



UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The UN counter-terrorism chief warned Tuesday that terrorists are exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic and appealing to new “racially, ethnically and politically motivated violent extremist groups.” Vladimir Voronkov spoke at the UN Security Council’s 20th anniversary commemoration of the pivotal resolution to fight terrorism adopted after the 9/11 attacks on the United States — and six days after a violent assault on the U.S. Capitol by a pro-Trump mob. He said that throughout the past two decades, “the threat of terrorism has persisted, evolved and spread.” Al-Qaeda, which was responsible for the 9/11 attacks that killed almost 3,000 people from 90 countries, is still proving resilient despite the loss of numerous leaders, Voronkov said. The Daesh extremist group, which lost its self-declared caliphate in Iraq and Syria, is still carrying out attacks in the two countries “and seeking to reconstitute an external operations capability.”

TORONTO/OTTAWA (Reuters) — Ontario declared an emergency on Tuesday after latest modeling put Canada’s most populous province on track to have more than 20,000 new COVID-19 cases per day by the middle of February, a nearly ten-fold increase from the current count. Ontario, which is battling a coronavirus surge that has swamped its hospitals and triggered a province-wide lockdown, could also see roughly 1,500 more deaths in its long-term care homes through mid-February under a worst-case scenario, according to modeling from experts advising the government. New restrictions that take effect on Jan. 14 mandate that residents must stay at home except for essential activity, while outdoor gatherings will be limited to five people, and non-essential construction work will be restricted.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) — Indian farmers were due to burn copies of the government’s new agricultural laws on Wednesday as they press on with their protest against the reforms despite the intervention of the Supreme Court, which said their grievances should be heard. Tens of thousands of farmers have been camped on the outskirts of the capital, New Delhi, for almost two months, protesting against what they say are laws designed to benefit large private buyers at the expense of growers. The government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi denies this, saying the legislation is required to reform an agricultural sector beset by wastage. The Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered a temporary suspension of the laws while a four-member committee looks into the protesters’ grievances. But farm leaders have refused to cooperate with the committee and planned on Wednesday to torch copies of the legislation on bonfires at their protest sites to drive home their opposition and mark the Lohri mid-winter festival.

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Wednesday received the first shot of a Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine after Indonesia approved it for emergency use and began efforts to vaccinate millions of people in the world’s fourth most populated country. After Widodo, top military, police and medical officials were vaccinated, as well as the secretary of the Indonesian Ulama Council, the clerical body that last week ruled the vaccine was halal and could be taken by Muslims. Others such as a health care worker, businessperson and a social media influencer also received the shots to encourage people to get the vaccine when it is available to them. Conditional use of the Sinovac Biotech Ltd. vaccine is scheduled to be rolled out in the coming months with health care workers, civil servants and other at-risk populations prioritized. It will be free for all Indonesian citizens.

PHOENIX (AP) — The Phoenix Police Department is investigating after a virtual funeral for civil rights icon and city leader Calvin Coolidge Goode was interrupted Tuesday by hackers yelling racist slurs. “The Phoenix Police Department has been made aware of the incident and after speaking with the FBI, the department will be the lead investigative agency,” spokeswoman Maggie Cox said in an email. “This type of language and disruption is unacceptable and only divides our community. We are committed to working with our community in identifying the person(s) responsible for this act.” Mayor Kate Gallego on Twitter condemned the comments and said the city does not tolerate hate crimes. “I condemn the racists who disrupted Vice Mayor Goode’s funeral services. This is horrific and does not represent the values & commitment of our community. I am determined to continue Vice Mayor Goode’s fight,” Gallego said.

MOSCOW (Reuters) — Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said on Wednesday he would fly back to Russia on Jan. 17 from Germany where he has been convalescing after being poisoned. Navalny, one of President Vladimir Putin’s leading critics, was airlifted to Germany for treatment in August after collapsing on a plane in what Germany and other Western nations claim was an attempt to murder him with a Novichok nerve agent. Russian authorities deny any involvement in the incident. Navalny wrote on Instagram that he had probably almost fully recovered his health now and said it was time to return to Russia despite various legal threats hanging over him.

Too Late: U.S. Lawmakers Push for Trump Ouster



President Donald Trump tours a section of the U.S.-Mexico border wall under construction, Jan. 12, 2021, in Alamo, Texas.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- With at least five Republicans joining their push to impeach President Donald Trump over the storming of the U.S. Capitol, Democrats in the House of Representatives stood poised for a history-making vote to try to remove the president from office.

With eight days remaining in Trump’s term, the House was to vote on Wednesday on an article of impeachment accusing the Republican of inciting insurrection in a speech to his followers last week before a mob of them stormed the Capitol, leaving five dead.

That would trigger a trial in the still Republican-controlled Senate, although it was unclear whether enough time or political appetite remained to expel Trump.

Democrats moved forward on an impeachment vote after an effort to persuade Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to remove Trump was rejected by Pence on Tuesday evening.

Despite the letter, the House passed a resolution formally calling on Pence to act. The final vote was 223-205 in favor.

While that was occurring, Trump’s iron grip on his party was showing further signs of slipping as at least four Republicans, including a member of

the House leadership, said they would vote for his second impeachment — a prospect no president before Trump has faced.

Representative Liz Cheney, the No. 3 House Republican, said: “There has never been a greater betrayal by a President of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution.” Trump “summoned this mob, assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack” on the Capitol on Jan. 6, Cheney, the daughter of former Republican Vice President Dick Cheney, said in a statement, adding: “I will vote to impeach the president.”

Three other Republican House members, John Katko, Adam Kinzinger and Fred Upton, said they would also vote for impeachment.

Republican leaders in the House did not urge their members to vote against impeaching Trump, saying it was a matter of individual conscience.

In his first public appearance since last Wednesday’s riot, Trump showed no contrition on Tuesday for his speech, in which he repeated his claim that President-elect Joe Biden’s victory was illegitimate. Biden will be sworn in as president on Jan. 20.

“What I said was totally appropriate,” Trump told reporters on Tuesday in his first public foray since the assault on the Capitol.

Report Reveals ‘Appalling’ Deaths at Church-Run Homes



General view of the Tuam graveyard, where the bodies of 796 babies were uncovered at the site of a former Catholic home for unmarried mothers and their children in Tuam, Ireland, January 12, 2021.

DUBLIN/TUAM, Ireland (Reuters) — Thousands of infants died in Irish homes for unmarried mothers and their offspring mostly run by the Catholic Church from the 1920s to the 1990s, an inquiry found, an “appalling” mortality rate that reflected brutal living conditions.

The report, which covered 18 so-called Mother and Baby Homes where over decades young pregnant women were hidden from society, is the latest in a series of government-commissioned papers that have laid bare some of the Catholic Church’s worst abuses.

Around 9,000 children died in all, Tuesday’s report found — a mortality rate of 15%. The proportion of children who died before their first birthday in one home, Bessborough, in County Cork, was as high as 75% in 1943.

Infants were taken from mothers and sent overseas to be adopted. Children were vaccinated without consent.

Anonymous testimony from residents compared the institutions to prisons where they were verbally abused by nuns as “sinners” and “spawn of Satan.” Women suffered through traumatic labors without any pain relief.

One recalled “women screaming, a

woman who had lost her mind, and a room with small white coffins”.

The head of the Irish Catholic Church unreservedly apologized to survivors and praised their determination to bring to light “a dark chapter in the life of Church and society.”

Relatives have alleged the babies were mistreated because they were born to unmarried mothers who, like their children, were seen as a stain on Ireland’s image as a devout Catholic nation. The inquiry said those admitted included girls as young as 12.

Government records show that the mortality rate for children at the homes where 56,000 women and girls, including victims of rape and incest, were sent to give birth, was often more than five times that of those born to married parents.

Prime minister Micheal Martin will make a formal apology to those affected by the scandal in parliament this week for what he described as “a dark, difficult and shameful chapter of very recent Irish history.”

A coalition of survivors’ groups said the report was “truly shocking”, but it had mixed feelings because it did not fully account for the role the state played in running the homes.

North Korean Leader Calls for Greater Nuclear Deterrence



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un acknowledges to the applause after he made his closing remarks at a ruling party congress in Pyongyang, Jan. 12, 2021.

SEOUL (Dispatches) -- North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for increased military power and greater nuclear war deterrence, state news agency KCNA reported on Wednesday, as a rare ruling party congress came to a close after eight days of policy discussions.

The Eighth Party Congress occurred less than two weeks before U.S. President-elect Joe Biden takes office and amid a prolonged gridlock in denuclearization talks.

“We must do everything we can to increase nuclear war deterrence even further as we build the strongest military capability,” KCNA quoted Kim as say-

ing at the conclusion of the congress.

Since announcing a self-declared moratorium on nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests in 2018, Kim has called for continued production of nuclear weapons for the country’s arsenal, launched a series of smaller missiles, and unveiled what would be North Korea’s largest ICBM yet at a parade in October.

Separately, Kim Yo Jong, the leader’s sister and a member of the Party Central Committee, criticized South Korea’s military for monitoring a parade in Pyongyang. The move was an expression of the South’s “hostile approach” towards the North, she said in

a separate statement carried by KCNA.

South Korea’s military said on Monday it had detected signs that North Korea held a nighttime military parade on Sunday for the congress.

Kim’s remarks come after South Korean President Moon Jae-in pledged to help engineer a breakthrough in stalled denuclearization talks.

The congress, which ran for eight days in Pyongyang, is the first since 2016, and just the second since 1980.

A meeting of the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA), or parliament, is scheduled on Sunday to discuss adopting a law on the five-year economic plan and state budget, KCNA said.

Kim said the country must “continue to give fresh spur” in making the military more elite and powerful so that it could cope with “any form of threat and emergency.”

“The hostile forces will try to check our advance more frantically, and the world will watch how the political declaration and fighting program of our (party) are realized,” he said.

Kim also called for reasserting greater state control over the economy, boosting agricultural production and prioritizing the development of chemicals and metal industries in a five-year plan.

Kim labeled the United States as the North’s “principal enemy” and said the fate of bilateral relations would depend on whether Washington discards what Pyongyang perceives as hostile policies.

Pompeo Cancels Europe Trip After Snub by Leaders



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is accompanied by the occupying regime of Israel’s foreign minister Gabi Ashkenazi as they arrive for a security briefing on Mount Bental in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights November 19, 2020.

BRUSSELS/WASHINGTON (Reuters) — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo cancelled his Europe trip at the last minute on Tuesday after Luxembourg’s foreign minister and top European Union officials declined to meet with him, European and U.S. diplomats familiar with the matter said.

The extraordinary snub of the top U.S. diplomat, first reported by Reuters, came days after the storming of the U.S. Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump, that stunned many world leaders and U.S. allies.

Pompeo, a close ally of Trump, had sought to meet Jean Asselborn in Luxembourg, a small but wealthy NATO ally, before meeting EU leaders and the bloc’s top diplomat in

Brussels, three people close to the planning told Reuters.

But the initial plan to go to Luxembourg, which had not been officially announced, was scrapped after officials there showed reluctance to grant Pompeo appointments, a diplomatic source said. The Brussels leg was still on until the last minute.

But the thin itinerary of Pompeo’s final visit to Brussels raised questions about the merit of the trip. There were no meetings on his schedule with EU officials or any public events at NATO. A third diplomatic source said allies were “embarrassed” by Pompeo after the violence in Washington last Wednesday that left five dead.

Trump encouraged his supporters

at a rally earlier that day to march on the building that houses the Senate and the House of Representatives while lawmakers were certifying Democratic President-elect Joe Biden’s Nov. 3 election victory. The Republican president claims that the election was stolen from him.

Appalled by the violence, Luxembourg’s Asselborn had called Trump a “criminal” and a “political pyromaniac” on RTL Radio the next day. Luxembourg’s foreign ministry confirmed the previously planned stop there was cancelled, but declined to give further details. The EU declined to comment.

The U.S. State Department, in a statement, attributed the cancellation to transition work before Biden takes office on Jan. 20, even if Pompeo had been reluctant until recently to unequivocally recognize Biden’s win. The State Department declined further comment on European officials’ rejection of meetings with Pompeo.

In Brussels, Pompeo was due to have a private dinner with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Wednesday evening at Stoltenberg’s private residence, before meeting Belgian Foreign Minister Sophie Wilmes, whose country is a NATO ally.

One of the sources said the lack of any public events at NATO was another reflection of European officials questioning the point of the trip. It was not immediately clear why Pompeo sought to go to Brussels so near to the end of Trump’s term.

Indonesia Searches for Crashed Jet’s Voice Recorder

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Divers searching for a crashed jet’s cockpit voice recorder were sifting through mud and plane debris on the seabed between Indonesian islands on Wednesday to retrieve information key to learning why the Sriwijaya Air jet nosedived into the Java Sea over the weekend.

Indonesian navy divers on Tuesday recovered the flight data recorder from the jet that disappeared Saturday minutes after taking off from Jakarta with 62 people aboard. The information on both black boxes will be key to the crash investigation.

The 26-year-old Boeing 737-500 had resumed commercial flights last month after almost nine months out of service because of flight cutbacks caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration sent an airworthiness directive requiring operators of various Boeing 737 aircraft models, including the 737-500, to carry out engine checks before they can be flown again after being out of service. The order followed reports of engines shutting down in mid-flight because of corrosion in a key valve.

Director General of Air Transportation Novie Riyanto said the plane was inspected on Dec. 2, including checks for engine corrosion, and was declared airworthy by Indonesia’s Transportation Ministry on Dec. 14. It resumed commercial flights on Dec. 22, according to ministry data. After returning

to service, the plane made 132 flights, including the last one, according to aviation-data firm Flightradar24.

Aviation experts said planes that are parked for long stretches can be returned to flight safely.

“It depends on how the airline maintains the aircraft while it is grounded,” said William Waldo, an aviation safety expert at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona. He said airlines should run engines periodically and perform other maintenance. “It tends to keep everything lubricated, and it reduces the likelihood of corrosion building up in places you don’t want it to be,” he said.

John Goglia, a former member of the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board, said preparing a long-grounded jet can be an intensive and expensive chore, taking a team of mechanics up to two weeks to check engines and make sure that electronic, hydraulic and fuel systems are operating and free of contamination.

Goglia said that his initial thought on learning about the plane’s long grounding “was if they did the proper due diligence, because sometimes that stuff doesn’t show up for a little while.”

At least 160 divers were deployed Wednesday to boost the search for the recorder that holds conversations between pilots.