



Mladic: Ruthless Serb crusader dubbed the 'epitome of evil'

## After UAE-Israel deal, which Arab nation will next forge ties?

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JAKARTA: Motorists commute past an installation depicting a coffin, a mannequin wearing personal protective equipment, and a board showing COVID-19 coronavirus infection statistics for the area, in Jakarta. —AFP

# Virus lockdowns limit IS attacks

## Threat of cybercrime as funding source has increased

**UNITED NATIONS:** Coronavirus lockdowns appear to have reduced the threat of Islamic State group attacks in many countries, but the risk is greater in Iraq and Syria, a UN official said yesterday. While IS is now a shadow of the organization that occupied swathes of Iraq and Syria just a few years ago, it still has an estimated 10,000 fighters between those two countries. However, movement curbs against the virus pandemic have reduced IS's ability to launch raids elsewhere.

"Measures to minimize the spread of COVID-

19, such as lockdowns and restrictions on movement, seem to have reduced the risk of terrorist attacks in many countries," said Vladimir Voronkov, under-secretary general for counter-terrorism. He did not specify which nations, but IS has claimed attacks in countries ranging from France to the Philippines. Voronkov said the pandemic's impact on the group's recruitment and finances is unclear, though the threat of cybercrime as a funding source has increased as more people are online due to the contagion.

He added there is evidence IS jihadists are regrouping in conflict zones like Iraq and Syria. Yet for the moment, authorities have not seen a clear indication of a strategy change under new leader Amir Mohammed Said Abd Al-Rahman Al-Mawla, who replaced Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi after his death in a raid by US special forces in October. A former officer in the army of Saddam Hussein, Mawla joined the ranks of Al-Qaeda after the US invasion of Iraq and Hussein's capture in 2003, according to the Counter Extremism

Project (CEP) think-tank.

Voronkov also provided an update on the group's activities elsewhere, saying IS has an estimated 3,500 fighters in West Africa, and has continued to build ties with local jihadist groups. In Libya IS jihadists number only in the hundreds, but the group remains a threat to the region. It also has capacity to launch devastating attacks in parts of Afghanistan, despite the arrest of some leaders and the loss of some of its territory, Voronkov said. — AFP

## Syrians lose kids, homes, jobs in Beirut blast

**BEIRUT:** Ahmad had saved his family from Syria's brutal war by bringing them to Lebanon, but then Beirut's massive blast ripped his wife and two of their daughters away forever. Weeks later, looking at the rubble of his former home near the port, he recounted how the explosion in one horrific moment upended his life. "I feel like I've lost my mind. I closed my eyes, and when I opened them everything around me had changed," said the man, aged in his forties. "I lost everything in an instant. We were a family of six people, but now it's just me and my two daughters."

Ahmad, from the Syrian province of Idlib, had worked hard in Lebanon for years, holding various jobs to send mon-

ey home. Three years into Syria's war, as fighting intensified in 2014, he decided to bring his family to Lebanon. Then the August 4 disaster struck, Lebanon's worst peace-time disaster. After hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate exploded at the Beirut port and sent shockwaves across the city, Ahmad rushed home to Beirut's Karantina neighborhood.

He was first to find the body of his 22-year-old daughter Latifa, who had been thrown against what remained of a wall. With the help of neighbors and civil defense workers, he also pulled from the rubble the bodies of his 13-year-old daughter Joud and 40-year-old wife Khalidiyeh. They managed to save another daughter, Diana, 17, after she had been trapped for 11 hours under the debris, screaming as both her legs were severely injured. Only 14-year-old Dima survived unscathed and now spends her days by Diana's hospital bedside.

'Somewhere safe'

Ahmad says all he hopes for today is

to leave. "I wouldn't dream of returning to Syria while it's not safe," he said. "I'm trying to find a way to travel abroad," he said. "I want to live somewhere safe with them." The working class neighborhood of Karantina was one of the most damaged by the blast that killed more than 181 people, wounded thousands and ravaged large parts of the city. Twenty-year-old Syrian Uday Qattan and his extended family, most of whom have lived in Lebanon for years and worked at the port, also lost their home. In what remained of it, walls have cracked or collapsed, ceilings caved in, and most furniture has been destroyed except for the odd television or mirror.

An adjacent shack shared by the bachelors in the family has been reduced to splintered wood. After the explosion, which the family says they survived by a "miracle", the married men sent their wives to other parts of Lebanon to live with relatives. Remaining family members now sleep in the courtyard in between the rubble, behind a washing line strung up with



BEIRUT: A Syrian national sleeps on a sofa near heavily damaged buildings in Beirut's Karantina neighborhood after a massive explosion at the city's port shook the Lebanese capital. —AFP

clothes. "We no longer have any work or home," Qattan said. "We sit here all day with nothing to do." They cannot return to Syria, where they lost their homes in Hama province in the war, and risk being detained over dodging military service.

Qattan joined his relatives a year ago from Syria's Idlib, where a fragile cease-

fire has barely stemmed a regime offensive on a rebel bastion. But he and his family say the Beirut blast was like nothing they even witnessed during the war. "In Syria, if we heard the sound of a war plane, we'd hide then stand back up after the strike, brush off the dust, and continue our lives," Qattan said. — AFP

## Navalny medical tests 'indicate poisoning'

**BERLIN:** The Berlin hospital treating leading Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said Monday that test results indicated he had been poisoned, although Russian doctors quickly responded that they had not found the toxin in question. The revelation prompted German Chancellor Angela Merkel to call for the Russian authorities to ensure those responsible are held accountable.

The 44-year-old opposition leader and anti-corruption campaigner was brought to the German capital on Saturday after falling ill in Siberia last week with what Russian doctors blamed on a metabolic disorder. But on Monday, Berlin's renowned Charite hospital said its clinical tests on Navalny "indicate poisoning with a substance from the group of cholinesterase inhibitors".

Cholinesterase is an enzyme needed for the central nervous system to function properly. Its inhibitors are used to make medicines and insecticides, but also nerve agents such as sarin. "Alexei Navalny's prognosis remains unclear: the possibility of long-term effects, particularly those affecting the nervous system, cannot be excluded," the hospital said on Twitter. Navalny is being treated in intensive care and remains in medically induced coma, it said, adding: "While his

condition is serious, it is not currently life-threatening."

'Investigate thoroughly'

He was transferred to Berlin by a German NGO after Merkel had extended an offer to treat him in the country. "In view of Mr Navalny's prominent role in the political opposition in Russia, the authorities there are now urgently called upon to investigate this act thoroughly - and to do so with full transparency," she said in a joint statement with Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. "Those responsible must be identified and held accountable." Navalny's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said on Twitter that his poisoning was "no longer a hypothesis but a fact."

The European Union's diplomatic chief Josep Borrell called on the Russian authorities to launch an "independent and transparent investigation" into the apparent poisoning of Navalny. "The European Union strongly condemns what seems to be an attempt on Mr Navalny's life," Borrell said in Brussels. Navalny, Russia's most prominent opposition figure, was rushed into intensive care in Siberia on Thursday after his plane made an emergency landing in the city of Omsk. His support-

ers have said they believe he was poisoned by something in his cup of tea at the airport before he took off, pointing the finger of blame at President Vladimir Putin. But Alexandre Sabayev, the chief toxicologist at Omsk Emergency Hospital No 1, told Russian agencies that they had tested Navalny for "a broad range of narcotics, synthetic, psychotropic and medicinal substances including cholinesterase inhibitors." "The results were negative," he said. — AFP

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We express our deep  
sorrow on the sad demise  
of our colleague

Deivasigamani Ezhilarasu

Process Control Engineer  
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Our prayers and heartfelt  
condolences to his family & relatives