

A PLANE CRASH SURVIVOR HITS \$1 MILLION JACKPOT

DUBAI: It's been an eventful few days for Mohammad Basheer Abdul Khadar, an Indian living in Dubai. In the space of a week, he survived a crash landing at Dubai airport then won \$1 million in a lottery organized by the airport's duty free operator, Gulf News reported. The 62-year-old was flying home from holidays with family in India when the Boeing 777 in which he was travelling caught fire on landing with 300 people on board.

The accident on Wednesday shut down the Middle East's busiest airport for several hours, forcing authorities to cancel hundreds of flights. All the passengers and crew escaped unharmed, but a firefighter died tackling the blaze. Just six days later, Khadar discovered that the lottery ticket he'd bought on the way to India was now worth \$1 million. A fleet administrator with a Dubai car dealership, Khadar told Gulf News he habitually bought a lottery ticket on

his way to visit family in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Ticket number 845 in the "Millenium Millionaire" draw at the airport's Dubai Duty Free proved to be his winning shot. "I live a simple life, and now that it's my time to retire, I feel like God gave me a second life when I survived the plane crash, and blessed me with this money to follow all this up by doing good things," he told Gulf News. Khadar has lived in Dubai for 37 years and is married with

two children, one of whom is paralysed after a fall early on in his childhood, reported Gulf News. Khadar told Gulf News he was planning to return to Kerala to retire and would use the money to help children in Kerala who need financial support. He said he earns around \$2,200 (2,000 euros) a month, and would continue to work as long as he could. "Nothing else can give you the satisfaction of your hard-earned money," he said.— AFP



TRIPOLI: A handout picture uploaded on August 10, 2016 on the official Facebook page of the media center of the forces of Libya's Government of National Accord's (GNA) military operation against the Islamic State group in Sirte shows the forces loyal to Libya's unity government in front of the Ouagadougou conference centre in Sirte. —AFP

BATTLE FOR IS BASTION IN LIBYA IN 'FINAL PHASE'

MAJOR BLOW TO THE JIHADISTS

TRIPOLI: Pro-government forces battled yesterday to clear the Islamic State group from its main Libyan stronghold of Sirte, after dealing a major blow to the jihadists by seizing their headquarters. IS fighters still control several areas of the Mediterranean city, whose capture in June last year sparked fears that the extremist group would use it as a springboard for attacks on Europe. The fall of Sirte would be a huge setback to the jihadists' efforts to expand their self-proclaimed "caliphate" beyond Syria and Iraq where they have also suffered a string of losses.

Forces loyal to Libya's UN-backed unity government made a significant breakthrough Wednesday in their nearly three-month-old offensive to retake the city, seizing a conference centre where IS had set up a base.

"The battle for Sirte has reached its final phase, after the successful offensive by our heroes," a spokesman for the forces, General Mohamad Ghassri, said Thursday in remarks carried by the LANA news agency. The rapid advance comes after the United States launched air strikes on IS positions in the city for the first time on August 1. IS took

advantage of the chaos that followed the ouster and killing of longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011 to gain a foothold in the oil-rich North African country. The forces loyal to the Government of National Accord on Wednesday also seized the University of Sirte campus just south of the Ouagadougou conference centre as well as the Ibn Sina Hospital to the north.

Libyan television broadcast images of flag-waving soldiers in recaptured areas including the Ouagadougou centre, flashing victory signs as they posed for photographs.

The pro-GNA forces said 16 of their fighters were killed and dozens wounded Wednesday in the fighting in Sirte, Kadhafi's hometown which lies just across the Mediterranean from Italy.

It was unclear how many IS fighters were killed, but the centre said that at least 20 jihadists had died in fighting for the university campus.

Fierce resistance

In total more than 300 pro-government fighters have been killed and 1,800 wounded in the operation for Sirte, according to medical sources in

the city of Misrata, where the operation's command centre is based. They have faced determined resistance from the jihadists who have struck back with sniper fire, suicide attacks and car bombings.

The Washington Post reported on Tuesday that US commandos were working from a joint operations centre on the outskirts of Sirte, the first time they have directly supported Libyan forces in the anti-IS fight.

Quoting US officials speaking on condition of anonymity, the Post said the US forces were operating alongside British troops, helping to coordinate American air strikes and providing intelligence. GNA chief Fayeze al-Sarraj told Italy's *Corriere della Sera* in an interview published on Wednesday that his government had asked only for "air strikes which must be very precise and limited in time and geographical scope". "We do not need foreign troops on Libyan soil," Sarraj said.

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi faced criticism at home yesterday for reportedly sending special forces to Libya to help the anti-IS fight without approval from parliament. — AFP

DETENTE WITH RUSSIA WORRYING WESTERN ALLIES

ANKARA: Two Turkish military attaches in Greece fled to Italy, others were caught overseas and some diplomats were on the run after being recalled as part of an inquiry into last month's failed military coup, Turkey's foreign minister said yesterday. Turkey, which has NATO's second-biggest armed forces, has dismissed or detained thousands of soldiers, including nearly half of its generals, since the July 15 coup bid, in which rogue troops commandeered tanks and warplanes in an attempt to seize power.

Western allies worry President Tayyip Erdogan is using the failed putsch and purge to tighten his grip on power, but many Turkish officials are frustrated over what they see as a lack of Western sympathy over a violent coup in which 240 people died. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told private broadcaster NTV that two military attaches in Greece—a naval officer and an army officer—had fled by car and ferry to Italy, but Turkish officials would seek their return.

Cavusoglu said a military attache based in Kuwait had also tried to escape through Saudi Arabia, but had been sent back, as well as two generals based in Afghanistan who had been caught in Dubai by UAE authorities and returned to Turkey. The hunt for fugitive Turkish officers and officials overseas expands from the crackdown at home, where tens of thousands of troops, police, teachers and bureaucrats have been detained, dismissed or put under investigation for alleged links to the coup, which authorities blame on a US-based cleric.

'Time has run out'

"There are those who have escaped. There have been escapees among our diplomats as well," Cavusoglu told NTV in an interview. "As of yesterday, time has run out for those initially called back. We will carry out the legal operations for those who have not returned." Interior Minister Ekan Ala was quoted yesterday as saying almost 76,100 civil servants have now been suspended. The Greek foreign ministry said the two attaches fled before Ankara asked them to return to Turkey, and before officials cancelled their diplomatic passports. US officials said this week that a Turkish military officer on a US-based assignment for NATO is also seeking asylum in the United States after being recalled by the government.

One official said the foreign ministry sent instructions to Turkish diplomatic missions around the world where those suspected of links to the plotters were thought to be working, ordering them back to Ankara as part of the investigations. Cavusoglu has previously said around 300 members of the foreign ministry have been suspended since the coup plot, including two ambassadors. He said yesterday two officials in Bangladesh fled to New York, and another official had fled to Japan through Moscow. "We will return these traitors to Turkey," Cavusoglu said.

'Parallel state'

Erdogan accuses US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen of staging the attempted putsch, harnessing his extensive network of schools, charities and businesses built up in Turkey and abroad over decades to create a "parallel structure". Gulen denies any involvement and has condemned the coup bid. But he says Erdogan is using the purges to shore up his own power in Turkey.

The abortive July 15 coup and the subsequent purge of the military has raised concern about the stability of Turkey, a key member of the US-led coalition fighting Islamic State and battling an insurgency at home by Kurdish militants. Turkey has been angered by the Western response to the attempted coup, viewing Europe as more concerned about the rights of the plotters than the events themselves and the United States as reluctant to extradite Gulen. — Reuters