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We welcome our readers in Macau, China

Activists' ship 'no love boat': Netanyahu

Report PM may ease blockade as 'Rachel Corrie' nears Gaza port



Activists are greeted by crowd after arriving in Istanbul Wednesday night

ISTANBUL, Turkey-- A ship packed with activists and humanitarian supplies, sailed defiantly toward Palestinian territory and is expected to be approaching Gaza late Friday evening or early Saturday.

However, based on reports from Israel public television, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may be considering easing of the blockade imposed on Gaza following international criticism of the deadly raid on an aid flotilla Monday.

The prime minister could allow merchants ships to carry goods to the Hamas-ruled Gaza strip, but only after an inspection, private Channel 10 said. Netanyahu could seek international help to inspect shipments heading to Gaza, which has been under embargo since Hamas seized the territory in 2007.

The Rachel Corrie left Ireland with its cargo--the latest effort to break Israel's blockade of Gaza. The ship was named for an

American activist killed in Gaza several years ago.

On Monday, commandos stormed six ships carrying hundreds of pro-Palestinian activists. Nine people were killed and dozens wounded after Israeli soldiers encountered unexpected resistance when they boarded the vessels. The Israeli military said seven soldiers were wounded, one seriously.

Before the ships set sail from waters off the east Mediterranean island of Cyprus on Sunday, Israel had urged the flotilla not to try to breach the blockade and offered to transfer the cargo to Gaza from the Israeli port of Ashdod.

Netanyahu defended his country's actions even though Turkey, Israel's most important friend in the Muslim world, recalled its ambassador and canceled planned military exercises with Israel as the countries' already tense relations soured even further. Street protests erupted throughout the world.

Vice President Joe Biden backed Israel's right to board ships bound for Gaza to prevent weapons smuggling Wednesday, but said Washington remained concerned about the plight of the Palestinians there. But Biden said the U.S. needed to "put pressure and as much cajoling on Israel as we can to allow in aid shipments such as building materials."

U.N. takes action

The raid also provoked multiple demands for an international probe, and on Wednesday, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, said he was headed in that direction. But on Tuesday--after an emergency meeting and marathon negotiations that lasted 12 hours-- the 15 council members had finally agreed on a presidential statement. It was weaker than what was initially demanded by Palestinians, Arabs and Turkey because of objections by the United States, Israel's closest ally.

The statement called for a "prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation conforming to international standards."

And only condemned "those acts" that resulted in deaths, without naming Israel.

Israeli officials have insisted that their military already is investigating the raid and the country is capable of conducting a credible review. Netanyahu's planned meeting with President Barack Obama to discuss the crisis was canceled.

Speaking in a nationally televised address, Netanyahu said the state has the responsibility to stop every vessel bound for Gaza, including the flotilla that was targeted Monday.

"That was no love boat," he said. "That was a boat of hatred. It was not a peaceful flotilla. The soldiers who boarded the ships were attacked by clubs, batons and knives."

Netanyahu said that Iran continues to smuggle weapons into Gaza.

Israel had allowed ships through five times, but has blocked them from entering Gaza waters since a three-week military offensive against Gaza's Hamas rulers in January 2009.

Israel releases all detainees; hold funeral in Istanbul for 8 of 9 killed

On Wednesday, all foreign detainees were taken to Ben Gurion Airport for flights to their various homes. Four Arab activists were released the following day.

Meanwhile, some 10,000 people in Istanbul turned out Thursday for the funeral of eight of the nine activists killed in the pre-dawn raid. The funeral came after thousands jammed the city's main square overnight to welcome home hundreds of pro-Palestinian activists who were aboard the ships and expelled by Israel.

The crowd prayed before eight Turkish and Palestinian-draped coffins lined up in a row outside Istanbul's Faith mosque in a traditional service for the dead. One of the victims was a 19-year-old American who was also a Turkish citizen.

Former suspect in Natalee Holloway disappearance

Manhunt over for van der Sloot, suspect in killing of Peruvian woman

SANTIAGO, Chile-- Joran van der Sloot, the main suspect in this week's slaying of 21-year-old Stephany Flores Ramirez in Peru, has been detained by Chilean police. He was previously considered a suspect in the 2005 disappearance in Aruba of Alabama teenager Natalee Holloway.

The body of Flores was found Wednesday in a Lima, Peru hotel room registered to the 23-year-old van der Sloot. Police said she suffered blunt trauma to the head, breaking her neck, and to her torso and back.

Van der Sloot entered Chile on Wednesday and was traveling in a taxi near the country's central coastal city of Vina del Mar when he was detained, said Douglas Rodriguez, spokesman for the Chilean Investigative Police.

Van der Sloot, a Dutch citizen, was transported Thursday afternoon to police headquarters in Santiago, Chile. He was escorted by three police officers, making no comment as he entered, walking calmly and without handcuffs as journalists shouted his name. His hair, which had been black, was red and worn in a close-cropped crew cut.

He faces extradition to Peru where he is expected to face murder charges.

Ironically, the killing happened May 30, exactly five years after the disappearance of Holloway during a high school trip to Aruba,

a Dutch Caribbean island where van der Sloot's late father was a prominent judge.

Van der Sloot had been staying at the hotel since arriving from Columbia on May 14 and according to Lima police Gen. Cesar Guardia was in Peru for a poker tournament. A hotel guest and an employee saw Flores and him entering the hotel room at 5 a.m. Sunday. Police have a video of the pair together the previous night at the Atlantic City Casino in Lima.

The victim's father, businessman and race-car driver Ricardo Flores, said he believes that van der Sloot is responsible for her death. He said police found his daughter's car about 50 blocks from the hotel where they found pills inside like those used in date rapes. Flores said he did not think his daughter knew van der Sloot beforehand. Both of them speak English and they struck up a conversation at the casino, he said.

A wake was held Thursday in Lima for Flores, who was buried later in the day.

A Dutch television crime reporter video-taped van der Sloot two years ago saying he was with Holloway when she collapsed on the beach from being drunk. He said he believed she was dead and panicked when he could not resuscitate her. He asked a friend to dump her body in the sea. Judges subsequently refused to arrest van der Sloot on the basis of the tape.



Joran van der Sloot is escorted to police station by Chilean police

A spokeswoman for Holloway's mother, Beth Twitty, said the family was aware of the development in Peru but would have no comment.

Holloway's mother establishes center in daughter's name

Twitty has teamed with New York-based Investigative Management Group to establish the Natalee Holloway Resource Center to help families of missing persons. The center will be based at the National Museum of Crime and Punishment in downtown Washington, D.C.

Targeted to open June 8, the nonprofit center's objective is to provide families with an action plan, examples of missing person posters, contacts, media liaisons and other services to guide them during a crisis. Officials say they will also provide educational programs on safe traveling and crime prevention and encourage careers in forensic science and law enforcement.