

world

21 dead in car bomb attack on Colombian police academy



People wait for news outside the site of an explosion on a police cadet training school in Bogota

Bogota, Colombia

Colombia's government declared three days of mourning after at least 21 people died in a car bomb at a Bogota police cadet training academy, and 68 were wounded -- the worst such incident in the city in 16 years.

The defense ministry said the "terrorist act" was carried out using a vehicle packed with 80 kilograms (around 175 pounds) of explosives.

"Unfortunately, the preliminary toll is 21 people dead, including the person responsible for the incident, and 68 wounded," Colombian police said in a statement, adding 58 of those injured had been discharged from hospital.

No group has claimed responsibility, but public prosecutor Nestor Humberto Martinez named suspect Jose Aldemar Rojas Rodriguez as the "material author of this abominable crime."

Martinez said Rojas Rodriguez entered the school compound at 9:30 am (1430 GMT) driving a grey 1993 Nissan Patrol truck, but gave no details about the explosion.

Ecuador's President Lenin Moreno said one of the dead was an Ecuadoran cadet, while a second suffered light injuries.

France will stay 'militarily engaged' in Mideast: Macron



French President Emmanuel Macron delivers his 2019 New Year's wishes to the military forces during his visit of paratroopers of the 11th Parachute Brigade of the Infantry at the air force base 101 Toulouse-Franczal, near Toulouse, southern France.

AFP | Toulouse, France

France will remain "militarily engaged" in the Middle East through 2019 despite the announced US withdrawal from the coalition fighting Islamic State jihadists in Syria, President Emmanuel Macron said Thursday.

"The retreat from Syria announced by our American friend cannot make us deviate from our strategic objective: eradicating Daesh," the president said in a speech at an army base near Toulouse, southern France, using the Arabic acronym for the IS group.

The French military has deployed 1,200 soldiers as part of the anti-IS efforts, via air operations, artillery, special forces in Syria and training for the Iraqi army.

"The fight is not over," Macron said, adding that in the coming months "we shall re-

visit our global military deployment" but "we shall remain committed to participating in stabilisation" in the Middle East region.

"Any rush to withdraw would be a mistake," he added.

Macron also expressed his condolences for "our four American friends killed on Syrian soil" on Wednesday in a bombing claimed by the Islamic State group.

Trump claimed IS had been eliminated in Syria to justify the US troop pullout, but the jihadists still hold small pockets of land in the Euphrates River Valley, and thousands of fighters are thought to remain in Syria.

Analysts also say the US troop pullout will leave thousands of Kurdish fighters in northern Syria -- who the Pentagon spent years training and arming against IS -- vulnerable to attack by Turkey, which consid-

ers Kurdish groups a terrorist threat.

Macron had already criticised US President Donald Trump for saying in late December that he would soon start to withdraw the 2,000 US soldiers deployed in Syria.

A few days after Trump's announcement Macron said "I deeply regret the decision," saying that "an ally must be reliable."

Macron has persisted in trying to develop a "special relationship" with the billionaire tycoon despite widely differing political beliefs and styles, and the two had seemed to share a camaraderie in the early days of their respective presidencies.

But differences over policy -- in particular the Paris climate accords which Trump opposed -- have become increasingly hard to paper over and tensions in their relationship have become more apparent.

Russia detains model claiming Trump secrets

Moscow, Russia

Russia on Thursday detained a Belarusian model who claimed she had evidence of Russian efforts to help Donald Trump win office, witnesses told AFP.

Anastasia Vashukevich, known by her pen-name Nastya Rybka, was held for questioning at a Moscow airport on Thursday evening after she was deported from Thailand as part of a group convicted of participating in a "sex training course," other passengers on the flight said.

Russian authorities detained her and several others including Alex Kirillov, a self-styled Russian seduction guru, witnesses said.



Detained Belarusian model Anastasia Vashukevich

Plain-clothes officials led away four of the group including Vashukevich and Kirillov, a woman who gave her name as Kristina said after emerging at Sheremetyevo airport arrivals.

UK's Prince Philip 'shocked and shaken' after car crash



Prince Philip's car was overturned on the side of the road (The Mega Agency)

London, United Kingdom

Queen Elizabeth II's 97-year-old husband Prince Philip was "very shocked and shaken" after being involved in a car accident that left his Land Rover flipped on its side, a witness reportedly said.

The duke emerged unharmed but two people in another car were injured in the crash that occurred Thursday when the duke was driving near the Sandringham Estate, according to police and Buckingham Palace.

Norfolk Police said two women -- the driver and passenger of a Kia -- required

hospital treatment but were later discharged. It would not confirm reports that a baby was also in the car.

The BBC reported that Prince Philip's vehicle turned on its side after pulling onto a Sandringham driveway onto a main road and colliding with the Kia.

Witness Roy Warne, 75, told The Sun newspaper that the Prince was pulled from the wreckage "conscious" but "very shocked and shaken".

"I saw the car flip," he said, adding that he rushed to help free the driver before he "suddenly realised it was Prince Philip".

More asteroids strike Earth since age of dinosaurs: study

Tampa, United States

Between two and three times as many asteroids have struck the Earth and the Moon since the age of the dinosaurs, when one massive space rock collision wiped them out forever, researchers said Thursday.

The mounting pace began around 290 million years ago, and likely coincides with some kind of large cosmic smashup in the main asteroid belt between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, researchers reported in the US journal Science.

The result was space debris, some of which made its way to the Earth and the Moon, leading to a rate of asteroid impacts 2.6

times higher than it was prior to 290 million years ago.

"These impacts send a shower of space rocks to the Earth, which will likely reach a peak and then decay with time," co-author Tom Gernon, associate professor in Earth science at the University of Southampton, told AFP.

The study did not draw any direct lines between the ramp up in asteroid strikes and major life-changing events in Earth's ancient past.

These include the Permian extinction some 252 million years ago, when up to 90 percent of life on Earth was wiped out for mysterious reasons.

A massive asteroid is largely blamed for the demise of the dinosaurs, which came into existence about 245 million years ago and disappeared 65 million years ago.

"The question is whether the predicted change in asteroid impacts can be directly linked to events that occurred long ago on Earth," said co-author Rebecca Ghent, an associate professor at the University of Toronto's Department of Earth Sciences.

"Though the forces driving these events are complicated and may include other geologic causes, such as large volcanic

eruptions, combined with biological factors, asteroid impacts have surely played a role in this ongoing saga."

Cause for concern?

More research is also needed to figure out how the pace of asteroid impacts has changed over the past 290 million years or so.

So should people be con-

cerned?

"Not at all," Gernon said, noting that asteroid impacts are random events.

