

GULF DIPLOMATIC CRISIS

Qatar isolation a big mistake: Erdogan

REUTERS, Ankara

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan denounced the isolation of Qatar by neighbouring states as a violation of Islamic values and tantamount to a "death penalty" against Doha in a crisis reverberating through the Middle East and beyond.

Erdogan's comments marked the strongest intervention yet by a powerful regional ally of Doha eight days after Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Egypt cut ties with Qatar and imposed stringent economic sanctions on it.

Qatar denies the allegations of supporting Islamist militants and Iran.

The measures against Qatar, a small oil and gas exporter with a population of 2.7 million people, have disrupted imports of food and other materials and caused some foreign banks to scale back business.

Qatar, which imported 80 percent of its food from bigger Gulf Arab neighbours before the diplomatic shutdown, has also been talking to Iran and Turkey to secure food and water.

"A very grave mistake is being made in Qatar, isolating a nation in all areas is inhumane and against Islamic values. It's as if a death penalty decision has been taken for Qatar," Erdogan told members of his ruling AK Party in Ankara.

"Qatar has showed the most decisive stance against terrorist organisation Islamic State alongside Turkey. Victimising Qatar through smear campaigns serves no purpose."

Turkey has maintained good relations with Qatar as well as several of its Gulf Arab neighbours. Turkey and Qatar have both provided support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and backed rebels fighting to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.



Smoke billows from a burning building in Marinaut village, as government troops continue their assault against IS militants, who has taken over large parts of the Marawi City, Philippines yesterday. Inset, a military K9 unit checks a vehicle along a street in the city.



PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

IS militants enslaving civilians

Says Philippines govt
AFP, Marawi

Islamist militants holding parts of a Philippine city are killing civilians who try to flee while using others as orderlies and cooks, authorities said yesterday after the gunmen boasted of executions.

There are up to 1,000 people still trapped in the parts of Marawi city that the militants control, the government said, three weeks after fighting erupted with gunmen going on a rampage and flying black flags of the Islamic State (IS) group.

The militants have defied a US-backed military onslaught which has seen relentless bombing of the residential areas of Marawi where they are holed up. Authorities say 400 gunmen are estimated to be still there and using civilians as slaves.

"Based on the revelations of the trapped civilians we have recovered (rescued), they are being used as orderlies to cook their food, to carry their munitions," local military spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Jo-ar Herrera told reporters.

At least 26 civilians, 58 police or soldiers and 202 militants have been killed, according to the government.

Five of the civilians were killed on Monday as they made a dash for safety when the militants discovered their hiding place, presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella told reporters in Manila.

"They were going to the river but the militants ran after them and indiscriminately fired at them, killing five and taking the remaining eight as hostages," Abella said.

IS also released a video on Monday via its Amaq propaganda news agency which it said showed jihadists shooting six Christians in Marawi according to the US-based SITE monitoring service.

A voiceover suggested further executions had taken place off-camera, SITE reported.

Food poisoning hits hundreds

Two civilians dead after iftar meal; US-backed Iraqi armed forces announce progress in fight against IS

AGENCIES

A mass food poisoning at a camp for displaced Iraqi civilians outside Mosul has left at least two dead and hundreds requiring urgent treatment, the UN and Iraqi officials said yesterday.

"There are 752 cases of food poisoning and two deaths, a woman and a child" at the Hasansham camp after a meal on Monday night, health ministry spokesman Seif al-Badr told AFP.

UN migration agency spokesman Joel Millman confirmed those details to reporters in Geneva, while adding that 312 people had been hospitalised.

The food they ate was part of the iftar meal, which breaks the dawn-to-dusk fast during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan.

The meal included rice, yogurt, chicken and soup and had been purchased from an area restaurant by a Qatar-based civil society group reportedly working to help displaced people in the region, said Millman of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Badr and UN officials said there would be further investigations.

The outbreak occurred at Hasansham, one of the many camps dotting the region around Mosul, where Iraqi forces are battling the Islamic State group.

More than 800,000 people have been forced to flee their homes since a

MOSUL DISPLACED CAMP



Displaced Iraqi people are treated in a field hospital at the Hasansham U2 camp in al-Khazer, east of Mosul.

PHOTO: REUTERS

massive operation against the jihadists in one of their last strongholds in Iraq was launched in October 2016.

Many of them live in overcrowded camps, where soaring summer temperatures are compounding the difficul-

ties faced by the government and the United Nations in maintaining acceptable living conditions.

UN refugee agency spokesman Andrej Mahecic said staff in the area had worked through the night in response to the "massive" poisoning.

"More water has been now provided at the camp and additional health agencies have been brought in to help with the response," Mahecic told the same news conference in Geneva.

Meanwhile, Iraqi forces yesterday reported progress in the US-backed campaign to dislodge Islamic State from Mosul, announcing the capture of a district just north the city's historic centre.

With the loss of the Zanjili neighborhood, the enclave still held by Islamic State in the northern Iraqi city has shrunk to two districts along the western banks of the Tigris river - the densely populated Old City centre and the Medical City, reported Reuters.

Iraqi government forces retook eastern Mosul in January and began a new push on May 27 to capture the remaining enclave, where up to 200,000 people are trapped.

'I got us into this mess'

UK PM admits her election gamble backfired, tries to clinch power deal with DUP party

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May took the blame for the ruling Conservatives' disastrous performance at last week's elections, as she faced her party's angry MPs on Monday, seeking to ward off any challenge to her leadership.

"I got us into this mess, and I'm going to get us out," May told Conservatives MPs during the meeting in Westminster.

May's Conservatives unexpectedly lost their majority in parliament in Thursday's snap general election, causing political chaos ahead of Brexit talks with the European Union set to start next week and prompting calls -- from within her own party -- for her resignation.

But one MP present at the meeting said there was no discussion of a leadership contest, adding "she's won, she's got to be prime minister".

The chaos has also weighed on the pound, which has plunged almost two percent since Thursday, and the government may have to delay the announcement of its policy plans to parliament.

Meanwhile, May began talks yesterday to form an alliance with Northern Ireland's ultra-conservative DUP party in order to cling to power after her election fiasco, leaving the EU's Brexit negotiator wondering when divorce talks will begin.

The premier welcomed the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party to Downing Street in a bid to gain the support of its 10 MPs.

May hopes with the backing of the DUP her Conservatives will again command the majority they lost in last week's election.

The arrival of the DUP's Arlene Foster followed a cabinet meeting, during which ministers went over plans "to deliver the best possible Brexit deal" according to a government spokeswoman.

Also on the cabinet's agenda were the talks to secure an alliance where the DUP back the Conservatives on a vote-by-vote basis in parliament, rather than a formal coalition government.

Before travelling to London, Foster on Monday said her party would go into the talks "with the national interest at heart".



TRAVEL BAN

Trump takes a swipe at US federal court

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday criticised a federal appeals court one day after it handed him another legal setback by refusing to revive his US travel ban on people from six Muslim-majority nations, and appeared poised for the nation's top court to weigh in.

On Monday, the San Francisco-based 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals became the second federal appeals court to reject the Republican Trump administration's bid to undo a Hawaii federal judge's decision that blocked the temporary travel ban in a dispute headed to the US Supreme Court.

The three-judge panel said Trump's March 6 order violated existing immigration law, but did not address whether it was unconstitutional discrimination against Muslims.

Trump's 90-day ban targets travelers from Libya, Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. "Well, as predicted, the 9th Circuit did it again - Ruled against the TRAVEL BAN at such a dangerous time in the history of our country. S.C." Trump said in a post on Twitter, apparently referencing the US Supreme Court.

The nation's top court, which leans conservative after Trump's appointee won confirmation as the ninth justice earlier this year, could act as soon as this week on his administration's request to reinstate the order.



Emergency personnel work at the scene after a building collapsed in a residential area of Nairobi, Kenya, yesterday. At least four people were missing after the collapse. The authorities had been alerted on Monday evening after cracks appeared in the building, prompting an urgent evacuation.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Train deaths prompt selfie crackdown

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan railway authorities announced a crackdown on selfies yesterday after a 12-year-old boy was decapitated and two other men also died while snapping themselves on a coastal track.

The boy and his 24-year-old brother were killed as they took photographs of themselves on the picturesque section of track in Colombo on Sunday.

Police said the boy was decapitated and his head became lodged between two railway carriages.

Another man died as he tried to take a selfie with his new bride on the same day on another section of the line.

The woman suffered serious injuries and is in intensive care. Railway spokesman Wijeya Samarasinghe said mobile phones accounted for most of the 28 deaths on Sri Lanka's railways so far this year.

"We are launching a campaign this week to deploy our security staff to arrest those walking on the tracks and taking selfies in front of moving trains," he told AFP.

"There are some who want to post videos and pictures of themselves in front of moving trains."

Police said the victims were often tourists from elsewhere in the country who had travelled to the seaside capital on holiday and wanted to pose for selfies with the Indian Ocean in the background.

Panama ditches Taiwan in win for Beijing

AFP, Beijing

Panama and China announced yesterday they were establishing diplomatic relations, as the Central American nation became the latest to dump Taiwan for closer ties with the world's second-largest economy.

The move prompted an angry response from Taiwan and will likely further strain ties between Taipei and Beijing, which considers the self-ruled island a renegade province awaiting reunification with the mainland.

Taiwan is recognised by around 20 countries worldwide and its status is one of the most politically sensitive issues for Chinese leaders who pressure trade partners to accept its "one China" principle.

India launches free legal aid via video conferencing

REUTERS, New Delhi

Villagers in India will soon be able to connect directly with city lawyers and receive free legal advice via video conferencing as part of a government initiative aimed at improving access to justice for the country's poorest and most marginalised.

The "Tele-Law" initiative launched on Sunday will be piloted in 500 village councils in the northern states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and then rolled out across the rest of the country in a phased manner, said the law ministry.

Villagers will access the service through newly established "Common Service Centres" -- single-window centres providing online services to the public in rural areas where there is little or poor internet connectivity.

Through the "Tele-Law" portal, people will be able to access lawyers - selected by the government in their state capitals - and seek advice on anything from land disputes to domestic violence cases via video conference.

The law ministry said hundreds of village women will also be trained up as paralegal

volunteers and will act as the first point of contact for rural citizens -- explaining the advice given by lawyers and assisting if further action is required.

Their training will include understanding laws on social justice and fundamental rights, and will include women and



child rights as well as labour-related legislation.

"Tele-Law will fulfill our commitment to ensure access to justice and empowerment of the poor," Ravi Shankar Prasad, minister for law and information technology, said in a statement.

MUNICH RAIL STATION SHOOTING

Several wounded by shots, man detained

AFP, Munich

A German police officer was critically wounded and two passengers hurt when a lone gunman fired shots at a commuter rail station near the southern German city of Munich yesterday before being injured himself and detained, police said.

A Munich police spokesman, Marcus da Gloria Martins, told reporters there was no indication of a "political or religious" motive behind the incident during the morning rush hour.

"The sole male perpetrator was motivated by personal reasons," he said.

Police identified the gunman as a 37-year-old German national but said no information was available on whether he had a criminal record.

Martins said the man had tried to push at least one police officer in front of an incoming train at an S-Bahn station in Unterfoehring, a northeastern suburb of the Bavarian city.

A scuffle ensued during which the assailant took an officer's gun and fired. "The police officer was shot in the head and critically injured," Martins said.

Two other people at the station were seriously wounded but their lives were not believed to be in danger. They were being treated in local hospitals.

"The assailant was arrested. He was also injured. There are no indications of further perpetrators," according to another police tweet.

NEWSIN brief

Iran says Saudi supports militants on its turf

REUTERS, Oslo

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said yesterday Saudi Arabia was supporting militants inside Iran, days after hardline Sunni group Islamic State claimed attacks in Tehran. Zarif also called on countries to establish a regional forum to resolve conflicts.

Delhi rushes more troops to Darjeeling

PTI, New Delhi

The Centre yesterday rushed 600 additional paramilitary personnel to Darjeeling to assist the administration and sought a detailed report from the West Bengal government. Local activists demanding the creation of a new Indian state warned that a general strike could degenerate into violence.

Jailed US student released in N Korea

AFP, Washington

North Korea has released 22-year-old US student Otto Warmbier from a 15 year sentence of hard labor, officials said yesterday, as former US basketball star Dennis Rodman arrived in Pyongyang. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert confirmed a message from US Senator Rob Portman announcing the release.

Spain's govt faces no confidence vote

AFP, Madrid

Spain's government yesterday faced a vote of no confidence tabled by the far-left Podemos to denounce a series of corruption scandals that have hit Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's conservative party. The motion to unseat Rajoy is unlikely to succeed as a majority of lawmakers plan to vote against it or abstain.