

MASSIVE LONDON HIGH-RISE BLAZE



Local residents watch as Grenfell Tower is engulfed by fire in west London yesterday. Inset, a police officer helps to evacuate a tower resident from close to the scene of the fire.

Mothers 'throw babies from windows of flats'

Witnesses have described screams of terror and people jumping from their flats as a fire ripped through Grenfell Tower in west London. One described hearing a neighbour screaming for help before apparently jumping out as flames engulfed his seventh-storey flat. Speaking from an evacuation centre on Freston Road, the woman, who asked not to be named, said: "There was a woman stood behind me who was shouting to someone she knew on the seventh floor. "She was on the phone trying to speak to him, she was obviously very emotional because the flats were blazing at this point. He looked like he was screaming to her. "Police said for anyone at the windows to wave a rag or something so the firemen could rescue them, but we thought, 'How are they gonna do that?' "I saw the woman later and she was hysterical. She said her friend jumped. The whole of this window was on fire." One report quoted a witness as claiming she saw a woman throw her baby from the ninth or 10th floor of the block before she disappeared from sight. The baby was caught by a man below. A number of people have died in the blaze, London Fire Brigade confirmed, but the exact figure is not yet known. More than 50 people are being treated in hospitals across London. Another witness, Samira, told BBC News: "I think the speed of the fire was the most shocking thing for everyone, how quick it literally went from zero to 100." She claimed she had seen "a lot of people jumping out that basically didn't make it". Another resident, called Zara, said she saw a woman throw her son, who was about five years old, from a fifth or sixth floor window to escape the blaze. She told LBC: "One woman actually threw her son out of the window. I think he's OK. I think he might have just had some broken bones and bruises. "I left my phone at home so I went back to grab it and, by the time I got back, the road was completely blocked off, the fire had dramatically spread. "It was like a scene from a Hollywood movie."



No warnings, no noises: survivor

Michael Paramasivan was watching a film in bed in his West London apartment when he smelled something "plastic-y." "I heard shouting. It's getting bigger, it's getting bigger," he told CNN yesterday. By the time he had grabbed his daughter and ran down the stairs, Paramasivan said half the building was on fire and the other half was catching fast. "If I'd fallen asleep, we would have all been dead... There weren't no warning, there weren't no proper noise to let us know what was happening. We lost everything. Everything in the house is gone," he said. Many residents who evacuated said the fire had spread incredibly quickly with almost no warning. Some people told CNN they didn't even hear a fire alarm. Khalid Ahmed, a 20-year-old student who lived on the eighth floor, was playing video games when he smelled smoke. As he walked to his kitchen to investigate, he saw "sparks coming up" from the window. Ahmed woke his aunt and started knocking on his neighbors' doors. "One of my neighbors ... came to his door, looking confused, and asked what was wrong. When he stepped out there was suddenly smoke everywhere, the whole corridor was engulfed. Everyone started coughing and couldn't breathe." Ahmed and his neighbors escaped to safety through the only communal stairwell for the whole building. "I watched flames burst out of our window and our flat was engulfed in flames," he said. On Friday, Ahmed had noticed a white powdery substance on the floor in his corridor.



US 'not winning' in Afghanistan

Says Mattis; Trump grants Pentagon authority to set troop levels

Pentagon chief Jim Mattis told exasperated lawmakers Tuesday that America still is "not winning" in Afghanistan, as US military commanders push for additional troops to help stabilize the country's security crisis. Mattis's latest assessment comes nearly 16 years after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and amid a war that continues to claim the lives of US troops each year -- and those of thousands of local forces and civilians. The Taliban had a good year last year, they are trying to have a good one this year, Mattis told the Senate Armed Services Committee at a hearing about the Pentagon's budget. "Right now I believe the enemy is surging," US military commanders who saw fragile security gains erode under Obama-era troop draw-downs, have been pushing for a new strategy that could see thousands of additional soldiers deploy to Afghanistan to help train and advise beleaguered Afghan partners. Media reports have said Mattis is considering asking for 3,000 to 5,000 additional US and Nato troops, but the defense chief has said little on the matter. In February, General John Nicholson, who commands Nato forces in Afghanistan, warned that he needs "a few thousand" more troops to reverse what he called a stalemate. Despite months of expectation that a new Afghanistan strategy announcement is imminent, Mattis said this would not be ready before mid-July. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump has granted the Pentagon authority to set troop levels in Afghanistan, a US official said Tuesday, a move that could lead to the deployment of thousands more soldiers. Speaking on condition of anonymity, the official told AFP that Pentagon chief Jim Mattis can now directly adjust troop numbers, though the official would not confirm whether a new "force-management level" -- currently at around 8,400 -- had been finalized. "The White House has done the same that it did with Iraq and Syria, which is to grant the secretary of defense the authority to set troop levels," the official said, referring to recent adjustments Trump has approved for the fight against the Islamic State group in those two countries. The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, during his Kabul visit yesterday, said there is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan that is forcing record numbers of people from their homes. "Peace is the solution for the problem," said Guterres, previously a United Nations high commissioner for refugees. At least 126,000 Afghans have been forced to flee their homes, the United Nations said.

FIGHT AGAINST TALIBAN
US CHIEF: NO MILITARY SOLUTION TO THE CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN

Palestinians to stop paying families of attackers

The leadership of the Palestinian Authority has agreed to naming the families of slain attackers, including suicide bombers. US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said "success remains." Compensation payments to the families of "martyrs" who die carrying out attacks on Israelis are one of the sticking points in the moribund Middle East peace process. "They have changed the policy, at least I have been informed they've changed this policy," Tillerson told US lawmakers. Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman expressed skepticism yesterday. "I did not see any evidence the Palestinian Authority has stopped payments for jailed terrorists and their families," Lieberman told Israeli public radio. US President Donald Trump has vowed not to revive peace talks, and has urged Israel to limit settlement building on Palestinian land, but many differences remain. Under questioning at a Senate hearing, Tillerson said Washington did not press Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas on the issue of payments to the families of suicide bombers and other attackers killed. "It was discussed directly by president Abbas made his visit with me at my meeting in Washington," Tillerson said, adding that Trump had raised the issue at the White House. "Their intent is to cease the payments to the family members of those who have committed murder or violence against others. "So we've been very clear with them that this is simply not acceptable to us. It is certainly not an acceptable American policy." If the change in policy in fact could be publicly acknowledged for Abbas, who has committed himself publicly to the peace process but is wary of being seen to make concessions.

Britain, EU in suspense

May faces calls to soften her stance on Brexit

nothing on this side to indicate that. Following more than an hour of talks between May and DUP leader Arlene Foster on Tuesday, May said the discussion had been productive and Foster said she hoped a deal could be done "sooner rather than later". Despite the uncertainty over her ability to govern, May had confirmed that Brexit negotiations would be expected to be the most complex international talks Britain has held for decades -- would begin as planned next week. "There is a unity of purpose among people in the United Kingdom," May said following a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris. "It's a unity of purpose, having voted to leave the EU, that their government gets on with that and makes a success of it." Macron said the DUP was "always open" for Britain to remain in the EU as long as the negotiations on Brexit have not finished.

DOOR ALWAYS OPEN FOR UK TO STAY IN EU, MACRON
DEADLY FIRE COULD DELAY ANNOUNCEMENT OF DUP DEAL



Iraqi soldiers from 9th Armoured Division give drops of water to a dehydrated baby rescued earlier by soldiers at the frontline, during the ongoing fighting between Iraqi forces and Islamic State militants near the Old City in western Mosul, Iraq, yesterday.

100 migrants rescued from desert in Niger

Around 100 Libya-bound migrants, including women, have been rescued from the Sahara desert in Niger after being abandoned by their smugglers, a security source said yesterday. The migrants are believed to have been hoping to travel on to Europe. "We are greatly concerned with the mounting number of civilians' death," said Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro. United Nations war crimes investigators yesterday expressed alarm at the "staggering" number of civilian deaths as US-backed forces battle to oust the Islamic State group from its Syrian stronghold Raqqa. "We are greatly concerned with the mounting number of civilians' death," said Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro. United Nations war crimes investigators yesterday expressed alarm at the "staggering" number of civilian deaths as US-backed forces battle to oust the Islamic State group from its Syrian stronghold Raqqa. "We are greatly concerned with the mounting number of civilians' death," said Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro. United Nations war crimes investigators yesterday expressed alarm at the "staggering" number of civilian deaths as US-backed forces battle to oust the Islamic State group from its Syrian stronghold Raqqa. "We are greatly concerned with the mounting number of civilians' death," said Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro.

Egypt's parliament yesterday approved a controversial expansion of the Red Sea island of Saudi Arabia that transfers two Red Sea islands to the kingdom. The deal had sparked rare protests in the Egyptian capital, Cairo. "We are greatly concerned with the mounting number of civilians' death," said Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro.

UN's Zeid warns states to respect rights

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain appear to be violating people's human rights by threatening to jail or detain them for expressing sympathy for Qatar, UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein said yesterday. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt cut ties with Qatar and imposed stringent economic sanctions on it, accusing the country of supporting terrorism. Doha denies these accusations that it supports Islamist militants and Shia Iran. The four states, which have banned dozens of people and entities with alleged links to Qatar as terrorists, must respect citizens' rights, Zeid said. "It's becoming clear that the measures being adopted are overly broad in scope and implementation, and have the potential to seriously disrupt the lives of thousands of women, children and men, simply because they belong to one of the nationalities involved in the dispute," Zeid said in a statement. He said directives issued by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain to address the humanitarian needs of families with joint nationalities appeared to be iniquitous, and his office had received reports of specific individuals being ordered to return home or to leave the country they are residing in.

US troops on ground in besieged Marawi city

The Philippine military has for over three weeks been engaged in fierce battles with hundreds of militants, who have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group, in the southern city of Marawi on Mindanao island. The fighting has left 202 gunmen dead, while 58 soldiers and 26 civilians have also been killed, according to the government. The militants have withstood a relentless bombing campaign that has made parts of Marawi, the most important Islamic city in the mainly Catholic Philippines, resemble war-devastated cities in Iraq and Syria. The Philippines and the United States are longtime allies and are bound by a mutual defense treaty. "It's called situational awareness and that is the sort of assistance being given."

IS IN PHILIPPINES

S'pore rocked by open feud in Fat family

Tightly-ruled Singapore was rocked by an unprecedented political drama yesterday when a feud between the children of the late founding leader Lee Kuan Yew under his legacy burst into the open. The founder's oldest child, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, came under attack online before dawn from his younger brother Lee Hsien Yang, and younger sister Lee Wei Ling. They accused him of exploiting their father's legacy for his own political agenda, a charge the premier quickly denied. The pair also claimed that their brother had abused his powers to harass them -- and Hsien Yang said he had decided to leave the country as a result. The feud had simmered following the death in March 2015 of the founder, who ruled Singapore with an iron hand but transformed the city-state from a relatively poor British colony into one of the world's wealthiest and most stable societies. But the quarrel intensified in the small hours of yesterday with the issuance of the extraordinary statement, which immediately went viral in a country where tough laws against protests and curbs on press freedom have stifled political dissent. "The timing is important as Singapore has been facing more uncertainty both in terms of the current and future leadership as well as the economy and regional situation," said Southeast Asia watcher Bridget Welsh, a visiting professor at John Cabot University in Rome.

Egypt agrees island transfer to Saudi

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Lanka vows legislation to deal hate crimes
Sri Lanka's prime minister yesterday promised tough legislation to deal with hate crimes after an upsurge in attacks on the minority Muslim community. Ranil Wickremesinghe vowed not to allow a repeat of 2014 anti-Muslim riots in which four people died.