VOA NEWS

March 5, 2018

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

Syria's state media and human rights activists said government troops and allied militias have captured a number of villages and towns in rebel-held Eastern Ghouta. It's near the capital, Damascus.

Advances by Syrian government forces into the area caused many people to flee and seek shelter in areas in the heart of Eastern Ghouta, according to the pro-Syrian opposition television station, Orient TV.

About 400,000 people need food, medical and other supplies, according to the U.N.

The Syrian President Bashar al-Assad promised on Sunday that his military's offensive against rebels in Eastern Ghouta would continue even in the face of withering criticism from American and British leaders that he is creating a humanitarian disaster.

White House trade adviser Peter Navarro said Sunday that President Trump is not planning to exempt any countries from his increase in tariffs on imported steel and aluminum.

Navarro told CNN that final details on Trump's anticipated 25 percent tax on steel imports and a 10 percent tariff on aluminum should be completed by later in the week or early next week at the latest.

The new tariffs for the key metals have drawn wide condemnation from business-oriented Republican lawmakers in the U.S., as well as key allied trade partners, including Canada and the European Union.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in will send a high-level delegation to North Korea on Monday to discuss ways in which relations can be improved and to try to ease tension on the peninsula.

This is VOA news.

The U.N. refugee agency has launched a nationwide biometric verification system in Uganda to make sure data gathered about refugees and asylum seekers is accurate. The UNHCR says this is to ensure assistance reaches those for whom it is intended.

Correspondent Lisa Schlein reports for VOA from UNHCR headquarters in Geneva.

Uganda provides protection to about 1.4 million refugees from South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. The government has been praised for its generosity and open-door policy for people fleeing conflict and persecution.

But a major corruption scandal last month, reportedly involving millions of dollars and the exploitation of refugees, has tarnished the country's image and cast doubt on the credibility of its asylum policy. Four government officials have been suspended and are under investigation.

U.N. refugee agency spokesman Babar Balloch tells VOA the biometric verification system is important to fix discrepancies in Uganda's refugee data. He says this new registration process will ensure that the thousands of refugees who are arriving daily in Uganda receive the assistance to which they are entitled.

Lisa Schlein, for VOA news, Geneva.

Slovakia's President Andrej Kiska called Sunday for either substantial changes in the government or snap elections following the murder of an investigative journalist and his fiancée.

In a televised speech on Sunday, Kiska said, "There's a huge public distrust of the state. And many don't trust law enforcement authorities. This distrust is justified. We crossed the line, things went too far, and there's no way back."

Krishna Kumari Kohli was elected Sunday to Pakistan's Senate, becoming the first senator from the predominantly Muslim country's low caste Hindu minority. Kohli is a 39-year-old Dalit, [the longest] the lowest rank, that is, on the traditional Hindu caste system which persists in India and Pakistan.

Members of parliament and provincial assemblies voted Saturday to fill the seats of the upper house of parliament, the Senate. Elections for the lower house will take place this summer.

Kohli's PPP, the party of slain former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, won 12 seats. The former cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf party won 6.

You can find 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. From the world headquarters of the Voice of America in Washington, I'm Jonathan Jones, VOA news.

That's the latest world news from VOA.