

## Erdogan Hits Out At Some Arab Countries' 'Treason' Over Trump Plan

Agencies

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday blasted some Arab countries for backing a Middle East plan unveiled by the United States, con-



demning it as "treason".

"Some Arab countries that support such a plan commit treason against Jerusalem, as well as against their own people, and more importantly against all humanity," Erdogan told his party's lawmakers in the parliament.

President Donald Trump on Tuesday unveiled long-awaited details of a US plan for solving the Is-

raeli-Palestinian conflict, warning it may represent the last chance at statehood for the Palestinians.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called the peace plan the "slap of the century".

Turkey, a strong advocate of the Palestinian cause, had condemned the plan.

"The United States' so-called peace plan is stillborn," Turkey's foreign ministry had said in a statement. "This is an annexation plan aimed at killing a two-state solution and extorting the Palestinian territory."

Erdogan today added that Turkey may launch a military operation into Syria's northwestern province of Idlib if the situation in the region is not resolved immediately, as attacks by Russia-backed Syrian government forces raised concern of a new refugee wave to Turkey.

Speaking in Ankara, Erdogan said Turkey could not handle a fresh influx of migrants. On Wednesday, Erdogan had said Ankara was losing patience with the assault and accused Russia of violating agreements aimed at curbing conflict in the region.

## Afghanistan Violence Soars Amid Us-Taliban Talks: Watchdog



Agencies

NEW YORK: Violent attacks in Afghanistan jumped to record levels in the last quarter of 2019 compared to previous years, a US government watchdog has said, underscoring the 18-year-long conflict's continued toll on the country.

There were 8,204 attacks between October and December last year - up from 6,974 in the same period in 2018 - according to a report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) released on Friday.

This represented the highest number of attacks in the same three-month period of any year since recording began in 2010.

September, when the first round of presidential voting was held, was the worst month of 2019 with the highest number of casualty-causing attacks.

"A turbulent last six months resulted in increases in overall enemy attacks (six percent) and effective attacks (four percent) in 2019 compared to the already high levels reported in 2018," SIGAR said in its quarterly report to the US Congress.

Thirty-seven percent of the attacks resulted in people being killed or injured, the report said.

The capital, Kabul, and other urban areas have seen a rare stretch of more than two months without large-scale bomb attacks that frequently rock the city and cause mass casualties.

Despite the lull, which has come as the US and the Taliban continue talks over a possible deal for American forces to leave Afghanistan, fighting in rural provinces has continued unabated, with reports of skirmishes appearing daily.

Massive losses

SIGAR noted that attacks appeared to mirror progress in US-Taliban talks, with incidents dropping earlier in the year, then picking up again after US President Donald Trump temporarily halted negotiations in September.

The Pentagon has also continued to up the tempo of operations, with US warplanes dropping more bombs on Afghanistan in 2019 than at any other time in at least a decade, according to the US Air Force.



## Who Declares Coronavirus Global Emergency As Death Toll Rises

Agencies

GENEVA: The World Health Organization declared a global emergency over the new coronavirus, as China reported Friday the death toll had climbed to 213 with nearly 10,000 infections.

The UN health agency based in Geneva had initially downplayed the threat posed by the disease, but revised its risk assessment after crisis talks.

"Our greatest concern is the potential for the virus to spread to countries with weaker health systems," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a briefing in Geneva on Thursday.

"We must all act together now to limit further spread... We can only stop it together."

Tedros nevertheless said travel and trade restrictions with China were unnecessary to stem the spread of the virus, which has spread to more than 15 other countries.

Many countries have already urged their citizens not to visit China, while some have banned entry for travellers from the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the virus first surfaced.

The US reported its first case of a person catching the virus from another person on American soil - a man in Chicago who contracted the illness from his wife, who had travelled to Wuhan.

Airlines began cancelling flights servicing China on Wednesday, and more followed suit on Thursday.

Israel barred all flights from China, while Russia said it was closing its far eastern border with China over the outbreak.

More than 6,000 tourists were temporarily put under lockdown aboard a cruise ship at an Italian port after two Chinese passengers were isolated over fears they could be carrying the virus. They later tested negative for the illness.

Beijing has taken extreme steps to stop the spread of the virus, including effectively quarantining more than 50 million people in Wuhan and surround-

## Nations Should Avoid 'Overreaction', Says China

United Nations: As the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the coronavirus outbreak a global health emergency, China has said all countries should behave in a "responsible" manner and avoid overreaction that may result in more negative spill-over effects.

China informed the WHO about the coronavirus cases in late December. The death toll in China's novel coronavirus outbreak on Friday climbed to 213 with the number of confirmed cases totalling to 9,692.

The WHO said there had been 98 cases in 18 other countries, but no deaths. Most international cases are in people who had been to the Chinese city of Wuhan, the epicentre of the epidemic.

"We are still at a very

critical stage in fighting the coronavirus. International solidarity is extremely important and for that purpose all countries should behave in an appropriate and responsible manner, China's Ambassador to the UN Zhang Jun said on Thursday.

Speaking to reporters here, Zhang said while Beijing understands the concerns of other countries over the outbreak, "we should also listen to the advice" of the Director General of the WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus who has said that he "has full confidence in China's efforts to combat the outbreak."

Zhang said that "there is no reason for measures that unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade" and the WHO doesn't recommend limiting trade and movement.

ing Hubei province.

The government on Thursday reported 38 new deaths in the preceding 24 hours, the highest one-day total since the virus was detected late last year.

On Friday, the government reported 43 new deaths, bringing the total to 213.

All but two of the confirmed deaths on Thursday and Friday were in Hubei.

The National Health Commission said there were 1,982 new confirmed cases, bringing the total to just under 10,000.

Another 102,000 people were under medical observation with possible symptoms of the respiratory ailment.

The pathogen is believed to have emerged in a market that sold wild game, and spread during a Lunar New Year holiday season in which hundreds of millions of Chinese travel at home or abroad.

Thousands of foreigners have been trapped in Wuhan since it was sealed off last week.

Japan and the United States on Wednesday became the first countries to organise airlifts from Wuhan for their citizens. A second US flight is planned in the coming days.

Britain was planning an evacuation of around 200 of its citizens early Friday, after receiving the necessary clearance from Beijing.

## US House Passes Measures Seeking To Pull War Powers Back From Trump

Agencies

WASHINGTON: The US House of Representatives has passed two pieces of legislation aiming to contain President Donald Trump's war powers.

In a 228 to 175 vote on Thursday, the Democratic-led House voted to pass one measure that would forbid military action against Iran unless approved by Congress. While four of Trump's fellow Republicans joined Democrats in supporting the bill, three Democrats sided with most Republicans in voting no.

In addition, the House voted - 236 to 166 - to repeal the 2002 Authorization for the use of Military Force for the war in Iraq, which US presidents have long used to justify several military actions, with 11 Republican lawmakers voting yea and two Democrats voting nay.

"The Constitution gives Congress, not the president, the power to declare war. And with President Trump taking steps toward dangerous conflict with Iran - without any consultation with Congress - we need to reassert the responsibility given to us," said Democratic Representative Eliot Engel, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

There is uncertainty, however, as to what might happen to the legislation in the Republican-led Senate, where a similar effort to pass an Iran-related war powers resolution has been stalled during

Trump's impeachment trial.

Meanwhile, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said ahead of Thursday's vote that "members of Congress continue to have serious, urgent concerns about the president's decision to engage in hostilities against Iran and about its lack of strategy moving forward."

Congress' power to declare



war "has been, shall we say, usurped by administrations both Democratic and Republican, and now to an extent that practically abrogates whatever is in the Constitution," she added.

A day earlier, Trump took to Twitter to express opposition.

"With Votes in the House tomorrow, Democrats want to make it harder for Presidents to defend America, and stand up to, as an example, Iran. Protect our GREAT COUNTRY!" he wrote.

This comes following the US' assassination of Iranian senior anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani earlier this month.

## Pentagon Raises Number Of US Troops Injured In Iran Missile Attack To 64

Agencies

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon has yet again raised the figure of soldiers wounded in Iran's retaliatory missile attack in Iraq earlier this month to 64, saying they have suffered "traumatic brain injuries".

Pentagon chief Mark Esper and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark

report said eight troops were currently being treated in the United States, 21 in Landstuhl, Germany and that another 39 injured troops have returned to military operations in Iraq.

The new tally marks at least the fourth instance where US officials have raised the number of US troops injured following Iran's January 8 missile attack in response to



Milley said Thursday the military took these types of injuries "very seriously" after criticism that the authorities sought to whitewash them.

"The number is growing," Milley added, explaining that it takes time to diagnose and screen soldiers present in the area at the time of the attack.

The New York Times cited a Pentagon statement, which put the total number of injured troops at 68. The

Washington's assassination of top anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani on January 3.

The Trump administration at first claimed that no Americans had been injured in the attack.

"We suffered no casualties, all of our soldiers are safe, and only minimal damage was sustained at our military bases," President Donald Trump said a day after the missile strike.

### NEWSMAKERS

## Greta Thunberg Nominated For Nobel Peace Prize By Swedish MPs

Stockholm: Teen climate activist Greta Thunberg and the global protest movement "Fridays for Future" were nominated Thursday for the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize by two Swedish lawmakers.

"Greta Thunberg is a climate activist, and the main reason she deserves the Nobel Peace Prize is that despite her young age, she has worked hard to make politicians open their eyes to the climate crisis," Left Party parliamentarian Jens Holm and Hakan Svanenling wrote in a letter to the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

"The climate crisis will produce new conflicts and ultimately wars. Action for reducing our emissions and complying with the Paris Agreement



is therefore also an act of making peace," they said.

The pair added that without the Fridays For Future movement and Greta Thunberg, "the climate issue would not have been on the agenda to such an extent as it is today."

Thunberg, 17, was mentioned as a possible Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2019,

when the honour ultimately went to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed for his efforts to resolve a long-running conflict with neighbouring Eritrea.

In just over a year, the climate activist, who suffers from a form of autism called Asperger's, has become the voice of a generation haunted

by the climate crisis.

She began her "School Strike for the Climate" outside the Swedish parliament in August 2018, and has since inspired and mobilised millions of young people to get involved.

Nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize must be submitted by February 1 to the Norwegian Nobel Committee. Thousands of people are eligible to propose candidates, including former laureates, some university professors, lawmakers and government ministers around the world, and current and former Norwegian Nobel Committee members.

The committee never reveals the names of the nominees, but those who propose candidates are allowed to disclose their choice.

## Pak's anti-terrorism court acquits over 80 Christians in lynching cases

Lahore: An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan has acquitted over 80 Christians after the complainant entered into a compromise with the accused who were allegedly involved in lynching of two Muslim men and vandalism following a suicide attack on twin churches in Lahore in 2015.

On March 15, 2015, two blasts occurred at Roman Catholic Church and Christ Church during Sunday service in Youhanabad, Lahore, killing 15 Christians and leaving 70 wounded.

The attack was followed by mob violence killing two men mistaken as militants. The bombings occurred during prayers at two churches in thickly-populated Youhanabad that is home to more than 100,000 Christians.



The victim and accused families reached an out of court settlement after the latter submitted a statement saying they had forgiven the suspects and had no objection if they were acquitted.

Anti-Terrorism Court Lahore Judge Arshad Hussain

Bhutta announced the verdict on Wednesday after legal heir of the deceased - Muhammad Naem and Babar - pardoned 41 suspects.

"The victim and accused families reached an out of court settlement after the latter submitted a statement saying they had forgiven the suspects and had no objection if they were acquitted," a court official said.

The court also gave the benefit of the doubt to 47 other suspects accused of arson, rioting and vandalism in the aftermath of the attack on the churches.

Hundreds of Christians had smashed vehicles in a rare show of anger by the beleaguered minority community.

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's Jamaat-ul-Ahrar faction claimed responsibility for the attack.