



New UN sanctions an 'act of war': N Korea

## In 'China's Jerusalem', faith trumps Sunday School ban

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LANAO DEL NORTE: People look at the bodies of victims who died during Tropical Storm Tembin in Lanao del Norte on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. Tens of thousands have been forced from their homes by a tropical storm that battered the southern Philippines leaving at least 200 dead. —AFP

# Philippines storm death toll tops 200

## Scores missing; tens of thousands displaced

**MANILA:** More than 200 people have been killed and scores were missing in the southern Philippines yesterday after a tropical storm triggered severe flooding and landslides that also wrecked Christmas for tens of thousands of survivors. Tropical Storm Tembin lashed Mindanao Island, home to 20 million people, on Friday with strong gusts and torrential rain, wiping out at least one mountain village and prompting a massive rescue operation. Police said 208 people were confirmed dead and 164 remained missing, while more than 40,000 had fled their homes for evacuation camps as Tembin roared out into the South China Sea yesterday.

A total of 70,000 have been displaced or otherwise affected by the storm, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), which warned that continued heavy rain could hamper the search for survivors. "People left everything behind when they fled for their lives," the IFRC's Philippines operations and programs manager Patrick Elliott said in a statement. The archipelago nation is pummeled by major storms every year, many of them deadly.

Mindanao tends to be less affected and officials said

this may have caused many to ignore warnings to move to safer ground. Footage showed vast tracts of land on the island submerged by brown water, often waist-deep, with streets turning into rivers. Local police said 135 people were killed and 72 missing in the northern section of Mindanao, while 47 were dead and 72 missing in the impoverished Zamboanga peninsula on its western side. Another 26 people perished with 20 missing in the province of Lanao del Sur in the centre of the island, based on an updated official tally there.

### Village erased

One of the places hit hardest was the mountain village of Dalama, which was virtually wiped off the map as roaring

floodwater carried away 103 houses. Footage on ABS-CBN showed houses there destroyed or engulfed by floodwater and rescuers retrieving the body of a girl buried in a landslide.



## Tropical storm triggered severe flood, landslides

Police, soldiers and volunteers used shovels and their bare hands to dig through mud and debris in their search for survivors.

"The flood was already close and the people were not able to get out from their homes," Armando Sangcopan, an elderly male survivor, told the station.

"We called for forced evacuation, pre-emptive evacuation in certain areas. We are saddened by the (large) numbers of casualties," Romina Marasigan, spokeswoman for the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, told reporters in Manila.

In the town of Kabasalan in Zamboanga, dozens of families huddled in the homes of neighbors on Christmas Eve, two

days after floods carried off 40 houses, killing three people with one missing, said local civil defense chief Junalyn Maravillo. "This is a disaster. They don't think about Christmas. All they think about is what they will eat for today," she said. Pope Francis said in Rome he was praying for storm victims in the Philippines, where some 80 percent of the population is Catholic.

"May the merciful God welcome the souls of the dead and comfort those who suffer from this calamity," he said. The storm swept into the South China Sea before dawn yesterday after hitting the western tourist island of Palawan overnight Saturday, the state weather service said. "So far zero casualties, but we have accounts of some people missing," Palawan civil defense chief Zaldy Ablana told DZMM radio yesterday.

But in a Palawan fishing village, a 53-year-old man was killed by a crocodile while securing his boat in a river. Tembin struck less than a week after Tropical Storm Kai-Tak left scores dead and more than 20 missing in the central Philippines, straining the disaster-prone nation's already stretched resources. The deadliest typhoon to hit the country is still Haiyan, which killed thousands and destroyed entire towns in heavily populated areas of the central Philippines in November 2013.—AFP

## '10,000 refugees' to be relocated from Libya to EU

**ROME:** Up to 10,000 people stranded in refugee camps and detention centers in Libya could be relocated to Europe in 2018, the Italian government said yesterday. The initiative would be part of an attempt by EU countries to address the deteriorating conditions in Libya, where thousands of people are held captive in inhumane conditions. "In 2018, up to 10,000 refugees will be able to come to Europe without risk, through humanitarian corridors," Italian Interior Minister Marco Minniti said in an interview with the newspaper La Repubblica.

The announcement comes after a group of 162 "vulnerable" people, from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen, were evacuated from Libya and arrived by military plane in Rome on Friday. The group included single mothers, unaccompanied children and handicapped people, and was the first time refugees and migrants had been relocated directly to Europe by the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR).

About 400,000 migrants are in Libya, including roughly 36,000 children, the UN children's agency UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said earlier this month. In 2018, the IOM aims to repatriate 30,000 migrants to their home countries as part of a voluntary return program. Around 15,000 have been sent back this year. "In accordance with the objectives of the International Organization for Migration, 30,000 migrants without right to asylum will be able to be repatriated to their countries on a voluntary basis," in 2018, Minniti said.

"With the help of the Libyan authorities, we have constructed a new management model on the other side of the Mediterranean." Libya has long been a transit hub for migrants seeking a better life in Europe, but



TRIPOLI: Libya's unity government Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj (right) meets with Italy's Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano (left) in the capital Tripoli on December 23, 2017. —AFP

people smugglers have stepped up their lucrative business since the chaos following the 2011 revolution. Last month, US television network CNN broadcast video footage appearing to show migrants being sold as slaves near the Libyan capital Tripoli, sparking international outrage.

International organizations are now able to "visit reception centers and improve their living conditions," Minniti said, adding that the conditions were currently

"unacceptable". Italy also needs to take "credible" measures to work with the Libyan coastguard to better control the "illegal" influx of migrants arriving by sea, he said. Sea arrivals to Italy are down a third this year, from almost 180,000 people in 2016 to just under 119,000 in 2017, which includes nearly 15,000 unaccompanied children, according to UNICEF and IOM. Hundreds of people also drowned trying to make the treacherous journey across the Mediterranean.—AFP

## Turkey fires more than 2,700 in latest post-coup purges

**ANKARA:** The Turkish government yesterday ordered the sacking of more than 2,700 people working in public institutions over alleged links to "terror" groups, in the latest round of purges since last year's failed coup. In a separate emergency decree, the country's defense procurement agency was ordered to answer to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan instead of the defense ministry, in a move widely viewed as a further expansion of his powers.

Turkey's intelligence service (MIT) also came under Erdogan's control in August. A total of 2,756 people including academics, soldiers and military personnel were removed from different bodies including the interior, foreign and defense ministries, according to the Official Gazette. All those dismissed were either members of "terror" organizations or had links to structures which were acting against national security, it said. 17 Turkish institutions were also ordered to close, including two newspapers and seven associations.

More than 140,000 people including judges, lawyers and academics have been sacked or suspended since a failed coup in July last year, while some 55,000 people have been arrested over suspected links to US-based Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen and the coup attempt. Turkey claims Gulen and his Hizmet (service) movement, which it calls the "Fethullah Terrorist Organization", ordered and conducted the attempted coup. Gulen, who's lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999, denies any links to terrorism and the failed putsch.—AFP