaders express shock

World leaders yesterday expressed at the suicide bombing in Manchester which killed at least 22 people, including children. Here are some of the reactions:

UNITED STATES



President Donald Trump condemned the "evil losers" behind the attack, saying: "I won't call them monsters because they would like that term. They would think that's a great name. So many young, beautiful, innocent people living and enjoying their lives murdered," he said.

GERMANY



German Chancellor Angela Merkel voiced "sorrow and horror", adding: "This suspected terrorist attack will only strengthen our resolve to work with our British friends against those who plan and execute such inhuman acts. I assure the people in Britain: Germany stands by your side."

RUSSIA



Russian President Vladimir Putin said he was ready to boost anti-terror cooperation with Britain after "this cynical, inhuman crime." "We expect that those behind it will not escape the punishment they deserve," he said.

CHINA



President Xi Jinping sent his condolences to Queen Elizabeth II, expressing "deep grief for the victims" and their families.

FRANCE



French President Emmanuel Macron voiced "horror and shock" and said he planned to speak to the British prime minister. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said it was an example of "the most cowardly terrorism" that was aimed "specifically and knowingly" at young people.

AUSTRALIA



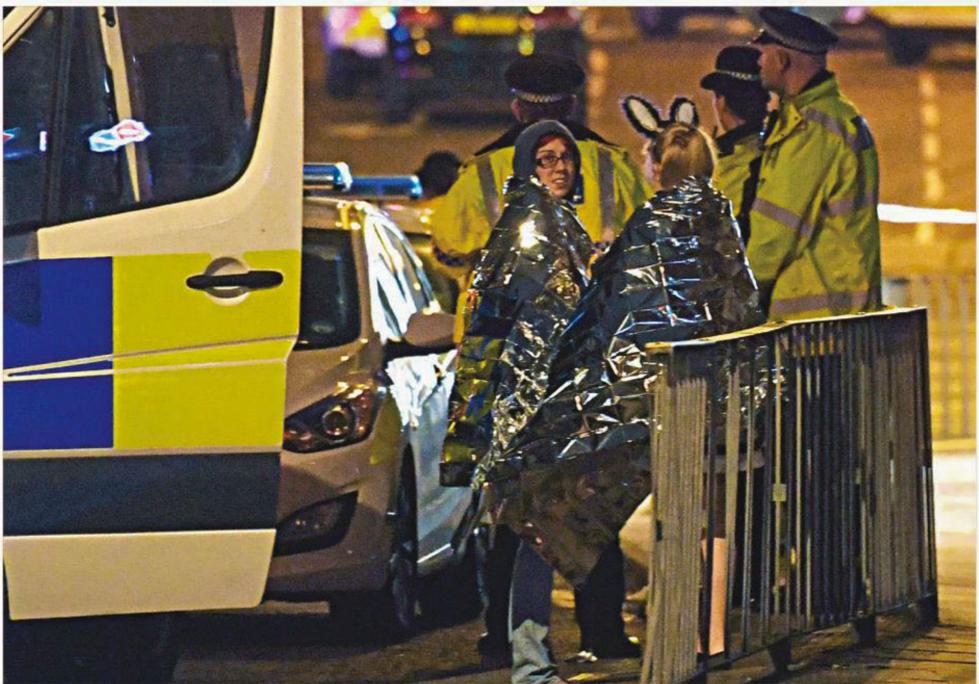
Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said the attack was "especially vile, especially criminal, especially horrific because it appears to have been deliberately directed at teenagers." He added: "This is an attack on innocents. Surely there is no crime more reprehensible than the murder of children. This is a direct and brutal attack on young people everywhere, on freedom everywhere."

ISRAEL



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his government "strongly condemns the terrible terror attack. 'Terror is a global threat and the enlightened countries must act together to defeat it in any place,' he said.

SOURCE: AFP



(Clockwise from left) Concert goers wait to be picked up at the scene of a suspected terrorist attack during a pop concert by US star Ariana Grande in Manchester, England on Monday night. Police forensic officers walk along a bridge linking Victoria station to the scene of the attack. Flowers as a tribute for victims of the suicide bombing are seen in front of the British embassy in Berlin.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

Attack prompts security rethinks worldwide

REUTERS, Tokyo/Singapore

Countries from the United States to Japan and Singapore are considering tightening security ahead of major theatre and sports events following a suicide bomb attack in Britain that killed at least 22 people.

Prime Minister Theresa May called an emergency meeting with intelligence chiefs on the deadliest militant assault in the country since four British Muslims killed 52 people in suicide bombings on London's transport system in July 2005.

The US Department of Homeland Security said it was closely monitoring Monday's attack, at the end of a concert by US singer Ariana Grande in Manchester, and that the US public may experience increased security at public events.

Sports events organisers were also looking into security. European soccer body UEFA said there was "no specific intelligence" to suggest that today's Europa League final in Stockholm between

Manchester United and Dutch side Ajax Amsterdam might be the target of any attack.

UEFA said that "a number of additional security measures were implemented" after a truck attack in central Stockholm last month.

Japan said it had started gathering information. "We have strengthened our position by establishing an information-gathering unit dedicated to international terrorism," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters.

In Singapore, the organiser of Britney Spears' concert in June said they were considering new measures.

"We are definitely looking at tightening security," Yogesh Mehta, project manager at IME Entertainment Group, said.

"All our events are licensed by the police. It is normally advised by the licensing department on what precautions to take, how many armed guards we need. So we work closely with them."

Taxi drivers offer free ride home

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Taxi drivers turned off their metres to offer free rides home to those caught up in a terror attack in Manchester, which claimed the lives of 22 people and left at least 59 people injured.

As Ariana Grande concert goers fled the area around Manchester Arena where the explosion went off, many were left stranded after transport networks were shut down to allow security services to investigate the incident.

But drivers from the city's many taxi and minicab firms stepped in to help.

A driver at Street Cars Manchester confirmed the firm were offering free rides home to people after the incident.

Woman leads 50 teenagers to safety

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Around 50 children separated from their parents and guardians in the chaos of the Manchester Arena attack were taken to safety by a concerned member of the public.

Paula Robinson, 48, said she was at Victoria train station next to the arena with her husband when she felt the explosion and saw dozens of teenage girls screaming and running away from the building.

At least 22 people, including minors, were killed and 59 injured when a lone male suicide bomber detonated an improvised explosive device as fans left a concert by US singer Ariana Grande, police have said.

Robinson, from West Dalton about 40 miles east of Manchester, said she "ran out" of the area seconds after the blast and "got the teens to run with me".

She took the teenagers to a nearby hotel and shared her phone number on social media telling worried parents to contact her.

"Parents were frantic running about trying to get to their children," she told Reuters. "There were lots and lots of children at Holiday Inn."

A spokesperson for Holiday Inn told The Independent two of its hotels in the direct vicinity of the area had worked with police to help people in the aftermath of the attack, but said Robinson had in fact taken the group of teenagers to a different hotel.

Concert organisers say they are considering new measures
US authorities monitoring closely



Smoke rises from a bomb attack in clashes between Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and Islamic State militants during a battle in Qairawan, west of Mosul, Iraq, yesterday. Iraqi military engineers installed a new floating bridge across the Tigris river, reconnecting the two halves of Mosul to facilitate troop deployments ahead of a final assault to dislodge IS.

N Korea 'flatly rejects' UN vow to tighten sanctions

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday "flatly rejected" a United Nations statement vowing to punish its latest banned missile test with tighter sanctions.

In a unanimous statement backed by Pyongyang's ally China, the UN Security Council on Monday strongly condemned Sunday's test-firing of the medium-range Pukguksong-2, instructing the UN sanctions committee to redouble efforts to implement a series of tough measures adopted last year.

A spokesman for Pyongyang's foreign ministry blamed what it called "the US and its followers" for the declaration, the official Korean Central News Agency reported, saying they were "obsessed by inveterate repugnancy and hostility".

"It is absolutely ridiculous to see them finding fault with the DPRK's every measure for self-defence," the spokesman added, using the acronym for the North's official name. "We flatly reject the press statement."

Pyeonggang habitually issues threats and says it needs nuclear weapons to defend itself against the risk of invasion.

It has carried out two atomic tests and dozens of missile launches since the beginning of last year in its quest to develop a missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to the continental United States.

The administration of US President Donald Trump has said military action was an option under consideration, sending fears of conflict spiralling.

More recently the United States has said it is willing to enter into talks with North Korea if it halts its nuclear and missile tests.

The US-drafted Security Council statement was agreed on the eve of an emergency meeting requested by the United States, Japan and South Korea to discuss a course of action on North Korea.

In it the Council agreed to "take further significant measures including sanctions" to force North Korea to change course and end its "highly destabilising behaviour".

North Korea is on a clear path to obtaining a nuclear-armed missile capable of striking the United States, Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lieutenant General Vincent Stewart told a Senate hearing yesterday.

TENSIONS IN KOREAN PENINSULA

NEWSIN brief

Palestinian stabs Israeli officer, is shot: police

AFP, Jerusalem

A Palestinian stabbed and lightly wounded a border policeman in the Israeli coastal city of Netanya yesterday before being shot and wounded, police said. The attack came as US President Donald Trump was on a visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories as part of his maiden foreign tour. Police identified the assailant as a man in his mid-forties from the nearby city of Tulkarem in the occupied West Bank.

Fresh Venezuela clashes after man set alight

AFP, Caracas

Doctors rallied in Venezuela Monday in the latest street protests against President Nicolas Maduro, as a young man lay in hospital after being set on fire by an angry crowd. Three people were killed, all of them by gunshot wounds, in violent riots in late president Hugo Chavez's home state of Barinas -- bringing the death toll to 51 as the unrest entered its eighth week, the public prosecution service said.

Five dead in Syria car bomb attacks

AFP, Damascus

Five people were killed yesterday in two car bomb attacks targeting minority neighbourhoods in Syria and claimed by the Islamic State jihadist group. Citing a security source, IS's propaganda agency Amaq said IS fighters were responsible for the blasts near the capital Damascus and in third city Homs. The first explosion killed four people and wounded 30 near the Al-Zahraa neighbourhood of Homs city, state news agency SANA said.

Ousted South Korean leader goes on trial

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's ousted president Park Geun-Hye, grim-faced and brought to court in handcuffs, went on trial yesterday over a sprawling corruption scandal that saw millions take to the streets and led to her downfall.

Only two months after leaving the presidential palace in disgrace, Park appeared at the Seoul Central District Court with a badge bearing her prisoner number pinned to her blue trouser suit, and no make-up.

She avoided meeting the glance of her longtime secret confidante and co-accused Choi Soon-Sil.

The trial, expected to last for months, is the final act in the drama that engulfed Park, the daughter of a dictator who went on to be elected president herself before being sacked by the country's top court.

Presiding judge Kim Se-Yun, who heads a three-man panel -- there is no jury -- asked her: "What is your occupation, the accused Park Geun-Hye?"

She responded: "I don't have any occupation."

Park, 65, is the third former South Korean leader to stand trial for corruption. She was impeached by parliament in December after mass demonstrations -- fuelled by economic and social frustrations -- demanding her removal over a scandal centred on Choi, her friend of 40 years, and implicating some of the country's top businessmen.



Myanmar army rejects UN claims of abuses

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar's army yesterday rejected allegations of human rights abuses during its crackdown on Rohingya Muslim last year, made by the United Nations in a report on the offensive that forced some 75,000 Rohingya to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh.

The crackdown, in response to attacks by Rohingya insurgents on border guard posts on Oct 9, poses the biggest challenge yet to Myanmar's leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who took power more than a year ago.

Myanmar's security forces committed mass killings and gang rapes of Rohingya in a campaign that "very likely" amounted to crimes against humanity and possibly ethnic cleansing, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said in a report published in February.

"Out of 18 accusations included in OHCHR's report, 12 were found to be incorrect, with the remaining six found to be false

and fabricated, based on lies and invented statements," the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper said in an article yesterday that summed up the internal military inquiry.

It said military investigators, among others, interviewed nearly 3,000 villagers from 29 villages and "wrote down" testimony from 408 villagers, 184 military officers and troops.

Three low-ranking soldiers were jailed for minor offences, such as stealing a motorbike or beating up villagers in one incident, it added.

Apart from the completed military inquiry, a national panel set up by Suu Kyi in December and chaired by vice president Myint Swe, a former head of military intelligence, is also looking into the allegations.

Besides the latter investigation, the ministry of home affairs, which is controlled by the army, is also carrying out an inquiry. Separately, the UN has ordered a fact-finding mission to examine allegations of human rights abuses.

ROHINGYA CRACKDOWN

India fires on Pak military posts: army

AFP, New Delhi

India announced yesterday it had fired mortars at Pakistani army posts across their disputed border in Kashmir, a rare public disclosure of such a pre-emptive assault against its neighbour.

Troops fired at military camps in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir which were being used to harbour militants, an Indian army spokesman said.

"As part of our counter-terror operations, punitive fire assaults across LoC (Line of Control, the de facto border) are being undertaken by the Indian army," Major-General Ashok Narula told a briefing in New Delhi.

"(A) recent action by our troops in Naushera sector has caused some damage to Pakistani army posts which are supporting infiltrations. This is part of our strategy to counter terrorism," he said, adding India would "proactively" resist militant incursions.

The army released footage of smouldering bunkers in ruins after being hit by mortar bombs. The date and place of the bombing was not disclosed.

Pakistan denied the allegations. "Indian claims of destroying Pakistani post along LOC in Naushera Sec and firing by Pak Army on civilians across LOC are false," Pakistan's military spokesman tweeted.

Indian Defence Minister Arun Jaitley posted on Twitter that the army was taking "preemptive and measured actions" to counter terrorism.

The hostile neighbours regularly exchange mortar fire across the Kashmiri border despite signing a ceasefire in 2003.