

NEWSIN
briefStorm Pabuk causes
chaos in Thailand

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's first tropical storm in three decades killed one person yesterday as it arrived on the south coast, knocking down trees and blowing off roofs in its path, but was losing speed, officials said, while warning against the risk of flash floods.

Tropical storm Pabuk made landfall in the Pak Phanang district of Nakhon Si Thammarat province, forcing airports and ferries in the region famed for its tourist spots to close.

US citizen held in Russia charged with 'espionage'

AFP, Moscow

US prosecutors have charged an American ex-Marine Paul Whelan detained in Moscow last week with espionage, his lawyer said Thursday, the latest in a series of rifts between Moscow and Washington. The lawyer said he had appealed the ruling and asked for Whelan to be released on bail pending the start of the trial. Whelan, who has denied the charges, could face up to 20 years in prison if found guilty.

Turkey slams Pompeo over Kurds comment

AFP, Ankara

Turkey yesterday hit out at US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for saying Washington will ensure Ankara does not "slaughter" Kurds in Syria as American troops withdraw. "Pompeo equating the YPG terror organisation with Kurds, (even) if it is not intentional, shows a worrying lack of knowledge," Turkish foreign ministry spokesman Hami Aksoy said.

BITS OF HISTORY (JANUARY 04)

1948: The British colony of Burma was proclaimed an independent republic with U Thakin Nu as prime minister.

2004: Rival Afghan factions attending the Loya Jirga national assembly agreed on a constitution, paving the way for free elections after nearly a quarter of a century of war.



House Speaker-designate Nancy Pelosi is applauded after being elected to the speakership as the US House of Representatives with Democrats in the majority meets for the start of the 116th Congress on Capitol Hill in Washington, US, on Thursday. Inset, Pelosi holds the gavel during the opening session of Congress.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Congress, BJP trade barbs

NDTV ONLINE

Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, replying to an acrimonious debate in parliament on the Rafale jet deal yesterday, accused the Congress of scrapping an earlier deal when it was in power because it "didn't get the money" and ignored social security in favour of its "treasury".

Referring to the Bofors scandal that erupted when the Congress was in power in the 1980s, Sitharaman said: "Bofors was a scam, Rafale is not. It is a decision in national interest. They lost an election because of Bofors. Rafale will bring Prime Minister Narendra Modi back."

Defending the 36-jet deal, the minister also alleged that the Congress was shedding crocodile tears on HAL (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited) not getting the offset contract with Rafale-maker Dassault as the party did nothing to scale up the capacity of the state-run company.

The Congress alleges that the BJP-led government scrapped a deal for 126 aircraft negotiated by the previous UPA government to go for an over-

RAFALE FIGHTER JETS DEAL

Indian defence minister says Bofors sank Congress, but Rafale will help Modi's relection

Rahul Gandhi says deal will be probed if Congress comes to power



priced deal for 36 aircraft only to help Anil Ambani, whose inexperienced defence company bagged an offset contract with Dassault.

Sitharaman said: "Our price of the basic Rafale aircraft is Rs. 670 crores, which is nine per cent cheaper than what the UPA deal would have cost. That is 737 crores."

The minister accused the Congress of misleading the country by saying that the current government reduced 126 Rafale jets to 36. "The Congress was supposed to buy 18 in fly-away condition, the NDA raised that to 36," she said.

Earlier, Congress president Rahul Gandhi said there would be a criminal investigation into the Rafale deal if his party comes to power in this year's national elections.

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "running away" from the questions posed to him. "If we come to power in 2019, there will be criminal investigation and people responsible will be punished," he said.

The opposition has demanded a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into the deal even though the Supreme Court recently gave a clean chit to the government.

Third woman enters flashpoint Indian temple

1,369 arrested so far; situation on ground calm but tense

AFP, Thiruvananthapuram

Police in southern India yesterday said that a third woman had entered a flashpoint temple, stoking tensions after two days of clashes involving Hindu hardliners and police.

The Sabarimala temple in Kerala state has been at the centre of a prolonged showdown since India's top court overturned in September a ban on menstruating women aged 10 to 50 setting foot inside.

Before dawn on Wednesday two women in their 40s, escorted by police, became the first to access the shrine since the landmark verdict, sneaking in via a side entrance. They remained under police protection yesterday.

The third to enter the temple, on Thursday night, was a 47-year-old Sri Lankan woman, police said.

Clashes on Wednesday and Thursday between devotees, activists of Kerala's ruling leftist alliance and riot police firing tear gas and water cannon, left one man dead and at least 15 people injured, including four who

were stabbed.

Police said that 1,369 people have been arrested, and that the situation on the ground on Friday was peaceful but tense.



An employee of the Palestinian government-run radio and television stations inspects the damage at one of the studios yesterday, after armed men reportedly raided the building in Gaza City. Five armed men entered the offices of Palestine TV and the Voice of Palestine radio station, assaulting workers and damaging broadcasting equipment, official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported.

PHOTO: AFP

Kate feels Meghan 'used' her: report

ANI, Washington DC

Kate Middleton and Meghan Markle, who have rarely been spotted together in public since the royal wedding in May, had put a rest to the royal family feud speculations on Christmas Day after they aired their grievances with one another. The latest report, however, suggests that the fight between the two has not ended.

According to US Magazine, the Duchess of Cambridge revealed that she felt like Meghan Markle had used her to climb the royal ladder.

The Duchess of Sussex, on the other hand, admitted that she had felt snubbed by Kate Middleton.

Rumours of a feud were fueled after Kensington Palace announced that Prince Harry and Meghan would move out of the palace and relocate to Frogmore Cottage at Windsor Castle as they prepare for the arrival of their first child.

It was also reported that the Duchess of Cambridge had an "explosive row" with Meghan Markle as she allegedly told her not to instruct the members of her team, saying, "That's unacceptable, they are my staff and I speak to them."



Massive data leak targets German leaders, public figures

REUTERS, Berlin

Personal data and documents from hundreds of German politicians and public figures have been published online, in what appears one of the most far-reaching cyber attacks in a country that has become a target of choice for hackers.

It was unclear if the breach, which triggered an emergency meeting of the national cyber defence agency, was the result of a hack or a leak, an Interior Ministry spokesman said.

Chancellor Angela Merkel was affected, but an initial analysis showed no sensitive material from her office was released, said a government spokeswoman.

If the data release does stem from a hack, it would be the latest in a number of hi-tech assaults on political institutions and key individuals in Germany.

Last year, lawmakers said a powerful cyber attack breached the foreign ministry's computer network.

Security officials have blamed most previous breaches on a Russian hacking group, while the Kremlin has consistently

No sensitive data from Merkel's office released

National cyber defence body meets to coordinate response

German armed forces not affected

denied involvement in such incidents.

Cyber defence body BSI met in reaction to the latest attack to coordinate the response of intelligence and other federal agencies, a spokesman said.

Public broadcaster rbb, which broke the story, said the identity of the hackers and their motive were not known.

Government spokeswoman Martina Fietz confirmed personal data and documents "belonging to hundreds of politicians and public figures" had been released online.

German media said a fax number and two email addresses used by Merkel had been published. "The information and data drained from the chancellery and that relate to the chancellor are manageable," Fietz told a news conference.

A defence ministry spokesman said the armed forces were not affected.

Bild newspaper reported that German authorities had asked the US spy agency NSA for help in investigating the incident. The mass-selling daily also said the secure internal network of Germany's government was not hit by the hackers, citing sources inside the BSI.

US issues China travel advisory

Countries agree trade talks on Jan 7-8

REUTERS, Washington

The US State Department on Thursday renewed its warning for US citizens traveling in China to exercise increased caution due to "arbitrary enforcement of local laws" amid heightened diplomatic tensions over the arrest in Canada of a Chinese technology company executive.

The updated travel advisory maintains the warning at "Level 2" but also warns about extra security checks and increased police presence in the Xinjiang Uighur and Tibet Autonomous Regions.

The advisory follows the detentions by Chinese authorities in December of Canadians Michael Kovrig, a former diplomat and an adviser with the International Crisis Group (ICG) think-tank, and businessman Michael Spavor. China says both men were suspected of endangering state security.

Tensions with China increased after Canadian police arrested Huawei Technologies Co Ltd's chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, on Dec 1 in Vancouver at the request of the United States.

US prosecutors have accused her of misleading banks about transactions linked to Iran, putting the banks at risk of violating US sanctions.

Meanwhile, China and the United States agreed to hold vice ministerial level trade talks in Beijing on Jan 7-8. A working team led by Deputy US Trade Representative Jeffrey Gerrish will come to China to have "positive and constructive discussions" with Chinese counterparts, China's commerce ministry said in a statement on its website.



US will not stand by and watch Pompeo warns Iran against space launch

AFP, Washington

The United States on Thursday warned Iran of consequences if it goes ahead with plans to send off three space launch vehicles, charging despite Tehran's denials that the move would violate a UN resolution.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that Iran's satellite-delivery rockets used technology "virtually identical" to nuclear-capable ballistic missiles, which could eventually include long-range missiles capable of reaching the United States.

"The United States will not stand by and watch the Iranian regime's destructive policies place international stability and security at risk," Pompeo said in a statement.

"We advise the regime to reconsider these provocative launches and cease all activities related to ballistic missiles in order to avoid deeper economic and diplomatic isolation," he said.

Pompeo said that an Iranian launch would defy UN Security Council Resolution 2231 of 2015, which endorsed an international accord on ending the clerical regime's nuclear program and called on Tehran "not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons."

US President Donald Trump last year walked out of the Iran deal, which was negotiated by his predecessor Barack Obama, instead reimposing sweeping sanctions aimed at crippling the country's economy.

'Bomb those who feel unsafe in India' Says BJP lawmaker, terms them as 'traitors'

NDTV ONLINE

People who feel unsafe in India should be bombed, believes a BJP lawmaker in Uttar Pradesh. Vikram Saini, a legislator from Muzaffarnagar, also feels that people who voice such feelings are "traitors".

"These traitors should be severely punished as per the law. My personal view is that those who say they feel unsafe and threatened in India should be bombed. If these people do not respect the values of our nation, then they are always welcome to leave this country and settle down in a foreign country," Vikram Saini said, according to news agency ANI.

"Give me a ministry and I will bomb all such people," he went on, adding that he would spare none.

The comments come days after a massive controversy over actor Naseeruddin Shah saying in an interview that he felt anxious for his children at a time when there were mob killings and the death of a cow was given more importance than the death of a policeman. He was referring to the killing of a police officer in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr last month in mob frenzy over the killing of cows.