



Hong Kong protesters target Chinese traders

British counter-terrorism police hunting leaker

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KISMAYO: A man passes in front of the rubbles of the popular Medina hotel of Kismayo a day after at least 26 people, including several foreigners, were killed and 56 injured in a suicide bomb and gun attack claimed by Al-Shabaab militants. —AFP

26 killed in deadly Somalia hotel siege

Attack lasted 11 hours; Local elders, MPs were meeting in the hotel

MOGADISHU: Islamist gunmen killed 26 people, including Kenyans, Americans, a Briton and Tanzanians, when they stormed a hotel in Somalia's southern port city of Kismayo, a regional state president said yesterday, the deadliest day in the city since insurgents were driven out in 2012. A car bomb exploded at the hotel where local elders and lawmakers were having a meeting on Friday night, and then three gunmen stormed in, police said. It took 11 hours before security forces ended the overnight attack, police officer Major Mohamed Abdi told Reuters.

The dead included a presidential candidate for August's regional elections, Jubaland state president Ahmed Mohamed Madobe said in a statement. At least two journalists and a UN agency staff member were also reported to have been killed. Al-Qaeda-linked Islamist group al Shabaab, which is trying to topple Somalia's weak UN-backed government, immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Abdiyas Abu Musab, the group's military operation spokesman said yesterday they had killed 30 people and four of its

fighters were also dead. Al Shabaab and government officials tend to give differing casualty numbers for attacks. Regional president Madobe said that three Kenyans, one Briton, two Americans and three Tanzanians were among those killed. "Among the dead was also a Jubaland presidential candidate named Shuuriye. Four militants attacked the hotel. One of them was the suicide car bomber, two were shot dead and one was captured alive by Jubaland security forces," he said.

He said 56 people were wounded in the attack, including two Chinese citizens. Police had said earlier all the attackers had been killed. Kismayo resident Osman Nur told Reuters that the explosion had destroyed huge parts of the hotel and nearby businesses and security forces were deployed all over the city. Another anguished resident said she had lost relatives in the attack.

"I have been looking for the whereabouts of my nephew who worked at the hotel. I got his dead body this morning and have just buried him," Halima Nur, a mother of four, told Reuters by phone. "And this afternoon I will attend the burial of other relatives."

Jubaland's minister of planning, Just Aw Hersi, confirmed the deaths of several prominent Somalis on Twitter. He said some of the foreigners also held dual Somali citizenship. "We admit, we are heartbroken by their sudden violent deaths. But rest assured, we are also as mad as hell because of it," he tweeted.

Naming the dead

The Somalia office of the UN's International Organization for Migration said one of its local staff members, Abdifatah Mohamed, was among those killed while SADO Somalia, a local non-governmental organisation, said its executive director Abdullahi Isse Abdulle had died in the attack. Two journalists were among the dead: Somali-Canadian Hodan Naleyah, the founder of Integration TV, and Mohamed Sahal Omar, a reporter for SBC TV in Kismayo.

Jubaland president Madobe said Jama Fariid, Naleyah's husband, had also been killed. "Through her work as a journalist, Hodan highlighted the community's positive stories and contributions in Canada. She

became a voice for many. We mourn her loss deeply, and all others killed in the #KismayoAttack," Ahmed Hussen, Canada's Immigration minister, said on Twitter.

Al Shabaab was forced out of Mogadishu in 2011 and has since lost most of its other strongholds. It was driven out of Kismayo in 2012 by Kenyan forces supporting a regional militia headed by Madobe. The city's port had been a major source of revenue for the group from taxes, charcoal exports and levies on arms and other illegal imports. Kismayo is the commercial capital of Jubaland, a region of southern Somalia still partly controlled by al Shabaab.

The group remains a major security threat, with fighters frequently carrying out bombings in Somalia and neighboring Kenya, whose troops form part of the African Union-mandated peacekeeping force that helps defend the Somali government. Somalia is scheduled to have parliamentary elections this month and presidential elections next month. But relations between the central government and its federal states have sometimes been rocky amid arguments over power and resources. —Reuters

Eternally stinky city? Rome garbage crisis sparks health fears

ROME: Landfills in flames and rats feasting on waste in the streets have sparked health fears in Rome, as doctors warn families to steer clear of disease-ridden curbside garbage and locals launch a disgusting dumpster contest online. Crowds of summer tourists are forced to navigate overflowing bins in the stifling heat, as the pungent perfume of neglected garbage draws scavenging animals and the threat of disease to the Eternal City and locals fume over the city's refuse management.

Rome's chief physician Antonio Magi has issued a "hygiene alert", telling AFP this could be upgraded to a health warning, with disease spread through the faeces of insects and animals banqueting on rotting waste. His warning prompted local prosecutors to open an investigation this week into the city's refuse collection. In the meantime, furious Rome residents have launched a contest on Twitter to find the most fetid dustbins.

Discarded pizza boxes or the remains of spaghetti lunches and fruit rinds draw opportunistic seagulls, rats and even wild boars to the streets of Rome, with wolves also spotted closer to the city's outskirts than ever before. Adding to the indignation of Rome residents is the steep price they are paying for their garbage to rot in the streets. The city spent more than 597 euros (\$670) per inhabitant on household waste treatment in 2017 - by far the highest in the country, ahead of Venice (353 euros) and Florence (266 euros), according to a report by the Openpolis Foundation. But the city lacks infrastructure: of its three main landfills, one has closed and the others were ravaged by fire in recent months. And two biological treatment sites have reduced their activities for maintenance work.

'Degradation and abandonment'

Some residents make matters worse by simply dumping their old mattresses, fridges and sofas next to garbage bins. But local Salvatore Orlando, 50, told AFP the council was entirely to blame. "Of course it's the mayor's fault. You certainly can't blame the citizens," he said. "They produce waste, they have to throw it away, and the public services have to collect it. It's simple. We pay taxes for it". Rome's mayor and the pres-



ROME: A resident walks past overflowing trash bins in the Centocelle district of Rome, as the Italian capital struggles with a renewed garbage emergency aggravated by the summer heat. —AFP

ident of the Lazio region both assured Italy's environment minister Tuesday that the crisis would be resolved "within 15 days". But to do so, more of the city's 5,000 tons of daily waste will have to be sent for incineration elsewhere.

"Everyone complains about waste but no one wants an incinerator. Instead, we take the waste abroad, to Austria, to Germany!", another aggrieved resident said, declining to give his name. Even Pope Francis has commented on the decline, lamenting in June Rome's "degradation and abandonment". Italy's Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, head of the far-right League, has jumped on the chance to use the crisis as a political weapon against mayor Virginia Raggi, who hails from the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S).

The stench and sticky pavements have given him ammunition ahead of the next municipal elections, scheduled for 2021. But in a city where key sectors are riddled with inefficiency and corruption, residents will wonder whether Salvini has a magic recipe for resolving a situation that has stumped parties over the years across the political spectrum. In the meantime, rubbish is just one more daily challenge in a city with countless potholes, trees that topple at the first gust of wind and buses that catch fire if their engines start at all. —AFP

US Labor Secretary resigns over Epstein affair

WASHINGTON: US Labor Secretary Alex Acosta resigned Friday, amid a backlash over a secret plea deal he negotiated a decade ago with Jeffrey Epstein, the financier accused of sexually abusing young girls. Acosta, 50, a former federal prosecutor, had been facing mounting calls to quit over the deal that saw Epstein serve just 13 months in a county jail. "I called the president this morning and told him that I thought the right thing was to step aside," Acosta said in a joint appearance with President Donald Trump at the White House.

Epstein, 66, was charged on Monday by prosecutors in New York with one count of sex trafficking of minors and one count of conspiracy to commit sex trafficking of minors. He faces up to 45 years in prison if convicted. Trump, who had defended Acosta after Epstein's arrest, described him as a "tremendous talent" and "great secretary of labor" who had done a "very good job." The president said Patrick Pizzella, Acosta's deputy, "will do the job. Highly recommended by Alex. Going to be acting. He's already been told."

According to prosecutors, Epstein sexually exploited dozens of underage teen girls at his homes in Manhattan and Palm Beach, Florida, between 2002 and 2005. Some were as young as 14. Acosta fielded a barrage of questions Wednesday from reporters about his office's handling of the Epstein case when he was a federal

prosecutor in Florida. The deal reached with Epstein required him to admit a single state charge of soliciting prostitution from a minor and register as a sex offender.

'Roll of the dice'

Acosta said prosecutors agreed to the deal rather than take Epstein to trial on more serious charges because that would have been a "roll of the dice." "The goal here was straightforward," he said. "Put Epstein behind bars, ensure he registered as a sexual offender, provide victims with the means to seek restitution, and protect the public by putting them on notice that a sexual predator was in their midst." Acosta welcomed the revived charges against Epstein but demurred when asked whether he should apologize to the victims in the Florida case.

Another alleged victim of Epstein went public Wednesday with her claim that he raped her when she was 15 years old. Jennifer Araoz, 32, told NBC News that she was recruited by a woman outside her New York City high school in 2001 to meet Epstein at his Manhattan townhouse. She said that in the fall of 2002, Epstein raped her. "He raped me, forcefully raped me," Araoz said, adding that she did not return to his home after that day.

She said she was afraid at the time of going to the authorities. Top Democrats in Congress, including House speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer, have called this week for Acosta's resignation. "Acosta was never fit to serve in the Cabinet - his departure is the right thing for our country," tweeted Virginia Senator Tim Kaine, Hillary Clinton's running mate when she lost the 2016 election to Trump. "Now it's time to focus on finally securing justice for survivors of Epstein's abuse and getting a Labor Secretary who will stand up for workers and trafficking victims." —AFP