



Gunmen hit Libya foreign ministry

## Amnesty says 37 protesters killed in Sudan crackdown

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WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump speak on the telephone as they answer calls from people calling into the NORAD Santa tracker phone line in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

# Trump accused of sowing Xmas 'chaos'

## US president lashes out at opponents, renews verbal assaults

WASHINGTON: Democratic leaders have accused an isolated President Donald Trump of sowing Christmas "chaos" after the stock market plummeted and the US government shutdown hit a third day. "It's Christmas Eve and President Trump is plunging the country into chaos," Nancy Pelosi, who takes over next month as House speaker, and Chuck Schumer, the top Democrat in the Republican-led Senate, said in a joint statement. With Congress out of town, there was no chance for progress on the government funding crisis.

Trump's demand for a \$5 billion US-Mexico border wall—a pillar of his election platform—has been rejected by Democrats and some Republicans. In retaliation, Trump refused last week to sign a wider spending bill, temporarily stripping funding from swaths of the government. "Nothing new on the shutdown. We need more security," Trump said at the White House on Monday. Trump tweeted more than 10 times on Monday to lash out at opponents of the wall project and to renew his verbal assaults on the Federal Reserve, which he blames for growing jitters over the US economy. The Dow Jones index sank more than 650 points, the worst ever performance on a Christmas Eve, according to CNBC television.

Outside the White House, Washington's National Christmas Tree became a forlorn symbol of the dysfunction when the National Park Service—one of the government bodies hit by the funding shutdown—briefly

turned off the lights. It was brought back on after help from the service's charity foundation. And the budget standoff could drag on into January, when the new Congress is seated, although negotiations were planned for Thursday, offering a glimmer of hope. Trump, who had to delay his annual Christmas holiday in Florida, tweeted: "I am all alone (poor me) in the White House waiting for the Democrats to come back."

'He can't putt!'

The government shutdown adds to uncertainties spooking global stock markets after a tumultuous week in which respected Defense Secretary Jim Mattis resigned and the president stepped up attacks on the supposedly independent chairman of the Federal Reserve. Last week, the central bank hiked rates, infuriating Trump who has ignored traditional respect for the Fed's independence, calling it "crazy," "out of control" and a greater economic threat than China.

In a tweet Monday, Trump compared the Fed to a blundering golfer "who can't score because he has no touch - he can't putt!" Trump's Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin had spent much of the weekend in

damage control mode following reports that Trump had privately asked cabinet members whether he has the authority to fire Fed Chairman Jerome Powell. And domestic issues are just part of the far from merry Christmas picture, with Trump also juggling a trade war with China and fallout from his abrupt decision to pull US troops from Afghanistan and Syria.

Wall of worry

About three-quarters of the government, including the military, is fully funded through September 2019 but the partial shutdown forced several other major agencies to cease operations from Saturday. The shutdown meant that more than 400,000 federal employees reported to their jobs on Monday without getting paid, while nearly 400,000 others "will be locked out of work with no pay," the American Federation of Government Employees union said. "No private business or company would be permitted to impose on or disrupt the lives of their employees in such a manner," the Federation said in letters to the Senate and House of Representatives.

A deal to end the funding shortfall appears a distant prospect as Congress adjourned on the weekend for

Christmas. "It's very possible that this shutdown will go beyond the 28th and into the new Congress" which takes its seat in early January, White House budget director and incoming acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney said. But while trying to pin the blame on Democrats, Mulvaney, speaking on "Fox News Sunday," acknowledged that Trump's hardline stand played a role. "This is what Washington looks like when you have a president who refuses to sort of go along to get along," Mulvaney said.

Flasher arrested

A choice political gesture, or holiday merriment gone awry? A man has been arrested after exposing himself in front of the White House. Five people were posing together for pictures Sunday at around 1:30 am near the north fence of the White House when a police officer saw more than he wanted from one of them. The man, turning around to face the executive mansion, "proceeded to lower his pants and undergarment exposing his genital to plain view," said the incident report by Washington police. The suspect was arrested for indecent exposure, a misdemeanor. Police did not assign a motive. While it was unlikely that President Donald Trump or his family caught a glimpse of the flasher, the incident came after Trump postponed a holiday trip to Florida due to a political showdown that has partially shut down the US government. — AFP



### Trump's demands \$5 bn border wall

## Life and death choices for Indonesia victims

SOUTH LAMPUNG: Udin Ahok was forced to make a choice that no one would ever want to make: save his wife or his mother and baby. The 46-year-old Indonesian had just gone to sleep on Saturday evening when - without warning - a wall of water smashed into his house in Way Muli village on the coast of Sumatra. Panicked, he fought to reach his sleeping 70-year-old mother and one-year-old son but then he saw his wife about to drown in the swirling waters. He plucked her to safety and they survived the fury of a volcano-triggered tsunami that smashed into Indonesia's coast, killing more than 400 people who had no time to escape. Ahok's mother and baby were found dead under mountains of debris.

"I didn't have time to save my mother and son," a weeping Ahok told AFP from a local shelter for evacuees in one of the stricken region's hardest-hit areas. "I regret it so much. I can only hope they've been given a place in God's hands." Sulistiwati, another Way Muli resident who is six months pregnant, only survived thanks to a neighbor who saw her tumble into the salty water. "Luckily, he spotted me and pulled me out of the wave and we ran to higher ground with our other neighbors," she said. "It was pitch black. I didn't know I could run that fast being preg-



RAJABASA: Residents search for belongings from their collapsed homes in Rajabasa in Lampung province yesterday, three days after a tsunami - caused by activity at a volcano known as the 'child' of Krakatoa - hit the west coast of Indonesia's Java island. — AFP

nant. It was so scary. We waited for a few hours until the water went down."

'I can't rebuild'

Across the Sunda Strait in Java island, Saki stood amidst the rubble of what was once Sumber Jaya village and wondered aloud how he would get his life back on track. "I can't rebuild, everything is gone — my clothes, my money," he said. "I had 19 million rupiah (\$1,300) inside the house," said the 60-year-old, who has been left with nothing but his white Muslim skull cap, a t-shirt and a sarong.

"I'm sleeping at the mosque and every day I come back here because I had lots of money that has been lost inside (the house)."

Two people were killed and at least 20 houses destroyed in Saki's neighborhood, according to locals, who spent Christmas Day scouring through what was left of their homes for belongings. The streets of Sumber Jaya are muddy, partly flooded and covered in debris. Here and there mounds of timber, rubbish and bricks have been piled up on the roadside. The army is clearing the area with the aid of heavy machinery. — AFP

## Sick and hungry tsunami survivors cram shelters

CARITA: Desperately-needed aid flowed into a stretch of Indonesia's tsunami-struck coastline yesterday, but humanitarian workers warned that clean water and medicine supplies were dwindling as thousands crammed makeshift evacuation centers. Fears about a public health crisis come as the death toll from Saturday's volcano-triggered disaster topped 400 with thousands more displaced — many left homeless after houses were flattened by the killer wave. "A lot of the children are sick with fevers, headaches and they haven't had enough water," said Rizal Alimin, a doctor working for NGO Aksi Cepat Tanggap, at a local school that was turned into a temporary shelter.

"We have less medicine than usual ... It's not healthy here for evacuees. There isn't enough clean water. They need food and people are sleeping on the floor." The powerful tsunami struck at night and without warning, sweeping over popular beaches on southern

Sumatra and the western edge of Java and inundating tourist hotels and coastal settlements. The latest death toll stood at 429, with 1,485 people injured and another 154 missing. Experts have warned that more deadly waves could slam the stricken region now covered by mountains of overturned cars, boats, furniture and other debris.

Many evacuees are too afraid to return home, fearing another tsunami. "I've been here three days," said Neng Sumarni, 40, who was sleeping with her three children and husband on the school's floor with some three dozen others. "I'm scared because my home is right near the beach." Authorities are using sniffer dogs to try to find any survivors and victims' bodies, while they have turned to drones to survey the devastated coastlines. "We are still searching for victims who might still be buried under the rubble," said Ketut Sukarta, head of the disaster agency in South Lampung on Sumatra.

'Can't reach them'

Abu Salim, with volunteer disaster aid group Tagana, said aid workers were scrambling to stabilise the situation. "Today we're focusing on helping the evacuees in shelters by setting up public kitchens and distributing logistics and more tents in suitable places," he said yesterday. — AFP