

Shabaab attack on cops kills 5 in Somalia

AFP, Mogadishu

Five people were killed and 10 were wounded yesterday when a car packed with explosives rammed into the wall of a police station in southern Mogadishu, the security ministry said.

"The blast was caused by a car loaded with explosives, five people were killed and 10 others wounded," Ahmed Mohamud Mohamed, Somalia's internal security ministry spokesman told reporters.

The attack was claimed by Al-Qaeda linked Shabaab Islamists, according to a statement carried by the SITE intelligence agency.

Police officer Abdulkadir Moalim said a suicide bomber had driven the car into the outer wall of the Waberi police station, killing mostly civilians.

Witnesses said the blast led to panic on the capital's busiest road, which runs alongside the police station.



Indian supporters of the Gorkha Janamukti Mochra (GJM) shout slogans during a protest rally in support of a separate Gorkhaland state in Darjeeling, in Mumbai, yesterday. Darjeeling has been rattled at the height of tourist season after violent clashes broke out between police and hundreds of protesters of the GJM-- a long-simmering separatist movement that has long called for a separate state for ethnic Gorkhas in West Bengal. PHOTO: AFP

Russians targeted 21 election systems

US official tells Congress

REUTERS, Washington

Russian hackers targeted 21 US state election systems in the 2016 presidential race and a small number were breached but there was no evidence any votes were manipulated, a Homeland Security Department official told Congress on Wednesday.

Jeanette Manfra, the department's acting deputy under-secretary of cyber security, testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee.

US intelligence agencies have concluded the Kremlin orchestrated a wide-ranging influence operation that included email hacking and online propaganda to discredit Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and help Donald Trump, a Republican, win the White House in November.

The Russia issue has cast a shadow over Trump's first five months in office. The extent of interference by Russian hackers, and whether they or others could interfere in future elections, has been the source of speculation and media reports for months.

Russia has repeatedly denied responsibility for any cyber attacks during the election. Trump has variously said Russia may or may not have been responsible for hacking but has dismissed allegations his associates colluded with Moscow as "fake news."

Trump acknowledged on Friday he was under investigation in the probe of alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 race and possible collusion by his campaign, and seemed to assail the Justice Department official overseeing the inquiry.

Assad's ouster no longer priority in Syria: Macron

AGENCIES

France no longer sees the departure of President Bashar al-Assad as a priority in the Syrian conflict, President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday, making the policy official for the first time.

The new French leader said instead that fighting jihadists such as the Islamic State group had to be the international community's number one goal in a conflict that grew out of protests against the Syrian president in 2011 but has since become increasingly complex and multifaceted.

"The real change I've made on this question, is that I haven't said the deposing of Bashar al-Assad is a prerequisite for everything," Macron said in an interview with several European newspapers, including Britain's Guardian, Spain's El Pais and Germany's Sueddeutsche Zeitung.

"Because no one has introduced me to his legitimate successor," said the French president, who took office last month.

His comments were met with dismay by the Syrian opposition. Macron said he now saw two key priorities in Syria.

"My line is clear: one, a total fight against terrorist groups. They are our enemies... We need the cooperation of

Islamic State, Ankara said yesterday, seeking to address Turkish concerns about arming Kurds on its border.

Turkish defence ministry sources said US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis also promised his Turkish counterpart to provide a monthly list of weapons handed to the YPG.

A senior US official yesterday said the US-led coalition battling the Islamic State group is building a database of foreign fighters to track jihadists returning from Iraq and Syria at home.

Meanwhile, Australia yesterday said it would resume air strikes into Syria, ending a two-day suspension implemented after the downing of a Syrian military aircraft triggered a Russian threat against Washington-led coalition planes.

Russia said on Monday it would resume air strikes into Syria, flying west of the River Euphrates in Syria as potential targets and track them with missile systems and military aircraft, but stopped short of saying it would shoot them down.

DEVELOPMENTS

- US will take weapons from Kurds after Islamic State defeat: Turkey
- US-led coalition building jihadist database: envoy
- Australia to resume air strikes

everyone to eradicate them, particularly Russia. Two: stability in Syria, because I don't want a failed state."

Meanwhile, the United States has told Turkey it will take back weapons supplied to the Kurdish YPG militia in northern Syria after the defeat of

9.8b to tread on earth by 2050: UN

AFP, United Nations

The world's current population of 7.6 billion will balloon to 9.8 billion in 2050, with India's numbers to surpass China's in just seven years, a UN report said Wednesday.

Nigeria will overtake the United States by 2050 to become the third most populous country in the world, according to the figures by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

"With roughly 83 million people being added to the world's population every year, the upward trend in population size is expected to continue, even assuming that fertility levels will continue to decline," the report's authors said.

At that rate, the global population will reach 8.6 billion in 2030, 9.8 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion in 2100, it said.

The population of India, which currently ranks as the second most populous country with 1.3 billion inhabitants, will surpass China's 1.4 billion citizens by 2024.

But Nigeria is growing the most rapidly, and the populations in 26 African countries are likely to "at least double" by 2050, according to the report.

The number of persons aged 60 or above is expected to more than double by 2050 and more than triple by 2100.

Merkel slaps down May

Says EU's future more important than Brexit talks

AFP, Brussels

German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday insisted that the EU's future took priority over Brexit talks as Prime Minister Theresa May met European leaders for the first time since a disastrous election gamble.

Under intense pressure on all sides since losing her majority, May said her task at the Brussels summit would be to set out her plans to protect EU citizens' post-Brexit rights.

But Merkel, Europe's most powerful leader, made clear that this was not at the top of her agenda as she reaffirmed Berlin's strong ties with France and its newly elected President Emmanuel Macron.

"For me the shaping of the future of the 27 is a priority coming before the issue of the negotiations with Britain on the exit," Merkel said. "We want to conduct these negotiations in a good spirit but the clear focus has to be on the future of the 27."

Macron, attending his first summit, did not mention Brexit directly but said it was now time to get down to concrete work -- "hand in hand with Germany" -- on putting EU back on track after years of austerity and crisis.

May was set to brief EU leaders on her



City of a million could be built on Mars by 2062!

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A city of a million people could be established on Mars within decades, Elon Musk, the billionaire inventor, has claimed.

Echoing recent remarks by the renowned physicist Professor Stephen Hawking, Musk, who founded the private firm SpaceX, said at some point humans would face a "doomsday event" unless we become a "truly multi-planetary species".

He said the main reason why he was making money -- he has an estimated fortune of about \$15b after helping to create PayPal and setting up the Tesla electric car company -- was to make this dream a reality.

Writing in the journal New Space, Musk envisaged creating a Mars Colonial Fleet of 1,000 craft that would make multiple journeys, building up a population of a million over 40 to 100 years.

He suggested Mars was the best candidate for the first human colony outside the Earth.

"It is a little cold, but we can warm it up. It has a very helpful atmosphere, which, being primarily carbon dioxide

with some nitrogen and argon and a few other trace elements, means that we can grow plants on Mars just by compressing the atmosphere," Musk wrote.

The paper suggested the first Mars flight could take place in late 2022, which would mean a large city could be built on Mars as early as 2062.

The trip would need to be attractive



to potential Martians, Musk stressed.

"I do not have an immediate doomsday prophecy, but eventually, history suggests, there will be some doomsday event," Mr Musk said.

"The alternative is to become a space-bearing civilization and a multi-planetary species, which I hope you would agree is the right way to go."



Trump's son-in-law launches ME peace push

REUTERS, Jerusalem

US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, met Israeli and Palestinian leaders on Wednesday to try to revive long-fractured Middle East peacemaking that Washington acknowledged will take some time.

Kushner, a 36-year-old real estate developer with little experience of international diplomacy or political negotiation, arrived in Israel on Wednesday morning and was due to spend barely 20 hours on the ground.

Video showed him giving Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a friend of Kushner's father, a handshake and a hug as they prepared to sit down with the Israeli ambassador to Washington, the US ambassador to Israel and other senior officials for preliminary discussions.

Kushner travelled to Ramallah, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, for two hours of talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rdainah said all major issues at the heart of the conflict were discussed.

US officials called the trip part of an effort to keep the conversation going rather than the launching of a new phase in the peace process, saying that Kushner and Jason Greenblatt, the president's special representative for international negotiations, are likely to return often.

Trump a 'psychopath': N Korea

AGENCIES

North Korea yesterday called US President Donald Trump a "psychopath" as tensions soar following the death of American student Otto Warmbier, who was evacuated in a coma from North Korean detention last week.

Pyeongyang's official Rodong Sinmun newspaper said the US president was in a "tough situation" at home and claimed he was toying with the idea of a preemptive strike on North Korea to divert attention from a domestic political crisis.

"South Korea must realise that following psychopath Trump... will only lead to disaster," an editorial carried by the paper said.

A series of atomic tests and missile launches since last year have ratcheted up tensions on the Korean peninsula, and Warmbier's death has further strained relations between Pyongyang and Washington.

Trump slammed the "brutal regime" in Pyongyang, and said he was determined to "prevent such tragedies from befalling innocent people at the hands of regimes that do

not respect the rule of law or basic human decency."

His language was echoed by South Korean President Moon Jae-In, who said in an interview ahead of a White House visit next week that North Korea bears responsibility for the student's death.



Moon yesterday also asked China to do more to rein in North Korea's nuclear program.

Moon's remarks echoed that of Trump, who said in a tweet on Tuesday Chinese efforts to persuade North Korea to rein in its nuclear program have failed.

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