

International

Alan Kurdi rescue ship picks up another 44 migrants

Malta to relocate migrants on German rescue ship

VALETTA: The migrant rescue boat Alan Kurdi has saved another 44 people, including women and infants from their stricken vessel in the Mediterranean, its operator German charity Sea-Eye said yesterday. Malta has agreed to take in those rescued and is sending a vessel to pick them up, the charity said in a statement.

Malta's coastguard confirmed that it would transfer the migrants to one of its vessels in international waters. Malta's government did not say whether a deal had been reached for the migrants' final destination. The Alan Kurdi last week rescued 65 shipwrecked migrants attempting the perilous journey from North Africa, handing them over to Malta after hardline Interior Minister Matteo Salvini closed Italy's ports to the vessel.

Sea-Eye said it was alerted to the plight of the latest migrants off the Libyan coast by Tunisian fishermen and a civilian search plane. The rescued migrants said they had left Zuwara in Libya early Saturday. Their wooden boat was in Malta's search and rescue area so Maltese authorities asked a nearby freighter to coordinate the rescue, which told Sea-Eye to take the migrants on board.

"Forty-four people, including four women and three children," were brought aboard the Alan Kurdi, Sea-Eye said. The children are 15 months, three and five years old. The people come from Syria, Libya, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Guinea, it said. "A 15-month-old baby should never have to be in such a life-threatening situation," said Sea-Eye spokeswoman Carlotta Weibl.

Italy mulling warship patrols

The 65 migrants the Alan Kurdi handed over to Maltese authorities on Sunday have already been sent on to other European Union countries. An Italian customs vessel on Tuesday separately brought 47 rescued

migrants into Sicily's Pozzallo port, Italian media reported. The migrants had been headed to Lampedusa, an Italian island between Sicily and Libya, but there was no space for them there as hundreds of migrants continue to arrive by their own means or are rescued by authorities.

Salvini has vowed to close Italian ports to charity rescue ships, which he accuses of helping people smugglers. Interior ministry figures showed that 395 migrants have arrived in Italy since the end of June. Italian media reported that this year barely one in 10 migrants and asylum seekers has been brought into Italy by charity vessels—the vast majority arrived by other means. Salvini on Monday said he wanted to deploy military vessels to stop migrant vessels arriving.

Half of the migrants landed in Pozzallo are Tunisian, Italian media reported. Salvini has written to the Tunisian authorities urging a new bilateral deal on handling migrants, including using ferries to repatriate them.

Captains risk Italian ire

Italy and Malta have repeatedly criticized Europe's "case-by-case" approach to migrant rescues, which means shipwreck victims spend days or weeks at sea while countries try to agree where they should go. The Alan Kurdi, which had been banned from entering Maltese and Italian waters, is the third rescue vessel in a week to make headlines. Some 41 people were finally allowed to step off migrant rescue charity Mediterranean's Italian-flagged Alex, which arrived at the port on Saturday in an overnight operation that saw the ship seized by authorities.

The boat's captain Tommaso Stella is being investigated for allegedly aiding illegal immigration. Salvini last month issued a decree that would impose fines of up to 50,000 euros for the captain, owner and opera-



VALETTA: Migrants, part of group of 65 rescued by the German-flagged NGO rescue ship Alan Kurdi, look out from a patrol boat as they are brought into Haywharf, in Valletta, by the Armed Forces of Malta after being transferred onto the Maltese patrol boat. —AFP

tor of a vessel "entering Italian territorial waters without authorization". Authorities on Lampedusa in late June seized a rescue ship belonging to German aid group Sea-Watch, which had forced its way into port with dozens of rescued migrants on board, and arrested its captain, Carola Rackete.

An Italian judge subsequently ordered her freed,

saying she had been acting to save lives, a decision which sparked Salvini's ire but may have encouraged the Alex crew. Libya, which has been wracked by chaos since the 2011 uprising that killed dictator Moamer Kadhafi, has long been a major transit route for migrants, especially from sub-Saharan Africa, desperate to reach Europe. —AFP

Maduro 'optimistic' after opposition talks resume in Barbados

CARACAS: Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro said Monday he was "optimistic" after dialogue between his government and the opposition resumed in Barbados. The South American nation was plunged into political turmoil in January when National Assembly speaker Juan Guaido declared himself acting president in a direct challenge to Maduro's authority. The opposition leader is recognized by the United States and more than 50 other countries, but has been unable to dislodge Venezuela's socialist leader, who is backed by Russia, China and Cuba.

Delegations from both sides arrived in Barbados Monday morning to revive discussions, after a previous round in Norway petered out. "I am very optimistic... Today they had a five-hour session, and I think that step by step, with strategic patience, we can find a path to peace," Maduro said in a broadcast on the state television channel VTV. Without giving details, he said that a six-point agenda was being discussed with "the whole country in mind."

"If you work with goodwill and there is no American interventionism, I am sure that we will reach an agreement," said Maduro, who blames the United States for fanning the crisis. The Barbados talks will be the third round since the Oslo talks in May, although Guaido had originally said last Tuesday there were no plans to reopen talks with Maduro's "murderous dictatorship" following the death of an officer in custody over an alleged coup plot.

The suspicious death of retired naval officer Rafael Acosta Arevalo had sparked international condemnation. Guaido said Sunday he wants the talks to lead them towards Maduro's departure from the presidency he has held since 2013 to a transitional government, and then "free elections with international observers".

Ravaged by crises

Some members of the opposition oppose the Barbados talks, fearing they may reinvigorate Maduro, but Enrique Marquez, vice president of Venezuela's opposition-controlled National Assembly, said they are the best option. "A violent solution... could generate loss of governance even for a new government," he told AFP. Along with the negotiations in Barbados, Guaido had a closed-door meeting on Monday in the capital Caracas with Enrique Iglesias, the European Union's special advisor for Venezuela.

Afterwards, Iglesias met with Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodriguez. "Iglesias has confirmed his commitment to the dialogue process," Rodriguez said on Twitter. Oil-rich Venezuela has been ravaged by five years of recession marked by shortages of food, medicine and other basic necessities, and the economic woes have been exacerbated by the political crisis. Delegations representing the Venezuelan rivals met face-to-face in Oslo for the first time in late May, in a process begun two weeks earlier under Norwegian auspices to find a solution to the nation's multiple crises.

Maduro has repeatedly said that the dialogue will continue with the opposition "for peace in Venezuela." Guaido has called Maduro a "usurper" for staying in power after a 2018 election widely dismissed as a sham. Meanwhile, Panamanian President Laurentino Cortizo stressed in a TV interview that a military intervention is not the solution to the Venezuelan crisis, and offered his country's assistance in reaching a negotiated solution. —AFP

Trump outbursts test US-UK 'special relationship'

LONDON: Donald Trump's refusal to deal with the UK ambassador following the leak of his frank assessment of the US president's chaotic rule raises a big question: can the allies' much-vaunted "special relationship" survive? The Mail on Sunday's publication of Ambassador Kim Darroch's confidential cables set off a furious Trump Twitter storm. Darroch had called Trump "inept" and his administration "uniquely dysfunctional".

Trump tweeted back Monday that Darroch "is not liked or well thought of within the U.S. We will no longer deal with him." He also welcomed the "good news" that Prime Minister Theresa May was stepping down in two weeks. He followed that up on Tuesday by calling "wacky Ambassador" Darroch "a very stupid guy". All of which creates another headache for UK politicians during a tumultuous stretch in which they must decide how- or even if-Britain will leave the EU as scheduled on October 31.

Who leaked?

The hunt is on for the culprit and the "whodunnit" theories are flying. Most concern the nuanced politics at play in the UK leadership fight between Brexit-backing former London mayor Boris Johnson and underdog Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt. One popular theory says the leak

was meant to punish both Darroch and the politician tipped to replace him for allegedly failing to embrace Brexit in full.

This would suggest that the culprit was trying to make sure Johnson—seemingly assured of May's office-picks someone who shares Trump's far more sceptical view of the EU. But the leak has also damaged Britain's foreign standing and some talk is focused on how much an old rival like Russian President Vladimir Putin stands to gain. "Of course it would be massively concerning if it was the act of a foreign, hostile state," Hunt told The Sun.

Can the ambassador stay?

UK politicians of all stripes have bristled at the thought of Trump simply shoving their man out of Washington. Whether Darroch can still perform his duties depends on what Trump actually meant in his tweets. Darroch has already been taken off one White House dinner guest list. But the UK envoy will be more concerned about maintaining his private contacts and talking to people in Trump's inner sanctum. If Trump means "the whole White House staff is closed to you, including the national security adviser, that would be much more serious," Britain's former US envoy Christopher Meyer said.

How bad is the damage?

UK diplomats worry that the publication of what Downing Street described as Darroch's "unvarnished" views will put off others from reporting similarly delicate matters. "The damage is to the confidence of civil servants to put their frank thoughts to ministers," former Foreign Office number two Peter Ricketts wrote in The Guardian. Ricketts also expressed concern that "Britain's reputation as a country that



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump applauds after speaking about his administration's environmental policies at the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP

knows how to keep its secrets" might suffer. Hunt agreed that it was "very important" that UK ambassadors all over "continue to give us their frank assessments".

What next?

The scandal piles on the pressure for the next UK leader to either bow to Trump's pressure or stick by London's envoy. "Removing Darroch swiftly from office would be seen as a humiliating cave-in to a bullying foreign power," the Politico news site wrote. "But voicing support for the beleaguered ambassador risks damaging relations with Trump from the outset." The choice is made all the more important by the next ambassador's role in negotiating a new US trade agreement that can mitigate the potential dam-

age of Britain's split from the EU.

Will the 'special relationship' last?

The "special relationship" term has always been more widely used in London than in Washington. The United States also enjoyed "special" ties with countries such as Israel and neighboring Canada. But London provides Washington with a vital and reliable European ally that has been by its side through two world wars. The two provide each other with intelligence and share the same global security vision that has spanned decades and which is almost certain to last. "The relationship with Washington is based on strong and deep shared interests," Ricketts wrote. "Those are unchanged by the leaks." —AFP

Washington DC hit by torrential rain, flooding

WASHINGTON: Torrential rain lashed Washington DC and surrounding areas on Monday, flooding many neighborhoods and hobbling electricity and transportation networks. The National Weather Service issued a Flash Flood Warning as the storm hit, drowning roads and forcing closures of many major arteries. Airports and rail networks were also hit, causing delays. The American capital's Ronald Reagan airport received 3.3 inches (around 83 millimeters) of rainfall in just one hour, the NWS added in a tweet.

Dramatic footage aired on local TV stations and posted on social media showed vehicles submerged on roads near major landmarks like the Washington Monument,

and some motorists standing on the roofs of their cars as the floodwaters rose. One such video showed water gushing down through a hole in the roof of a Washington metro station. The main power vault of the National Archives building—which houses some of the most important documents in American history—was flooded, cutting power as the streets around it were submerged.

"The building's flood walls deployed and worked," the institution said in a statement. "The Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights—along with all of the permanently valuable records stored in the building—are safe and not in any danger." The White House was not spared either: Footage posted by several correspondents and outlets showed puddles forming in one of its basements.

Emergency services said they received dozens of calls from citizens seeking help. Despite the widespread flooding, no deaths were reported. The rainfall and floodwaters subsided later in the day, as damage assess-



WASHINGTON: Flood debris from the rain storm is seen on Canal Road in Washington, DC. —AFP

ments began in the District of Columbia—where Washington is located—and neighboring parts of Virginia and Maryland. Hundreds of customers were affected by power outages

because of the rainfall, according to a live map on the website of local utility Pepco. "Stay clear of downed power lines and always assume they are energized," it said in a tweet. —AFP

Russia adopts resolution in favor of Georgia sanctions

MOSCOW: Russian lawmakers yesterday adopted a resolution in favor of introducing economic sanctions against Georgia as tensions between Moscow and Tbilisi rise. Lawmakers in

Russia's lower-house of parliament, the Duma, supported an appeal for the government to "impose special economic measures on Georgia, where anti-Russian provocations continue". Duma chairman Vyacheslav Volodin said the resolution recommends banning Georgian wine and mineral water in Russia, as well as "limiting financial transactions from our country to Georgia."

Protesters in Georgian capital Tbilisi

have rallied over the past weeks after a Russian lawmaker spoke in the Georgian parliament, with Moscow responding by tightening restrictions on wine imports and suspending flights to Georgia. Tensions rose further after a Georgian presenter launched into a live-TV expletive-laden tirade against President Vladimir Putin, sparking fury in Moscow. "We consider the insults to our country, threats to our citizens and insults to our president inadmissible,"

Volodin was quoted as saying on the Duma website.

The Kremlin said the parliament's "tough" and "unified" position followed "the unprecedented behavior of the Georgian TV presenter". "This kind of thuggish behavior fuels Russophobia. This is very dangerous," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. "But, as you know, the decision is made by the government and ultimately the president," Peskov added. —AFP