

Turkey's Erdogan confirms sending Syrian fighters to Libya

Agencies
Ankara: Pro-Turkish Syrians are fighting in Libya alongside military trainers dispatched by Ankara, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan admitted for the first time on Friday.
Turkey supports the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli and sent dozens of military training personnel after the two countries signed a deal last year.
"Turkey is there with a training force. There are also people from the Syrian National Army," Erdogan told reporters in Istanbul, referring to the group of rebels

would agree to a permanent ceasefire if Syrian "mercenaries" left Libya, and Turkey ended its support for the GNA, according to RIA news agency.
"A ceasefire [would] be the result of a number of conditions being fulfilled... the withdrawal of Syrian and Turkish mercenaries, an end to Turkish arms supplies to Tripoli, and the liquidation of terrorist groups," Haftar was quoted as saying on Friday.
But Haftar warned he would not hesitate to use force if his conditions were not met.

New talks expected
The GNA in Tripoli agreed to



fighting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government.
The GNA has been under sustained attack for months from eastern-based renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar, whose principal backers include the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt.
Last month, the warring sides agreed to a truce and although there have been violations, they have held two rounds of talks in Geneva.
Haftar, meanwhile, said he

resume negotiations on Thursday after suspending talks with Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) after rocket attacks on the capital's strategic port on Tuesday.
Several rounds of talks focused on economic issues, including fairer distribution of Libya's oil wealth, have also taken place in Egypt and Tunisia, while talks aimed at a political solution are scheduled to start in Geneva on February 26.

Pompeo drums up 'Iran threat' on visit to Saudi

Agencies
Riyadh: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has repeated trumped-up "Iran threat" on a visit to Saudi Arabia amid US push to sell more arms to Riyadh, which is America's number one weapons buyer.
He met with Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and discussed shared security interests in the Persian Gulf and the alleged Iran threats.
Pompeo "assured the Crown Prince that the United States stands with Saudi Arabia in the face of these threats, as reflected in our greater military presence in Saudi Arabia," US State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortigas said in a statement.
Pompeo also visited Sultan Air Base near the Saudi capital, where some 2,500 US troops have been stationed since last summer.
"The visit to Prince Sultan air base and a nearby US Patriot battery highlights the longstanding US-Saudi security relationship and reaffirms America's determination to stand with Saudi Arabia in the face of Iranian malign behavior," the State Department said.
The base is home to a squadron of US Air Force F-15E fighter jets that fly daily missions over Iraq and

Syria and Patriot missile batteries.
Pompeo's visit to Saudi Arabia revolved mostly around countering Iran, although he was forced by a group of US Senators to address the issue of imprisoned US citizens inside Saudi Arabia.
Among those imprisoned are two writers and dual US-Saudi citizens, Badr al-Ibrahim and Salah al-Haidar, son of prominent imprisoned feminist Aziza al-Yousef.
They were arrested in April 2019 amid Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's crackdown on pro-democracy activists.
Like most of Saudi Arabia's human rights violations, the imprisonment of US citizens does not affect US support for the kingdom, US media said.
Speaking in Ethiopia before his visit to Saudi Arabia, Pompeo stressed that the US "pressure campaign" against Iran continues, adding, "It's not just an economic pressure campaign, it's diplomatic pressures, isolation through diplomacy, as well."
The top US diplomat further held talks with Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Prince Khalid Bin Salman, who was previously ambassador to Washington. They discussed the US-Saudi partnership and ways to counter Iran, among other issues.



US, Taliban To Sign Peace Deal In Doha On 29th

Agencies
KABUL: The US and the Taliban are set to sign a historic agreement that would pave the way to ending America's longest war, the bitter foes announced on Friday, hours after Kabul said a week-long partial truce across Afghanistan would kick off this weekend.
If that so-called "reduction in violence" holds, it would mark a major turning point in the grueling conflict and set the conditions for a deal that could, ultimately, pull US troops out after more than 18 years and launch Afghanistan into an uncertain future.
Both US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the Taliban issued statements saying they had agreed to sign the accord on Feb 29 in Doha, following the one-week partial truce.
"Upon a successful implementation of this understanding, signing of the US-Taliban agreement is expected to move forward," Pompeo said, adding that negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government would "start soon thereafter."
Afghanistan's National Security Council spokesman Javed Faisal and Taliban sources had

earlier said the "reduction in violence" between US, Taliban and Afghan security forces would begin on Saturday.
Afghan govt to hold talks with militants if 'reduction of violence' continues for a week; Pakistan welcomes the developments
Pakistan welcomed the announcements and expressed the hope that the parties concerned would seize the opportunity and work out an inclusive political settlement for durable peace in Afghanistan.
The United States has been in talks with the Taliban for more than a year to secure a deal in which it would pull out thousands of troops in return for Taliban security guarantees and a promise to hold peace talks with the government in Kabul.
A reduction in violence would show the Taliban can control their forces and demonstrate good faith ahead of any signing, which would see the Pentagon withdraw about half of the 12,000-13,000 troops currently in Afghanistan.
Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said the partial truce was to start at midnight on Friday-Saturday.
"Our next steps on the peace process will depend on the evalu-

ation of the week of the reduction in violence," Ghani, who this week secured a second term in office, said in a televised address.
"The Afghan security forces will remain on active defence status during the week."
In their statement, the Taliban said warring parties would "create a suitable security situation" ahead of a deal signing.
The Taliban's political spokesman, Suhail Shaheen, separately tweeted that the agreement would see "all" foreign forces leave Afghanistan.
But a senior US administration official stressed that any withdrawal would be "conditions-based". And for now at least, the Pentagon wants to leave troops in Afghanistan on a counter-terrorism mission to fight elements such as those from the militant Islamic State group.
The reduction of US forces "is very much tied to delivery on the commitments that (the Taliban) have made," the US official told reporters.
One Taliban source said that if an agreement was signed on Feb 29, talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, needed to cement a broader peace deal, would be slated to start on March 10.

US-Taliban Truce Begins, Raising Hopes Of Peace Deal

Agencies
Kabul: A week-long "reduction in violence" between the Taliban, the United States and Afghan security forces took effect on Friday, raising hopes for a resolution to the 18-year-long war.
The agreement struck during negotiations between US and Taliban representatives, if maintained, could secure a peace deal that would lead to a withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan.
In a televised address, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced the reduction in violence (RIV) would begin at midnight local time on Friday (19:30 GMT). The army will "remain on active

defence status during the week", he said.
Earlier, Javid Faisal, spokesman for Afghan National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib, said Afghan forces will keep up normal military operations against other armed groups, such as ISIL (ISIS) during the RIV period.
"Local government and security officials have been instructed by the president himself on how to follow the regulations agreed upon for the RIV period," he said, adding that Afghan forces will also retaliate to any violation of the understanding.
US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Friday that upon successful implementation of this agreement, the US would move to

sign a peace deal with the Taliban on February 29.
Soon after Pompeo's announcement, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed the development and said both sides will invite senior representatives to take part in the peace deal "signing ceremony".
The Taliban's statement also said the signing of the peace deal would be followed by intra-Afghan talks with various political parties in the country.
The Afghan armed group, which was removed from power in a US-led invasion in 2001, has previously refused to speak directly to the Kabul government, which it denounces as a "US puppet".

Russia Trying To Get Trump Elected Again: US Intel Warns Lawmakers

Agencies
Washington: US intelligence officials told lawmakers in a confidential briefing last week that Russia is meddling in the 2020 poll campaign to ensure the re-election of President Donald Trump, viewing his administration as favourable to Kremlin's interests, according to media reports.
Though no specifics were reported, The New York Times, which broke the news, said Moscow intended to interfere in the 2020 Democratic nominating contests and the general election, which is due in No-

man Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "Naturally, they have nothing to do with the truth."
Trump on Friday dismissed reported warnings by US intelligence that Russia is meddling in this year's elections as a "hoax" planted by his Democratic rivals.
"Another misinformation campaign is being launched by Democrats in Congress saying that Russia prefers me to any of the Do Nothing Democrat candidates who still have been unable to, after two weeks, count their votes in Iowa," Trump wrote on Twitter.
On Thursday, a judge



member.
Russia has denied it was interfering in the US election. "These are new paranoid reports, which, to our deep regret, will continue to grow in number as the election day approaches," Kremlin spokes-

sentenced Trump's adviser Roger Stone to three years and four months in prison and said his lies to lawmakers investigating Russian interference in the 2016 US election posed a threat to American democracy.

Pentagon Again Raises Number of Soldiers Injured in Iran Attack



Agencies
Washington: The US Defense Department has yet again raised the number of troops wounded in Iran's retaliatory missile attack in Iraq last month, saying they have suffered "traumatic brain injuries."
The Pentagon said on Friday 110 service members have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injury following the Iran strike on January 8. The figure is higher than the last toll that was announced on February 10.
The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) fired volleys of ballistic missiles at Ain al-Asad, a large airbase hosting about 1,500 US troops, and another outpost in Erbil, the capital of the semi-auton-

omous Iraqi Kurdistan.
The missile operation was in response to Washington's January 3 assassination of top Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, who led the IRGC's Quds Force. The assassination also resulted in the death of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).
Speaking on the morning following Iran's reciprocal military operation, US President Donald Trump had said that "no Americans were harmed in last night's attack."
"We suffered no casualties, all of our soldiers are safe, and only minimal damage was sustained at our military bases," he added.
The Pentagon had also initially ruled out any casualties from the attack.

NEWSMAKERS

Trump India visit: Who all will be accompanying the President

US President Donald Trump's upcoming visit to India demonstrates the strong and enduring ties between the two largest democracies of the world, the White House said on Friday.
The US president and First Lady Melania Trump will lead a 12-member American delegation to Ahmedabad, Agra and New Delhi on February 24 and 25.
"The president is going to India as a demonstration of the strong and enduring ties between our two countries," a senior administration official told reporters less than 48 hours before Trump departs for his maiden presidential trip to India.
"These are ties based on shared democratic traditions, common strategic interests, and enduring bonds between our people. And, in part, this has been exemplified by the very close relationship between the



President and Prime Minister Narendra Modi," said the official, requesting anonymity.
The visiting American delegation includes Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette, Acting Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney and National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien.
Trump's daughter Ivanka, and son-in-law Jared Kushner, who serve as Assistant to the President and Senior Advisor to

the President respectively, will also be visiting India.
Senior advisors to the President Stephen Miller, Dan Scavino, Chief of Staff to the First Lady Lindsay Reynolds, Assistant to the President and Special Representative for International Telecommunication Policy and Senior Advisor to the Chief of Staff Robert Blair, and White House Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham are the other members of the delegation.

Firm seeks to recover Titanic's iconic telegraph machine

NORFOLK: The salvage firm that has plucked silverware, china and gold coins from the wreckage of the Titanic now wants to recover the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Machine that transmitted the doomed ship's increasingly frantic distress calls.
Lawyers for the company, R.M.S. Titanic, Inc., called witnesses before a federal judge on Thursday to explain why the company should be allowed to possibly cut into the rapidly deteriorating ship to recover the device before it's irretrievable.
It's one of those iconic artefacts, like the signal flares (that the sinking ship launched), testified David Gallo, an oceanographer who retired from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and is now a paid consultant for the firm.
Gallo, who testified in federal court in Norfolk, Virginia, said that salvaging the device would not be grave robbery but a way to connect people to the ship's legacy and honor its passengers.

US District Judge Rebecca Beach Smith, the maritime jurist who presides over Titanic salvage matters, said it was too early for her to make any decisions on the proposal. She said she needed more details and proposed scheduling another hearing sometime in the future.
The Titanic was traveling from England to New York when it struck an iceberg at 11:40 pm on April 14, 1912. The large and luxurious ocean liner sent out distress signals using the relatively new Marconi wireless radio system.
The messages in Morse code were picked up by other ships and onshore receiving stations. They included: "We require immediate assistance... "Have struck iceberg and sinking"... "We are putting women off in boats." The ship sank in less than three hours, with the loss of all but 700 of the 2,208 passengers and crew.
An international team led by oceanographer Robert Ballard located the wreckage in 1985 on the North Atlantic seabed, about 400 miles (645 kilometers) off Newfoundland, Canada.

Woman plotted to bomb London church

LONDON: A woman has pleaded guilty to two terrorism offences, including scoping out St Paul's cathedral in London as a possible bomb target, police said on Friday.
Safiyya Shaikh, 36, of Hayes, west London, has been remanded in custody ahead of sentencing at the Old Bailey on May 11.
She was charged last October with preparing terrorist acts including making contact with someone she believed could help her make explosives and staying in a hotel to conduct reconnaissance.
The statement of charges also said she selected the hotel as a target for an explosive device and then scoped out St Paul's as a location to plant a second bomb. She also prepared words of a pledge of allegiance to the militant Islamic State group.

