



Ghana bids farewell to Kofi Annan

REUTERS, Accra

Ghana bid farewell to former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan yesterday in a state funeral attended by African leaders and international statesmen who hailed his record as an advocate for humanity and world peace.

Annan, a Ghanaian national and Noble laureate, died in a Swiss hospital last month at the age of 80. His body was flown to Accra on Monday for burial in his homeland, where he is seen as a national hero.

Around 6,000 mourners packed the auditorium for yesterday's official service - the climax of a multi-day funeral ceremony, which has seen his coffin, draped in the Ghanaian national colours, displayed for public viewing.

Current UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was among the dignitaries in attendance, alongside former Ghanaian presidents, the leaders of Ivory Coast, Liberia, Namibia and Niger, and the Crown Prince of Norway.

In an address, Guterres hailed Annan, who served as the seventh UN Secretary-General between 1997 and 2006, as an exceptional global leader with a deep faith in the role of the United Nations as a force for good.

The ceremony was projected onto big screens outside the auditorium for the crowds of mourners that could not fit inside the venue. Many commuters in the capital wore black as a sign of respect.

On Wednesday, Annan's family and Ghanaian dignitaries were among hundreds to file past his casket amid traditional rites by local chiefs and clan leaders.

A 'living hell' for children

UN warns of worsening humanitarian crisis after collapse of peace talks

AGENCIES

Yemen's humanitarian situation has worsened rapidly since UN peace talks collapsed endangering hundreds of thousands of lives especially the children.

"The situation has deteriorated dramatically in the past few days. Families are absolutely terrified by the bombardment, shelling and airstrikes," the UN humanitarian coordinator Lise Grande said in a statement.

Yesterday, the Saudi-led military coalition attacking Houthi rebels seized the main road into the strategic port city of Hodeida, weakening Houthi control over the supply of humanitarian aid into the country.

"The mills in Hodeida feed millions of people," Grande said. "We're particularly worried about the Red Sea mill, which currently has 45,000 metric tonnes of food inside, enough to feed 3.5 million people for a month. If the mills are damaged or disrupted, the human cost will be incalculable," she said.

WAR IN YEMEN

Hundreds of thousands of lives at risk as key rebel supply route cut

In U-turn, Spain to deliver laser-guided bombs to Saudis

US says Saudi, UAE working to cut risks to Yemen civilians

And the war's largest victims are children.

In the malnutrition ward of a hospital in the Yemeni capital Sanaa, doctors weigh toddlers with protruding rib cages and skeletal limbs.

Twenty children, most under the age of two, being treated at the ward in Sab'een Hospital are among hundreds of thousands of children suffering from severe malnutrition in the impoverished country that has been ravaged by a more than three years of war.

"The conflict has made Yemen a living hell for its children," Meritxell Relano, UNICEF Representative in Yemen, told Reuters.

She said more than 11 million children, or about 80 percent of the country's population under the age of 18, were facing the threat of food shortages, disease, displacement and acute lack of access to basic social services.

"An estimated 1.8 million children are malnourished in the country. Nearly 400,000 of them are severely acute malnourished and they are fighting for their lives every day."

A coalition of Sunni Muslim Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, intervened in Yemen's war in 2015 against the Iranian-aligned Houthis after they drove the internationally recognised government out of the capital Sanaa.

The war has unleashed the world's most urgent humanitarian crisis in the nation of 28 million, where 8.4 million people are believed to be on the verge of starvation and 22 million people are dependent on aid.



The coalition has imposed stringent measures on imports into Yemen to prevent the Houthis from smuggling weapons but the checks have slowed the flow of commercial goods and vital aid into the country.

"The situation of the families without jobs, without income and in the middle of the war, is catastrophic," Relano said.

"The human cost and the humanitarian impact of this conflict is unjustifiable," Lise Grande said in a statement yesterday.

"Parties to the conflict are obliged to do absolutely everything possible to protect

civilians and civilian infrastructure and ensure people have access to the aid they are entitled to and need to survive."

Amid criticism of Saudi-led campaign, Spain yesterday said it will go ahead with the controversial delivery of 400 laser-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia.

And US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has "certified" that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are working to reduce risks to civilian life in Yemen.

The measure comes amid a string of high-profile coalition strikes that have killed scores of civilians, many of them children.

US braces for Hurricane Florence

Trump rejects Puerto Rico storm toll of 3,000 as Democrat plot

AFP, Wilmington

"Life-threatening" Hurricane Florence edged closer to the east coast of the United States yesterday, with tropical-force winds and rain already lashing barrier islands just off the North Carolina mainland.

The huge storm weakened to a Category 2 hurricane overnight, but forecasters warned that it still packed a dangerous punch -- 110 mile-an-hour (175 kph) winds and torrential rains.

Georgia joined four other coastal states issuing an emergency declaration as forecasts showed Florence dumping historic amounts of rain on the southern state.

As Florence closed in, President Donald Trump and state and local officials urged residents in the path of the storm to evacuate.

Appeals to stay safe came from as far away as space. German astronaut Alexander Gerst tweeted pictures of the monster storm taken from the International Space Station along with the warning: "Watch out, America!"

Up to 17 million people are under voluntary or manda-

tory evacuation orders, and coastal residents were frantically boarding up homes and businesses and hitting the road on Wednesday as the storm approached.

Meanwhile, Trump yesterday rejected the official death toll from last year's Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, saying it had been inflated to almost 3,000 as part of a ploy to make him look bad.

"3000 people did not die in the two hurricanes that hit Puerto Rico," Trump tweeted early Thursday. "When I left the Island, AFTER the storm had hit, they had anywhere from 6 to 18 deaths."

"Then, a long time later, they started to report really large numbers, like 3000..." he said, going on to claim: "This was done by the Democrats in order to make me look as bad as possible when I was successfully raising Billions of Dollars to help rebuild Puerto Rico."

Hurricane Maria killed 2,975 people in Puerto Rico, a long-awaited independent investigation into the 2017 storm concluded last month. It was initially said to have killed just 64 people.



US moves to ban e-cigarettes

AFP, Washington

US regulators said Wednesday they are considering an immediate ban on flavored e-cigarettes, as the Food and Drug Administration chief warned of an "epidemic" of vaping among youths.

The agency sent more than 1,100 warning letters and 131 fines to retailers it said illegally sold JUUL and other e-cigarette products to minors during a nationwide undercover sting including brick-and-mortar and online stores this summer.

The crackdown marked the "largest coordinated enforcement effort in the FDA's history," the agency said.

"We see clear signs that youth use of electronic cigarettes has reached an epidemic proportion, and we must adjust certain aspects of our comprehensive strategy to stem this clear and present danger," said FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb in a statement.

"We're especially focused on the flavored e-cigarettes. And we're seriously considering a policy change that would lead to the immediate removal of these flavored products from the market."

According to the Washington Post, the preliminary data is from the National Youth Tobacco Survey, and it shows a 75 percent increase in e-cigarette use among high school students in 2018 compared to 2017.



Troops and military equipment are pictured during Vostok-2018 (East-2018) military drills at Tsugol training ground in eastern Siberia, yesterday. President Vladimir Putin yesterday said Moscow is planning to strengthen the country's armed forces. Some 25,000 soldiers, 7,000 vehicles as well as 250 helicopters and planes are taking part in the war games. The exercises will continue until September 17.

PHOTO: AFP

Gunman kills 5 in US, then himself

AFP, Los Angeles

A man went on a shooting rampage in California on Wednesday, killing five people including his wife, before taking his own life.

The shooting at multiple locations in Bakersfield in central California was possibly "a domestic violence incident," said Lieutenant Mark King of the Kern County sheriff's office.

Police received their first call at 5:19 pm before responding to the first location, a trucking company, where the rampage began.

Three people were killed there and the shooter, armed with a large caliber hand gun, fled.

Sheriff Donny Youngblood told reporters that the suspect first shot a man at the trucking company and then killed his own wife. He chased a person who had witnessed the shooting and killed that person, too.

He then fled and shot a couple at a house.

Officers gave chase and the suspect pulled into a business, got out of the car and shot himself, he said.

It was the latest chapter of America's epidemic of gun violence.

Americans make up only four percent of the global population but they own 40 percent of the world's firearms, according to a recent study published by the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva.

European court rules against Britain over mass surveillance

AFP, Strasbourg

Europe's top rights court yesterday ruled that Britain's programme of mass surveillance, revealed by whistleblower Edward Snowden as part of his sensational leaks on US spying, violated people's right to privacy.

Ruling in the case of Big Brother Watch and Others versus the United Kingdom, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, said the interception of journalistic material also violated the right to freedom of information.

The case was brought by a group of journalists and rights activists who believe that their data may have been targeted.

The court ruled that the existence of the surveillance programme "did not in and of itself violate the convention" but noted "that such a regime had to respect criteria set down in its case-law".

They concluded that the mass trawling for information by Britain's GCHQ spy agency violated Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights regarding the right to privacy because there was "insufficient oversight" of the programme.

The court found the oversight to be doubly deficient, in the way in which the GCHQ selected internet providers for intercepting data and then filtered the messages, and the way in which intelligence agents selected which data to examine.

It determined that the regime covering how the spy agency obtained data from internet and phone companies was "not in accordance with the law".

In a further victory for the 16 complainants the court ruled that the programme also provided "insufficient safeguards in respect of confidential journalistic material", violating Article 10 of the European convention, which protects freedom of expression and information.

But it dismissed claims that Britain further violated the privacy of those on whom it snooped by sharing intelligence with foreign governments.

"The regime for sharing intelligence with foreign governments did not violate either Article 8 or Article 10," it said.

Snowden leaked thousands of classified documents to the press in 2013 which revealed the vast scope of surveillance of private data that was put in place after the 9/11 attacks.

South Sudan rivals sign peace deal

AFP, Addis Ababa

South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar signed a much-anticipated peace deal on Wednesday, the latest attempt to end five years of a vicious civil war that's torn the world's youngest nation apart.

Seated before a roomful of regional leaders, diplomats and officials convened in the Ethiopian capital, the two men signed a document meant to end a conflict that began in 2013 and quickly spiralled into a regional crisis.

Hopes were high that the agreement, the details of which were not announced, will end the war which has cost the lives of tens of thousands of people, pushed millions to the brink of starvation and scattered refugees across East Africa.

"The eyes of the world are upon us as the South Sudan leaders commit today to press for reconciliation and lasting peace in their country," said Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed at the start of a brief but delayed closed-door meeting after which Kiir and Machar emerged to sign the document.

The agreement was greeted with applause and ululations from the delegates, but also concerns from some parties that it might not be honoured.

Since the civil war began in December 2013 -- following Kiir's claim that Machar was plotting a coup -- the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) regional bloc, chaired by Ethiopia, has taken the lead on peace negotiations, to little effect.

'We were just tourists'

REUTERS, Moscow

Two Russians resembling men Britain accuses of jettisoning to England to murder a former spy yesterday said that they were innocent tourists who had flown to London for fun and visited the city of Salisbury to see its cathedral.

Britain said it was clear the two men, who appeared on Russia's state-funded RT television, were agents of Russia's GRU military intelligence who carried out the attack, and their interview an example of Russia's "obfuscation and lies".

The two men, who appeared deeply uncomfortable, identified themselves as Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov, the names British prosecutors said were used by the poisoners. They said they had fallen victim to a "fantastical coincidence".

Britain has charged the two men with attempting to murder former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia by spraying a chemical weapon on Skripal's door in March. The Skripals and a police

officer fell seriously ill. A woman in a nearby town later died after her partner brought home a discarded counterfeit Nina Ricci perfume bottle containing the poison.

The two men, both wearing blue jumpers, said they were civilians in the sports nutrition business.

Britain and dozens of other countries have kicked out scores of Russian diplomats over the incident, and Moscow has responded tit-for-tat in the biggest East-West wave of expulsions since the Cold War. The affair has worsened Russian relations with the West, already under strain over Ukraine, Syria and other issues.

According to British police, the two men arrived in London on March 2, a Friday, and spent two nights in an east London hotel. They visited Salisbury twice by train on day trips -- on the Saturday for reconnaissance and on the Sunday to poison Skripal. They then went straight to the airport and flew home, hours after the Skripals were found unconscious on a bench.

NERVE AGENT ATTACK IN UK

