



Indian police patrol on their horses during Christmas celebrations in Kolkata yesterday. — AFP

Erdogan invites Trump to Turkey amid Syria pullout

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sent more troops to Syria's border ahead of an imminent US withdrawal, as the White House announced he had invited Donald Trump to Ankara. Unlike several other allies of the United States, Turkey has praised President Trump's decision to withdraw 2,000 of his ground forces from Syria, a country where it will now have a freer rein to target Kurdish fighters.

On Monday, Ankara sent more troops to its Syrian border and said an offensive targeting the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia and IS group will be launched in the coming months. Turkey views the YPG as a "terrorist offshoot" of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984. But the militia has also been a key US ally in the fight against Islamic State in Syria, working with American forces on the ground there.

"Just as we did not leave our Syrian Arabs to Daesh (IS), we will not leave Syrian Kurds to the cruelty of the PKK," Erdogan said during a speech in Ankara. A Turkish military convoy arrived overnight on Monday at the border with local media reporting that some vehicles had entered Syria. In a telephone conversation Sunday between Trump and Erdogan, which both sides described as "productive", they agreed to avoid a power vacuum in Syria after the US withdrawal.

"President Erdogan invited President Trump to visit Turkey in 2019. While nothing definite is being planned, the President is open to a potential meeting in the future," a White House spokesperson later said on Monday evening. Erdogan's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin told reporters on Monday that a US military delegation would arrive this week to "discuss how to coordinate (the withdrawal) with their counterparts". A Turkish foreign ministry delegation would go to Washington for

talks early January, he added.

Trump stunned the US political establishment and allies last week with his decision, days after Erdogan had warned that Ankara would soon launch an offensive in northern Syria. Critics of Trump's decision fear that thousands of Islamic State (IS) group extremist members are still thought to be in Syria, despite Trump's claim of having defeated IS. The US leader tweeted that Erdogan had told him Ankara would "eradicate" the last IS elements. And Kalin vowed that there was "no question of a step backwards, vulnerability or a slowdown in the fight against Daesh (IS)". He added: "Turkey will show the same determination against Daesh. To beat Daesh, we don't need the PKK or the YPG. We can bring peace to this region."

The Turkish military convoy with howitzers, artillery batteries and several units of the armed forces, was deployed to the border district of Elbeyli in Kilis province, state news agency Anadolu reported on Monday. Parts of the convoy had entered Syria, the private IHA news agency reported, which said the reinforcements would take place "gradually". The deployment began over the weekend with around 100 vehicles, the Hurriyet daily said, and crossed into the Al-Bab region, headed towards Jarabulus and YPG-held Manbij.

Jarabulus and Al-Bab were areas captured from IS during Ankara's first military operation in August 2016 which lasted until March 2017. Military reinforcements had also been sent to the Akcakale border town and Ceylanpinar district, both in the southeastern Sanliurfa province. Turkey conducted a second offensive with Syrian rebels against the YPG in its northwestern enclave of Afrin in January this year. Turkish officials have previously said Ankara has no territorial ambitions in Syria.

As a result, Netflix dropped Spacey from its political thriller series "House of Cards", and he was dumped from his scenes in Ridley Scott's film "All the Money in the World". Spacey is one of the most high-profile figures in the torrent of allegations that have brought down male power players from the worlds of politics, finance, entertainment and journalism, in the wake of accusations against movie mogul Harvey Weinstein 14 months ago.

As the arraignment was announced, a bizarre video was shared by Spacey's Twitter account of the actor apparently addressing his sacking by Netflix - while in character as President Frank Underwood from "House of Cards". "Oh sure, they may have tried to separate us, but what we have is too strong, too powerful. After all, we shared everything, you and I," Spacey says in Underwood's signature southern drawl, in the video entitled titled, "Let Me Be Frank".

"I told you my deepest, darkest secrets. I showed you exactly what people are capable of. I shocked you with my honesty, but mostly I challenged you and made you think. And you trusted me, even though you knew you shouldn't. So we're not done, no matter what anyone says. And besides, I know what you want. You want me back."

The three-minute vignette marks Spacey's first public performance since the allegations against him came to light. "Of course, some believed everything and have been just waiting with bated breath to hear me confess it all. They're just dying to have me declare that everything said is true and that I got what I deserved," he goes on. "Only you and I both know it's never that simple, not in politics and not in life," he says - apparently an allusion to the allegations against both the actor and his Machiavellian character on the show. Netflix declined to comment, and Spacey's representative did not immediately respond when contacted. — Agencies

around KD 20 million and called on the minister to make the decisions to invest in the amusement park.

Speaking on the plight of bedoons or stateless people, MP Subaei said they constitute a time bomb and called for swiftly resolving their problem. The lawmaker inquired why authorities have not naturalized the 34,000 bedoons the government had repeatedly said deserve Kuwaiti citizenship. MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri urged the new ministers to change their attitude, adding that Kuwait "did not die" by the Iraqi invasion, but it appears now it is "going to die" by corruption.



ANKARA: President of Turkey and leader of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party Recep Tayyip Erdogan gestures to his supporters during his party's parliamentary group meeting at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey yesterday. — AFP

Trump's move has sparked dismay among many allies and turmoil within his administration. First Defense Secretary Jim Mattis resigned, then Brett McGurk, the special envoy to the anti-IS coalition, stepped down. American support for the YPG, under the banner of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alliance, has long been a source of tension between NATO allies the US and Turkey.

But relations between the Turkish and American

leaders appear to have improved substantially since a crisis in the summer over the detention of a US pastor, since released. Last week, the US approved the sale of \$3.5 billion in missiles to Turkey, after American outrage over Ankara's major arms purchase from Russia. But there are still strains over the US refusal to extradite Fethullah Gulen, the Pennsylvania-based Muslim preacher who Turkey says ordered the 2016 failed coup. — AFP

Actor Spacey charged with...

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Unruh told reporters the 59-year-old had sexually assaulted her son on the holiday island of Nantucket after plying him with alcohol late at night in a bar in July 2016. Unruh said her "star struck, straight" son falsely told the actor he was old enough to drink when he met him at the bar. The legal age to drink alcoholic beverages in Massachusetts is 21. "Kevin Spacey bought him drink after drink after drink, and when my son was drunk, Spacey made his move and sexually assaulted him," Unruh told the news conference in Boston. "Spacey stuck his hand inside my son's pants and grabbed his genitals," Unruh said. Her intoxicated son, whom she did not name, panicked and froze. When Spacey left briefly to use the bathroom, he allegedly fled to his grandmother's house, where he is said to have told his sister what had happened.

The charge against Spacey, whose full name is Kevin Spacey Fowler, was filed after a Dec 20 hearing. Cape and Islands District Attorney Michael O'Keefe said. The name on the complaint was Kevin S Fowler. Spacey was considered one of the finest actors of his generation. His career has nosedived following allegations of sexual misconduct by more than a dozen men in the United States and Britain. The first public report of alleged abuse by him came from actor Anthony Rapp, who claimed that Spacey sexually abused him when Rapp was 14, in 1986. Spacey apologized to Rapp, claiming not to remember the incident, but remained silent as accusations against him mushroomed.

New ministers sworn in by Amir, take oath...

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City was closed because it posed a danger to visitors and its refurbishment is very expensive. But MP Safa Al-Hashem objected to this, saying that it needs

Pontiff calls for peace as queen...

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international community may finally bring relief to all those children and people exhausted by war and famine," he said. The pope also spoke of the war in Syria, which has forced millions from their homes and reduced swathes of the country to rubble.

He called for a "political solution" to the conflict "so that the Syrian people, especially all those who were forced to leave their own lands and seek refuge elsewhere, can return to live in peace in their own country". Francis also said he hoped for renewed peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians "that can put an end to a conflict that for over 70 years has rent the land chosen by the Lord to show his face of love."

Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, located near Jerusalem but cut off from the city by Israel's separation barrier, has seen an increase in visitors this season after several down years because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinian tourism officials and hotel operators have reported their strongest season in years. "This year is much more calm, much better than last year," said Abeer Nasser, a Palestinian from the nearby town of Beit Sahour celebrating in Bethlehem with her son and daughter. "Every year I feel more in the mood to celebrate despite the political situation," the 37-year-old added, referring to the Israeli occupation.

Beyond Bethlehem, Christians worldwide were marking Christmas, with services held from Indonesia to Iraq. This year's celebrations come after a year of tumult, much of which has come from Washington, where the festive spirit was dampened when the national Christmas tree went dark on the third day of a US government shutdown. One festive service not affected was the military's annual Santa Claus "tracker", which sees North American Aerospace Defense Command's (NORAD) deliver live updates on his international gift delivery route.

Fielding calls from children anxious to know if their presents would arrive on time, Trump risked a spell on Santa's naughty list by telling one young boy that believing in the jolly man in red at age seven was "marginal". But his scepticism is unlikely to have dampened the enthusiasm of many excited youngsters. "Historical data and more than 60 years of NORAD tracking information lead us to believe Santa Claus is alive and well in the hearts of people

throughout the world," the Pentagon's handbook read.

This year in Bethlehem, visitors were also able to view the Church of the Nativity's newly restored mosaics dating to the Crusader era after a major renovation. Visitors from across the world gathered in the "little town" on Christmas Eve for midnight mass, queuing to see the grotto where Jesus (PBUH) is believed to have been born and taking in a festive parade.

While for many who celebrate the festival Christmas is a time to gather with loved ones, many were struggling with unforeseen events and hardships. At a little church just outside Indonesia's tsunami disaster zone, a few dozen congregants gathered on Christmas day to pray for the victims. The tsunami, triggered by a volcanic eruption, left more than 400 people dead when it smashed into popular beaches on southern Sumatra and the western edge of Java, inundating tourist hotels and coastal settlements. "This Christmas is different because we're celebrating it during a disaster," Rahmat Carita congregant Eliza told AFP. "For me, it's a chance to contemplate. God's love is real, we must not forget that."

Queen Elizabeth II warned of religious "tribalism" in a Christmas message yesterday delivered against a backdrop of Britain bickering over its impending exit from the EU. The tone of the 92-year-old monarch's annual TV appearances reflected a somber mood sweeping the island nation as it ponders the perils of leaving the European project after 46 years in March.

British royalty traditionally steer well clear of politics - a unifying position that puts them above the daily fray of Westminster and Downing Street. But the queen came close to breaking that mold on several occasions during a five-minute appearance recorded earlier this month and played simultaneously on Britain's main TV stations.

"Some cultures believe a long life brings wisdom. I'd like to think so. Perhaps part of that wisdom is to recognize some of life's baffling paradoxes, such as the way human beings have a huge propensity for good, and yet a capacity for evil," the queen said while seated in front of a fireplace and Christmas tree. "Even the power of faith, which frequently inspires great generosity and self-sacrifice, can fall victim to tribalism," the queen said.

Spain's second-largest city Barcelona was meanwhile on alert after the US State Department warned of the risk of a terrorist attack during the Christmas holidays. And in France, groups of "yellow vest" anti-government demonstrators are spending Christmas day at makeshift protest camps on roundabouts across the country, eating devilled eggs and foie gras with new friends they have made in weeks of rallies against the policies of President Emmanuel Macron. — AFP