

## Moscow calls on US, N Korea to start talks

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday called for the United States and North Korea to start negotiations, the RIA news agency reported.

Lavrov was cited as saying that Russia was ready to facilitate such negotiations.

Moscow has long called for Washington and Pyongyang to hold talks aimed at de-escalating tensions around North Korea's nuclear and missile programme.

North Korea's foreign ministry said on Sunday that the latest UN sanctions against North Korea were an act of war and tantamount to a complete economic blockade against it.

The UN Security Council unanimously imposed new sanctions on North Korea on Friday for its recent intercontinental ballistic missile test, seeking to limit its access to refined petroleum products and crude oil and its earnings from workers abroad.



(From top, clockwise) Pope Francis kisses a statue of baby Jesus during the traditional midnight Mass in St Peter's Basilica on Christmas Eve at the Vatican early yesterday; worshippers attend a Christmas midnight mass at a church in Kochi, India and members of the US army play guitars during Christmas Eve celebrations at a US airfield in Bagram, Afghanistan.

## 'We're winning'

Trump sends Christmas message for US troops stationed around the globe

USA TODAY ONLINE

President Trump had a Christmas Eve message for US troops stationed around the globe: "We're winning."

From his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, where Trump is spending the holidays, he spoke by video hook-up to members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard, stationed in Qatar, Kuwait and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Trump lavished the troops with praise on "how well we're doing" in the fight against terrorism and declared, "We're winning."

He called the troops "underappreciated" and described their military families as "the greatest people on earth."

"I just want to wish everybody a very, very merry Christmas, we say Merry Christmas, again, very, very proudly. Very very merry Christmas," Trump said. "We're going to have a great year, an incredible year. I'm thrilled to bring seasons greetings on behalf of the first lady and our entire family and most importantly, on behalf of the American people."

He singled out the Coast Guard for the service's work during a series of deadly US hurricanes that caused billions of dollars in damage and that parts of the country are still recovering from.

"Many Republicans are very happy, but I have to tell you, the people of Florida, Texas, Puerto Rico, and lots of other states are even more happy," Trump told the Coast Guard members. "What a job you've done. The Coast Guard saved thousands and thousands of lives. Almost — it's unbelievable when I looked at the charts and I saw the number of lives you've saved. So I want to congratulate the Coast Guard for having done an incredible job," he said.

Separately on Sunday night, Trump tweeted that he was proud to take credit for a resurgence in the phrase "Merry Christmas."

# Guatemala to follow Trump

President Morales announces his country will move embassy to Jerusalem, draws praise from Israel; Palestinians condemn the move as shameful

AFP, Guatemala City

Guatemala is to move its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, President Jimmy Morales said Sunday, following US President Donald Trump's controversial lead on the holy city.

After speaking with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Morales wrote to Guatemalans on his Facebook page that "one of the most important topics was the return of Guatemala's embassy to Jerusalem," from Tel Aviv where it is currently located.

"For this reason I am informing you that I have given instructions to the foreign ministry that it start the necessary respective coordination to make this happen," Morales wrote.

Israeli foreign ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon thanked Guatemala for the "important decision."

"Wonderful news and true friendship!", he wrote on Twitter.

The Palestinian foreign ministry yesterday said Guatemala's decision to transfer its embassy to Jerusalem after the United States recognised the city as the capital of Israel was "shameful".

Guatemala's leader made the announcement on Christmas Eve, three days after two-thirds of UN member states rejected Trump's decision to have the United States recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

In all, 128 nations voted to maintain the inter-



national consensus that Jerusalem's status can only be decided through peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Only eight countries stood with the United States in voting no to the resolution held in the UN General Assembly, among them Guatemala

and fellow Central American country Honduras.

Guatemala and Honduras are both reliant on US funding to improve security in their gang-ridden territories.

The two nations are, along with El Salvador, in what is known as the Northern Triangle of Central America. Violence, corruption and poverty have made them the main source of illegal migration to the United States, which is giving them \$750 million to provide better conditions at home.

Morales, like Trump, was a television entertainer with no real political experience before becoming president of Guatemala in 2016.

On Friday, Morales foreshadowed the decision he was to make regarding Jerusalem, as he defended his government's vote at the UN backing the United States.

"Guatemala is historically pro-Israeli," he told a news conference in Guatemala City. "In 70 years of relations, Israel has been our ally," he said.

"We have a Christian way of thinking that, as well as the politics of it, has us believing that Israel is our ally and we must support it. Despite us only being nine in the world (in the UN vote), we have the total certainty and conviction that this is the right path."

# Anger as Peru's ex-president pardoned

REUTERS, Lima

Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski pardoned former authoritarian leader Alberto Fujimori late on Sunday, triggering Christmas Eve street clashes as protesters denounced the decision as part of a crude political deal.

The decision clears Fujimori of convictions for human rights crimes and graft when his right-wing government was in power from 1990 to 2000, and could define Kuczynski's legacy and rewrite political alliances.

At least two ministers in Kuczynski's cabinet who objected to the pardon told him they wanted to resign, and Kuczynski might reshuffle the cabinet as early as this week, a government source said.

Two ruling party lawmakers quit his party as his political group planned next steps.

Kuczynski, a former Wall Street banker who vowed as a candidate not to pardon Fujimori, based his decision on a medical review that found Fujimori suffered from "a progressive, degenerative and incurable disease", according to a statement from the president's office.

Late on Sunday, Fujimori was taken to hospital from prison by ambulance to treat a drop in blood pressure and abnormal heart beat.

But many in Peru saw the pardon as part of a quid pro quo. Three days earlier, Fujimori's loyalists - led by his lawmaker son Kenji - unexpectedly saved Kuczynski from a vote in Congress that nearly removed him from office.

# NEWS IN brief

## Trial of newspaper staff resumes in Turkey

AFP, Istanbul

The controversial trial of staff from Turkey's main opposition newspaper accused of terror links resumed yesterday, in a case which has raised alarm over press freedom under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

## Saudi police find body of kidnapped Shia judge

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi police have recovered the body of a kidnapped pro-government Shia judge after a shootout in which a policeman and a suspected militant were killed, the interior ministry said yesterday.

## Vietnam braces for Typhoon Tembin

REUTERS, Hanoi

Authorities in Vietnam prepared to move a million people from low-lying areas along the south coast yesterday as Typhoon Tembin approached after it battered the Philippines with floods and landslides that killed more than 230 people.

## UAE attack fears behind female flyer row: Tunisia

AFP, Tunis

Controversial security measures taken by the United Arab Emirates against Tunisian women trying to travel to the Gulf state were prompted by fears of a terrorist attack, Tunisia said yesterday. Since Friday Tunisian women and girls have been delayed for hours as they look to board planes for the UAE, sparking outcry in the North African nation that led to the suspension of Emirates airline flights to Tunis.

## Pakistan lets family meet 'Indian spy'

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday allowed the wife and mother of an Indian man convicted of spying to visit him in Islamabad, eight months after he was sentenced to death by a military court.

Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav, a former officer in the Indian navy, was arrested in March 2016 in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, where there has been a long-running conflict between national security forces and militant separatists.

The case has added to tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours, who often accuse each other of violating a 2003 ceasefire along their disputed border in Kashmir, where countries sometimes engage in intense artillery duels.

Pakistan released a picture of Jadhav's mother, Avanti, and wife, Chetankul, seated at a desk and speaking to him from behind a glass window.

The mother and wife of Commander Jadhav sitting comfortably in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan. We honour our commitments," a spokesman for Pakistan's foreign office, Mohammad Faisal, said in an earlier Twitter posting when the women first arrived at the ministry in Islamabad.

India's foreign affairs office has not responded to a request for comment on the meeting.



Former Indian navy officer Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav's mother Avanti (L) and wife, Chetankul, (3rd R) arrive to meet him at Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Islamabad, Pakistan yesterday.

## Dozens killed in fresh Yemen air strikes

AFP, Aden

Fresh air strikes and clashes in Yemen have killed over 60 fighters as Saudi-backed pro-government forces push an offensive against Houthi rebels, security and medical sources said yesterday.

Saudi-led coalition air raids overnight killed at least 18 of the Iran-backed rebels in Hais, south of the key port of Hodeida, while bombardments from gunships left 35 others dead in nearby Tahita, a security official told AFP.

Apart from what it termed "large radar" - it was unclear if the report was referring to more than one - construction this year has included facilities for underground storage and administrative buildings.

There has been an increase in military patrols too, the report added, without giving specifics.

## South China Sea islands expanded 'reasonably'

Says Beijing amid conflicting claims with neighbours

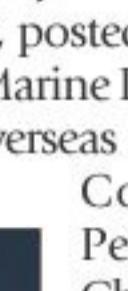
REUTERS, Beijing

China has "reasonably" expanded its islands in the disputed South China Sea and this year construction projects there including radar facilities covered about 290,000 square meters (72 acres), according to a new government report.

The number was broadly similar to one provided by a US think tank earlier this month.

China has conducted extensive land reclamation work on some of the islands and reefs it controls in the South China Sea, including building airports, alarming its neighbours and Washington.

Beijing says the work is help provide international services such as search-and-



rescue but admits there is a military purpose too. China also says it can do whatever it wants on its territory.

The new report, posted on a website run by China's National Marine Data and Information Service and the overseas edition of the ruling

Communist Party's People's Daily, says China has enhanced its military presence there and "reasonably" expanded the area covered by the islands.

Apart from what it termed "large radar" - it was unclear if the report was referring to more than one - construction this year has included facilities for underground storage and administrative buildings.

There has been an increase in military patrols too, the report added, without giving specifics.

The latest fighting killed 12 government troops and wounded 19 more, military and medical sources said.

"The road cannot lead again to confrontation and exclusion, which as we already know generate nothing but discord, uncertainty and discouragement," he said at his Madrid

## Avoid 'confrontation'

Spain's King urges Catalan lawmakers to respect their region's diversity after separatists win vote

AFP, Madrid

Spain's King Felipe VI in a Christmas speech on Sunday urged Catalan lawmakers to respect their region's diversity and avoid another confrontation over independence.

King Felipe's remarks came three days after separatist parties, led by ousted president Carles Puigdemont, won an absolute majority of seats in a parliamentary vote.

The wealthy northeastern region's newly elected parliament must "face the problems that affect all Catalans, with respect to plurality and bearing in mind their responsibility to the common good," the monarch said.

"The road cannot lead again to confrontation and exclusion, which as we already know generate nothing but discord, uncertainty and discouragement," he said at his Madrid

residence, flanked by Spanish and EU flags.

Spain's central government called the election after sacking Puigdemont's cabinet, dissolving the Catalan parliament and stripping the region of its treasured autonomy following an independence declaration on October 27.

The declaration rattled a Europe already shaken by Brexit, and inflamed passions across Spain.

It followed a banned independence referendum on October 1, which saw a brutal police crackdown that focused the world's attention on the Catalan crisis.

Two days after the referendum, Felipe made a rare televised speech, condemning the separatists' "unacceptable

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