VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm Jim Bertel.

A Russian plane made a fiery landing in Moscow Sunday. Russian officials say at least 40 people have been killed.

Video from the scene shows passengers using emergency slides to evacuate the burning plane.

Russia's Investigative Committee has opened a criminal investigation into the incident.

Media reports say the Aeroflot plane had 78 people on board.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ordered the army to keep up massive strikes against Hamas targets in Gaza in the deadliest fighting along the border in five years.

Israel killed a Hamas commander in a targeted strike, the first such killing since the 2014 Gaza war.

Reuters David Doyle reports.

The death toll rose on both sides of the Israel-Gaza border on Sunday. Among the dead, top Hamas commander Hamed Ahmed Al-Khodary.

Israel's military says more than 600 projectiles have been fired at southern Israel since Friday and that it's attacked 260 targets belonging to Gaza militant groups, the ruling Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

In Gaza, at least eight civilians have been killed since Friday. On Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the Israeli military to continue with "massive strikes" and said forces around the Gaza Strip would be stepped up.

That's Reuters David Doyle reporting.

Catholics in Sri Lanka celebrated Sunday Mass at their homes for another week Sunday. This was prompted by security concerns following attacks last month that killed more than 250 people.

As he did last week, Cardinal Malcom Ranjith conducted a private memorial mass that was broadcast on television.

Also on Sunday, the Sri Lankan government imposed a curfew on Negombo and reimposed a ban on social media.

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A Taliban suicide bomber detonated his explosive-laden vehicle at a police headquarters in northern Afghanistan Sunday. A six-hour gun battle between gunmen and security forces followed.

The attack killed at least 13 security personnel and injured more than 55 other people.

The standoff between the White House and Congress over special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russia's tampering with the U.S. election continues.

A Democratic member of the House Judiciary Committee says he is hopeful Mueller will testify before the committee, but President Trump says he shouldn't do it.

AP's Ben Thomas reports.

"A tentative date has been set for May 15 and we hope the special counsel will appear. We think the American people have a right to hear directly from him."

But on Fox News Sunday, Congressman David Cicilline conceded the Judiciary Committee has not confirmed Robert Mueller's appearance.

"... until the date comes, we never have an absolute guarantee. The White House has so far indicated they would not interfere with Mr. Mueller's attempts to testify, we hope that won't change."

But President Trump doesn't sound happy about it, tweeting Sunday "Bob Mueller should not testify. No redos for the Dems!"

The president said last week he would leave the decision to his attorney general.

Ben Thomas, Washington.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says Venezuelan President Nicholás Maduro is only ruling for the moment despite last week's failed effort by opposition leader Juan Guaidó to overthrow his regime.

Meanwhile, Democratic Senator Dick Durbin on CBS's "Face the Nation" says Russia has contributed to the upheaval in Venezuela by sending in soldiers in unmarked green army uniforms to support President Maduro.

"They are destabilizing the situation there. They're there to, to support Maduro. They don't wanna see the change that the American people wanna see and that's to have a free election in that country and the choice of someone democratically."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov says he hopes President Trump is not considering military options.

Top U.S. officials throughout the week praised the efforts to overthrow Maduro's government as its fall appeared possible. But Pompeo rejected the suggestion that the aborted takeover was a U.S. intelligence failure.

U.S. President Donald Trump is pressuring China to speed up talks on a new trade agreement. To do that starting Friday, he will impose sharply higher tariffs on billions of dollars of Chinese exports to the United States.

There was no immediate reaction from China about Trump's announcement.

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