

## 12 DEAD, 74 INJURED AS DEADLY ...

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There was no immediate word on the cause of the blaze, but angry residents said they had warned local authorities about fire issues at Grenfell Tower.

The subsidized housing block of 120 apartments was built in 1974 and was recently upgraded at a cost of 8.6 million pounds (\$11 million), with work finishing in May 2016, according to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Samira Lamrani, a witness, said one woman dropped a baby from a window on the ninth or 10th floor to people on the sidewalk. "People were starting to appear at the windows, frantically banging and screaming" and one woman indicated she was going to drop the baby, Lamrani told Britain's Press Association news agency.

"A gentleman ran forward and managed to grab the baby," Joe Walsh, 58, said he saw someone throw two children out of a window from the fifth or sixth floor. Tiago Etienne, 17, said he spotted about three children between the ages of four and eight being dropped from an apartment around the 15th floor. Police commander Stuart Cundy gave the death toll of 12 but added the figure was likely to rise "during what will be a complex recovery operation over a number of days." Paul Woodrow, head of operations for the London Ambulance Service, said 20 of the injured were in critical condition.

The London Fire Brigade received the first reports of the fire at 12:54 am and the first engines arrived within six minutes, Cotton said. Witnesses described a white, polystyrene-type material falling like snow from the building as it burned. Some feared the charred tower block might collapse, but a structural engineer said the building was not in danger, according to the London Fire Brigade, which added "it is safe for our crews to be in there."

Ruks Mamudu, 69, escaped from her first floor apartment wearing only her purple pajamas and bathrobe. She and her grandson sat outside the building and watched people trapped on higher floors cry desperately for help. "I sat there watching my house burn down and watching people cry for help who couldn't come down," she said. People at the scene spoke of being unable to reach friends and family inside. Others saw people inside using flashlights and mobile

phones to try to signal for help from higher floors. Nassima Boutrig, who lives opposite the building, said she was awakened by sirens and smoke so thick that it filled her home as well.

"We saw the people screaming," she said. "A lot of people said 'Help! Help! Help!' The fire brigade could only help downstairs. It was fire up, up, up. They couldn't stop the fire." The disaster occurred 10 days after a terror attack at London's Borough Market. Some residents initially feared the fire was also terror-related, though authorities discounted that possibility. Edward Daffarn, a 55-year-old who lived on the building's 16th floor, said the fire alarm didn't ring. Daffarn said residents had complained for years to London City Council about building safety, to no avail. "I'm lucky to be alive. A neighbor's smoke alarm went off and another neighbor phoned and told me to get out," he said. "I consider this mass murder."

The Grenfell Action Group, a community organization formed to oppose a nearby redevelopment project, has been warning about the risk of fire at Grenfell Tower since 2013. The group has raised concerns about testing and maintenance of firefighting equipment and blocked emergency access to the site. "All our warnings fell on deaf ears and we predicted that a catastrophe like this was inevitable and just a matter of time," the group said after the fire broke out. A July 2014 newsletter for residents said the tower building was designed "according to rigorous fire safety standards" and recommended that in case of a fire residents should stay inside their apartments.

The British company that carried out the tower's 2016 refurbishment, Rydon, said in a statement that its work "met all required building control, fire regulation and health and safety standards." London Mayor Sadiq Khan said many questions now need to be answered about the scores of tower blocks around the city. "There will be a great many questions over the coming days as to the cause of this tragedy, and I want to reassure Londoners that we will get all the answers," Khan said. Prime Minister Theresa May's Downing Street office said she was "deeply saddened by the tragic loss of life in the Grenfell Tower and is being kept constantly updated on the situation." — Agencies

## EGYPT MPs APPROVE DEAL GIVING ISLANDS TO SAUDI

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Police and opponents of the deal clashed late Tuesday in downtown Cairo, with policemen kicking, punching and using sticks to beat several dozen protesters outside the national journalists' union. An unspecified number of arrests were made and eight protesters remained in police custody yesterday, according to defense lawyers.

After the agreement was first announced in 2016, Egypt saw the largest anti-government protests since El-Sisi took office in 2014. Hundreds of demonstrators and activists were arrested, with most later released. "Ratifying the agreement in this manner will create a deep rift between the president and a large segment of society," said Khaled Dawoud, leader of the opposition Dostour (Constitution) party. "It is a turning point in our relationship with the president."

Earlier yesterday, the house's defense and national security committee approved the deal with a 35-2 vote, becoming the second such body to do so in as many days. The legislative and constitutional committee approved the deal on Tuesday after a three-day, often raucous review during which lawmakers got into heated arguments, pushed and shoved each other and came close to blows. The government insists the islands of Tiran and Sanafir at the mouth of the Gulf of

Aqaba were always Saudi but were placed under Egypt's protection amid Arab-Israeli tensions in the 1950s.

Critics have linked the islands transfer to the billions of dollars in Saudi aid given to El-Sisi's government, saying it amounts to a sell-off of sovereign territory. "There is nothing in the agreement that violates the constitution," Kamal Amer, chairman of the defense committee, told the house yesterday before the vote. "It is designed to realize and perpetuate the mutual interests of the two nations and it also came in response to Saudi requests (to take back the islands) made in 1984, 1989 and 1990."

"The demarcation of the border between Saudi Arabia and Egypt confirmed that the islands are on the side of that brotherly nation, but we are confident that they (the islands) will always be used to serve national Egyptian and Arab security," Amer added. The island of Tiran, a popular destination for Red Sea divers, controls a narrow shipping lane that leads to and from the ports of Eilat and Aqaba, in Israel and Jordan respectively. Egypt's unilateral closure of that lane was among the main reasons behind the outbreak of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, in which Egypt lost the entire Sinai Peninsula. Control over Sinai was restored to Egypt under its 1979 peace treaty with Israel. — AP

## REPUBLICAN CONGRESSMAN SCALISE WOUNDED IN MULTIPLE...

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The gunman had a rifle and "a lot of ammo," said Sen Jeff Flake of Arizona, who was at the practice. The shocking event left the Capitol horrified and stunned. The House canceled proceedings for the day. The shooting occurred at a popular park and baseball complex in Alexandria, Virginia, where Republican lawmakers and others were gathered for a morning practice about 7 am.

They were in good spirits despite the heat and humidity as they prepared for the congressional baseball match that pits Republicans against Democrats. The popular annual face-off, which raises money for charity, was scheduled for Thursday evening at Nationals Park across the Potomac River in Washington. The team was taking batting practice when gunshots rang out and chaos erupted. Scalise was fielding balls on second base when he was shot, according to lawmakers present, then dragged himself into the outfield to get away from the gunman.

Rep Mo Brooks, an Alabama Republican, said his colleague "crawled into

the outfield, leaving a trail of blood." "We started giving him the liquids, I put pressure on his wound in his hip," Brooks said. Texas Rep Joe Barton, still in his baseball uniform, told reporters a shooter came out to the practice and opened fire, shooting at Rep. Trent Kelly, R-Miss, who plays third base. "He shot at Steve Scalise, our second baseman. He hit Steve Scalise," Barton said. "Scalise's security detail and the Capitol Hill police immediately returned fire, and Alexandria Police also immediately came and began to return fire."

They shot the shooter. The security detail saved a lot of lives because they attacked the shooter."

Barton said the shooting lasted 5-10 minutes, and there were dozens if not hundreds of shots fired. "It was scary," Barton said. Lawmakers took cover in the dugout. Barton said his son, Jack, got under an SUV. FBI special agent in charge Tim Slater said it was "too early to say" whether it was an act of terrorism, or whether Scalise was targeted. After the gunfire stopped, Sen Flake, of Arizona, said he ran onto the field and also tried to come to Scalise's aide. — AP

## NO WASTA WITH GOD

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Because Ramadan is the month of fasting, it is one of the best times to supplicate to our Creator for whatever our hearts desire. But be careful what you ask for! Ask things that are really important and valuable, not things that could eventually lead us to wrongdoing. The Quran provides examples for our prayers. The following prayers touch upon many worthwhile aspirations: My Lord, increase me in knowledge. (20:114) My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and my parents and to work righteousness of which You will approve and make righteous for me my offspring.

Indeed, I have repented to You, and indeed, I am of those who sub-

mit to You. (46:15) Our Lord! Pour out on us patience and constancy, and make us die as those who have surrendered themselves unto You. (7:126) And do not disgrace me on the day they are [all] resurrected, the day when there will not benefit [anyone] wealth or children, but only one who comes to Allah with a sound heart. 26:87-89 Our Lord! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come and keep us safe from the torment of the Fire (2:201).

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