VOA NEWS

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(VOA) news. I'm Christopher Cruise reporting.

Afghan officials say a group of unknown gunmen, including suicide bombers, stormed a government building in Kabul on Monday, killing at least 29 people, wounding more than 20 others.

The raid began in the afternoon when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives-packed car outside the building. The powerful blast enabled his partners to enter the building, which houses, among others, the department for people with disabilities and martyrs' families.

There were no immediate claims of responsibility for Monday's attack.

The search and rescue mission continues two days after a powerful tsunami swept away locals and tourists along the [Sundi] Sunda Strait in Indonesia.

The tsunami death toll has now climbed at 373.

Associated Press correspondent ??? reports.

Indonesia's disaster agency said 120 others are missing in the disaster and more than 600 homes, many hotels and vendor stalls, and more than 400 boats and ships are damaged. The number of casualties may still rise.

The tsunami was not huge and did not surge far inland, but its force was destructive. The waves washed ashore along western Java and southern Sumatra islands Saturday night following a volcanic eruption.

Thousands of soldiers, police and government personnel as well as volunteers are working to find victims of the tsunami.

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo surveyed the destruction Monday.

Indonesia's National Disaster Agency confirming that 373 people were killed, more than 1,000 injured and 57 remain missing.

Turkey sent another convoy of soldiers to its border with Syria on Monday. This heightened activity comes as Turkey and the U.S. have agreed to coordinate on the withdrawal of American troops from Syria.

This is VOA news.

An anti-corruption court in Pakistan has sentenced the former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, to seven years in prison for owning assets beyond his known sources of income.

The ruling noted that Sharif failed to disclose the source of income for establishing a steel mill in Saudi Arabia.

Israel will hold early general elections in April and the Knesset will be dissolved.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's [party] coalition has been plagued by internal divisions for months, including the recent resignation of the defense minister, Avigdor Lieberman, in protest of what he perceived to be the government's weak response to rocket attacks from Hamas-ruled Gaza.

There were peaceful Christmas celebrations in the West Bank town of Bethlehem on Monday hosted by the Palestinian Authority.

Correspondent Robert Berger reports for VOA.

The turnout is much bigger than last year when unrest kept many visitors away. Palestinians launched violent protests after U.S. President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Bethlehem Mayor Anton Salman told VOA that Jerusalem must be the capital of a Palestinian state.

"Trump with what he did - he lost his position as a mediator, honest mediator. I don't think that there is a possibility with his policy in the Middle East that peace will prevail or the peace process will be active again."

In the Holy Land, religion and politics are never far apart.

The U.S. government remains partially closed until at least Thursday, possibly for days or even weeks beyond. President Trump is holding firm in demanding funds for a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Democrats remain resolutely opposed.

Trump is expected to discuss border security issues with his cabinet on Monday.

With only one shopping day left before Christmas, many people spent this weekend buying last minute presents.

Associated Press correspondent Julie Walker reports.

There's lots of reasons why people wait until the last minute to buy holiday gifts - work, money, not sure what to get someone and then there is this: "???"

???Ken Close, who is shopping at the Westfield Mall on Sunday, needs lots of gifts. So far, he's got a box of truffles for business colleague. "???"

Shopper ???Amanda Maryfield already picked up quite a bit. "???, Pandora, ???, Converse."

A National Retail Federation survey found 7 percent of shippers say they are still buying on Christmas Eve and 4 percent said their final gifts wouldn't be bought until after Christmas.

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