

NEWSIN brief

US, S Korea meet on eve of Trump-Kim talks

AFP, Seoul

The US special envoy for North Korea met Seoul's top security advisor yesterday, a day before discussions with Pyongyang officials on the second summit between Trump and Kim Jong Un. Stephen Biegun briefed Chung Eui-yong on Washington's stance ahead of a working-level meeting with the North's delegation to discuss the agenda of summit.

28 Haitians dead after ship sinks off Bahamas

AFP, Miami

At least 28 Haitians have drowned off the coast of Abaco in the Bahamas, officials said Sunday, the latest tragedy at sea for migrants seeking to leave the Caribbean's poorest economy. "Thus far, a total of 17 persons have been rescued alive and 28 bodies have been recovered from the water" after two days of dive operations, authorities said.

UN urged to probe Xinjiang crackdown

AFP, Geneva

Rights groups yesterday urged the United Nations to send investigators to China's northwestern Xinjiang province to probe the mass detainment of ethnic Uighur and other Muslim minorities. "The abuse in Xinjiang today is so severe that it cries out for international action," Human Rights Watch chief Kenneth Roth said.

BITS OF HISTORY (FEBRUARY 4)

1945: British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, US President Franklin Roosevelt and Soviet leader Josef Stalin met at Yalta in the Crimea to discuss plans for the defeat of the Axis powers and decide on the post-war world.

1976: An earthquake measuring 7.5 on the Richter scale and resulting mudslides killed 23,000 people near Guatemala City.

2004: Facebook is founded by Mark Zuckerberg.



Somali security forces and emergency services evacuate an injured man from the scene where a car bomb exploded at a shopping mall in Mogadishu, Somalia yesterday. At least nine people were killed and several people were wounded in the attack claimed by Al-Shabaab militants.

Trump ignites new immigration furor

Sends more forces to Mexico border

CNN ONLINE

President Donald Trump is carving new divides on immigration ahead of his State of the Union address that likely offer a more reliable guide to the year ahead than the ritual calls for national unity he is expected to issue tonight.

"With Caravans marching through Mexico and toward our Country, Republicans must be prepared to do whatever is necessary for STRONG Border Security," Trump wrote in a tweet on Sunday evening.

"Dems do nothing. If there is no Wall, there is no Security. Human Trafficking, Drugs and Criminals of all dimensions - KEEP OUT!"

Trump doubled down on his call for a wall to boost border security as Pentagon said Sunday the US will send an additional 3,750 troops to its frontier with Mexico.

Soldiers were originally deployed to the border under an order Trump gave before midterm elections in November as "caravans" of migrants made their way to the border to seek asylum from violence and poverty in their own countries.

But the mission, under which troops assist civilian border patrol agents by providing logistical support and installing concertina-wire fencing, has been described by opponents as a political stunt designed to create the illusion of a crisis.

"The Department of Defense will deploy approximately 3,750 additional US forces to provide the additional support to CBP (Customs and Border Protection) at the southwest border that Acting Secretary of Defense (Pat) Shanahan approved Jan. 11," a statement said.

This additional deployment is for three months, the statement added, and will bring to 4,350 the total number of troops at the border.

Erdogan slams US 'silence'

Demands Saudi answers; UN team on extrajudicial executions concludes week-long trip to Turkey to gather information

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has lashed out at the United States for not taking a tougher position against Saudi Arabia over the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, as he demanded answers from the kingdom over the journalist's killing.

"I cannot understand America's silence when such a horrific attack took place, and even after members of the CIA listened to the recordings we provided," Erdogan said in an interview aired by state broadcaster TRT on Sunday.

"We want everything to be clarified because there is an atrocity, there is a murder," he added, calling the killing "not an ordinary one."

Erdogan has long insisted that the order to kill Khashoggi at the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul four months ago came from the highest levels of the Saudi government.

In the interview, Erdogan said the murder was planned by 22 people, 15 of whom arrived in Istanbul on two planes and visited the consulate on the day of the killing.

"What they [Saudi Arabia] say is '22 people are arrested now'. Despite this, we have some information. They might have taken some of them out. They might be victims of traffic accidents. Because the system there is working very weird," he said.

Last month, a trial opened in Riyadh of 11 defendants over the killing, including five people facing the death penalty. Several rights groups and international observers, however, have said it lacked credibility.

Erdogan's latest remarks came as Agnes Callamard, the UN's special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, on Sunday concluded a week-long trip to Turkey to gather information on the events surrounding Khashoggi's murder four months ago.

Callamard is understood to have heard the grisly audio recordings of the Saudi journalist's last moments, which are in Turkey's possession and were previously shared with CIA Director Gina Haspel, as well as Germany, France and Britain.

Khashoggi, a Washington Post contributor and critic of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was murdered on October 2 soon after he entered the Istanbul-based consulate to collect documents for his planned wedding to a Turkish woman.

US intelligence agencies have reportedly concluded that Prince Mohammed, also known as MBS, ordered the assassination of Khashoggi, whose body is yet to be found.

KHASHOGGI MURDER

"We want everything to be clarified because there is an atrocity, there is a murder."



Merkel urges 'creativity', 'goodwill' in Brexit talks

Says withdrawal deal not up for renegotiation

AFP, Tokyo

German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday urged Britain and the EU to show "creativity" and "goodwill" in upcoming Brexit talks but stressed the withdrawal agreement was not up for renegotiation.

Speaking alongside her Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe, Merkel said "we want to do everything to avoid a no-deal (Brexit) because that would increase the uncertainty."

However, she reiterated that the withdrawal agreement had been painstakingly negotiated and "we do not want to reopen" it. "This is not on the agenda."

Nevertheless, the German chancellor said that questions over crunch topics like the unpopular Northern Ireland "backstop" provision could be discussed in the so-called political agreement that accompanies the Brexit deal.

The backstop is intended to ensure there is no return to a hard border with Ireland, but Brexit supporters fear it will keep Britain tied to EU customs rules.

"We need to show creativity, we need to listen to each other," said Merkel.

"We can still use the time to come to an agreement over the things that are standing in our way, if everyone shows goodwill."

British MPs voted last week to send Prime Minister Theresa May back to Brussels to renegotiate the backstop clause, suggesting that her deal would then be able to pass after it was roundly rejected in parliament last month.

"When I return to Brussels, I will be battling for Britain and Northern Ireland, I will be armed with a fresh mandate, new ideas and a renewed determination to agree a pragmatic solution," wrote May in the Sunday Telegraph.

But the March 29 exit date approaching, the risks of a no-deal Brexit for both Britain and the bloc are coming into sharp focus.

Japan's Abe also said it was "necessary to minimise the risk of Brexit on the European and World economy. We must avoid a no-deal Brexit."



Violence in God's name cannot be justified: Pope

Calls for end to wars in Yemen and Syria

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Pope Francis yesterday rejected "hatred and violence" in the name of God, on the first visit by the head of the Catholic church to the Muslim-majority Arabian Peninsula.

The pontiff, who met with the world's top Sunni Muslim cleric in Abu Dhabi, said "every form of violence must be condemned without hesitation... No violence can be justified in the name of religion".

He called for "the full recognition" of rights for people of all faiths from the UAE.

Religious freedom "is not limited only to freedom of worship but sees in the other truly a brother or sister, a child of my own humanity whom God leaves free and whom, therefore, no human institution can coerce, not even in God's name", Pope Francis said during an interfaith meeting attended by Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb.

He called for equal citizenship rights and religious freedom in the Middle East.

"I look forward to societies where people of different beliefs have the same right of citizenship and where only in the case of violence in any of its forms is that right removed," he said.

The Pope arrived in Abu Dhabi on Sunday night for a three-day visit. He also raised the issue of Yemen, devastated by a war in which the UAE is a key player.

"Human fraternity requires of us, as representatives of the world's religions, the duty to reject every nuance of approval from the word war. I am thinking in particular of Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Libya," the Pope said.



Relatives of 30-year-old Palestinian Ahmed Abu Jabal, who died of injuries sustained from Israeli gunfire in clashes following border demonstrations the week before, mourn during his funeral in Gaza City yesterday.

STUDY ON HIMALAYAN GLACIERS

Two-thirds could melt by 2100

AFP, Kathmandu

Two-thirds of Himalayan glaciers, the world's "Third Pole", could melt by 2100 if global emissions are not reduced, scientists warned in a major new study issued yesterday.

And even if the "most ambitious" Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius is achieved, one-third of the glaciers would go, according to the Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment.

Glaciers in the Hindu Kush-Himalaya (HKH) region are a critical water source for some 250 million people in the mountains as well as to 1.65 billion others in the river valleys below, the report said.

The glaciers feed 10 of the world's most important river systems, including the Ganges, Indus, Yellow, Mekong and Irrawaddy, and directly or indirectly supply billions of people with food, energy, clean air and income.

Impacts on people from their melting will range from worsened air pollution to more extreme weather, while lower pre-monsoon river flows will throw urban water systems and food and energy production off-kilter, the study warned.

It was published by the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Nepal, one of eight countries on the front line.

Australia floods bring crocodiles to the streets

Military deployed; more than 1,100 evacuated

AFP, Cairns

Australia's military has been deployed to tackle devastating "once-in-a-century" floods that have inundated homes, schools and airports in the country's northeast, forcing more than 1,100 to flee and bringing crocodiles onto the streets.

The Australian Defence Forces delivered 70,000 sandbags, deployed amphibious cargo vehicles and helped pluck flashlight-wielding residents from their rooftops yesterday, as monsoon rains drenched the northern state of Queensland.

Australia's tropical north typically experiences heavy rains during the monsoon season, but the recent downpour has seen some areas get a year's worth of rainfall in a week.

The authorities were forced to open floodgates of a major dam late Sunday, unleashing what they called "dangerous and high velocity flows."

In hard-hit Townsville, cars were mostly submerged, with picket fences barely poking through waist-deep flood waters.

"We've never seen so much water in our lives," said local radio journalist Gabi Elgood. "You think there can't possibly be any more to come but the rain just doesn't stop."

Desperate residents had to contend not only with flash flooding, landslides and power blackouts, but also several saltwater crocodile sightings in residential roads and cul-de-sacs.

Queensland Police issued a blunt warning for people to stay out of floodwaters.



Obesity-linked cancers on the rise in adults

AFP, Paris

A sharp increase in the rate of obesity-linked cancers among young adults in the United States could foreshadow a reversal in the overall decline in cancer mortality, researchers warned yesterday.

In a sweeping study covering two-thirds of the US population, they showed that half a dozen cancers for which obesity is a known risk factor became more frequent from 1995 to 2015 among women and men under 50.

The younger the age bracket, the more quickly these cancers gained ground, they reported in The Lancet, a medical journal.

During the period examined, the incidence of pancreatic cancer, for example, increased by about one percent per year for adults aged 45 to 49. Among 30 to 34-year-olds, the average annual percent increase was more than twice that high.

And among 25 to 29-year-olds, the rate jumped by 4.4 percent per year.

Comparing five-year age brackets from 25 to 80, the annual hike was similarly highest among the 25 to 29 cohort for four other obesity-linked cancers: kidney (6.23 percent), gallbladder (3.71 percent), uterine (3.35 percent), and colon (2.41 percent).

"Our findings expose a recent change that could serve as a warning of an increased burden of obesity-related cancers to come in older adults," said co-author Ahmedin Jemal of the American Cancer Society, USA.

Norway intel service adds Huawei on threat list

AFP, Oslo

Norway's intelligence service PST yesterday issued a warning about Chinese telecoms giant Huawei, whose ties to Beijing have sparked security concerns.

"One has to be attentive about Huawei as an actor and about the close connections between a commercial actor like Huawei and the Chinese regime," the head of Norway's domestic intelligence unit PST, Benedicte Bjornland, said as she presented a national risk assessment report for 2019.

"An actor like Huawei could be subject to influence from its home country as long as China has an intelligence law that requires private individuals, entities and companies to cooperate with China," she said.

In Norway, the main telecoms operators Telenor and Telia -- which chose Huawei to supply their 4G networks -- are gearing up for the roll-out of 5G.

Several countries like the United States have banned Huawei 5G telecoms equipment for security reasons. The Scandinavian country is considering ways of limiting its exposure.

"As far as we're concerned, it's about setting up a regulatory framework to protect what could be considered critical infrastructure," Justice Minister Tor Mikkel Wara said at the same press conference.

"What this regulatory framework would look like, and what it would cover, is what we're working on right now," he said.

Norway is treading cautiously on the issue, after China's angry reaction to the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo, triggering lengthy diplomatic and trade repercussions from Beijing's side.