

SPAIN COPS FOIL KNIFE ATTACK AT BORDER

This set of image grabs taken from handout video footage released yesterday by the Spanish Police shows police apprehending a man armed with a knife at the Beni Anzar border crossing between Morocco and the Spanish territory of Melilla. "A man entered the border post and once inside, pulled out a large knife and confronted (police) shouting 'Allahu Akbar' (God is Great), slightly injuring a policeman," Irene Flores, spokeswoman for the central government's representative office in Melilla, told AFP. The man, believed to be Moroccan, is tackled by several police and detained.

PHOTO: AFP



TALKS IN FRANCE TO END LIBYA CHAOS

Rivals 'commit to ceasefire, polls'

AFP, Paris

The two main rivals in conflict-ridden Libya are committed to a ceasefire and holding elections "as soon as possible", according to a draft statement released ahead of French-brokered talks yesterday.

The communique says Libya's UN-backed Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj and Khalifa Haftar, the military commander who controls the remote east of the vast country, accept that only a political solution can end the crisis.

Diplomatic sources said the two sides had agreed on a joint statement but that the text being circulated was not the final version. The 10-point version seen by AFP says the ceasefire would not apply to counter-terrorism efforts.

It also says the two sides are committed to developing the rule of law.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who has made Libya one of his foreign policy priorities, has organised the meeting and while officials admit they have modest expectations, they say it sends a "strong signal".

French officials are aiming to persuade the two sides to agree on a roadmap to end a conflict that has plunged the oil-rich country into chaos since the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

Dozens of armed groups have vied for control in Libya in the power vacuum created by Gaddafi's fall.

Human traffickers have exploited the chaos in Libya to boost their lucrative but deadly trade, and the country has this year become the main springboard for migrants seeking to reach Europe in often flimsy and overloaded boats.

Maldives crisis deepens

Troops blockade parliament, clash with opposition lawmakers to foil no-confidence bid against speaker

AFP, Malé

Maldivian troops blockaded parliament and clashed with opposition leaders for a second day, witnesses said yesterday, as political turmoil escalated in the troubled honeymoon islands.

The latest turbulence came as the United Kingdom urged its citizens to take caution in the capital Male after soldiers tear gassed protesting politicians there.

Soldiers barred the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) from entering the heavily guarded parliament complex again yesterday, with witnesses reporting shoving as MPs were forced back from the barricade.

"Even when parliament is not in session, MPs are free to go to the building and attend to their work, but it is not allowed now," MDP spokesman Hamid Abdul Ghafoor told AFP. "This is ridiculous."

The parliament gates were padlocked by soldiers Monday in a move described as illegal by exiled Maldivian opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed.

An opposition coalition, united against President Abdulla Yameen, had been threatening to move a no-confidence motion against the speaker in a bid to impeach the president's ally.

But MPs trying to enter the compound were hit with pepper spray and forcibly evicted.

Yameen's office said in a statement yesterday that parliament was closed ahead of an "incoming VVIP visit".

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is in the Maldives as the tropical island nation celebrates its 52nd anniversary, the Pakistan High Commission in Sri Lanka said. "The special measures taken by the security forces at the parliament building on 24 July 2017

were to ensure the security and safety of the premises, as mandated by the... constitution," Yameen's office said.

Residents said security in Male, a congested capital just one-square mile (two square kilometres) in size, was tighter than usual.

The UK government urged its citizens to avoid large gatherings and protests following the disturbance around the parliament building.



Metal detectors removed

Israel softens stance on holy site; Muslim leaders to continue boycott

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel removed metal detectors from a highly sensitive Jerusalem holy site yesterday after their installation triggered deadly violence, but Muslim officials said worshippers should continue a boycott for now.

The Israeli move came in the face of intensive international diplomacy seeking to stop the dispute over the Haram al-Sharif mosque compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount, sparking wider Palestinian unrest.

The government said it would introduce subtler measures instead to secure the compound, which houses the revered Al-Aqsa mosque and Dome of the Rock, following a deadly attack on Israeli police nearby.

A work crew removed the metal detectors from one entrance to the compound in the early hours, and cameras installed on overhead bridges in recent days were also gone, an AFP correspondent reported.

Dozens of Israeli security personnel stood quietly outside the entrance,

where Muslims have prayed for days in protest at the metal detectors.

A statement from the Waqf, the Islamic endowments organisation which administers the compound, said there should be "no entry into Al-Aqsa mosque until after an assessment by a Waqf technical committee and the return of the situation to how it was before the 14th of this month."

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged all Muslims to visit

ROW OVER AL-AQSA
ERDOGAN URGES ALL MUSLIMS TO 'VISIT' AND 'PROTECT' JERUSALEM

Jerusalem to protect the holy places.

"From here I make a call to all Muslims. Anyone who has the opportunity should visit Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa mosque," Erdogan said in Ankara. "Come, let's all protect Jerusalem."

Israel installed metal detectors at entrances to the compound after an attack nearby that killed two policemen on July 14.

Palestinians viewed the new security measures as Israel asserting further control over the site. They refused to enter the compound in protest and prayed in the streets outside instead.

Israeli authorities said the metal detectors were needed because the July 14 attackers smuggled guns into the compound and emerged from it to shoot the officers.

The decision to remove the metal detectors followed talks between Netanyahu and Jordan's King Abdullah II, who demanded they be taken away. Jordan is the official custodian of Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem and is one of only two Arab governments to have signed a peace treaty with Israel.

It also came after one of US President Donald Trump's top aides, Jason Greenblatt, arrived in Israel for talks on the crisis and with UN Middle East envoy Nikolay Mladenov warning of the risks of escalation.

A separate diplomatic standoff between Israel and Jordan may have helped push negotiations to remove the metal detectors along.



Mattis rebukes Pentagon over Afghan uniform

AFP, Washington

US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has issued a sharp rebuke after the Pentagon wasted millions of dollars buying the Afghan army a pricey uniform that may have made soldiers easier to spot.

According to a memo released Monday, Mattis told Pentagon procurement officials that the decision to buy the overpriced woodland green camouflage uniforms "serves as an example of a complacent mode of thinking. ... Cavalier or casually acquiescent decisions to spend taxpayer dollars in an ineffective and wasteful manner are not to recur," Mattis wrote in the July 21 memo.

The office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) issued a report last month saying the Pentagon may have spent as much as \$28 million more than necessary when it decided in 2007 to purchase the dark-green camouflage uniforms.

SIGAR also found that a private company held rights to the camo design and that Afghanistan's then defense minister, Abdul Rahim Wardak, essentially chose the pattern on a whim.

The proprietary design meant the uniforms cost about 40 percent more than non-proprietary camouflage.

The highly critical SIGAR report also says officials ordered the uniforms without conducting any formal testing or evaluation.

Mattis said that he wanted the episode to serve as a "catalyst" to bring to light wasteful practices. Lawmakers at the House Armed Services Committee were scheduled to hold a hearing yesterday on the matter.

Mattis is considering whether to send thousands more US troops to Afghanistan to help beleaguered Afghan partners as they struggle to contain a resurgent Taliban.

FLOODS IN INDIA

Building collapse kills 6 in Mumbai

15 missing; 8 more killed in Gujarat

AGENCIES

A 40-year old four-storey building collapsed in the Indian city of Mumbai yesterday, killing at least eight people with more than 20 feared trapped, fire and police officials said.

A total of 16 people had been rescued so far. The ground floor of the building in the suburb of Ghatkopar housed a nursing home, which was vacant at the time, while the rest of the building was occupied by three or four families on each floor.

Building collapses are common in India, especially during the annual monsoon season which usually runs from late June to September.

Worsening floods killed another eight people in 24 hours in India's Gujarat state as rescue teams raced yesterday to reach hundreds of people marooned in stricken towns and villages. About 80 people are believed to have been killed in Gujarat since the start of the monsoon a month ago.

Apart from Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam states in India's northeast have been hard-hit, while pockets of the eastern states of Odisha and Bihar have also been affected.

In Assam at least 75 people have been killed since April. Thirteen people were killed in flash floods in Jammu and Kashmir at the weekend.



Syrian children wait to receive treatment at a make-shift hospital in Arbin, east of the capital, late Monday. The air strike killed eight civilians, half of them children, and wounded dozens more at the rebel-held area where a fragile truce was declared at the weekend.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump slams Sessions again

Calls him 'VERY weak' on prosecuting Hillary Clinton's 'crimes' over emails amid rumour of sacking of the top law official

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump resumed his attacks on Attorney General (AG) Jeff Sessions yesterday, calling his onetime ally "VERY weak" in pursuing intelligence leaks and for failing to go after former Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton over her email.

Trump's latest Twitter salvo followed a report in the Washington Post that the president and his advisers have discussed replacing Sessions, one of the Republican billionaire's earliest supporters.

"Attorney General Jeff Sessions has taken a VERY weak position on Hillary Clinton crimes (where are E-mails & DNC server) & Intel leakers!" Trump tweeted.

Trump has openly criticized Sessions for recusing himself from overseeing a federal probe into possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia to meddle in the 2016 US presi-

dential elections. Sessions has said he has no plans to resign.

With pressure mounting from the investigation led by former FBI director Robert Mueller, Trump has sought



to revive an election year controversy over Clinton's use of a private server to send email while secretary of state.

The White House also alleged last week that the Democrats colluded with Ukraine during the 2016 campaign, adding another twist to the president's counter-offensive.

"Ukrainian efforts to sabotage Trump campaign - 'quietly working to boost Clinton.' So where is the investigation A.G.," Trump said in another early morning tweet yesterday.

US presidents normally go to great pains to avoid being seen as influencing ongoing or possible investigations, making Trump's attacks on Sessions all the more extraordinary.

On Monday, Trump took to Twitter to declare his top law enforcement official "beleaguered" as he wondered out loud why Sessions was not investigating Clinton. "So why aren't the Committees and investigators, and of course our beleaguered A.G., looking into Crooked Hillary's crimes & Russia relations?" Trump asked.

Trump has expressed increasing anger with Sessions as his Justice Department's investigations into possible Trump-Russia collusion has quickened.

US Navy fires warning shots at Iranian ship

AFP, Washington

A US Navy patrol ship fired warning shots at an Iranian Revolutionary Guard vessel in the Persian Gulf yesterday after it approached within 150 yards (137 meters), a US defense official said.

"The IRGCN boat was coming in at a high rate of speed. It did not respond to any signals, they did not respond to any bridge-to-bridge calls, they felt there was no choice except to fire the warning shots," the defense official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The incident occurred at about 3:00 am local time (0000 GMT) in the northern Persian Gulf, when the Iranian vessel began to approach the USS Thunderbolt.

After the US ship fired the warning shots, the Iranian vessel stopped, the official said, at which point the Thunderbolt continued on her way.

The episode marks the latest in a series of close encounters between US ships and Iranian naval vessels.

In January, the USS Mahan destroyer fired warning shots at four Iranian Revolutionary Guard vessels that approached at high speed in the Strait of Hormuz.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards are a paramilitary force that answers directly to the Islamic republic's supreme leader.

Saudi-led group unveils Qatar 'terror' blacklist

Erdogan sees progress, says more time needed to end row

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia and its allies yesterday unveiled a "terrorist" blacklist of 18 organisations and individuals suspected of links with Islamist extremism that they said had ties with regional rival Qatar.

The move by the four Arab governments came despite mounting international pressure to compromise in their weeks-old boycott of their fellow US ally.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt last month released a list of 59 people and 12 groups they alleged had links to Qatar, accused by the four states of ties to extremist groups in the region.

Qatar has denied the allegations. Yesterday's list blacklisted nine charity and media organisations and nine individuals "directly or indirectly linked to Qatari authorities" as "terrorist", read a joint statement released by the four states.

"We expect Qatari authorities to take the next step and prosecute the terrorist groups

and people," the statement said.

On Monday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his visit to the Gulf region made a contribution to easing the crisis surrounding Ankara's ally Qatar, but indicated that more time was needed to end the standoff.

"I think that our visit and contacts (in the region) have been an important step on the way to rebuilding stability and mutual confidence," he told reporters at Ankara airport after returning from Qatar.

Meanwhile, Egypt warned the EU yesterday that four Arab states would accept no compromise in their dispute with Qatar over allegations that the gas-rich emirate supports terrorism.

Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, speaking after talks with European Union diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini in Brussels, said Qatar must accept in full the demands by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.