

2018 ASSASSINATION OF KHASHOGGI

Trump boasted of saving Saudi crown prince: report

AFP, Washington
US President Donald Trump boasted that he saved Saudi Arabia's crown prince from greater scrutiny over the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, according to an explosive new book.

In one of 18 interviews with legendary investigative reporter Bob Woodward, Trump defended Mohammed bin Salman over the gruesome murder inside a Saudi consulate of Khashoggi, a US-based critic of the crown prince's rule.

"I saved his ass," Trump told Woodward for his forthcoming book "Rage," according to an excerpt published Thursday by Business Insider.

"I was able to get Congress to leave him alone. I was able to get them to stop," Trump said.

In an echo of the infamous 2018 summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin in which the US leader appeared to accept his denials of election meddling, Trump noted that Prince Mohammed denied involvement.

"He will always say that he didn't do it," Trump was quoted as telling Woodward.

"He says that to everybody, and frankly I'm happy that he says that. But he will say that to you, he will say that to Congress, and he will say that to everybody. He's never said he did it."

Khashoggi's killing triggered an uproar among US lawmakers but the Trump

administration has stood by Saudi Arabia, including controversially bypassing Congress for an \$8 billion arms deal.

As he has said publicly, Trump defended his stance by pointing to the major oil producer's purchases of US goods, including weapons.

"He says very strongly that he didn't do it," Trump was quoted as telling Woodward. "Bob, they spent \$400 billion over a fairly short period of time."

Khashoggi -- who wrote opinion pieces for The Washington Post, Woodward's newspaper -- was lured into the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018 to handle marriage paperwork.

Within minutes, the onetime royal insider turned critic was strangled to death with his body then dismembered, according to Turkish and US officials.

A Saudi court on Monday handed jail terms of between seven to 20 years to eight unnamed defendants and overturned five death sentences, in a final ruling condemned by Khashoggi's fiancée and a UN rights expert.

After Khashoggi's death set off outrage among US legislators from both parties, Trump bypassed Congress to sell roughly \$8bn in precision-guided missiles and other high-tech weapons to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.



500,000 flee as bushfires rage in US

15 killed; Oregon officials warn death toll could shoot up as record heatwaves, intense dry winds fuel flames in West Coast

AFP, Clovis

Firefighters were battling unprecedented wildfires up and down the US West Coast yesterday that killed 15 people and forced more than half a million others to flee their homes, with officials warning of more deaths to come in the days ahead.

The true scale of destruction was impossible to count across wide stretches of California, Oregon and Washington cut off from the world by an apocalyptic wall of flames, fuelled by record heatwaves and intense, dry winds.

The August Complex Fire became the biggest recorded blaze in Californian history on Thursday, after multiple fires in the state's northwest combined under high temperatures and winds to rip through 746,000 acres of dry vegetation.

More than 2.6 million acres have been burned across the whole state so far, a Cal Fire spokesman said on Thursday evening.

Half a million people have been evacuated in neighboring Oregon, where the government said firefighters were "prioritizing life (and) safety as they battle a record 900,000 acres of wildfires."

Governor Kate Brown said that the amount of land incinerated by fires in just the last 72 hours was twice the state's annual average, and that at least five towns had been "substantially destroyed."

"We have never seen this amount of uncontained fire across our state," she told a press conference.

Huge wildfires are becoming more common, with the World Meteorological Organization saying the five years to 2019 was "unprecedented" for fires, especially in Europe and North America.

Climate change amplifies droughts which dry out regions, creating ideal conditions for wildfires to spread out-of-control and inflict



Sandra and Daniela Reyes comfort Isaias Reyes while visiting their damaged trailer home after the wildfires destroyed a neighborhood in Bear Creek, Oregon on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

unprecedented material and environmental damage.

Local Oregon officials confirmed two deaths in the Santiam Canyon region south of Portland, and a third in the Ashland area, near the California border.

Police went door to door to make sure that residents were evacuating the city of Molalla, marking their driveways with spray paint to show they had left.

"It's one thing to leave your house, it's another thing being told that you have to leave," said Denise Pentz, a resident of the town for 11 years, who was loading her family belongings into a

camping trailer.

Among those killed in the past day was a one-year-old boy who perished while his parents suffered severe burns as they attempted to flee an inferno 130 miles east of Seattle.

"This child's family and community will never be the same," said Washington governor Jay Inslee, in a statement on his state's first fire death of 2020. Police said the death toll had jumped to 10 in northern California's Butte County on Thursday. "We have to report an additional seven deceased individuals were located by our deputies and detectives today," Butte County Sheriff Captain Derek Bell said.



Democratic presidential nominee and former VP Joe Biden and his wife Jill, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, US VP Mike Pence and his wife Karen all stand with their hands over their hearts as they attend ceremonies marking the 19th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum in New York City, US yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Russia, China hackers targeting US vote

Microsoft said Thursday it thwarted recent cyberattacks from China, Russia and Iran targeting both Republican and Democratic presidential campaigns, as technology giants scrambled to protect election security less than two months ahead of the US vote. The announcement came as Twitter said it would implement a policy next week to remove "false or misleading information intended to undermine public confidence in an election," including unverified claims of victory; and Google said it would take steps to ensure its "autocomplete" search feature doesn't make such misguided suggestions. Microsoft said that attackers have been targeting staff from the campaigns of President Donald Trump and his Democratic rival, Joe Biden. "In recent weeks, Microsoft has detected cyberattacks targeting people and organizations involved in the upcoming presidential election," said corporate vice president Tom Burt.

Huge blast rocks Jordan military arms depot

A huge explosion rocked a Jordanian military munitions depot early yesterday sparking a large fire, but the army said there were no casualties at the base located in an uninhabited area. The military said the blast was accidental



and likely caused by a chemical reaction inside a shell amid a blistering heatwave in the desert country. "An explosion occurred in the early hours of Friday ... in a warehouse containing unusable mortar bombs belonging to the armed forces," government spokesman said in a statement. The blast happened in the city of Zarqa, 25 kilometres (15 miles) east of the capital Amman, where several Jordanian bases and depots are located. Images which widely spread on social media showed a huge ball of flames rising into the night sky. Preliminary findings indicated that "the explosion was due to high temperatures provoking a chemical reaction in a shell", the military said in a statement.

SOURCE: AFP

'It's a horrific journey'

Rohingyas share experiences of 200-day ordeal at sea

AFP, Lhokseumawe

When hundreds of Rohingya refugees paid traffickers to escape their squalid camp in Bangladesh, they were promised a new life in Malaysia after just one week at sea.

Instead, the group of mostly women and children suffered more than 200 days of terror on the high seas, until they landed this week on Indonesia's northern coast, where they are now back in refugee tents.

Beaten by the traffickers, they battled hunger and thirst as storms lashed their wooden vessel, and watched in horror as the corpses of scores who died were tossed overboard, according to survivor accounts.

"We were told that we'd reach Malaysia in seven or eight days, but we floated in the water for months," one male survivor told AFP from a makeshift tent camp on Indonesia's Sumatra island.

Kamrun Nahar, another survivor, said she lost count of how many bodies were thrown into the

sea, adding "mothers and their children died" after succumbing to illness.

The new accounts -- and those of nearly 100 Rohingyas who landed in Indonesia in June -- suggest some 800 migrants left Bangladesh on a large boat around March before being split onto smaller vessels.

Many paid up to \$2,400 to get aboard, but smugglers held them hostage for months in order to extort more money from their friends and relatives, survivors and aid agencies said.

Despite their ordeal, the group looked relatively healthy, suggesting that traffickers had an interest in keeping them alive.

"It's a horrific journey, it's very unpredictable", another survivor told AFP.

Experts say some smuggling boats are fitted with desalination machines to produce potable water during the hazardous crossings.

But the latest arrivals said they were fed little more than a handful of rice and a glass of water each day.

IEP REPORT ON CLIMATE CRISIS

1.2b people could be displaced by 2050

CNN ONLINE

The global climate crisis could see more than a billion people displaced from their homes in the next 30 years, as ecological disasters drive mass migrations and greater armed conflict, according to a new report released Wednesday.

The Ecological Threat Register, conducted by the Sydney-based Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), projected that as many as 1.2 billion people around the world could be displaced by 2050. No country will be able to escape the impact of the climate crisis -- but the world's poorest and most vulnerable populations will be hardest hit.

"Ecological threats and climate change pose serious challenges to global development and peacefulness," the report said. "The world's least resilient countries, when faced with ecological breakdowns, are more likely to experience civil unrest, political instability, social fragmentation and economic collapse."

The report drew on data from international organizations like the UN, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the IEP's prior research on countries' resilience levels. Using these figures, the IEP then calculated the relative threats of population growth, water stress, food insecurity, droughts, floods, cyclones, and rising temperature and sea levels.

EU ramps up 'no-deal'

planning amid Brexit chaos

REUTERS, LONDON

The European Union stepped up planning for a "no-deal" Brexit yesterday after Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government refused to revoke a plan to break the divorce treaty that Brussels says will sink four years of talks.

Britain said explicitly this week that it plans to break international law by breaching parts of the Withdrawal Agreement treaty that it signed in January, when it formally left the bloc.

Britain says the move is aimed at clarifying ambiguities, but it caused a new crisis in talks less than four months before a post-Brexit transition period ends in December.

The EU has demanded that Britain scrap by the end of this month the plan to breach the divorce treaty. Britain has refused, saying its parliament is sovereign above international law.

the European Union, a prerequisite for that is honouring agreements that are already in place," said Pascal Donohoe, chairman of euro zone finance ministers.

"It is imperative that the government of the United Kingdom respond back to the call from the (European) Commission."

As the atmosphere soured between London and Brussels, Japan and Britain said they had reached agreement in principle on a bilateral trade deal that meant 99% of the Britain's exports to Japan would be tariff-free.

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier said on Thursday, after talks in London, that the bloc was increasing its planning for a no-deal Brexit at the end of this year after trade talks made little progress.

"The UK has not engaged in a reciprocal way on fundamental EU principles and interests," Barnier said. "Nobody should underestimate the practical, economic and social consequences of a 'no deal' scenario."



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