VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm Tommie McNeil.

Hours after making landfall, Hurricane Michael has been downgraded to a Category 1 storm. But not before, at least one person has been confirmed killed as a result of Michael.

It intensified early Wednesday afternoon in Florida after strengthening into a Category 4.

Eric Blake is a specialist with the National Hurricane Center. "This is expected to be extremely devastating. The pictures have shown extensive tree damage, extreme storm surge flooding. It's expected to be a catastrophe in many parts of that area of Florida."

The hurricane will continue to spread inland Thursday across Panhandle, then southeastern Alabama and southwestern Georgia.

Protection of human rights in China has been on a "downward trajectory by virtually every measure" since President Xi Jinping assumed power in 2012. That's according to a U.S. congressional study concluded Wednesday.

U.S. Senator Marco Rubio contributed to that report.

"First, bad human rights throughout our bilateral relations. Second, prior ties, reciprocity in every area of our bilateral relationship including diplomacy, trade, investment, media and cultural and academic exchanges. It's very simple. We should be treating them and their companies, their government, their products, their services, the same way they treat us. Third, holding Chinese officials accountable for abuses through sanctions and visa denials and the like. Fourth, promoting Internet freedom and counter foreign disinformation here and abroad. And fifth, revamped export controls to ensure that American technology is not being used to commit or facilitate gross right violations."

The report contends the Communist Party "unflinchingly continues to preserve its monopoly on domestic political power through state-sponsored repression, surveillance, indoctrination and brutality."

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The United States has charged a Chinese spy with trying to steal trade secrets from some of the country's top aviation and aerospace companies.

The Justice Department announced Wednesday it arrested Yanjun Xu in Belgium on April 1 and extradited him to the U.S. on Tuesday.

The U.S. has offered to help in the investigation of the mysterious disappearance of a Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi, last seen entering Riyadh's consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, a week ago.

Reuters Emily Wither explains why those close to him believe he was killed.

He was increasingly worried that Riyadh could hurt him or his family.

In Turkey, though, he had friends in high places, including among President Tayyip Erdoğan's advisers.

He believed he had no reason to fear walking in and get paperwork to marry his Turkish fiancée.

On the day of Jamal's appointment, 15 Saudis arrived in Istanbul from Riyadh. Later, Turkish officials say the group entered the consulate while Jamal was collecting his paperwork.

By the end of the day, they were on their way back to Saudi Arabia.

His fiancée says she waited for him but he never came out.

U.S. President Donald Trump was asked whether he had talked with Saudi officials about this case.

"I'd rather not say, but at a very high level. The highest level. Let me say this: It's the highest level."

(Inaudible) last couple days about this?

"Yeah. And more than once."

A key U.S. lawmaker, Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia, told VOA the unfolding drama could significantly affect U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia, long an American ally in the Middle East.

Afghanistan's civilians continue to die in record numbers, according to a new report released by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

From the start of the year to the end of September, the U.N. documented more than 8,000 casualties, of which 3,000 died and more than 5,000 (were) wounded.

In the 17 years of conflict, last five years seem to have been the deadliest for civilians.

Most of the casualties resulted from the actions by non-state actors, including the Taliban and Islamic State.

The U.S. denounced what it said was the Venezuelan government's participation in the death of opposition activist Fernando Alban.

The White House said in a statement the U.S. would continue to pressure the government "until democracy is restored in Venezuela."

The White House also called for "the immediate release of all Venezuelan political prisoners, and for the Maduro regime to take direct, credible steps to re-establish democracy.

The five-year war in South Sudan is among the deadliest the world has seen in recent years. That's according to a new analysis by researchers from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The authors of the report, which was funded by the United States Institute of Peace, hope the new analysis will help to illustrate the true human cost of the war and give a renewed impetus to peace talks and humanitarian funding.

I'm Tommie McNeil, VOA news.