

IRMA'S RAVAGES

Fear, looting grip tense St Martin

AFP, Marigot

"For pity's sake, do something," Estelle Kalton begs the police. "They're looting the shops."

A crime wave on the Franco-Dutch Caribbean holiday island of St Martin, five days after hurricane Irma ripped through, has everyone on edge.

It is only by making scene on the steps of a makeshift security centre set up in Marigot, the main town on the French side of the island, that Kalton is able to confront officials. She gets an angry response to her charges of looting. "We know," a police officer replies.

Minutes earlier, France's Minister for Overseas Territories Annick Girardin had walked down the same steps after assuring reporters that "there is now security" on the island.

But officials and people in the streets seem to have different definitions of "security" and criticism of the state's response to the disaster is mounting on the island and in Paris.

"Police saw people trying to loot our store," says Kalton's 57-year-old husband Philippe. "Sometimes they're just 50 metres away, but they don't do anything."

"They told me that people's security is the priority and that the rest is only material, that's not important."

The shopkeeper moved to St Martin seven years ago. Before Irma, he and his wife enjoyed a sun-soaked life in a villa by the turquoise waters of Nettle Bay.

What remains of their house, metres from the beach, is visible from the steps of the security centre. Like the others, it is a wreck.

Regional police chief Jean-Marc Descoux said some 500-600 local delinquents were likely responsible for most of the looting, taking advantage of the devastation for personal profit.



An emergency worker clears a fallen tree after Hurricane Irma made landfall in Downtown Tampa, Florida, US, yesterday. Inset, Cars make their way through a flooded street in Bonita Springs, Florida.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US tones down its demands

Tries to win Russia, China support as UN votes on draft resolution

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council was expected to vote yesterday on a draft resolution imposing new sanctions on North Korea after the United States toned down its demands in a bid to win support from Russia and China.

Washington has led the international drive to punish the rogue state after it detonated its sixth and most powerful nuclear device earlier this month.

The United States had originally pushed for a strict oil embargo, as well as a freeze on the assets of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un.

A new draft text circulated late Sunday maintains an embargo on gas but would limit sales of oil to 500,000 barrels for three months from October 1 and 2 million barrels from January 1 for a period of 12 months, according to the text obtained by AFP.

Kim would be spared from a UN blacklist that would have hit him with an assets freeze and a travel ban and punished him directly for the country's military drive.

The proposed resolution, however,

would slap a ban on textile exports from North Korea, but drop demands for a full halt to payments of North Korea workers.

It would add the name of North Korean senior official Pak Yong Sik, who helps direct the country's missile industries, to the blacklist along with three other North Korean agencies.

N KOREA SANCTIONS

PYONGYANG WARNS US OF 'GREATEST PAIN'

NO RADIATION HARM FROM NORTH'S NUKE TEST: CHINA

Among other concessions the new text also softens the inspection by force of ships suspected of carrying cargo prohibited by the UN and drops a proposed assets freeze on the state-owned Air Koryo airline.

Early yesterday, North Korea said it would not accept any chastisement over its nuclear and missile program, which it says is vital to stave off the threat of an American invasion.

If Washington does "rig up the illegal and unlawful 'resolution' on harsher sanctions, the DPRK shall make absolutely sure that the US pays due price," its foreign ministry said, in a statement published by the official KCNA news agency.

The North has a long history of making florid threats against Washington and its allies without following through on them.

"The forthcoming measures to be taken by the DPRK will cause the US the greatest pain and suffering it had ever gone through in its entire history," the ministry said.

Meanwhile, China has concluded that radiation levels remain normal in the provinces near the North Korean border after Pyongyang's most powerful nuclear test yet spurred concerns of residual environmental damage.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection announced Sunday it was ending its emergency radiation monitoring in response to the blast last week, which the North claimed was the successful detonation of a hydrogen bomb.

FINAL PUSH FOR IS IN DEIR EZZOR

Syria's army sends huge reinforcement to the city

AFP, Beirut

Syria's army sent massive reinforcements to territory under its control in Deir Ezzor yesterday ahead of a final push for the Islamic State group-held half of the eastern city.

The metropolis is the capital of the oil-rich eastern province of Deir Ezzor, regarded as a strategic prize by both Russian-backed Syrian troops and US-backed fighters.

Regime forces have scored major advances in recent days, breaking a pair of IS sieges on the city and capturing territory around it.

They were now looking to make a push into the eastern IS-held part of the city, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor.

"Huge military reinforcements, including equipment, vehicles and fighters have arrived in Deir Ezzor ahead of an attack to push Daesh from the city's eastern neighbourhoods," said Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman, using an Arabic acronym for IS.

"Russian and Syrian regime warplanes are striking IS positions in the city and its outskirts," he added.

Since 2014, IS has controlled most of Deir Ezzor city and the surrounding province, which borders territory the jihadists hold in Iraq.

The remaining 40 percent of the city still held by the government -- and home to around 100,000 civilians -- was under crippling IS siege.

Backed by Russian air power, government troops have breached IS's sieges, captured the strategic Jabal Thardah region and expanded their control to half of Deir Ezzor city, according to the Observatory.

Moscow intervened in Syria in September 2015 in support of its ally President Bashar al-Assad.

Russia's defence ministry said yesterday a demining unit comprising more than 40 experts and special equipment had been sent to Syria, adding that they will be sent to Deir Ezzor "in the nearest future".

But Al-Thani insisted that "it is no secret that the real motives behind the siege and the severing of diplomatic relations with the state of Qatar were not aimed at fighting terrorism."

"But rather an attempt to force Qatar into a state of trusteeship to interfere in its foreign policy, to undermine its sovereignty and to interfere in its domestic policy."

Qatar "cannot tolerate this situation," he said.

His comments came after Saudi Arabia vowed Sunday to keep pressuring Qatar until demands by the bloc of Arab states had been met, dampening hopes for a US-mediated resolution to their diplomatic crisis.

The bloc's 13 demands include Doha ending its alleged support for Islamist extremist groups, closing a Turkish military base in the emirate and downgrading diplomatic ties with Tehran.

The Saudi move came just two days after US President Donald Trump spoke with the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Qatar in a bid to mediate.

Trump said he believed the dispute between Riyadh and Doha, both key US allies, could be solved "fairly easily".

The Saudi and Qatari rulers spoke by phone on Saturday, raising hope for talks.

NEWS IN brief

Indian soldiers kill two Kashmiri rebels

AFP, Srinagar

Indian government forces killed two suspected rebels and captured one in Kashmir yesterday during a brief gun battle, sparking protests by local civilians, police said. Soldiers and special counter-insurgency police forces surrounded a neighbourhood in Khudwani after a tip-off about the presence of militants.

Nobel winner launches march for abused kids

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Nobel peace laureate Kailash Satyarthi yesterday started a cross-country march aimed at forcing authorities to clamp down on the widespread sexual abuse and trafficking of vulnerable children.

Satyarthi and scores of supporters embarked on the "India March" at Kanyakumari on the country's southernmost tip.

18 dead in attack on convoy in Egypt

AFP, Cairo

Militants killed 18 people in an attack yesterday on a security convoy in Egypt's North Sinai, where police and troops are battling a jihadist insurgency, security and medical sources said.

The interior ministry confirmed an attack around the town of Bir al-Abed had caused deaths and injuries but did not provide a toll.

A local Islamic State group affiliate based in North Sinai has killed hundreds of soldiers and police in attacks since the military in 2013 ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi.



US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump, senior advisor Jared Kushner (L) and Ivanka Trump observe a moment of silence yesterday, at the White House during the 16th anniversary of 9/11. PHOTO: REUTERS

TURKEY'S POST-COUP PURGE

Trial of opposition daily's staff resumes

AFP, Istanbul

The controversial trial of staff from Turkey's main opposition newspaper resumed yesterday in a case seen as a test for press freedom under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The case, which opened in Istanbul in July, involves 17 current and former writers, cartoonists and executives from Cumhuriyet ("Republic") who are being tried on "terror" charges in a move denounced by supporters as absurd.

For government critics, the case is emblematic of the erosion of freedom following last year's failed coup when Ankara launched a massive crackdown targeting those with alleged links to the putschists as well as opponents.

The secular daily is one of the few voices in the Turkish media to oppose Erdogan, with its embarrassing scoops angering those in the halls of power.

On July 28, an Istanbul court freed seven of the newspaper's staff after 271 days, including respected cartoonist Musa Kart and Turhan Gunay, editor of the books supplement.

But some of the paper's most prominent staff remain in custody, among them commentator Kadri Gursel, investigative journalist Ahmet Sik, editor-in-chief Murat Sabuncu and chief executive Akin Atalay.

Eight other suspects have also been charged but are not being held in prison.

CAMBODIA CRACKDOWN

PM threatens ban on opposition party

AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodian premier Hun Sen threatened to dissolve the country's embattled opposition party yesterday, as the rival politicians protested outside a remote border prison where their leader is being held for alleged treason.

Last week's dramatic arrest of opposition leader Kem Sokha was the latest move in a years-long crackdown on the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), which poses the only real threat to Hun Sen's 32-year grip on power in next year's national elections.

The 64-year-old politician was accused of conspiring in a "secret plan" with foreign entities that began in 1993, with Hun Sen alleging that the US was involved in the plot.

Yesterday, two dozen opposition politicians travelled to the prison where he was sent on the border of Vietnam to protest his arrest.

Back in the capital Phnom Penh, Hun Sen threatened to dissolve the party if they continued to "protect" their leader.

"If the political party continues to block (proceedings) and continues to protect the traitor, it means this party is also a traitor, so there is no need to keep this party in Cambodia's democratic process anymore," said the self-described strongman.

It still is very painful

Says Hillary Clinton on 2016 election loss

AFP, Washington

Hillary Clinton says she is "done" being a political candidate, and that her shock US presidential loss last year to Donald Trump remains a source of deep anguish.

"It still is very painful. It hurts a lot," the 2016 Democratic nominee said in an interview on CBS Sunday Morning, the first in a series of appearances to highlight the upcoming publication of "What Happened," her memoir about the campaign.

"I am done with being a candidate," she said. "As an active politician, it's over."

If true, Clinton is closing the door on a storied political career that saw her become the first woman presidential nominee of a major US political party.

She also served eight years representing New York in the Senate, and eight years as US first lady.



The former secretary of state, who is 69, has teased out several excerpts from her book ahead of its release today.

In those, she takes responsibility for her devastating loss to Trump. But she also blames Russian election interference, and extraordinary decisions by then-FBI director James Comey to reopen an investigation into her emails.

She also points the finger at allies including then-president Barack Obama, former vice president Joe Biden, and her progressive rival for the Democratic nomination, Bernie Sanders.

Sunday's interview, conducted in Clinton's home outside New York City, showed the former nominee apparently still uncomfortable with what happened in last year's election -- and admitting she was unprepared for the conditions in the United States that led to Trump's victory.

Iraq holding 1,400 IS women, children

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Iraqi authorities are holding 1,400 foreign wives and children of suspected IS fighters after government forces expelled the jihadi group from one of its last remaining strongholds in Iraq, security and aid officials said.

Most came from Turkey. Many others were from former Soviet states such as Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Russia, Iraqi army and intelligence officers said. Other Asians and a "very few" French and Germans were also among them.

The wives and children are being held at an Iraqi camp south of Mosul. Most had arrived since 30 August, when troops drove Isis out of Mosul.

One intelligence officer said that they were still verifying their nationalities with their home countries, since many of the women no longer had their original documents.

It is the largest group of foreigners linked to IS to be held by Iraqi forces since they began driving the militants from Mosul and other areas in northern Iraq last year, an aid official said. Thousands of foreigners have been fighting for IS, or Daesh, in Iraq and Syria.

"We are holding the Daesh families under tight security measures and waiting for government orders on how to deal with them," said Army Colonel Ahmed al-Taie from Mosul's Nineveh operation command.