VOA NEWS

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

The Trump administration is preparing for the president to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un next month.

State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert says there are several things currently in motion.

"North Korean Vice Chairman of the Central Committee, Kim Yong Chol, is arriving in New York and will meet with Secretary Pompeo later this week. We also have U.S. delegation meeting with the North Korean delegation in the DMZ."

And this comes after President Trump sent a letter just last week to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, saying their scheduled June 12 summit in Singapore would not happen, blaming what he said was "tremendous anger and open hostility" shown in a statement from Pyongyang.

But negotiations between the two countries have continued, including talks at the Korean demilitarized zone.

Hurricane Maria has claimed more than 4,600 lives in Puerto Rico last year. That's more than 70 times higher than the U.S. government's official death toll of 64. That's according to a study published Tuesday by the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The findings are based on a survey of thousands of Puerto Rican residents conducted by researchers from Harvard University and elsewhere, and they show the fatalities occurred between September 20 and December 31 of 2017.

Israeli military planes carried out airstrikes Tuesday in the Gaza Strip targeting positions of the militant group Islamic Jihad.

The strikes came hours after the Israel Defense Forces said militants in Gaza fired at least 25 mortar shells toward several sites in southern Israel.

The IDF statement said most of the projectiles were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system. But three soldiers were wounded, raising the chances of further Israel retaliation.

One mortar shell did land near a kindergarten.

This is VOA news.

The underwater search for a missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 has ended with no conclusive evidence of the airliner's fate four years after it disappeared over the Indian Ocean in the world's biggest aviation mystery.

Matthew Larotonda reports.

"The plane is still missing four years on and we're still at square one. I don't know what closure is or when we can attain it, I don't know if we will ever attain it."

The underwater search for that missing passenger jet Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 has come to an end. There's still no conclusive evidence on what happened to it or why.

For the families of the 239 souls aboard, lack of answers has only added to the pain.

"I believe that we shouldn't give up at this point in time because there are still avenues that have not been explored and I don't think every option available to us has been exhausted."

Grace Nathan's mother, Anne Daisy, was one of the passengers aboard MH370 when it was flying between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing.

That's Matthew Larotonda for Reuters reporting.

U.S. President Donald Trump contended Tuesday that prosecutors investigating his 2016 campaign links to Russia "will be MEDDLING" in November's congressional elections.

VOA's Katherine Gypson has that story.

Trump offered no explanation how he thinks the legal team of special counsel Robert Mueller would interfere with the voting for all 435 seats in the House of Representatives and a third of those in the 100-member Senate. Last week he suggested that the length of Mueller's year-long investigation could turn voters against candidates he favors and "put some hurt on the Republican Party."

Trump, in a string of Twitter comments, ignored the conclusion last week by his new secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, that U.S. officials expect "continued efforts" by Russia to interfere with the congressional elections. The U.S. intelligence community concluded Russia meddled in the presidential election two years ago to help Trump win. With the congressional campaigns now in their early stages in many U.S. states five-plus months ahead of the voting, Pompeo said there is much work ahead to mitigate any Russian interference.

Katherine Gypson, VOA news.

As talks continue over a proposed summit between U.S. President Trump and Kim Jong Un, the U.S. estimates that North Korea is now holding tens of thousands of political prisoners at camps.

The U.S. military will continue sailing ships near disputed islands in the South China Sea, according to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. That is despite Beijing's increased complaints about the operations.

The South China Sea is expected to be a major focus this week when Mattis heads to Singapore to attend an annual gathering of Asian defense and other leaders.

I'm Tommie McNeil, VOA news.

That's the latest world news from VOA.