

Millions of Britons are
Holocaust deniers: poll

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

More than 2.6 million British people think the Holocaust is a myth, a poll has found. Five per cent of UK adults do not believe millions of Jews were systematically murdered by the Nazis, according to the survey, which survivors and anti-racism campaigners said pointed to a "terribly worrying" level of denial.

50 mass graves found in
Congo: UN rights group

AFP, Kinshasa

More than 50 mass graves have been identified in western Democratic Republic of Congo after a spate of killings in the region, a UN rights group has said. The army chief in western DRC, General Fall Sikabwe, told AFP an investigation had begun. Earlier this month, the UN said at least 890 people were killed during inter-communal clashes in the region.

Two die after eating
food at Indian temple

AFP, Bangalore

Two women have died and nine others including two children are undergoing treatment after eating contaminated food at a Hindu temple in southern India, police said. It is the second such case in two months in the southern state of Karnataka, after at least 11 people died consuming poisoned rice at another temple in December.

BITS OF HISTORY
(JANUARY 27)

1973: A ceasefire agreement signed in Paris ended the US military role in Vietnam.

2002: Explosion at military storage facility in Lagos causes over 1,000 deaths, including 120 who drowned trying to escape.

2016: Tibetan monk begins world tour in London urging action over Chinese oppression.



Anti-war and civil rights activists rally against Trump administration interference in Venezuela politics in front of the White House in Washington, US, on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Maduro rejects polls call

Venezuelan US defense attache deserts Maduro as West ups ante

REUTERS, Istanbul

Venezuela's embattled President Nicolas Maduro rejected an international ultimatum to call elections within eight days and said opposition leader Juan Guaido had violated the country's constitution by declaring himself leader.

Maduro, in an interview with CNN Turk aired yesterday, also said he was open to dialogue and that meeting US President Donald Trump was improbable but not impossible. The broadcaster dubbed the interview from Spanish into Turkish.

Washington, which has recognised Guaido as leader, had on Saturday urged the world to "pick a side" on Venezuela and financially disconnect from Maduro's government.

Venezuela has sunk into turmoil under Maduro with food shortages and protests amid an economic and political crisis that has sparked mass emigration and inflation that is seen rising to 10 million percent this year.

Britain, Germany, France and Spain all said they would recognize Guaido if Maduro failed to call fresh elections within eight days, an ultimatum Russia said was "absurd" and the Venezuelan foreign minister called "childlike."

Washington, Canada most Latin American nations and many European states have labelled Maduro's second-term

election win last May fraudulent.

Some 26 people have been killed and more than 350 people have been detained in clashes this week between anti-Maduro activists and security forces, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said Friday.

Maduro retains the loyalty of the armed forces, though Venezuela's top military envoy to the United States on Saturday defected to Guaido.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, at a special UN Security Council meet, asked all nations to follow the US in recognizing opposition leader Juan Guaido as the interim president.

"Now it is time for every other nation to pick a side. No more delays, no more games. Either you stand with the forces of freedom, or you're in league with Maduro and his mayhem," he said.

Pompeo denounced Russia and China, which have stood by Maduro, saying that they were "propping up a failed regime in the hopes of recovering billions of dollars in ill-considered investments and assistance made over the years."

Meanwhile, a 72-hour deadline issued by Maduro for US embassy personnel to leave Caracas expired on Saturday, after the embattled socialist leader broke off bilateral relations on Wednesday.

At UN, Pompeo asks
countries to 'pick a
side' on Venezuela

Russia slams EU nations
eight day ultimatum
on polls



AFGHAN PEACE TALKS

Foreign troops to leave in 18 months

Say Taliban sources citing draft deal

REUTERS, Kabul

Taliban officials said US negotiators on Saturday agreed on a draft peace pact setting out the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan within 18 months, potentially ending the United States' longest war.

The details of the draft were given to Reuters by Taliban sources at the end of six days of talks with US special peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Qatar aimed at ending the war, more than 17 years since American-led forces invaded Afghanistan.

It stipulates that troops would leave within 18 months of the agreement being signed.

While no joint statement was issued, Khalilzad tweeted later that the talks had made "significant progress" and would resume shortly, adding that he planned to travel to Afghanistan to meet government officials.

"Meetings here (in Qatar) were more productive than they have been in the past. We have made significant progress on vital issues," he wrote, adding that numerous issues still needed work.

"Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed and everything must include an intra-Afghan dialogue and comprehensive ceasefire," he wrote in the tweets.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Saturday wrote on Twitter that he had received "encouraging news" from Khalilzad about the talks.

"The US is serious about pursuing peace, preventing #Afghanistan from continuing to be a space for international terrorism & bringing forces home," Pompeo tweeted. He did not give a timetable for the potential withdrawal of US forces.

KHASHOGGI MURDER PROBE

Int'l team seeks access to KSA, consulate in Turkey

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

A United Nations human rights investigator leading an international inquiry into the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi said on Saturday she requested access to Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul, and to visit the kingdom.

Agnes Callamard, UN special rapporteur on executions, who begins a week-long mission to Turkey at government invitation today, said she had not yet received a reply from Saudi authorities.

On Thursday, she said the three-member legal and forensic panel would seek to establish "states' and individuals' responsibilities" for the killing.

Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist living in the US, was murdered at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2 where he had gone to collect documents for his planned wedding.

US intelligence agencies believe Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) ordered

an operation to kill Khashoggi, who was a critic, and say his body was dismembered and removed to a location still publicly unknown.

Riyadh denies the crown prince had any involvement in the murder.

"I have requested access to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul and a meeting with the ambassador of the Kingdom of Saud Arabia in Turkey," Callamard said in an email to Reuters news agency. "I have also sought permission to conduct a similar country-visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

The Saudi mission in Geneva and government media office in Riyadh have not responded to Reuters' inquiries.

A Saudi public prosecutor's spokesperson said last year that 21 Saudis had been taken into custody over the case, 11 of whom had been indicted and referred to trial.

"I conceive of this inquiry to be a necessary step, among a number of others, towards crucial truth telling about and formal accountability for the gruesome killing of Mr. Khashoggi," Callamard said.



'Deeply sorry'

UK's Prince Philip apologises to woman
injured in crash involving his Land Rover

AFP, London

Britain's Prince Philip has said he is "deeply sorry" about the injury suffered by a woman in a car crash he was involved in over a week ago, according to a report in the Sunday Mirror.

The newspaper published a copy of a letter written by the 97-year-old royal to Emma Fairweather, who broke her wrist when the Kia she was in collided with the prince's Land Rover.

"I would like you to know how very sorry I am for my part in the accident... I can only imagine that I failed to see the car coming, and I am very contrite about the consequences," said the letter, signed by Philip in blue pen.

The crash, which left the prince's vehicle on its side, happened as he pulled out of a side road onto a busy main road near the royal country residence in Norfolk, eastern England.

Philip was uninjured in the January 17

accident, while the driver of the Kia sustained cuts to the knee.

Fairweather, a passenger in the Kia, had complained to the Sunday Mirror last weekend that she had not received an apology from the prince.

"I was somewhat shaken after the accident, but I was greatly relieved that none of you were seriously injured," said Philip in the letter dated January 21, according to this Sunday's report.

"I have since learned that you suffered a broken arm. I am deeply sorry about this injury."

Philip, known for his forthright manner and off-colour jokes, retired from public life in 2017 and underwent a hip replacement operation last April.

The accident stirred up what The Sun described as Britain's "age-old debate" about whether and when the elderly should give up driving.



Newly initiated 'Naga Sadhus' (Hindu holy men) sit as they perform rituals on the banks of the Ganga River during Kumbh mela festival, in Allahabad, yesterday. During every Kumbh Mela, the diksha, a ritual of initiation by a guru takes place for new members.

PHOTO: AFP

Blasphemy lawyer returns to Pak to aid in Bibi appeal

AFP, The Hague

The Pakistani lawyer of a Christian woman acquitted of blasphemy Saturday jettied out of the Netherlands to "hopefully assist his client for the last time" in a Pakistani court hearing, a Dutch MP said.

Saif-ul-Malook fled to the Netherlands from Pakistan in November last year after violent protests erupted over the Pakistani Supreme Court's decision to overturn the conviction of Asia Bibi, who was on death row.

Pakistan's Supreme Court will decide on Tuesday whether to allow an appeal against Bibi's acquittal, lawyers in the case have said.

Christian Union party parliamentarian Joel Voordevind tweeted a picture of himself and Malook saying "this afternoon (Saturday) I escorted Asia Bibi's lawyer, Mr Malook to Schiphol airport."

"He's going back to Pakistan to hopefully represent Asia for the last time in her case," Voordevind said.

The Netherlands last year granted Malook a temporary stay, but Voordevind said Malook will "unfortunately lose his asylum status in the Netherlands."

The allegations against Bibi date back to 2009, when Muslim women accused her of blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed, a charge punishable by death under the colonial-era legislation.

Her case drew the attention of international rights groups and swiftly became the most high-profile in the country.

If the court refuses to allow the appeal, it will remove the last legal hurdle facing Bibi, who is a prime target in conservative Muslim-majority Pakistan and remains in protective custody.

250 still missing in Brazil

37 bodies found; 24,000 evacuated as another dam risks collapsing

AFP, Brumadinho

Communities devastated by a dam collapse that killed at least 37 people at a Brazilian mining complex -- with hopes fading for 250 still missing -- were alarmed by an early morning alert yesterday warning of a possible second breach.

Loudspeakers rang out at 5:30am (0730 GMT) among homes surrounding the Corrego do Feijao mining complex in southeastern Brazil, warning of dangerously high water levels, the Vale mining company said.

Workers at the complex are still reeling after a barrier at the site burst Friday, spewing millions of tons of treacherous sludge and engulfing buildings, vehicles and roads.

Firefighters halted the search for survivors and immediately began evacuating communities near the dike, which contains at least three million cubic meters (800 million gallons) of water.



"Attention, general area evacuation!" blared a warning through loudspeakers in Brumadinho, population 39,000. "Find the highest point in the city," the warning said.

Vale's CEO Fabio Schvartsman and Minas Gerais Governor Romeu Zema earlier warned that the death toll from Friday's rupture could rise.

Search and rescue operations,

suspended overnight because of rain, resumed at 4:00am (0600 GMT). The military said it deployed 1,000 soldiers, including sniffer dogs, to the disaster zone.

Dozens of helicopters were set to be deployed because the thick mud was treacherous for ground rescuers to venture into.

Yesterday, firefighters raised the

death toll to 37, with 192 rescued.

Meanwhile, Brazilian judicial authorities announced they had frozen \$3 billion of Vale's assets, saying real estate and vehicles would be seized if the company could not come up with the full amount.

The company also has been hit with fines by the federal and state government totaling some \$92.5 million.

The mining company, one of the world's biggest, was involved in a 2015 mine collapse elsewhere in Minas Gerais that claimed 19 lives in what is regarded as the country's worst-ever environmental disaster.

The Brazilian branch of environmental group Greenpeace said the dam break was "a sad consequence of the lessons not learned by the Brazilian government and the mining companies." Such incidents "are not accidents but environmental crimes that must be investigated, punished and repaired," it added.