VOA NEWS

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VOA news. I'm Christopher Cruise reporting.

U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces say they have recaptured 41 positions held by Islamic State militants as they seek to clear the last enclave the militant group controls in eastern Syria.

An SDF spokesman tweeted Sunday that SDF forces had destroyed fortifications in the village of Baghuz, but that heavy fighting continued.

The SDF is fighting IS in a 4-square-kilometer area that includes Baghuz and is near the Iraqi border. They are backed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes.

South Korea and the United States signed an agreement Sunday that increases the amount the South will pay for having U.S. troops there. The South will pay about $890 million under the one-year agreement. That's about $60 million more than last year.

Kang [Kyung-ya] Kyung-wha is South Korea's minister of foreign affairs. "The response so far has been quite positive. Of course, there are some points of criticism as well, and we'll have to deal with them. But I think at this point we were able to close the gap on the total amount, the number."

The new deal represents an 8.2 percent hike in Seoul's payment for helping to maintain the 28,500 American troops in South Korea.

Parliament must till approve the deal. It's expected to do that in April.

Thousands of people marched Sunday in the Spanish capital, Madrid, responding to a call by right-wing political parties to protest the government's negotiations with Catalan separatists.

Supporters of conservative Popular Party and far-right Vox Party took to the streets of Madrid to call for Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to step down.

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Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi has been elected chairman of the African Union at the group's summit in Ethiopia.

The rights group Amnesty International warned that el-Sissi's chairmanship might undermine the African Union's human rights mechanisms.

With Brexit just 47 days away, the British government asked lawmakers on Sunday to give Prime Minister Theresa May more time to rework her divorce deal with the European Union.

Communities Secretary James Brokenshire said Parliament would get to pass judgment on May's Brexit plan "no later than February 27."

The head of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, spoke about Brexit at the Dubai Government Summit on Sunday. "Whether it ends well, whether there is a smooth exit given by customs unions as predicated by some, or whether it's as a result of a brutal, you know, exit on March 29 without extension of notice, it's not going to be as good as it is now because there will be additional friction."

The British Parliament has rejected May's divorce bill, leaving her to seek changes from the EU.

The U.N. refugee agency says it is worried about reports that people are fleeing escalating violence in Myanmar's southern Chin State and Rakhine State, adding to growing instability in these regions.

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

More than 720,000 Rohingya refugees have fled to Bangladesh since August 2017 to escape persecution and violence in Myanmar. Because of previous refugee crises in Myanmar, Bangladesh currently is home to nearly one million Rohingya refugees.

The UNHCR praises the country's generosity and appeals to the authorities to continue to allow people fleeing violence in Myanmar to seek safety in Bangladesh.

The Trump administration is not ruling out another federal government shutdown.

Acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney told Fox News Sunday that President Trump is adamant that he wants a wall built on the southern border.

"We will take as much money as you can give us, and we will often find the money someplace else - legally - in other to secure that southern barrier. But this is going to get built with or without Congress."

Also on the program, Democratic Senator Jon Tester of Montana.

The White House had asked for $5.7 billion, which was rejected by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives to start building a southern wall.

President Trump has said he could declare a national emergency to build a wall without congressional approval using money approved for other projects. But key Republican lawmakers have warned him not to do that.

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