

JAMAL KHASHOGGI KILLING

Turkey's trial of Saudi suspects resumes

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

A Turkish court will resume the trial in absentia of 20 Saudi officials today for the gruesome killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Khashoggi, a 59-year-old Washington Post newspaper columnist and prominent critic of Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), was last seen entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018, where he had gone to obtain documents for his impending wedding to his Turkish fiancée, Hatice Cengiz.

The journalist was killed at the consulate and his body was reportedly dismembered and removed from the building. His remains have never been found.

The killing sparked international outrage and tarnished the image of MBS.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said the order to murder Khashoggi came from "the highest levels" of the Saudi government but has not directly blamed MBS.

Saudi Arabia said Khashoggi was killed in a "rogue operation" by agents and the crown prince has denied ordering it.

Last year, a United Nations investigation found that high-level Saudi officials had carefully planned and endorsed the murder.

Following an investigation, Turkish prosecutors in March accused Saud al-Qahtani, a former senior adviser to MBS, and Ahmad al-Asiri, Saudi Arabia's former deputy intelligence chief, with incitement to first-degree murder.

A further 18 Saudi nationals were charged with premeditated murder. Prosecutors are seeking life sentences for all of the accused.

The defendants all left Turkey and Saudi Arabia has refused to extradite them. "Red notice" detention requests via Interpol have been issued for the 20 men.

The indictment included evidence from phone records and CCTV footage of the suspects and named 54 witnesses, including 26 Turkish members of staff of the consulate and the consul's residence.

Agnes Callamard, the United Nations expert on extrajudicial killings, has said the indictment was a "counterbalance to the travesty of justice at the hands of Saudi Arabia".

A Saudi court in September overturned the death sentences handed down to five defendants after a closed-door trial in Saudi Arabia last year, sentencing them to 20 years in prison instead.



Demonstrators burn an effigy representing Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei during a protest demanding his resignation, in Guatemala City on Sunday night. Hundreds of Guatemalans partly burned the Congress building Saturday in a protest demanding the resignation of Alejandro, following the passage of a budget that has sparked outrage in the impoverished Central American nation.

PHOTO: AFP

Unicef to ship 2b Covid vaccines to poor nations in 2021

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION, London

Nearly 2 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines will be shipped and flown to developing countries next year in a "mammoth operation", the UN children's agency Unicef said yesterday, as world leaders vowed to ensure the fair distribution of vaccines.

Unicef said it was working with over 350 airlines and freight companies to deliver vaccines and 1 billion syringes to poor countries such as Burundi, Afghanistan and Yemen as part of COVAX, a global Covid-19 vaccine allocation plan with the World Health Organization (WHO).

"This invaluable collaboration will go a long way to ensure that enough transport capacity is in place for this historic and mammoth operation," said Etelea Kadilli, director of Unicef's Supply Division, in a statement.

COVAX - co-led by GAVI vaccine group, the WHO and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations - aims to discourage governments from hoarding Covid-19 vaccines and to



focus on first vaccinating the most at risk in every country.

At a G20 summit this weekend, leaders of the biggest 20 world economies pledged to ensure the equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines, drugs and tests so that poorer countries are not left out.

Even before the pandemic hit, access to vaccines was unequal with around 20 million babies not receiving vaccines that could save them from serious diseases, death, disability and ill health, according to the WHO.

"We need all hands on deck as we get ready to deliver Covid-19

vaccine doses, syringes and more personal protective equipment to protect frontline workers around the globe," said Unicef's Kadilli, who is working with the Pan American Health Organization and the International Air Transport Association.

Unicef's role with COVAX stems from its status as the largest single vaccine buyer in the world.

It said it procures more than 2 billion doses of vaccines annually for routine immunisation and outbreak response on behalf of nearly 100 countries.

Drugmakers and research centres worldwide are racing to develop Covid-19 vaccines, with large global trials of several of the candidates involving tens of thousands of participants well underway.

Pfizer Inc and BioNTech could secure emergency US and European authorisation for their Covid-19 vaccine next month after final trial results showed a 95% success rate and no serious side effects.

'Point of no return'

Ethiopian PM gives Tigray forces 72 hrs to surrender; Axum airport smashed

AGENCIES

Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed gave the leaders of a dissident northern region 72 hours to surrender ahead of a threatened all-out assault on Tigray's capital, Mekele.

Abiy -- last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner -- launched the military campaign against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) on November 4, accusing it of attacking two federal military camps in the region, and of defying his government and seeking to destabilise it.

A communications blackout in the region has made claims from both sides difficult to verify but hundreds of people are reported to have been killed while tens of thousands have fled the fighting into neighbouring Sudan.

TPLF have destroyed an airport in the ancient town of Axum, state-affiliated media said yesterday.

"Your journey of destruction is coming to an end, and we urge you to surrender peacefully within the next 72 hours, recognising you are at a point of no return," Abiy said on Sunday night in a statement aimed at the leaders of the TPLF party.

"Take this last opportunity," he added.

Abiy also called on the TPLF forces to "surrender peacefully" and urged the people of Mekele to side with the army "in bringing this treasonous group to justice".

Earlier in the day, the Ethiopian army had threatened to besiege the city of half a million and warned civilians to flee while they still could.

"The next decisive battle is to surround Mekele with tanks," Dejene Tsegaye, a military spokesman, told state broadcasters.



A girl plays with a snow man wearing a face mask in a playground in Moscow yesterday, amid the crisis linked with the Covid-19 pandemic caused by coronavirus. Russia has set a new record confirming 25,173 new daily Covid-19 daily cases including 6,886 in Moscow and 2,926 for Saint Petersburg.

PHOTO: AFP

'5-star culture' in Congress

Ghulam Nabi Azad on why party loses polls in India

NDTV ONLINE

Congress's Ghulam Nabi Azad, one of the key dissenters in the party, on Sunday offered another explanation of the party's recent slump when it comes to elections.

Speaking in the middle of the latest controversy to hit the party - sharp criticism by party colleague Kapil Sibal after the Bihar election - Azad said leaders who get a ticket now turn their backs on the heat and dust of campaign, preferring instead to remain ensconced in five-star comfort.

"The problem with our leaders is that if they get a party ticket, they first book a five-star hotel. Even there they want a deluxe place. Then they will not move without an air-conditioned car. They will not go to places where there is an untarred road," he told news agency ANI.

"Elections are not fought from five-star hotels... We can't win until we change this culture," he added.

From parachuting outside in-charges to poor leadership from the top, many claims have been



made about the reason for the party's dismal performance.

"Many blame the leaders. The Congress president or Rahul Gandhi," Azad said, pointing instead to local leaders of the party who are appointed to top posts.

"They have lost the connection with people. The block leaders or district leaders. The moment someone gets a rank, they print their letter pads and visiting cards and think the job is done. But that is where the work begins," he added.

Indicating that the top leadership was not going wrong either, he said under Sonia Gandhi, the Congress won five states in four to five years, "when I was in-charge of election affairs".

"We won in Karnataka, Kerala and we formed an alliance in Tamil Nadu. In Andhra Pradesh, we won in 2004. The party leadership did not interfere in the party functioning," he said.

He said that as long as office-bearers are not elected but appointed, they would not connect with the grassroots. There should be people who are elected, Azad added.

World must not turn away from Afghans: UN

AFP, GENEVA

The international community must continue aiding Afghanistan or risk "disastrous consequences," UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi urged yesterday as a donors conference kicked off in Geneva.

Grandi's appeal comes after his visit to the war-torn nation that remains beset by violence and corruption, and is grappling with the imminent withdrawal of thousands of US troops.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Grandi said the future of millions of Afghans depends on the outcome of peace talks taking place in Qatar and on international commitment to develop the country, including at the two-day donors conference in Geneva.

Greenhouse gas levels at new high despite Covid curbs: UN

AFP, Geneva

Greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the main driver of climate change, hit record highs last year and have continued climbing this year, despite measures to halt the pandemic, the UN said yesterday.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said lockdowns, border closures, flight groundings and other measures to rein in the coronavirus crisis had indeed cut emissions of many pollutants and greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide.

But it warned the industrial slowdown due to the pandemic had not curbed record concentrations of the greenhouse gases that are trapping heat in the atmosphere, raising temperatures, causing sea levels to rise and driving more extreme weather.

"The lockdown-related fall in emissions is just a tiny blip on the long-term graph," WMO chief Petteri Taalas said in a statement.

"We need a sustained flattening of the curve."

The WMO's main annual Greenhouse Gas Bulletin said preliminary estimates indicated that during the most intense

period of the shutdowns, daily CO2 emissions may have been reduced by as much as 17 percent globally.

The annual impact was expected to be a drop of between 4.2 and 7.5 percent, it said.

But this will not cause concentrations of CO2 in the atmosphere to go down, it said, warning the impact on concentrations was "no bigger than the normal year to year fluctuations."

CO2 concentrations will continue to rise, albeit at a slightly reduced pace, WMO said, adding that the pace would be no more than 0.23 parts per million (ppm) per year slower than the previous trajectory -- well within the 1.0 ppm natural inter-annual variability.

"On the short-term the impact of the Covid-19 confinements cannot be distinguished from natural variability," it said.

Emissions are the main factor that determine the amount of greenhouse gas levels but concentration rates are a measure of what remains after a series of complex interactions between atmosphere, biosphere, lithosphere, cryosphere and the oceans.



Palestinian employees of United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) take part in a protest against planned salary cuts, outside the agency's headquarters in Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

US formally withdraws from Open Skies treaty

The US on Sunday formally exited the decades-old Open Skies Treaty, some six months after President Donald Trump first announced the decision, according to the State Department. The 1992 treaty allows the 34 member countries to conduct short notice, unarmed, reconnaissance flights over the other countries to collect data on their military forces and activities. The Trump administration has cited Russian restrictions on Open Skies flights as the reason why it sought to exit the treaty, accusing Moscow of imposing limits on flights near its exclave of Kaliningrad, an area between Poland and Lithuania where the Russian military maintains a robust presence. The US has also accused Russia of denying flights within 6.2 miles of the Georgia-Russia border, and denying a previously approved flight over a major Russian military exercise.

HK activists detained for 2019 illegal assembly



Three young Hong Kong dissidents including Joshua Wong were remanded into custody yesterday after pleading guilty to inciting a rally during last year's pro-democracy protests, deepening the crackdown against Beijing's critics. Hong Kong was convulsed by seven straight months of huge and often violent democracy rallies last year in which millions took to the streets. Beijing has refused demands for free elections and authorities have pursued democracy supporters with criminal cases and a sweeping new national security law. Wong, 24, was prosecuted alongside fellow activists Ivan Lam and Agnes Chow over a protest which took place last summer outside the city police headquarters.

French ex-president Sarkozy on trial for graft

France's former president Nicolas Sarkozy went on trial yesterday on charges of corruption, becoming the first French ex-head of state to stand as an accused in the dock and risking a humiliating end to a career tainted by legal woes. Sarkozy, who has vowed to vigorously contest the accusations of bribery, was himself present in court in Paris but did not make any statement to reporters, an AFP correspondent said. Only one other president, Sarkozy's political mentor Jacques Chirac, has faced trial after leaving office -- but because of ill health, Chirac never appeared in court for his conviction in a fake-jobs scandal. The bribery inquiry also saw Sarkozy become the first ex-president taken into police custody for questioning after it was launched six years ago.

SOURCE: AFP, CNN