



Putin foe found guilty of fund embezzlement

AP, Moscow

A Russian court yesterday found opposition leader Alexei Navalny guilty in the retrial of a 2013 fraud case, which disqualifies him as a candidate for president next year.

However, an associate said Navalny will carry on with the campaign he announced in December.

In a webcast hearing, Judge Alexei Vtyurin found Navalny guilty of embezzling timber worth about \$500,000. The previous guilty verdict was overturned by the European Court of Human Rights which ruled that Russia violated Navalny's right to a fair trial.

The judge has yet to pronounce sentence in the trial held in Kirov, a city nearly 800 kilometers east of Moscow.

During a break in the proceedings, Navalny told reporters that he and his lawyers were comparing this verdict with the text of the 2013 verdict and found them to be identical.

"You can come over and see that the judge is reading exactly the same text, which says a lot about the whole trial," Navalny told reporters, adding that even the typos in the names of companies were identical in both rulings.

Navalny, the driving force behind massive anti-government protests in 2011 and 2012, had announced plans to run for office in December and had begun to raise funds.

Navalny's campaign manager, Leonid Volkov, insisted that the campaign goes on even though the guilty verdict formally bars Navalny from running.

In a post on Facebook, Volkov said that the Kremlin will ultimately decide whether Navalny will be confirmed as a presidential candidate.



Syrian refugee Baraa Haj Khalaf clutches her daughter Shams as they arrive at O'Hare Airport on a flight from Turkey in Chicago, Illinois on Tuesday. Their trip to the US was recently suspended after President Trump signed an executive order on travel ban. Inset, US Vice President Mike Pence (R) swears in Education Secretary Betsy DeVos (L), joined by her husband Dick DeVos (2nd L), at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building at the White House in Washington.

US, Turkey to work together

In their first phone call, Trump, Erdogan discuss issues including Syria safe zone, refugee crisis, war on terror

REUTERS, Washington

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and US President Donald Trump agreed in a phone call overnight to act jointly against Islamic State in the Syrian towns of al-Bab and Raqqa, both controlled by the militants, Turkish presidency sources said yesterday.

The two leaders discussed issues including a safe zone in Syria, the refugee crisis and the fight against terror, the sources said.

They also said Erdogan had urged the United States not to support the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia.

Trump spoke about the two countries' "shared commitment to combating terrorism in all its forms" and welcomed Turkey's contributions to the fight against Islamic State, the White House said in a statement, but it gave no further details.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an alliance of US-backed militias, started a new phase of its campaign against Islamic State in Raqqa on Saturday.

Turkey, a Nato ally and part of the US-led coalition against Islamic State, has repeatedly said it wants to be part of the operation to liberate Raqqa but does not want the YPG, which is part of the SDF alliance, to be involved.

Erdogan's relations with former US President Barack Obama were strained by US support for the YPG militia, which Ankara regards as a terrorist organisation and an extension of Kurdish militants waging an insurgency inside Turkey.

The Turkish army and Syrian rebel groups it supports are meanwhile fighting Islamic State in a separate campaign around al-Bab, northeast of the city of Aleppo. Ankara has complained in the past about a lack of US support for that campaign.

The offices of both leaders said Trump had reiterated US support for Turkey "as a strategic partner and Nato ally" during the phone call on Tuesday.

The Turkish sources said new CIA Director Mike Pompeo would visit Turkey Thursday to discuss the YPG, and battling the network of US-based Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Turkey accuses of orchestrating a July coup attempt.

Turkey has been frustrated by what it sees as Washington's reluctance to hand over Gulen, who has lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999.

There was no immediate confirmation from Washington of Pompeo's visit.



FIGHT AGAINST IS
US president vows Nato support
Erdogan urges US not to support Kurdish militia
CIA chief would visit Ankara this week



Yemen halts US raids

Report says Trump's first botched military operation missions killed 30 civilians and a US Navy Seal

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Yemen has withdrawn its permission for the US to conduct special operation missions in the country after the raid on an al-Qaeda base last month which killed up to 30 civilians and a US Navy Seal.

There has been widespread anger in Yemen at the reported loss of life in a ground raid in which "almost everything went wrong," as one US military official described it, leading Yemeni officials to suspend the counter-terror programme.

Neither Yemen nor the US have officially announced the decision, which was reported by the New York Times, citing unnamed American officials.

Several Yemeni officials said that they had not been given proper notice or fully consulted on the raid before it took place. Foreign Minister Abdul Malik Al Mekhlafi condemned the raid in a Twitter post as "extrajudicial killings."

It is also unclear whether US President Donald Trump's proposed travel ban for citizens of Yemen and six other Muslim countries - which is currently being challenged in federal courts - had any bearing on the reported decision.

The Yemeni's withdrawal of permission for ground raids does not affect unmanned

drone missions, nor the small number of US personnel currently assisting anti-terror initiatives in the country.

The ban on US operations is a set back for the new president, who made much of his promise on the campaign trail to be "tough on Isis" and other religious extremism. An investigation into the events of the 29 January raid is going.

The Pentagon repeatedly sought permis-



sion from Trump's predecessor Barack Obama to allow operations to take place without detailed White House review. It is not known whether the Yemeni decision will impact any future plans to allow the Pentagon to operate more freely.

The botched operation was planned under Obama, but the White House later clarified it had been reviewed and approved by the Trump administration.

Pope Francis speaks out on 'tortured' Rohingya

Criticises Myanmar's treatment of the Muslim minority

AGENCIES

Pope Francis yesterday spoke out over the alleged maltreatment of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim minority, who he said were being "tortured and killed" for their faith.

The pontiff used his midweek address to describe the Rohingya as "good and peaceful people" who "have suffered for years."

Francis offered a special prayer for "brothers and sisters" as he alluded to a UN human rights report last week which accused Myanmar's military of likely killing hundreds of Rohingya in an ongoing crackdown.

"They have been suffering for years, they have been tortured, killed simply because they wanted to live their culture and their Muslim faith," the Pope said.

"They have been thrown out of Myanmar, moved from one place to the

other because no one wants them. But they are good people, peaceful people. They are not Christian. They are good people. They are our brothers and sisters," he said.

The report by the UN's rights body OHCHR said the accounts of torture, murder and gang-rape at the hands of security forces were so severe they may amount to ethnic cleansing, reported AFP.

Almost 70,000 Rohingya are reported to have fled to Bangladesh since the army launched "clearance operations" four months ago to find Rohingya militants accused of attacking police border posts.

An estimated 22,000 more have fled to the Myanmar interior according to the UN report, based on 200 interviews and including brutal testimonies of children butchered with knives while their mothers were raped by security forces.



Smoke billows from houses, which were gutted by a fire overnight, in an informal settlers area, near the south harbour port in Manila yesterday. More than a thousand houses were razed during the ten-hour fire, which left some 3,000 people homeless, according to local media.

NEWSIN brief

Amnesty report on mass hangings 'false': Syria

AFP, Damascus

Syria's justice ministry yesterday dismissed as "completely false" an Amnesty International report alleging up to 13,000 people were hanged over five years in a Syrian government prison. The ministry said the Amnesty report was "completely untrue and intended to harm Syria's reputation in international forums," the official SANA news agency reported.

Poll shows boost for Scottish independence

AFP, Edinburgh

The battle over Scotland's constitutional future is now "a virtual dead heat" with support rising for independence as Britain prepares to leave the European Union, according to a new poll released yesterday. Support has risen to 49 percent, excluding undecided voters, with 51 percent in favour of the British union, a BMG poll for the Herald newspaper said. The poll was conducted after Prime Minister Theresa May confirmed her intention to take Britain out of single market.

Romania PM survives no-confidence vote

AFP, Bucharest

Romania's defiant Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu easily survived a no-confidence vote yesterday as his left-wing government battles nationwide unrest over its attempt to weaken corruption laws. The motion, submitted by the centre-right opposition, failed to garner the required 233 votes in parliament where Grindeanu's left-wing Social Democrat party (PSD) holds a solid majority after winning elections only two months ago.

500 reunite for family photograph in China

MAIL ONLINE

If you had a family photograph taken how many people would be present?

Well, for one super-size family in China, 500 relatives turned up for their photo session, requiring a drone to fly back from a distance in a bid to get the full clan in the frame.

Apparently it took more two years for the Ren family to coordinate the impressive stunt, which took place close to their ancestral town in the Zhejiang province.

Images show a mixture of different generations standing side-by-side on a rocky outcrop. The photos were taken in front of a backdrop of basalt formations where Ren's original family village was founded. The ancestors are seen snaking down

the hillside with some passers-by even snapping shots of the unusual family get-together. The 500 living members of the Ren dynasty are part of the 25th to 31st generations of the family.

Many of them are scattered across the country with some residing in Beijing, Shanghai, Xinjiang, and even across the strait in Taiwan.

The relatives were brought together by a project to update their sprawling family tree. It took more than 30 minutes for them to get into position in front of the drone camera.

Commenting on the reunion, Ren Tuanjie - one of the main organisers of the event - told china.org: "It took us two and a half years to complete the new family tree. During Spring Festival, we like to bring all the family members together so as to let our ancestors know where they are."



Six Afghan Red Cross workers 'killed by IS'

AFP, Mazar-i-sharif

Suspected Islamic State gunmen killed six Afghan employees of the Red Cross delivering relief supplies in snowbound northern Afghanistan yesterday, officials said, underscoring the dangers faced by aid workers in the war-battered country.

Two other Red Cross workers were missing in the incident in the volatile province of Jowzjan, the international charity said.

The Red Cross convoy, comprising three drivers and five field officers, came under attack while they were carrying relief supplies to a restive area badly affected in recent days by heavy snowfall.

Tamil Nadu CM refuses to give way to successor

AFP, Chennai

The chief minister of India's Tamil Nadu state yesterday refused to give way to his anointed successor, threatening to plunge the prosperous southern region into chaos months after the death of its popular leader.

O Panneerselvam took over as chief minister after Jayalalithaa Jayaram, a former film star who enjoyed an almost god-like status in the state of 78 million people, died in December.

On Sunday his party unexpectedly announced he had resigned and that Jayalalithaa's former aide VK Sasikala -- a one-time video cassette seller who has never held political office or stood for election -- would take over.

But just days later, Panneerselvam told journalists he would not stand down, insisting he had grassroots support in the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

(AIADMK) party that Sasikala heads.

"I will prove the majority at the state assembly floor. I am discharging my duty as the chief minister now, as per the wish of the party workers and common people," he told reporters.

The comments have raised the prospect of a split in the party that rules Tamil Nadu, one of India's wealthiest states, whose capital Chennai is an auto manufacturing hub.

Sasikala has responded by sacking Panneerselvam from all party positions and accusing him of betrayal.

The death of Jayalalithaa, a three-time chief minister, sparked a mass outpouring of grief across Tamil Nadu, with huge crowds lining the streets to pay tribute to her. Sasikala was running a video parlour and Jayalalithaa was a budding politician when the two met, which marked the beginning of a decades-long friendship dogged by corruption scandals.

