VOA NEWS

December 18, 2017

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

Three heavily armed suicide bombers attacked a crowded Christian church in Quetta, Pakistan, Sunday, killing at least eight worshipers. Women and children were among the victims of the attack on the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church, which is in a highly secured central part of the city.

Witnesses said two of the attackers tried to enter the main hall where around 400 worshipers were attending Sunday service, but police guards at the main gate stopped them, killing one of them and leading the second to blow himself up outside the hall. The explosion fatally wounded a security guard.

There [is] have been no claims of responsibility so far for the attack.

Taliban insurgents have killed at least 14 Afghan troops and injured several others in a pre-dawn attack in southern Helmand province.

Officials said on Sunday that insurgents stormed police outposts around the provincial capital of Lashkargah, but security forces repelled the attack and ensuing fierce clashes inflicted heavy casualties on the Taliban.

An employee of Britain's embassy in Lebanon was found murdered on Sunday.

The body of Rebecca Dykes was reportedly found on the side of the road. Police sources told the British media that Dykes appeared to have been raped before she was killed but that the crime did not appear to be politically motivated.

Dykes had been working in Beirut for nearly a year as the program and policy manager for the Department for International Development.

This is VOA news.

A power outage at the international airport in the southern American city of Atlanta has disrupted all flights in and out of the huge place.

Authorities at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport said the outage happened Sunday afternoon, affecting all airport operations.

Incoming flights, both domestic and international, are being diverted to other airports in region.

Australian officials say a South Korean-born man has been arrested and charged with acting as an economic agent for North Korea.

Reuters correspondent Samantha Vadas reports.

The suspect has been identified by local media as 59-year-old Chan Han Choi. He has reportedly been living in Australia for more than 30 years and is of Korean descent.

Police allege the man tried to broker the sale of missile components, including software for the guidance systems of ballistic missiles, as well as trying to sell coal to third parties in Indonesia and Vietnam.

Officers say the trade could have been worth "tens of millions of dollars" if successful.

"We think he is acting as an economic agent on behalf of North Korea. There is nothing to suggest he's doing anything but that, he's doing it out of a patriotic purpose."

Police say Chan Han Choi had been in touch with high-ranking North Korean officials but no missile components ever made it to Australia.

Hundreds of protesters clashed with police in Ukraine Sunday while trying to storm Kyiv's October Palace following a rally against President Petro Poroshenko.

The crowd, which was dispersed with tear gas fired by police, is the latest to have gathered in support of opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili, who was released from custody last week after having been detained and accused of trying to stage a Russia-supported coup.

[at the] Saakashvili told the crowd Sunday at the protest "You have to show them that you are brave, but very, very calm. I will stand by you to the very end."

The Kremlin said Sunday that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency provided Russian authorities with information that stopped a series of Islamic State bombings planned in St. Petersburg.

Moscow said Russian President Vladimir Putin called the American President Donald Trump to thank him for the CIA information, a call the White House confirmed.

The White House said based on the information the U.S. provided, Russian authorities were able to capture the terrorists just prior to an attack that could have killed large numbers of people.

There is more on these and other late breaking and developing stories, from around the world, around the clock, at voanews.com and on the VOA news mobile app. I'm Jonathan Jones reporting from the world headquarters of the Voice of America in Washington.

That's the latest world news from VOA.