

## International

# Fear, kidnap worries in Ghana after abduction of Canadians

## Rise of kidnapping for ransom could dent hard-earned reputation

ACCRA: It was a shocking attack; two young Canadian women grabbed as they stepped from a taxi outside a golf club in Ghana - and still missing one week later. But the abductions have also shed light on other attacks in a country popular with tourists, raised fears of copy-cat Nigeria-style abductions, and sparked warnings of rising crime if security forces don't crackdown on the gangs responsible. "Ghana had long had an enviable reputation as the safest country in West Africa, avoiding the violence that has plagued most of its neighbors," said Nnamdi Obasi, an analyst from the International Crisis Group (ICG).

"The rise of kidnapping for ransom could dent that hard-earned and well-deserved reputation. It could also harm tourism, an important industry for the country," The Canadians, charity volunteers aged 19 and 20, were abducted last Tuesday, 4 June, in Kumasi, Ghana's second-largest city, some 200 kilometers northwest of the capital Accra. The police, who have not released the names of the women, are working with Canadian authorities to find them. "The combined efforts to trace the ladies is still going on," assistant commissioner of police David Eklu said yesterday.

### Tourism dent

Ghana, better known for its palm-fringed beaches, hosts over 1.3 million tourists a year. Many visitors, especially from North America, also come to see the grim reminders of the slave trade. Tourism plays a big role in Ghana's economy, making up some five percent of GDP. So the kidnaps are a big worry. "Who wants to visit a country that is not safe to visit?" said Adam Bona, who heads Security Warehouse Limited, a Ghanaian company fitting electronic alarm and security systems. "We want to be in a country you can walk around without looking on your shoulder, and the latest

wave of kidnapping makes things dangerous."

Businesses relying on tourism are fearful. "We are concerned because it could affect our business," said Samuel Owusu Oppong, who runs a backpacker hostel in Accra. "Seeing such things will make people stay home." Violent crime towards foreigners is rare, but analysts point to a rising number of kidnappings for cash. Last year, three Ghanaian women were kidnapped in the southern port of Takoradi.

In April, an Indian man was reportedly abducted, also in Kumasi, by an armed gang demanding a cash ransom. He was swiftly rescued by police. The Estonian consul was also briefly abducted in April, but released soon after. "Everyone is a target - but foreigners are becoming the main focus because they get more attention," said Vladimir Antwi-Danso, from the Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Training Centre, in Accra. "If it's about ransom, it means the kidnappers can ask for huge sums of money for themselves."

### Nigerian influence?

Some fear that the example of nearby Nigeria, where abductions take place nearly daily, has inspired criminals. "The surge of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria could be having an unhealthy demonstration effect on criminal groups in Ghana and elsewhere in West Africa," Obasi said.

"It is important to track down and punish the perpetrators of these crimes, in order to prevent a climate of impunity that could embolden other criminals," he added. Earlier this year, local media quoted President Nana Akufo-Addo as warning that kidnapping must not become commonplace in Ghana. "Our brothers and sisters in Nigeria have known it," Akufo-Addo said, according to Ghanaian newspapers.

"But we have not known it in this country, and we



KUMASI: Photo shows the Silver Spring residence in Kumasi, where two Canadian women, 19 and 20 years old, were living before having been kidnapped late on June 4. — AFP

need to do something about it, to make sure that it doesn't become a feature of our society." The vast majority of visits are safe, but foreign embassies err on the side of caution when they issue travel advice. Canada's High Commission warns citizens to "exercise a high degree of caution due to petty crime" in Ghana - as it does for France or Britain. "Violent crimes, including armed robbery and kidnapping, may occur," the Canadian government travel advisory warns.

### Bulwark of stability

Ghana is a country of some 30 million people, where more than two-thirds of people follow Christianity and the rest Islam and other religions. It has long been seen as a bulwark of stability in a region struggling to contain multiple groups of Islamist fighters. "Ghanaian security sources say previous kidnappings had been for ransom - and that they do not think the most recent incident is terrorism-related," Obasi added. — AFP

## Nuclear stalemate one year after Trump-Kim summit

SEOUL: When Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump shook hands before the world's cameras in Singapore a year ago on Wednesday, they pledged change and progress. But now they are gripped by diplomatic recriminations after a failed second meeting in Hanoi. In Singapore - the first-ever summit between a sitting US president and a North Korean leader - Kim signed a vaguely-worded deal on denuclearization, touted by Trump as a historic breakthrough.

But a second meeting in Vietnam in February ended abruptly - without even a scheduled lunch - after the two failed to agree on what the North would be willing to give up in exchange for sanctions relief. The process remains deadlocked and analysts say the two sides have sobered up since. "Immediately after the Singapore summit, we had a tidal wave of completely unrealistic, almost comical expectations," said Andrei Lankov, a professor at Kookmin University in Seoul. "Then it became clear what has been obvious - the North Koreans are not going to surrender nuclear weapons," Lankov told AFP.

Kim declared an end to nuclear tests and long-range missile launches last year amid a rapid rapprochement, paving the way for the Singapore meeting. Since Hanoi, Pyongyang has accused Washington of acting in "bad faith" and given it until the end of the year to change its approach. And last month the North fired short-range missiles for the first time since Nov 2017. "We have gone from what felt like a spirit of hope and optimism to now a clear path of uncertainty," said Harry Kazianis of the Center for the National Interest.

### 'Military and diplomatic surrender'

US officials say privately there has been no direct contact with the North Koreans since the Hanoi summit and have expressed increasing frustration over Pyongyang's silence. The North has instead spoken through its state media, demanding the removal of Trump's top aides - Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton - and warning of a "new path" if Washington does not change course. The two leaders went to Hanoi with very different approaches - the US wanting an "all-for-all" deal while Pyongyang sought a "step-by-step" process - and have blamed each other for the failure to reach an agreement.

Washington accused Pyongyang of effectively demanding an end to all sanctions for partial disarmament, while the North said it wanted some of the meas-



SINGAPORE: In this file photo taken on June 12, 2018, US President Donald Trump and North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un shake hands following a signing ceremony during their historic US-North Korea summit at the Capella Hotel on Sentosa island. — AFP

ures eased in return for closing all the nuclear production facilities at its Yongbyon complex. "The current impasse will continue indefinitely unless both sides can come to grips with why it has occurred in the first place," Kazianis told AFP.

In Hanoi the US had in essence demanded "an unprecedented military and diplomatic surrender" by Pyongyang, he said, but added the North should not expect "the most crippling sanctions" to be removed for only closing the Yongbyon facility. The two leaders will drag out the current stalemate "to prevent engagement from running completely off the rails", the Eurasia Group said in a brief, forecasting a slight possibility of a third summit this year.

### 'Cycle of provocation'

Officials in Washington say they have proposed working-level talks to Pyongyang but are not planning another summit until a deal is hammered out. And with a US president who says he is in "no rush" and appears content with the status quo, analysts say the ball is now in North Korea's court - even as Pyongyang insists otherwise. Trump has dismissed worries about the North's recent missile tests, reiterating his trust in Kim who he described as "a man who perhaps wants to get attention".

With sanctions still in place, the US expected pressure to mount on the North to offer concessions, said Go Myong-hyun, an analyst at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies. But Go warned that Pyongyang appeared to be "heading back towards its traditional cycle of provocation". The missile launches were "a friendly reminder to Donald Trump that North Korea exists and that they still are ready to talk", Lankov said, adding the North had been "explicit" about resuming nuclear testing unless the US accepts its conditions. — AFP

women have spoken to a person or an institution about their suffering and only 6.6% have brought their case before justice, the survey said. Ben Ghala said she was referred to the Araafa listening and counseling centre after she went to the hospital to seek treatment for her injuries. "We live under oppression and we live in pain. The blow I received in my head deteriorated my vision," she said. Ben Ghala did not identify the relative who she said had abused her.

The Araafa centre can help only a small proportion of the women who say they have been abused. Last year, it offered advice to 146 women subjected to all kinds of violence and abuse. Morocco has dozens of such centers across the country. "I had a miscarriage because of the beating and the mental pressures I was enduring," said Raja, an unemployed 19-year old, who said her husband had been violent and who now lives with her parents. "I can't understand why that violence happened. Was it a habit or a mental illness or something else?", she said. Charifa, 26, told Reuters she had been beaten by her husband, who expelled her from the house and prevented her from seeing her son and daughter, aged 7 and 6. — Reuters

## N Korean leader's brother was CIA informant

SEOUL: Kim Jong Nam, the estranged half brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un who was killed in Malaysia in 2017, was a CIA informant, the Wall Street Journal reported yesterday. Citing "a person knowledgeable about the matter", the paper said Kim Jong Nam had met with CIA operatives several times.

Kim Jong Nam, who was once seen as heir apparent to the North's leadership, died after having his face smeared with the outlawed VX nerve agent as he waited at Kuala Lumpur airport. According to the Journal's source there was a "nexus" between Kim Jong Nam and the CIA, but the paper said many details of his connection with the intelligence agency were unclear.

The source said Kim Jong Nam travelled to Malaysia in February 2017 to meet his CIA contact, but that may not have been the only purpose of his trip. Kim Jong Nam died after being attacked at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on February 13, 2017 in a Cold

War-style assassination that shocked the world. Two young women, one Vietnamese and one Indonesian, were arrested and charged with the murder. They insisted they were tricked by North Korean agents into carrying out the hit and had thought it was a reality TV show prank.

Malaysian prosecutors eventually dropped the murder charges against them and Indonesian Siti Aisyah was released in March this year while her Vietnamese co-accused Doan Thi Huong was freed in May. South Korea has accused the North of ordering the hit, which Pyongyang denies. Once seen as leader Kim Jong II's natural successor, Kim Jong Nam apparently fell from grace after being deported from Japan in 2001 for trying to enter on a forged passport to visit Disneyland.

Since then he had been living in virtual exile, mainly in the southern Chinese enclave of Macau. He had spoken to Japanese and other overseas media with surprising candour on various occasions and 2011 he told a Japanese newspaper that he opposed the idea of the North's dynastic power transfer. "Several former US officials said the half brother, who had lived outside of North Korea for many years and had no known power base in Pyongyang, was unlikely to be able to provide details of the secretive country's inner workings," the Journal said. — AFP



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## Many women in Morocco face abuse at home

RABAT: Bearing pictures of scars and bruises she said she had suffered at home, Fatna Ben Ghala sought help at a women's counseling centre in a poor neighborhood near Morocco's capital Rabat after she and her mother endured domestic violence by a relative. The case of Ben Ghala, 40, and her mother was not unusual. Some 54.4% percent of women, amounting to millions in a country with a population of about 35 million, have been subjected to violence, according to a survey released last month by the Solidarity, Family and Social Development Ministry.

The survey, which showed the 25-29 age group is most vulnerable, also pointed up the amount of work to be done to remedy the abuse. Only 28.2% of abused