VOA NEWS

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 (From) Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Tommie McNeil reporting.

An international convoy of humanitarian aid trucks has reached besieged Eastern Ghouta in Syria, but government forces continue their aerial bombardment and ground assault against the rebel enclave.

In addition, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 45 people have been killed, 190 injured Monday alone in the latest attacks even as the aid has been arriving.

Hundreds have been killed in the last two weeks as Syria's military tried to gain territory inside Eastern Ghouta.

Syria's President Bashar Assad says the military offensive will continue.

"As long as there are people who we think are the majority in Eastern Ghouta who want to exit the control of the terrorists and go to the state's control. Then there should be a truce that can open the way even for one person to move from the control of the terrorists to the control of the government."

The advance comes after 15 days of deadly attacks and airstrikes on the rebels.

Thousands have huddled in underground tunnels and basements trying to survive.

Jesusemen Oni, VOA news, Washington.

Turkish state media reports that Turkey has detained four Iraqis in connection with a security threat to the U.S. embassy in Ankara.

The report came as the U.S. embassy said that it was closed Monday due to a "security threat."

The embassy said it would announce its reopening once it's safe to do so.

Officials in Seoul say North Korean leader Kim Jong Un hosted a dinner late Monday to welcome top aides of South Korean President Moon Jae-in in the latest diplomatic effort that some hope will pave the way for direct talks between the U.S. and North Korea.

The goal of a broader dialogue could be complicated by military planned drills, as a commentary published by North Korea's official news agency warned that Pyongyang could "counter the U.S."

This is VOA news.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House Monday that "Iran must be stopped; that is our common challenge."

The two leaders sat alongside one another and discussed how to end Iran's military advances in the Middle East.

Mr. Trump said he believes the U.S. can help broker peace between Israelis and Palestinians and he referred to his decision to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem as a proud moment toward the effort.

"It would be a great achievement and even from a humanitarian standpoint. What better than if we could make peace between Israel and the Palestinians? I can tell you we are working very hard on doing that and I think we have a very good chance. And the biggest difficulty that anybody said, you look over 25 years, nobody could get past number one, Jerusalem. They couldn't get past it. We've taken it off the table."

With no outright winner and the Italian parliament appearing to be hung based on early seat projections Monday, the already fractious country will be thrown into weeks of tortuous backroom deal-making.

The FTSE MIB Index in Milan was down 1.2 percent on a day when global markets were trading higher.

Analysts say the strong showing by the anti-establishment 5-Star Movement and the right-wing League party means it's less likely the next Italian government will try to make the economy more pro-business. It is more likely to increase government spending which could help growth but could also add to public debt which is already above worryingly high 130 percent of GDP.

Luis Ramirez, VOA news.

A former Russian military intelligence agent who was convicted of spying for the British is critically ill after being exposed to an unknown substance in the UK.

Police said two people had been found unconscious on a bench in the city of Salisbury on Sunday, a 66-year-old man and a 33-year-old woman.

"Both are currently in a critical condition in intensive care. Because we are still at the very early stages of the investigation, we are unable to ascertain whether or not a crime has taken place. A major incident, however, has been declared today and a multi-agency response has been coordinated."

Skripal was granted refuge in the UK after a spy swap between the U.S. and Russia in 2010.

Relations between Britain and Russia have been strain since ex-KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko was poisoned with polonium-210 in London in 2006, a killing which a British inquiry said was probably approved by President Vladimir Putin.

And that is David Doyle reporting for Reuters.

Others have been followed up. U.S. President Trump's announcement that his admin would impose new tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. He says his admin is currently working on something for Canada and Mexico as an exception.

I'm Tommie McNeil, VOA news.

That's the latest world news from VOA.