

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

Trump says border troops could hit 15K, surprising Pentagon

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump says the number of military troops deployed to the U.S.-Mexican border could reach 15,000 — roughly double the number the Pentagon said it currently plans for a mission whose dimensions are shifting daily.

The Pentagon says “more than 7,000” troops were being sent to the southwest border to support the Customs and Border Protection agents. Officials said that number could reach a maximum of about 8,000 under present plans.

The troop numbers have been changing at a dizzying pace, with Trump drawing a hard line on immigration in the lead-up to the midterm elections.

Just last week officials were indicating that about 800 to 1,000 might be sent. On Monday, officials announced that about 5,200 were being deployed. The next day, the Air Force general running the operation said more than the initially announced total were going, and he pointedly rejected a news report that it could reach 14,000, saying that was “not consistent with what’s actually being planned.”

Gen. Terrence O’Shaughnessy, the commander of U.S. Northern Command, told reporters the number would exceed the initial contingent of 5,200, but he offered no estimate of the eventual total.

Rabbis gather up traces of Pittsburgh victims for burial

PITTSBURGH — As the first funerals for the victims of the Pittsburgh massacre began, two rabbis and five other volunteers approached the sawhorses cordoning off the Tree of Life synagogue, and an FBI agent led them into the crime scene. Inside the desecrated temple, the men donned white forensic coveralls, face masks and gloves, and set to work.

Judaism asks the living to take special care of the dead, and this group had a last, sacred duty to fulfill: gather up every drop of blood and other bodily traces of the 11 people killed in the deadliest attack against Jews in U.S. history.

“The Jewish law is that everything that belonged to the body needs to be buried, so we do our best,” one of the group’s leaders, Rabbi Elisar Admon, said Tuesday.

The work is meticulous and mentally taxing, carried out with implements as ordinary as wipes and paper towels.

Judaism is very specific about death and

how it should be handled, whatever the circumstances. When a loved one dies, religious law requires that representatives of the living accompany the body until burial. In a ritual known as tahara, the remains are carefully washed and placed in a white shroud. Jewish law mandates that the burial take place as soon as possible.

The global lost: 56,800 migrants dead and missing in 4 years

JOHANNESBURG — One by one, five to a grave, the coffins are buried in the red earth of this ill-kept corner of a South African cemetery. The scrawl on the cheap wood attests to their anonymity: “Unknown B/Male.”

These men were migrants from elsewhere in Africa with next to nothing who sought a living in the thriving underground economy of Gauteng province, a name that roughly translates to “land of gold.” Instead of fortune, many found death, their bodies unnamed and unclaimed — more than 4,300 in Gauteng between 2014 and 2017 alone.

Some of those lives ended here at the Olfantsvlei cemetery, in silence, among tufts of grass growing over tiny placards that read: Pauper Block. There are coffins so tiny that they could only belong to children.

As people worldwide flee war, hunger and a lack of jobs, global migration has soared to record highs, with more than 258 million international migrants in 2017. That is an increase of 49 percent from the turn of the century, according to the United Nations.

Far less visible, however, has been the toll of this mass migration: The tens of thousands of people who die or simply disappear during their journeys, never to be seen again. A growing number of migrants have drowned, died in deserts or fallen prey to traffickers, leaving their families to wonder what on earth happened to them. At the same time, anonymous bodies are filling cemeteries around the world, like the one in Gauteng.

Divers recover jet’s data recorder from Indonesia seafloor

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Divers recovered the crashed Lion Air jet’s flight data

recorder from the seafloor, a crucial development in the investigation into what caused the 2-month-old plane to plunge into Indonesian seas earlier this week, killing 189 people. Relatives, meanwhile, buried the first victim to be identified and prayed at her flower-covered grave.

TV showed footage of two divers after they surfaced, swimming to an inflatable vessel and placing the bright orange device into a large container that was transferred to a search-and-rescue ship.

“I was desperate because the current below was strong but I am confident of the tools given to me,” said navy 1st Sgt. Hendra, who uses a single name. After narrowing the possible location, “I started digging and cleaning the debris until I finally found an orange object,” he told TV, standing on the deck of a ship next to his diving mate.

The Boeing 737 MAX 8 plane crashed early Monday just minutes after takeoff from the Indonesian capital Jakarta. It was the worst airline disaster in Indonesia in more than two decades and renewed concerns about safety in its fast-growing aviation industry, which was recently removed from European Union and U.S. blacklists.

Navy Col. Monang Sitompul told local TV an object believed to be the aircraft’s fuselage was also seen on the seafloor.

Christian woman acquitted in Pakistan to leave country

ISLAMABAD — A Christian woman acquitted in Pakistan after eight years on death row for blasphemy plans to leave the country, her family said as radical Islamists mounted rallies for a second day against the verdict, blocking roads and burning tires in protest.

The developments followed a landmark move by Pakistan’s Supreme Court on Wednesday that overturned the 2010 conviction against Asia Bibi for insulting Islam’s Prophet Muhammad. The charge of blasphemy carries the death penalty in this majority Muslim nation.

Bibi’s acquittal immediately raised fears of religious violence — and presented a challenge to the government of new Prime Minister Imran Khan who came to power this summer partly by pursuing the Islamist agenda. Khan warned Islamist protesters on Wednesday night not to “test the patience of the state.”

Bibi remained at an undisclosed location where the 54-year-old mother of five was being held for security reasons, awaiting her formal release, her brother, James Masih told The Associated Press.

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