

# Human Rights Watch Denounces Egypt Military Trials



Egyptian defendants react in a cage during their trial in the coastal city of Alexandria, Egypt, May 19, 2014.

NEW YORK (PRESS TV) – Human Rights Watch (HRW) has censured Egyptian authorities over referring hundreds of civilians to military courts based on a decree by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. “Curtailed the use of military courts to try civilians was one of the few tangible gains of the 2011 revolution, but that’s out the window now,” the HRW’s Middle East and North Africa Director Sarah Leah Whitson said in reference to the uprising three years ago that ousted dictator Hosni Mubarak. She added, “Al-Sisi’s administration is methodically reversing the reforms achieved in 2011, while

the United States and other governments resume arming the government as if none of it matters.” “Military trials of civilians, including children, is taking Egypt in the wrong direction, and doing so retroactively compounds the abuse,” Whitson stated. On October 27, Sisi issued a decree that placed all “public and vital facilities” under military jurisdiction for the coming two years. Whitson said, “President Al-Sisi should repeal his October decree before more damage is done if he has any concern for preserving Egypt’s reputation and the new constitution he has sworn to protect.”

“He should also annul all verdicts against civilians that military courts have handed down since his government took power and order their retrial before civil judges,” she said. Egypt has been experiencing unrelenting violence since Mohamed Morsi, the country’s first democratically-elected president, was ousted in July 2013 in a military coup led by Sisi, Egypt’s current president and the then army commander. Since then, the North African country’s military-backed government has launched a heavy crackdown on Morsi’s supporters, arresting thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members, including the party’s senior leaders.

## Spaniard Drives Car Into Ruling Party Headquarters



Spanish police block the entrance of Genova Street close to the Spanish Popular Party headquarters after a man crashes his car the party’s headquarters in Madrid, December 19, 2014.

MADRID (PRESS TV) – A Spanish man with serious financial difficulties has been arrested after allegedly driving a car containing gas cylinders into the headquarters of Spain’s ruling People’s Party. Police arrested the man on Friday after his vehicle crashed into the party’s headquarters in the capital Madrid’s Calle Genova Street. The man, identified by media as

37-year-old Daniel P.B., had reportedly said he put two gas bottles and an explosive substance in the car, claiming that some 15 kilograms of ammonium nitrate and aluminum powder – and three timers were in his Citroen Xantia. In addition, the man reportedly said the explosives were timed to go off in half an hour, blaming the ruling party led by Prime Minister Mariano Ra-

joy for his economic problems. However, initial analysis of the vehicle and the substances showed that the material was flammable and not explosive. The incident took place just days after Rajoy admitted that Spaniards are still suffering the consequences of the economic crisis. The prime minister acknowledged on December 16 that not all Spaniards have noticed an improvement in their economic situation and the recovery has not reached all fairly since the country exited recession last year. Spain has been struggling to deal with its worst economic crisis since the Second World War. In recent years, Rajoy’s government has increased taxes, frozen public salaries and limited spending on services such as education and healthcare. Lack of jobs and the deepest austerity measures in more than 30 years have pushed the average household income in Spain down 10 percent since 2008. A recent report showed that one in four Spaniards, or 11.7 million, are living in poverty, of which 77 percent are jobless and 61 percent are struggling to have a place to live.

## Russia Invites North Korean Leader to Moscow

MOSCOW (Reuters) – Russian President Vladimir Putin has invited North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to Moscow next year to mark the 70th anniversary of the Soviet defeat of Nazi Germany in World War Two, the Kremlin’s spokesman said on Friday. It would be Kim’s first foreign visit since taking the helm of the east Asian state in 2011. His personal envoy came to Moscow last month in the framework of ef-

forts by the two Cold War-era allies to improve relations. “Yes, such an invitation was sent,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the state news agency TASS. Russia marks the former Soviet Union’s World War Two victory every year on May 9. Moscow needs North Korean cooperation in boosting natural gas exports to South Korea as Gazprom wants to build a gas pipeline through North Korea to reach its

southern neighbor. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has also said North Korea is ready to resume stalled international talks on its nuclear program. North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the United States began talks in 2003 to rid the Korean peninsula of nuclear weapons, but they were suspended after Pyongyang tested nuclear devices in 2006 and 2009.

## Lawyers for Friends of Accused Boston Bombers Due in Court

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – Lawyers for two friends of the accused Boston Marathon bombers are due in court on Friday for separate hearings as the city braces for the January start of a trial focused on the attack that killed three people and injured more than 260. Attorneys for Khairullozhon Matanov, a cab driver from Kyrgyzstan who was charged with lying to investigators by downplaying his relationship with the accused bombers after calling police to offer information on them, are expected to ask a judge to crack down on leaks about their client from law-enforcement sources. A Boston magazine story on Matanov contained information from non-public FBI reports on agents’ interviews with Matanov, his lawyers contend. Matanov went to the police on the morning of April 19, 2013, four days after the attack, to say that he believed his friends Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev were the men pictured in

photos the FBI had released as they sought to identify the suspected bombers. Prosecutors said he lied about his relationship with the brothers and accused him of destroying some records of his interactions with the two. The older of the pair, 26-year-old Tamerlan, died on the night of April 18, 2013, following a gun battle with police. Younger brother Dzhokhar, now 21, was arrested the next evening and is awaiting a trial to begin in January on charges that carry the death penalty. Attorneys for another associate of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, Stephen Silva, are also due in U.S. District Court in Boston on Friday. Silva is charged with having possessed a gun with its serial number filed off that prosecutors say the Tsarnaev brothers used in the shootout, and also faces drug charges. Silva, who has pleaded not guilty, may change his plea to guilty on Friday, according to a court filing.

## UN Chief in Liberia to Monitor Ebola-Fighting Efforts



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

MONROVIA (PRESS TV) – UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has traveled to Liberia for an unmediated assessment of global efforts against Ebola in West Africa. Ban flew in from the UN Ebola mission headquarters in Ghana on Friday. The UN chief was welcomed on arrival by Liberian Vice President Joseph Boakai in the capital, Monrovia. “United Nations will stand with the people in region until such time that we make sure that there is no such cases,” Ban told Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama late Thursday in the capital, Accra. Mahama said, “We must think carefully about how to strengthen the healthcare systems of the countries in the region to withstand the future outbreak of infectious diseases.” Non-governmental organizations have censured UN agencies, such as the World Health Organization, for the delay in

their responsive actions regarding Ebola. Ban has planned a meeting with Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and officials from the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), and a visit to an Ebola center run by the US military. Head of the World Health Organization, Margaret Chan, the UN coordinator for the fight against Ebola, David Nabarro, and UNMEER chief, Anthony Banbury, accompany Ban in the Liberia trip. The Ebola-stricken countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Mali are also on Ban’s itinerary. He said last month that with international mobilization, the epidemic will be highly likely under control in 2015. Ebola has killed more than 6,900 people, almost all of them in West Africa, over the past few months. The number of fatalities in Liberia has been 3,290 deaths.



ATHENS (AP) – A lawmaker from a small right-wing party claimed Friday he had been offered a bribe worth up to 3 million euros (\$3.68 million) to vote in favor of electing Greece’s new president, in the latest twist in the bailed-out country’s fraught presidential vote. Greece faces early general elections if its 300-member parliament fails to elect a president by the third round of voting on Dec. 29. In Wednesday’s first round, the sole candidate and government nominee garnered 160 votes; 180 are needed for election. Actor Pavlos Haikalis of the Independent Greeks claimed during a phone-in to a live television program that he was offered about 700,000 euros in cash, a loan repayment and advertising contracts, with the alleged bribe’s total value amounting to about 2-3 million euros (\$2.4-\$3.7 million). He didn’t identify the person, but said he had informed a prosecutor about two weeks ago and had turned over audio and video material. It’s the second such claim from the Independent Greeks. Another of the party’s lawmakers claimed last month that someone had approached her with the intention of bribing her. Government spokeswoman Sofia Voulepsi dismissed the allegations as “badly acted theater.” She called for any evidence to be made public, and for those making the allegations to be prosecuted if there was none.

JAKARTA (PRESS TV) – A volcano has erupted in eastern Indonesia, releasing molten lava, hot ash, and thick smoke and sending hikers into a panic. Mount Gamalama on the Ternate island in the North Maluku Province spewed smoke up to 2,000 meters into the sky just before midnight Thursday. It released hot ash on Friday, when slow-moving red lava was visible at the peak of the eruption. Nine panicked hikers fell while fleeing to safety. Four of them were hospitalized and rescuers were searching for the tenth. The provincial capital Ternate had an airport, schools, and offices closed. The mountain’s last major eruption was in 2012. No deaths were reported then. Indonesia has about 129 active volcanoes. The country lies on the major tectonic fault lines known as the Ring of Fire between the Pacific and Indian oceans. In 2010, more than 350 people lost their lives, following a series of volcanic eruptions in Mount Merapi in central Java.

KIEV (Reuters) – Kiev’s military said on Friday five Ukrainian soldiers had been killed and seven wounded in attacks by pro-Russian separatists in the past 24 hours, a larger than normal death toll compared with recent weeks. A September ceasefire has been repeatedly flouted by both sides, but shelling lessened significantly in December, fuelling hopes of de-escalation of the conflict which has killed over 4,700 people since April. “For now there’s only firing from firearms, they are not using tanks or artillery. We cannot say that the situation has escalated,” military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said in a televised briefing.

BUDAPEST (AP) – A Hungarian official says a plan to tax Internet use, which provoked huge protests, “is dead and will never come back to life.” In October, the government to complement a levy on phone calls because people were increasingly using the Internet for telecommunications. Prime Minister Viktor Orban promised to shelve the tax, but revisit it in 2015, after street rallies against the plan drew tens of thousands of mostly young protesters. Tamas Deutsch, a member of the European Parliament and close ally of Orban, said Friday a “national consultation” would be launched in March to ask Hungarians’ view about the Internet. Deutsch said he was seeking input from Internet users and businesses about what to include in the online questionnaire.