VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Liz Parker reporting.

Attack in Afghanistan.

A group of as many as four gunmen attacked the Intercontinental Hotel in the Afghan capital of Kabul on Saturday night. The gunmen seized hostages and exchanged gunfire with security forces as the building caught fire and residents and staff fled.

Reuters has been reporting from the scene a government official saying details of the raid which came days after a U.S. embassy warning of possible attacks on hotels in the capital were unclear.

The official said the attackers who entered through a kitchen appeared to have included suicide bombers.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the latest in a long series of attacks to hit Kabul.

[that report from Reuters] There are reports of a high number of casualties, but officials say that nothing is conclusive.

U.S. lawmakers resumed debate Saturday afternoon in Washington D.C. Opposing sides showed few signs of agreement after a funding bill was blocked in the Senate, beginning a partial shutdown of the U.S. government.

Spending authority expired at midnight.

Lawmakers are at odds over a range of defense spending and immigrations issues, including a legislative fix for nearly 800,000 undocumented young people brought to the U.S. as children.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence arrived in the Jordan capital of Amman this evening. He is on a four-day visit to the Middle East.

Pence met with the Egyptian president, Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, to discuss terrorism and security issues on Saturday.

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Beijing has accused the United States of violating China's sovereignty after a U.S. missile destroyer sailed near a disputed shoal in the South China Sea.

The USS Hopper sailed within 12 nautical miles of an island, also known as Scarborough Shoal, on January 17.

China's Defense Ministry said in a statement that a Chinese frigate "immediately took actions to identify and verify the U.S. ship and drove it away by warning."

The U.N. Children's Fund warns that millions of Iraqi children affected by conflict and poverty face a grim future and are in desperate need of international support.

The government has made great strides in bringing the fighting to an end [in a se...] in several areas of the country. But UNICEF notes children continue to suffer from ongoing violence, lack of education and basic care.

VOA's Lisa Schlein has been digging into this story and she has much more. Just go to voanews.com for the latest coverage.

Saturday in Peru, Pope Francis denounced killings of women and other gender-based crimes in Latin America.

At a Marian prayer in the northern city of Trujillo, the pontiff called for legislation protecting women and a new culture "that repudiates every form of violence."

It was the second time in as many days that he has spoken out about gender violence following his strong defense of indigenous women in the Amazon.

The United States has condemned Sudan's arbitrary detention of journalists after reporters from the French news agency, AFP, and Reuters were arrested covering a street protest on Friday.

The U.S. State Department said it was aware of the detentions and was closely following reports.

The U.S. is continuing to press Sudan to improve its performance regarding freedom of expression and overall human rights and "to ensure that those detained are treated humanely and fairly, in accordance with Sudanese law and international human rights standards, and that they are allowed to access legal counsel and their families."

Thousands of women have gathered in Washington D.C. and in cities around the U.S. on the anniversary of the inauguration of President Trump.

The marchers are calling for equal rights and pay and health care, to denounce sexual harassment and to encourage women to run for office.

Marchers are also addressing other issues, such as racial equality, gun control and immigrant protections.

Much more coverage of this on voanews.com. I'm Liz Parker.

That's the latest world news from VOA.