

## World News Roundup



An Indian girl prays during the midnight Christmas Mass at Saint Joseph's Cathedral in Lucknow, India on Dec 25. While Hindus and Muslims comprise the majority of the population, Christmas is also observed as a national holiday in India. (AP)

## Philippines

## Duterte's son quits

## Thousands hit by storm spend X'mas in shelters

MANILA, Philippines, Dec 25, (Agencies): Tens of thousands of villagers in the southern Philippines spent their Christmas morning in emergency shelters Monday as the region dealt with the aftermath of a powerful storm that left more than 200 people dead.

Tropical Storm Tembin unleashed landslides and flash floods mostly in the hard-hit provinces of Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur and on the Zamboanga Peninsula. It strengthened into a typhoon before blowing out of the country Sunday into the South China Sea toward Vietnam.

The death toll across the southern Philippines has climbed to 240 with scores of others still missing, officials said Monday.

Civil defence officials said the number of confirmed deaths from Tembin on Mindanao's Zamboanga peninsula had risen to 78, while the death toll in Lanao del Sur province on the island went up to 27.

The storm killed 135 others in the northern section of the island, police said Monday, a figure that was unchanged from a day earlier.

Rescuers are still looking for 107 people in these three areas. Many were feared killed by mudslides and flash floods that buried or swept away hundreds of houses last weekend.

Civil defence officials said some 13,000 Mindanao families — at least 52,000 people — remained in evacuation camps on Christmas Day, many with few if any possessions left.

□ □ □

**Duterte's son quits as vice-mayor:** Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's eldest son quit as vice-mayor of the southern city of Davao on Monday, citing his being linked to a drug smuggling case by opponents and personal problems from a failed marriage as reasons for the move.

**Paolo Duterte** announced his resignation during a special session of the Davao City Council. Davao is President Duterte's hometown and its mayor is Paolo's younger sister, Sara Duterte-Carpio.

"There are recent unfortunate events in my life that are closely tied to my failed first marriage," the vice-mayor said, in a statement made available to media.

"These, among others, include the maligning of my reputation in the recent name dropping incident in the Bureau of Customs' smuggling case and the very public squabble with my daughter."

□ □ □

**20 dead as bus collides:** A passenger bus collided with a van carrying pilgrims to Christmas Mass at a church in the northern Philippines on Monday, leaving 20 people dead and more than two dozen injured, police said.

Police Chief Superintendent Romulo Sapitula said all those killed in the pre-dawn collision in La Union province's Agoo town were in the van, known as jeepneys. Another 10 van passengers, along with the driver and 17 other occupants of the bus, were injured.

The van's engine was ripped off due to the impact of the crash. The van passengers were bound for Our Lady of Manaog, a Roman Catholic church in northern Pangasinan province that has long been popular among pilgrims and Catholics praying for the sick and impoverished, police said.

Rickety passenger buses and jeepneys, lack of safety signs, poor law enforcements and reckless driving have been blamed for many road tragedies in the Philippines.

□ □ □

**Philippines probe deadly fire:** Philippine authorities ordered a criminal investigation Monday into a shopping mall fire that killed dozens of people, most of them call centre staff from an American firm.

Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre announced the inquiry as the government raised the toll from Saturday's NCCC mall fire in the southern city of Davao to one dead and 38 missing. The fire compounded the Christmas misery in the south of the mainly Catholic nation where tens of thousands were also displaced by floods and landslides from a storm that also killed more than 200 others on Friday.



This photo provided by Land Transportation Franchise and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) shows the wreckage of a passenger van in La Union province, Philippines following an early morning collision with a passenger bus on Dec 25. (AP)



Jong-Un



Liu

## Asia

**A 'pipe dream' — NKorea:** North Korea said it is a "pipe dream" for the United States to think it will give up its nuclear weapons, and called the latest UN sanctions to target the country "an act of war" that violates its sovereignty.

The UN Security Council unanimously approved tough new sanctions against North Korea on Friday in response to its latest launch of a ballistic missile that Pyongyang says can reach anywhere on the US mainland. The resolution was drafted by the United States and negotiated with the North's closest ally, China.

"We define this 'sanctions resolution' rigged up by the US and its followers as a grave infringement upon the sovereignty of our Republic, as an act of war violating peace and stability in the Korean peninsula and the region and categorically reject the 'resolution,'" North Korea's foreign ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

The ministry said the sanctions are tantamount to a "complete economic blockade" of North Korea.

The resolution doesn't include even harsher measures sought by the Trump administration that would ban all oil imports and freeze international assets of the government and its leader, **Kim Jong Un**. (AP)

□ □ □

**Artist freed in China:** An artist that could not be reached for more than a week after he painted a politically charged mural in southern China wrote on Twitter Monday that he has been "released".

"I was released a few days ago and we are in my hometown now," the Twitter account of painter Hu Jiamin read days after Hong Kong newspaper Ming Pao reported that the couple had been taken away by plainclothes men.

Hu noted in another post that he will return to France on December 30.

The artist and his French wife, Marine Brossard, had painted a mural honouring China's late dissident **Liu Xiaobo** at the entrance of a public exhibition in Shenzhen on Dec 15. But city authorities covered the wall with a banner the same evening, witnesses told AFP. (AFP)

□ □ □

**Vietnam evacuates thousands:** Hundreds of thousands of people in Vietnam's Mekong Delta have been evacuated as the region braced for the arrival of Typhoon Tembin after the storm left more than 160 people dead in the Philippines.

Weather forecasters were expecting the delta's southern tip to be in Tembin's path, and said heavy rain and strong winds

## Conflict

## Increase in military patrols: report

## China expands Sea islands

BEIJING, Dec 25, (RTRS): China has "reasonably" expanded its islands in the disputed South China Sea and this year construction projects there including radar facilities covered about 290,000 square meters (72 acres), according to a new government report.

The number was broadly similar to one provided by a US think tank earlier this month.

China has conducted extensive land reclamation work on some of the islands and reefs it controls in the South China Sea, including building airports, alarming its neighbours and Washington.

Beijing says the work is help provide international services such as search-and-rescue but admits there is a military purpose too. China also says it can do whatever it wants on its territory.

The new report, posted on a website run by China's National Marine Data and Information Service and the overseas edition of the ruling Communist Party's People's Daily, says China has enhanced its military presence there and "reasonably" expanded the area covered by the islands.

Apart from what it termed "large radar" — it was unclear if the report was referring to more than one — construction this year has included facilities for underground storage and administrative buildings.

There has been an increase in military patrols too, the report added, without giving specifics.

The report was released on Friday but appeared in the state-run newspaper the Global Times on Monday.

While attention in Asia has been distracted by the North Korean nuclear crisis in the past year, China has continued to install high-frequency radar and other facilities that can be used for military purposes on its man-made islands in the South China Sea, a US think tank said this month.

That report, by the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative of Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Chinese activ-

ity has involved work on facilities covering 72 acres (29 hectares) of the Spratly and Paracel islands, territory contested with several Asian neighbours.

More than \$5 trillion of world trade is shipped through the South China Sea every year. Besides China's territorial claims in the area, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Taiwan have rival claims.

## Also:

**BEIJING:** China's growing economic, political and diplomatic power means it is achieving an "overwhelming advantage" in bringing self-ruled Taiwan to heel, and time is on China's side, a senior official said in a comments published on Monday.

Taiwan is one of China's most sensitive issues. Beijing has never renounced the use of force to bring what it considers a wayward province and sacred Chinese territory under its rule.

Writing in the influential state-run newspaper the Study Times, **Liu Junchuan**, who heads the liaison office of China's policy-making Taiwan Affairs Office, said it was inevitable Taiwan would come under China's control.

China's economic growth means its economy now far surpasses Taiwan's, and the trend would only continue, Liu wrote in the paper, which is published by the Central Party School that trains rising Communist Party officials.

"The swift development and massive changes in the mainland of the motherland are creating an increasingly strong attraction for the people of Taiwan," he said.

"The contrast in power across the Taiwan Strait will become wider and wider, and we will have a full, overwhelming strategic advantage over Taiwan," Liu added.

"The economic, political, social, cultural and military conditions for achieving the complete reunification of the motherland will become even more ample."

starting Monday night could cause serious damage in the vulnerable region, where facilities are not built to cope with such severe weather.



A man dressed as Santa Claus (right), poses for photos on Christmas day at a shopping mall in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia on Dec 25. Shopping malls in Malaysia have been decorated with Christmas trees, Santa Claus figures and illuminations to attract year-end shoppers. (AP)

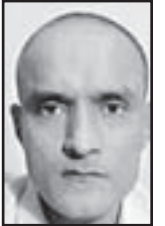
## Subcontinent

## IS kill 6 in Kabul

## Spy on death row 'meets' his family

ISLAMABAD, Dec 25, (Agencies): Pakistani authorities allowed an Indian national sentenced to death for spying to see his family for the first time since his arrest, a rare and highly-anticipated meeting arranged amid tight security in Islamabad.

**Kulbushan Sudhir Jadhav**, clad in a blue jacket, met with his wife and mother at Pakistan's foreign ministry in the capital, where they spoke through a glass barrier, pictures issued by the ministry showed.



Jadhav

The images were low quality, and it was impossible to ascertain Jadhav's well-being, but he was sitting up and appeared to be healthy.

Pakistani officials said Jadhav was in good health.

In a video released by authorities ahead of the meeting, Jadhav said he was grateful to Pakistan for a "grand gesture".

It was not clear if the video was filmed under duress.

The meeting, which a foreign office spokesman said lasted around 40 minutes, is the first time Pakistan has granted access to the family of Jadhav, who was arrested in the southwestern province of Balochistan last year.

□ □ □

## India tightens X'mas security:

Christians and others in India celebrated Christmas despite fears of an anti-Christian backlash in some parts of the predominantly Hindu country.

The Indian government asked states to increase security for Christmas celebrations this year after recent isolated attacks on Christians in northern India. No new incidents had been reported as of late Monday.

Vigilante groups have targeted Muslims since a Hindu nationalist party came to power in India in 2014. Some Christian leaders fear the attacks may now be spreading to their community.

"The poison of polarization has now made Christians also a target," said Madhu Chandra, the administrator of the All India Christian Council, a national alliance that works for religious freedom and the rights of marginalized people.

Earlier this month, members of a militant Hindu group allegedly beat up a group of Catholic seminarians and priests in Madhya Pradesh state.

Police arrested one member of the group, but also a priest, according to the Press Trust of India news agency. The priest was charged with forced religious conversion, an accusation frequently leveled against Christians in India.

□ □ □

**6 killed in Afghanistan:** A suicide bomber killed six civilians in an attack near an Afghan intelligence agency compound in Kabul Monday in the latest assault claimed by the Islamic State group in the capital.

The attacker struck as workers were arriving at the offices of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), a week after militants stormed an NDS training centre in Kabul.

Interior ministry spokesman Najib Danish told AFP six civilians in a car were killed when the attacker blew himself up.

"Six people were martyred and three others were wounded," Danish said.

"They were hit when they were passing the area in their Toyota sedan vehicle. We still do not know the target of the attack but it happened on the main road."

The health ministry confirmed the death toll but put the number of wounded at one.

□ □ □

## Myanmar criticism opposed:

The UN General Assembly on Sunday urged Myanmar to end a military campaign against Muslim Rohingya and called for the appointment of a UN special envoy, despite opposition from China, Russia and some regional countries.

A resolution put forward by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was adopted by a vote of 122 to 10 with 24 abstentions.

China, Russia, Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines and Vietnam joined Myanmar in voting against the measure as did Belarus, Syria and Zimbabwe.

The resolution calls on the government to allow access for aid workers, ensure the return of all refugees and grant full citizenship rights to the Rohingya.

It requests that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appoint a special envoy to Myanmar.

The measure was adopted by the assembly after its budget committee gave the green light to funds for the new position of UN special envoy to Myanmar.