

Top Canadian police official arrested on spying charges



Members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) ride onto Horse Guards Parade

AFP | Ottawa

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said on Friday that they had arrested a senior intelligence officer for allegedly stealing sensitive documents.

Cameron Ortis faces five charges under Canada's criminal code and its Security of Information Act, the federal police agency said in a statement.

"The allegations are that he obtained, stored, processed sensitive information, we believe with the intent to communicate it to people that he shouldn't be communicating it to," prosecutor John MacFarlane told journalists after Ortis appeared in court on Friday.

Canada's Global News reported that Ortis, who was arrested Thursday, was a top advisor to former RCMP commissioner Bob Paulson, and had control over counter-intelligence operations.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who is campaigning for a second term in office, told reporters at an election rally "I can assure you that the authorities are taking this extremely seriously," without comment-

ing further.

His opponent Conservative leader Andrew Scheer said it was "extremely concerning that a senior RCMP intelligence officer has been arrested for leaking national security information."

"This is another reminder of the threats we face from foreign actors," said Scheer, who is tied in the polls with Trudeau.

The RCMP fears Ortis stole "large quantities of information, which could compromise an untold number of investigations," according to Global News, which first reported the arrest.

Canada is a member of the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance with Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain and the United States.

The public broadcaster Radio-Canada said Ortis is a specialist in East Asia, critical infrastructure and online "bots."

On the LinkedIn social network, the account of a person named Cameron Ortis indicates that he has worked for the Canadian government since 2007 after receiving a doctorate in international relations and political science at The University of British Columbia.

Hurricane-hit Bahamas faces tropical storm



A man bikes past destroyed homes in Marsh Harbour, Bahamas

● The storm is expected to strengthen into a hurricane, threatening to disrupt relief and rescue efforts

● A warning was issued for the northern Bahamas, already ravaged by Hurricane Dorian

AFP | Washington

The devastated northern Bahama islands faced a fresh tropical storm yesterday, potentially complicating desperately needed relief efforts to the shattered archipelago in the wake of Hurricane Dorian.

The announcement from

the National Hurricane Centre (NHC) came after it had warned early Friday that a strengthening tropical depression was heading for the same islands hit by Dorian last week.

The storm, dubbed Humberto, is expected to strengthen into a hurricane, moving very near the northwestern Bahamas, before shifting to offshore Florida after the weekend, the Miami-based forecaster said.

Grand Bahama and Abaco -- in the path of the strengthening weather system, according to Bahamian forecasters -- were among the worst-hit by Dorian.

Carl Smith, a spokesman for the Bahamian National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), warned the storm could have an impact on relief and recovery efforts on the islands.

"The weather system will

slow down logistics," Smith told a press conference in Nassau, the capital. "Fuel and water remain the biggest needs in Abaco."

Humberto was generating 40 mile (64 kilometre) per hour winds, the NHC said, and was expected to become a hurricane in two or three days.

Winds of up to 60 miles (100 kilometres) per hour were expected and heavy rainfall could bring some flooding to the already saturated islands, said the Department of Meteorology's director Trevor Basden.

The announcement that yet another storm would lash the Bahamas came as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned of the dangers of climate change during a visit to the hurricane-battered archipelago.

Guterres said in a tweet he had come to the Bahamas "to



Winds of up to 60 miles (100 kilometres) per hour were expected and heavy rainfall could bring some flooding to the already saturated islands

express my solidarity with the Bahamian people" and "ways we can continue supporting them."

He said 75 percent of all buildings had been destroyed in some areas by Dorian, a Category 5 storm.

"Hospitals are either in ruins, or overwhelmed," Guterres said. "Schools have been turned into rubble. Thousands of people will continue to need help with food, water and shelter."

He said the hurricane demonstrated the need to address climate change.

"In our new era of climate crisis, hurricanes and storms are turbo-charged," Guterres said. "They happen with greater intensity and frequency -- a direct result of warmer oceans."

"Science is telling us: this is just the start. Without urgent action, climate disruption is only going to get worse. Every week brings news of climate-related devastation."

Meanwhile, NEMA raised the death toll from 50 to 52 -- although officials have said they expect it to rise significantly.

Former prime minister Hubert Ingraham said earlier this week he feared the final death toll could be in the hundreds.

Alaska seal die-off spurs government investigation

Reuters | Anchorage, Alaska

US government biologists are investigating the deaths of nearly 300 Arctic ice seals found on Alaska beaches since last summer, a phenomenon they suspect is driven by warming seas, federal officials said on Thursday.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Thursday declared the seal die-off an "unusual mortality event," a designation that allows extra resources to be used to



One of many dead seals found washed up on beaches in Alaska

determine the cause.

So far, 282 seal carcasses have been discovered since June 2018. Fewer than half - 119 - were found last year, NOAA said.

That is five times the normal mortality rate for such seals, according to NOAA.

The carcasses likely account for a small fraction of the total

number of dead seals, as scientists assume the majority of stricken animals would sink after dying or otherwise never make it to shore, said Julie Speegle, an Alaska spokeswoman for NOAA's Fisheries Service.

The die-off comes as Arctic Alaska sea ice is scarce and sea temperatures are unusually high - conditions most scientists attribute to global warming brought on by human-caused increases of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere.

Blast at Indonesian police warehouse holding World War Two munitions

Reuters | Jakarta

An explosion went off yesterday in an Indonesian police evidence warehouse containing munitions dating from World War Two, injuring one officer and prompting the evacuation of nearby residents, police said.

The warehouse is in the Mobile Police Brigade headquarters in Srandol, close to the

city of Semarang in Central Java province.

The explosion happened at 7 a.m. (0000 GMT), provincial police chief A. Dahniel told Kompas TV, adding that the explosives stored in the warehouse had been found by residents.

The cause of the blast was being investigated and firefighters had been deployed to tackle a blaze that it triggered.

Solid gold toilet stolen from English stately home

AFP London

A gang of thieves yesterday stole an 18-carat gold toilet from an art exhibition at Britain's Blenheim Palace, police said -- causing flooding to the World Heritage Site.

The fully-functioning piece by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan, dubbed "America", was once displayed at New York's Guggenheim museum and offered

on loan to US President Donald Trump.

A 66-year-old man has been arrested over the theft at the 18th-century stately home in Oxfordshire, where an exhibition of Cattelan works opened on Thursday.

"The offenders broke into the palace overnight and left the scene at about 4.50am (0350 GMT). No-one was injured during the burglary," local police said.



A fully functioning solid gold toilet, made by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan, on display at the Guggenheim Museum in New York

Detective Inspector Jess Milne said: "The piece of art that has been stolen is a high-value toilet made out of gold that was on display at the palace."

"Due to the toilet being plumbed into the building, this has caused significant damage and flooding."

"We believe a group of offenders used at least two vehicles during the offence."

"The artwork has not been recovered at this time but we are

conducting a thorough investigation to find it and bring those responsible to justice."

Blenheim Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was closed to the public yesterday morning due to "an incident", but it did not give further details.

The palace is home to the 12th duke of Marlborough and his family, and was also the birthplace of British wartime leader Winston Churchill.