

British police said on Wednesday they would be working with the US Air Force and others to find out why a US military helicopter crashed on the coast of eastern England, killing all four crew on board.

Turkey fires more police as graft scandal deepens

The Turkish government fired 16 provincial police chiefs in a new mass purge Wednesday as a corruption scandal rocking Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan deepened.

Among those dismissed were police from several big cities and provinces including Ankara, Izmir, Antalya and Diyarbakir as well as the deputy head of national security, under a decree signed by Interior Minister Ertan Ala, AFP reported.

The latest purge comes just a day after the government fired 350 police officers in the capital Ankara — bringing the total number sacked to over 700 since mid-December when the graft scandal broke, according to local media tallies. Media reports Tuesday also said another 25 people had been detained on suspicion of bribery and fraud in the widening corruption probe that has targeted several key Erdogan allies.

The turmoil has rocked Erdogan's government to its very core just weeks before crucial local elections in March and has sent Turkish financial markets tumbling. But the government worked on Wednesday it would overcome the crisis.

"The government is in charge. We will never let the political and economic stability of Turkey be disturbed. We



will do our best to prevent this," Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan told private Haberturk television.

Battling to contain the biggest threat to his 11 years in power, Erdogan has branded the investigation a "dirty" plot to try to topple his Islamic-rooted government.

He and his allies have blamed supporters of a powerful Muslim cleric who lives in self-imposed exile in the United States but wields considerable influence in Turkey's judiciary and police.

"It is an attempt to shatter our self-confidence. The attack is not directed against our government, but against Turkey," Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said Tuesday.

"It is an attempt to create a perception that the entire government is embroiled in massive corruption and that Turkey is passing through a great depression," he told NTV television.

The crisis erupted in December when dozens of leading businessmen and political figures — including the sons of three ministers — were rounded up in police raids in Istanbul and Ankara.

Erdogan was forced into a major cabinet reshuffle after the three ministers concerned resigned and the government has since gone on the offensive to root out foes in the police and judiciary.

Egypt forces clash with Morsi supporters

Clashes erupted between supporters of ousted president Mohamed Morsi and security forces in the eastern Cairo district of Nasr City.

Morsi supporters set ablaze five vehicles, including a police truck, in front of Al-Salam Mosque on the outskirts of Nasr City, Al-Ahram's Arabic news website reported.

Security was tightened around the mosque where police made some arrests while chasing away protesters who hurled stones and empty bottles at them. Security forces retaliated with teargas to disperse the crowd.

Pro-Morsi protesters had planned to march to the nearby Police Academy in New Cairo, where the second session of Morsi's trial for charges of inciting murder was to take place, before police forces fired the teargas. However, his trial was postponed until February 11 after officials said that bad weather had prevented him being flown to court.



Clashes erupt between supporters of former president Mohamed Morsi and security forces in Cairo on January 8, 2014.

Roads leading to Tahrir Square were closed following calls from pro-Morsi forces to march in support of the ousted president during the trial.

The military-backed government has cracked down hard on Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood since his overthrow, arresting almost its entire leadership and thousands of its backers as well as formally declaring it a terrorist organization. The Brotherhood says it is committed to peaceful activism.

India clashes leave 17 dead

Clashes between tribes in India's restive northeast Assam state have left 17 dead and forced thousands to flee, officials said on Wednesday.

Some 4,000 people have sought refuge in makeshift camps since fighting started in December in Karbi Anglong district, about 320 kilometers (199 miles) from the main city of Guwahati, a police spokesman said.

The latest violence, between the Karbi and Rengma Naga tribes over attempts to grab land, has involved villagers being shot at close range and their bodies dumped in a jungle area, officials said, AFP reported. "Most of the people have fled their homes out of fear following violent clashes between the two tribes that have been raging on in the past fortnight," state water resources minister Rajib Lochan Pegu said.

Separatists belonging to the Karbi People's Liberation Tigers attacked a Rengma Naga village in late December, killing seven residents, police officials said.

In a retaliatory attack, militants from the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, which comprises Rengma Naga tribes people, killed 10 Karbi villagers. Their bodies were found in an isolated jungle area near Dimapur, the commercial hub of adjoining Nagaland state, a police official said.

South Sudan rebels: no truce unless allies released

South Sudan's rebels indicated on Wednesday that there would be no imminent truce in the country unless the government freed a group of suspected rebels currently being detained.

A rebel spokesman said the 11 detainees, who were arrested in the capital Juba after fighting broke out more than three weeks ago, should be set free so they can take part in the peace talks under way in Ethiopia, AFP reported.

"Our colleagues must be released so that they come and participate," rebel spokesman Yohannis Musa Paik told reporters in Addis Ababa.

"You cannot go to negotiations while there are some people being

detained. You need to release them so that they now have a positive role in the negotiations. We are just waiting for the release of our detainees, when they release them very soon we will sign the cessation of hostilities agreement," he added.

The fighting began on December 15 as a clash between army units loyal to South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and those loyal to ex-vice president Rick Machar, and has escalated into war between government troops and a loose alliance of ethnic militia forces and mutinous army commanders.

The government is currently holding 11 of Machar's allies, many of them senior figures and former

ministers, but has been under pressure from IGAD — the East African regional bloc which is trying to broker a truce — as well as Western diplomats to release them as a goodwill gesture. The government, however, appears to have so far resisted the demands and maintains the detainees should be put on trial for their role in what the president says was an attempted coup.

The rebel spokesman accused the government of "lying" to IGAD over the detainees by sending mixed signals, and asserted that the rebel side was acting in good faith. "We came here for peace, not just for talks, we came here to sign an agreement," he said.

African migrants continue protests in Israel



African migrants protest outside Israel's parliament in Beit-ul-Moqaddas on January 8, 2014.

More than 10,000 African asylum seekers rallied outside Israel's parliament in Beit-ul-Moqaddas on Wednesday, police said, in a fourth straight day of protests against immigration policy.

The demonstration was "calm," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said, adding that police were deployed to keep order. He put the number of protesters at "more than 10,000," AFP reported.

"We are refugees, we need protection," the demonstrators chanted. An organizer of the rally, who gave his name only as Baso, said that more than 100 busloads of protesters had headed in the morning from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Parliament speaker Yuli Edelstein however banned four demonstration leaders, who were invited to a meeting with MPs, from entering the Knesset building. Edelstein wanted to "avoid provocation that could degenerate into violence," a statement from his office said.

Tens of thousands of migrants, mostly Eritrean and Sudanese, have demonstrated each day since Sunday in Tel Aviv, including outside offices of the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) and foreign embassies.

Israel's commercial capital was the scene of race riots in 2012 and the Israeli officials have vowed to step up the repatriation of illegal immigrants, saying they pose a threat to the regime's Jewish char-

acter. Some 52,000 were already in Israel, after managing to slip across the desert border with Egypt, before Israel completed a high-tech barrier last year.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted the protests will make no difference to his regime's tough stand on asylum seekers.

Gates slams Obama's leadership style in new book

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Gates said he never doubted Obama's support for the troops, "only his support for their mission."

In an essay Tuesday in the Wall Street Journal apparently to promote the book, Gates also writes that Obama's "fundamental problem in Afghanistan was that his political and philosophical preferences for winding down the US role conflicted with his own pro-war public rhetoric ... the nearly unanimous recommendations of his senior civilian and military

advisers at the departments of State and Defense, and the realities on the ground."

Gates, a carryover from the Bush administration who worked for every president since Nixon, except Clinton, said that underneath his notoriously calm exterior he was frequently "seething" because he felt Obama and his team had neither trust nor confidence in him.

Despite his criticism of Obama, Gates writes about the commander in chief's primary Afghanistan policies:

"I believe Obama was right in each of these decisions."

And he writes approvingly about Obama in several other passages, calling him "a man of personal integrity."

He admits to having "a few issues" with George W. Bush and essentially wrote approvingly of then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whom he described as being "smart, idealistic but pragmatic, tough-minded, indefatigable, funny, a very valuable colleague, and a superb representative of the United States all over the world."

ISIL vows to attack insurgents in Syria

An Al-Qaeda affiliate based in Iraq and Syria has vowed to crush opposition groups fighting it and to target members loyal to the so-called Syrian National Coalition (SNC), who have been fighting against Syrian forces for nearly three years.

Five days of heavy opposition fighting has shaken the Al-Qaeda-linked faction, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which lost its main base in the northern city of Aleppo to rival insurgents on Wednesday, according to a monitoring group.

The audio statement from the ISIL spokesman was issued late on Tuesday, hours after the head of the Al-Qaeda branch in Syria, the Nusra Front, called for a truce to halt the fighting.

"Crush them completely and kill the conspiracy in its cradle," said the group's spokesman, known as Abu Mohammed al-Adnani. ISIL is the restructured Al-Qaeda branch of Iraq, but its spread into Syria is opposed by Al-Qaeda's central leadership, which has recognized the Nusra Front instead.

Opposition groups last week launched what appeared to be a series of coordinated strikes against ISIL in northern and eastern Syria after months of increasing tensions with the group, which has alienated many Syrians in insurgent-held regions.

Insurgents on Wednesday took control of ISIL's main base in Aleppo, a northern city that was once Syria's largest and is now divided between government and insurgents, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Maliki says victory certain in Fallujah

Iraq's prime minister vowed to uproot Al-Qaeda and said he was sure of victory as his army prepared to launch a major assault against terrorists in the city of Fallujah. In a televised address on Wednesday, Nuri al-Maliki also thanked the international community for its support in the fight against Al-Qaeda and urged the group's members and supporters to surrender, promising clemency, Reuters reported.

The United States said earlier this week it would fast-track deliveries of military hardware, including drones and missiles, to Iraq, but ruled out sending troops two years after Washington ended nearly a decade of occupation.

"The support ... is giving us the confidence that we are moving on the right course and that the result will be clear and decisive: uprooting this corrupted organization," Maliki said.

"We will continue this fight because we believe that Al-Qaeda and its allies represent evil." Fighters from the Al-Qaeda affiliated Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),



which is also active across the border in Syria, overrun police stations in Fallujah and another city in Iraq's western Anbar province last week.

The army deployed more tanks and artillery around Fallujah on Tuesday as local leaders tried to persuade militants to leave in order to avert an impending offensive that has echoes of US assaults on the same city in 2004.

"We don't want this city to suffer and we will not use force, as long as the tribes announce their readiness to confront Al-Qaeda and expel it," Maliki said.

During the insurgency that raged in Anbar following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, local tribes eventually rose up against Al-Qaeda and routed the group in what came to be known as the "Awakening."

Maliki described the group's pledge to retake territory it lost to US troops as a "dream of Satan" and said the militants were intent on delaying elections scheduled for April this year.

Palestinian killed in Israel shelling

A Palestinian was killed in Israeli shelling near Gaza City on Wednesday, although the Israeli army denied any involvement.

Later on, Israeli tanks positioned behind the border fence shelled the area. Two children were also injured and brought to the hospital, their condition was described as "dangerous".

Palestinian officials named the victim as Mohammed al-Ijliah, 32 and said his body had been torn apart by the blast, the limbs ripped by shrapnel.

Family sources in the Shejaiyeh neighborhood said Ijliah was a fighter from Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds Brigade and was killed by a drone.

The group issued a statement confirming Ijliah was one of its members but said he had been killed "in a Zionist shelling" on the area. But the Israeli military denied carrying out any strike on Gaza and said its troops had not been involved in any other shooting incidents.

Meanwhile, Israeli troops shot and wounded at least 15 Palestinian men in the occupied West Bank.

According to Palestinian medical sources, the incident took place after the Israeli forces invaded the Al-Arroub refugee camp, north of the occupied West Bank city of Al-Khali.

Medical sources further noted the Israeli soldiers fired dozens of rubber bullets at Palestinians, wounding them.

Local sources also said that the Israeli troops prevented the residents from leaving or entering the camp.

The move prompted clashes between Palestinian residents and the Israeli forces.