

Gunmen attack Kabul

● The training centre is overseen by the National Security Directorate

● Commandos were also deployed to the scene

Kabul | Afghanistan

Gunmen attacked an intelligence training centre in Kabul yesterday, officials said, as families buried loved ones killed by a suicide bomber a day earlier in the war-weary Afghan capital.

The attack on the training facility was the latest incident in a blood-soaked week that saw militants deliver crippling blows to government forces across Afghanistan.

"Clashes are ongoing and the area is cordoned off by the Afghan security forces," said Kabul police spokesman Hashmat Stanikzai.

The firefight erupted near a training centre overseen by the National Security Directorate -- Afghanistan's intelligence agency -- with the gunmen holed



An Afghan resident (R) weep for his relative following a suicide attack in Kabul on August 15, 2018

up in a construction site near residential buildings, an official at the scene said.

Live television footage showed humvees patrolling the empty streets while gunfire echoed and a helicopter circling above.

Commandos were also deployed to the scene to help contain the fighting, according to

another security official.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the incident.

Bloody week

The attack comes just hours after a suicide bomber detonated explosives inside an education centre in a predominantly Shiite area of western Kabul, where students were studying

for college entrance exams, killing at least 37 people.

The attack was claimed by the Islamic State (IS) group Thursday via their Amaq propaganda service, as families of the dead held a mass funeral where mourners wept and clutched the wooden coffins.

An industrial-sized digger helped soften the arid ground for the fresh graves as men removed rocks from the soil with pickaxes.

Mourners decried the unrelenting bloodshed, while others dismissed murmurings of possible ceasefires and peace negotiations between the government and the Taliban, even though the attack was claimed by IS.

"Death to your ceasefire and death to your ghost peace talks," cried one of the funeral attendees. "They are killing our educated people and everyday they are killing us."

The surge in violence comes just weeks after Afghans marked an unprecedented country-wide ceasefire between the Taliban and government forces in June, giving some temporary relief to civilians.

The brief respite sparked hopes the truce could clear the



Despite the many terrorist attacks by anti-state elements, the city is greatly developing and was the fifth fastest-growing city in the world as of 2012

way for talks to end the nearly 17-year-old conflict.

However the devastating attacks across the country in recent days have led many to question how such negotiations could move ahead.

"Everyday we are witnessing deadly attacks in Kabul and other major cities. So, I believe the Taliban do not believe in peace talks," said shopkeeper Shahenshah Shahin in Kabul.

Rescue efforts continue after Italy bridge collapse

Genoa | Italy

Italy's populist government was on a war footing yesterday with the Italian operator of the bridge that collapsed and killed dozens in the port city of Genoa as desperate efforts to find survivors in the rubble went into a third day.

Shares in Atlantia, the holding company of infrastructure giant Autostrade per l'Italia, plummeted after the government said it would seek to revoke its lucrative contracts.

On the ground, rescue workers toiled among bulldozers and cranes to find survivors amid the ruins of a vast span of the Morandi bridge that collapsed on Tuesday, sending about 35 cars and several trucks plunging 45 metres (150 feet) onto railway tracks below.

"We were unlucky last night, we did not find anyone. We are still looking for cavities that can hide people, living or not," said fire official Emanuele Gissi, adding that the unstable rubble has made the search operation



Rescuers at work amid rubble and wreckage

"dangerous".

"We are trying to cut the big pieces of concrete that fell off the bridge, after which we will move them with the cranes and send in search dogs. Then our personnel will try to see if there are any positive signs."

The government has blamed Autostrade per l'Italia, which operates and maintains nearly half of the country's motorways, for the tragedy that Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said Thursday has claimed at least

38 lives.

Children aged eight, 12 and 13 were among the dead, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini said Wednesday, adding that more people were still missing. Sixteen people were injured.

Three Chileans, who live in Italy, and four French nationals were also killed.

The government has announced a year-long state of emergency in the region, with five million euros going towards recovery work.

Trump blacklists critical ex-CIA chief Brennan

Washington | United States

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday revoked the security clearance of former Central Intelligence Agency director John Brennan, and warned several other prominent critics they too risk being blacklisted.

In a highly unusually directive, Trump claimed that Brennan -- a former station chief in Riyadh who rose to lead the formidable spy agency -- had become "erratic."

Brennan is a frequent Trump critic. Just hours before Trump issued the edict, the former CIA chief had accused the Republican leader of failing "to live up to minimum standards of decency, civility, & probity."

And after Trump's surprise decision was made public at a White House briefing, Brennan quickly hit back, accusing the president of trying to curb free speech in a "politically motivated" action that he said should "gravely worry all Americans."

In his statement, Trump

suggested the ex-spy chief had tossed around "unfounded and outrageous allegations -- wild outbursts on the internet and television -- about this administration" and engaged in "increasingly frenzied commentary."

Brennan, who has briefed Republican and Democratic presidents, could now lose access to classified information -- a courtesy usually afforded to former senior officials of all political stripes.

The White House has been besieged by a scandal over a former aide's tell-all memoir in recent days and often tries to defuse crises by stoking new controversy.

It said that eight other officials could also lose their clearances, including former director of national intelligence James Clapper, former CIA director and four-star general Michael Hayden and ex-FBI director James Comey.

The individuals were accused -- without details -- of politicizing and monetizing their public service and security clearances.

Schumacher not being moved from Switzerland

Geneva | Switzerland

Ex-Formula One champion Michael Schumacher is not being moved from his home in Switzerland to the Spanish island of Mallorca, a spokeswoman said Thursday, refuting a report by a Swiss magazine.

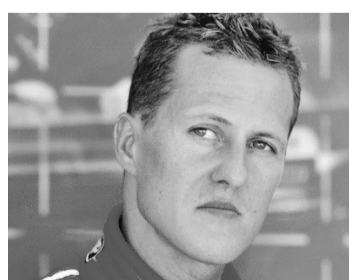
Swiss news magazine L'Illustré reported this week that the seven-time world champion, who sustained serious head injuries in a 2013 skiing accident, was being moved to a vast prop-

erty in the village of Andratx on Mallorca, recently purchased by his wife Corinna.

A number of media around the world have picked up the story in recent days, prompting the family to exit its habitual silence on all private matters.

"The Schumacher family does not plan to move to Mallorca," family spokeswoman Sabine Kehm told AFP in an email.

L'Illustré based its story on a comment from Andratx mayor Katia Rouarch, saying she could



Michael Schumacher

"officially confirm" the 49-year-old German sportsman would be

settling in the village.

"Everything is being put in place to accommodate him," she told the magazine.

But it appears that the vast property that Corinna Schumacher reportedly bought from Real Madrid president Florentino Perez in Andratx for some 30 million euros (\$34 million) is meant to be used as a vacation home for her and the couple's two adult children.

Schumacher fell and hit his head against a rock while skiing

in the French Alps with his family in December 2013.

He spent time in hospital in Grenoble and Lausanne before being brought to his home on the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland in September 2014 to continue his rehabilitation.

Schumacher's family has avoided providing any details about his health, insisting it is not a public issue, and his current condition remains a mystery.

Man who smashed Trump Hollywood star justifies attack

Los Angeles | United States

A US man accused of taking a pickaxe to President Donald Trump's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame justified his actions on Wednesday as he pleaded not guilty to a felony vandalism charge.

"I don't personally think there should be any charges brought against me because what I did, I believe, was a rightful and just act, and I think that the repercussions of it were only positive," Austin Mikel Clay, 24, told ABC7 after appearing in court in Los Angeles.

Clay, who faces three years in prison if convicted, smashed Trump's star in Hollywood on July 25 and then reportedly called police and told them "see you soon" before leaving the scene.

He later turned himself in to police in Beverly Hills.

It was the second time Trump's star had been vandalized in less than two years.

In October 2016, a man dressed as a construction worker smashed the star with a pickaxe and sledgehammer. James Otis pleaded no contest to felony vandalism and was sentenced to three years' probation and agreed to pay \$4,400 for the damage.

Chinese MH370 relatives ask to meet Malaysia PM

Beijing | China

Chinese relatives of those who disappeared on board Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 on Thursday asked to meet the country's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad when he visits China this week.

The plane disappeared in March 2014 with 239 people -- mostly from China -- on board, while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

Amid a heavy police presence, about a dozen relatives gathered outside the Malaysian Embassy in Beijing where they handed over a letter addressed to the Malaysian government.

"We ask that Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir, or other representatives (of the Malaysian government) meet with Chinese relatives of those on board MH370 during the official visit," the letter read.

Mahathir, who became Malaysia's premier for a second time after a shock election victory in May, will arrive in China Friday for a five-day visit, including a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Monday.

Other requests include resuming the search, a monthly meeting with airline and Malaysian officials, as well as for investigators to thoroughly explain the recent investigation report.

A similar letter was also given to the foreign ministry.