

Somalia truck bombing kills more than 300, scores remain missing

By **ABDI GULED**
Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia — More than 300 people were killed in the weekend truck bombing in Somalia's capital and scores remained missing, authorities said Monday, as the fragile Horn of Africa nation reeled from one of the world's worst attacks in years.

As funerals continued, the government said the death toll was expected to rise.

Nearly 400 people were injured in the bombing Saturday that targeted a crowded street in Mogadishu. Somalia's government blamed the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab, though the Islamic extremist group has not claimed responsibility for the attack. A new statement by the SITE Intelligence Group said al-Shabab posted claims of responsibility as recently as Monday for other attacks on Somali and African Union forces — but not for Saturday's blast.

Still, analysts said there was little doubt the Islamic extremist group carried out the bombing, one of the deadliest in sub-Saharan Africa. "No other group in Somalia has the capacity to put together a bomb of this size, in this nature," said Matt Bryden, a security consultant on the Horn of Africa.

Nearly 70 people remained missing, based on accounts from relatives, said police Capt. Mohamed Hussein. He said many bodies were burned to ashes in the attack.

As the death toll rose to 302, overwhelmed hospitals in Mogadishu were struggling to treat badly wounded



AP Photo/Farah Abdi Warsameh

Turkish doctors transport a critically wounded man on a stretcher to a waiting Turkish air ambulance to airlift injured patients for treatment in Turkey, in Mogadishu, Somalia, Monday.

victims, many burned beyond recognition. Exhausted doctors struggled to keep their eyes open as the screams from victims and bereaved families echoed in the halls.

Africa's deadliest Islamic extremist group, al-Shabab has waged war in Somalia for more than a decade, often targeting high-profile areas of the capital. Earlier this year, it vowed to step up attacks after both the Trump administration and Somalia's recently elected Somali-American president, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, announced new military efforts against the group.

After Saturday's attack, Mohamed declared three days of mourning and joined thousands of people who

responded to a plea by hospitals to donate blood.

Meanwhile, a Turkish military plane carrying 35 critically wounded people arrived in the Turkish capital, Ankara, where they were taken to hospitals for treatment. Countries including Kenya and Ethiopia have offered to send medical aid in response to what Somali's government called a "national disaster," Information Minister Abdirahman Osman said. A plane carrying a medical team from Djibouti also arrived to evacuate the wounded, according to health ministry official Mohamed Ahmed.

Mogadishu, a city long accustomed to deadly bombings by al-Shabab, was stunned by the force of Satur-

day's blast. The explosion shattered hopes of recovery in an impoverished country left fragile by decades of conflict, and it again raised doubts over the government's ability to secure the seaside city of more than 2 million people.

The United States condemned the bombing, saying "such cowardly attacks reinvigorate the commitment of the United States to assist our Somali and African Union partners to combat the scourge of terrorism." But the U.S. Africa Command said U.S. forces had not been asked to provide aid. Pentagon spokesman Col. Robert Manning said Monday the U.S. currently has about 400 troops in Somalia, adding "we're not going to speculate" about sending more.

BRIEFLY

North Korea says 'a nuclear war may break out any moment'

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — North Korea's deputy U.N. ambassador warned Monday that the situation on the Korean peninsula "has reached the touch-and-go point and a nuclear war may break out any moment."

Kim In Ryong told the U.N. General Assembly's disarmament committee that North Korea is the only country in the world that has been subjected to "such an extreme and direct nuclear threat" from the United States since the 1970s — and said the country has the right to possess nuclear weapons in self-defense.

He pointed to large-scale military exercises every year using "nuclear assets" and said what is more dangerous is what he called a U.S. plan to stage a "secret operation aimed at the removal of our supreme leadership."

This year, Kim said, North Korea completed its "state nuclear force and thus became the full-fledged nuclear power which possesses the delivery means of various ranges, including the atomic bomb, H-bomb and intercontinental ballistic rockets."

"The entire U.S. mainland is within our firing range and if the U.S. dares to invade our sacred territory even an inch it will not escape our severe punishment in any part of the globe," he warned.

Trump says predecessors didn't honor fallen; response heated

WASHINGTON (AP) — For U.S. presidents, meeting the families of military personnel killed in war is about as wrenching as the presidency gets. President Donald Trump's suggestion Monday that his predecessors fell short in that duty brought a visceral reaction from those who witnessed those grieving encounters.

"He's a deranged animal," Alyssa Mastromonaco, a former deputy chief of staff to President Barack Obama, tweeted about Trump. With an expletive, she called Trump's statement in the Rose Garden a lie.

Trump said in a news conference he had written letters to the families of four soldiers killed in an Oct. 4 ambush in Niger and planned to call them, crediting himself with taking extra steps in honoring the dead properly. "Most of them didn't make calls," he said of his predecessors. He said it's possible that Obama "did sometimes" but "other presidents did not call."

The record is plain that presidents reached out to families of the dead and to the wounded, often with their presence as well as by letter and phone. The path to Walter Reed and other military hospitals, as well as to the Dover, Delaware, Air Force Base where the remains of fallen soldiers are often brought, is a familiar one to Obama, George W. Bush and others.

Bush, even at the height of two wars, "wrote all the families of the fallen," said Freddy Ford, spokesman for the ex-president. Ford said Bush also called or met "hundreds, if not thousands" of family members of the war dead.

Venezuela opposition looks for answers after election loss

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Voting sites were shifted to distant neighborhoods with rampant crime. Ballots featured the faces of opposition candidates who lost in primaries. The government-stacked National Electoral Council denied monitoring accreditation to one of Venezuela's most important independent observers.

The opposition pointed on Monday to those irregularities and others that began the moment regional elections were called to explain a staggering loss in gubernatorial contests it had expected to win in Sunday's voting.

"We encountered an absolutely fraudulent system," said Carlos Ocariz, the opposition's candidate in Miranda, the nation's second most populous state where the candidate of the ruling socialist party won.

Opposition leaders vowed to contest the vote and called for protests, though there was no sign of the mass anti-government demonstrations that wracked Venezuela this year.

Iraqi forces push into disputed city as Kurds withdraw

KIRKUK, Iraq (AP) — Two weeks after fighting together against the Islamic State, Iraqi forces pushed their Kurdish allies out of the disputed city of Kirkuk on Monday, seizing oil fields and other facilities amid soaring tensions over last month's Kurdish vote for independence.

The move by the Iraqi military and its allied militias so soon after neutralizing the Islamic State in northern Iraq hinted at a country that could once again turn on itself after disposing of a common enemy.

Civilians and federal troops pulled down Kurdish flags around the city. Kurdish Gov. Najmaddin Karim, who had stayed at his post despite being dismissed by Baghdad weeks ago, fled to Irbil, the capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish zone.

Houses spared by fires bring joy, sense of loss

SANTA ROSA, Calif. (AP) — Tom and Catherine Andrews live on the edge of devastation.

On one side of their mid-century style home, the deadly wildfires that ravaged parts of Northern California for more than a week wiped away the houses of neighbors they have known as long as two decades. On the other side, were those like the Andrews, who were spared.

On Monday as calm winds gave an advantage to firefighters trying to tame the flames, the couple balanced their good fortune against the losses suffered by many friends.

"It was disbelief and just feeling like the luckiest guy on earth," Tom Andrews said. "I can't believe, I mean, total destruction 50 feet away and to have our house still standing here."

For his wife, a real estate agent who sold many of the homes to friends on Wikiup Drive, there was bitter along with the sweet.

"It's heartbreaking," she said. "I'm trying not to have survivor's guilt, I think they call it. But we've been here 20 years this week. We raised



AP Photo/Eric Risberg

A house stands intact above one that was destroyed by wildfire near Atlas Peak Road Monday in Napa, Calif.

our kids in this house. So many of the families on this hill raised their kids."

After days of wind gusts that constantly fanned the fires, lighter wind offered a chance for crews to make greater gains, and thousands more people were allowed to go home more than a week after the blazes that have killed more than 40 people began.

Improving weather, the prospect of some rain later in the week and tightening containment of the flames were tempered by the first

death from the firefighting effort — a driver who was killed when his truck overturned on a winding mountain road.

Many of those who returned knew in advance whether their homes were standing or reduced to ash.

Satellite images, aerial photos and news reports with detailed maps of entire neighborhoods had given homeowners in populated areas a pretty clear idea of the fire's path. Some had seen the flames coming as they fled. Some families in rural

areas had to wait until they laid eyes on their property.

The return home was emotional even for those whose properties were spared.

"When we came up to check on it, we were amazed it was here," said Tom Beckman, who credited his neighbor's two sheep with chomping vegetation surrounding his home and keeping the fires at bay.

"All the trivial things we have to work on — cleaning up, replacing the stuff in the fridge and freezer — that's nothing compared to my friends who lost their homes," Beckman said.

The smell of smoke remained thick in the air and spread to the San Francisco area, but skies were clearer in some places.

The truck driver, who had been delivering water to the fire lines, crashed before dawn Monday in Napa County on a roadway that climbs from vineyards into the mountains. No other details were available about the accident, which was under investigation, said Mike Wilson, a fire spokesman.

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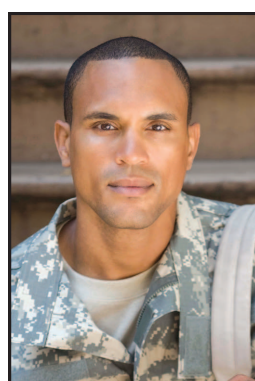


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