VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Jonathan Smith reporting.

The United States has temporarily halted all non-immigrant visa applications from Turkey.

A statement from the U.S. embassy in Ankara on Sunday read that "Recent events have forced the United States Government to reassess the commitment of the Government of Turkey to the security of U.S. Mission facilities and personnel."

The statement did not clarify the reasons for which the embassy is reassessing Turkey's commitment, nor did it say how long the suspension would last.

It also said, "In order to minimize the number of visitors to our Embassy and Consulates while this assessment proceeds, effective immediately we have suspended all non-immigrant visa services at all U.S. diplomatic facilities in Turkey."

Hours later, Turkey retaliated by announcing its own suspension of visa services in the U.S., using language that parroted the U.S. statement and reasons for the halt.

Rescuers in the Syrian city of Maarat al-Numan are picking through the rubble after what they say was a Syrian military airstrike on a market Sunday.

At least six were killed. But the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says the death toll is now up to 11.

Syria's famed White Helmet rescuers pulled a man and a young boy from under a pile of rocks and dust and said they expect to find more victims.

Maarat al-Numan is in Syria's rebel-controlled Idlib province, which borders Turkey.

Turkish forces have launched what President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan calls a "serious" operation in Idlib.

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Residents of [Colonia] Catalonia, that is, opposed to the regional government's efforts to secede from Spain rallied in Barcelona on Sunday. Police said 350,000 demonstrators attended. Organizers said it was more likely 900,000.

The march was peaceful and no major incidents were reported.

One protester told the French news agency AFP "we have perhaps been silent too long."

Last week, Catalans voted overwhelmingly for independence. In that poll, which was deemed illegal by the Spanish government, 90 percent voted to break with Spain. But the turnout was less than half of the electorate.

Opinion polls have consistently suggested that more Catalans favor remaining in Spain than declaring independence.

Australians have handed in 51,000 weapons during the first national gun amnesty in more than 20 years.

The government says the amnesty has helped reduce the risk of firearms falling into the hands of terrorists and criminals. From Sydney, correspondent Phil Mercer reports.

Authorities in Australia believe the three-month gun amnesty that ran through September 30 has made the country safer since a mass shooting in the state of Tasmania in 1996.

It's estimated that there are about 260,000 unregistered weapons in Australia, which has some of the world's toughest gun control measures.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull says the measures are critical to Australian society.

"Now, it's vitally important that we maintain our gun control laws. They are among the strictest in the world. We've seen the shocking tragedy in Las Vegas. The killer there had a collection of semi-automatic weapons, which a person in his position would simply not be able to acquire in Australia."

Anyone found with an unregistered firearm in Australia now faces up to 14 years in prison or a heavy fine.

Phil Mercer, for VOA news, Sydney.

The American Vice President Mike Pence walked out of a football game Sunday in his home state of Indiana after some of the players knelt during the playing of the national anthem.

The former Indiana governor said on Twitter, "I left today's game because President Trump and I will not dignify any event that disrespects our soldiers, our Flag, and our National Anthem.'

While Colts players stood arm-in-arm at their home game in Indianapolis, more than 20 of the San Francisco 49ers players knelt during the song as they have for weeks.

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That's the latest world news from VOA.