

Thirteen Philippine college students on a camping holiday and a bus driver were killed and dozens injured on Monday when their bus slammed into an electricity post in a mountainous region, police said.

# Famine declared in South Sudan

Famine has been declared in parts of South Sudan, where UN agencies warned on Monday that war and a collapsing economy have left 100,000 people facing starvation.

A further 1 million people were classified as being on the brink of famine, according to the World Food Programme (WFP) and other UN bodies. Unimpeded humanitarian access was urgently needed to reverse "an escalating catastrophe", they added, the Guardian reported.

The famine is the first to be declared since 2011 in Somalia, where more than a quarter of a million people are estimated to have died between October 2010 and April 2012.

The UN has warned that three other countries – Yemen, Somalia and Nigeria – are at risk of famine.

Famine has been declared in parts of Unity State in the northern-central part of South Sudan.

Three years of civil war has devastated hopes that the oil-rich country would prosper when it gained independence from Sudan at the end of one of Africa's longest running conflicts. Unity State, which borders Sudan, has been at the centre of some of the fiercest fighting, while tens of thousands have been forced to flee their homes in the face of a government offensive against opposition-held areas.

The worsening crisis in South Sudan comes as three other countries – Yemen, Somalia and Nigeria – are at risk of looming famines, agencies have warned.

About 4.9 million people – more than 40% of South Sudan's population – are in need of urgent food, agriculture and



nutrition assistance, according to an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) update released on Monday by the government, humanitarian organizations and the WFP, The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN children's fund, UNICEF.

The IPC update, which was based on information built up over recent months, added that the total number of food insecure people is expected to rise

to 5.5 million in July if nothing is done to curb the severity and spread of the food crisis.

The IPC report, which assessed 23 of South Sudan's 86 counties, estimates that 14 have global acute malnutrition (GAM), a measurement of the nutritional status of a population, at or above the emergency threshold of 15%. In some areas it was as high as 42%.

The WFP said it plans to provide food

and nutrition assistance to 4.1 million people during this year's "hunger season" – when food from the last harvest has run out but new crops haven't come in yet – including emergency food, cash and nutrition assistance.

UNICEF, which said more than 1 million children are estimated to be acutely malnourished across South Sudan, plans to treat 207,000 children for severe malnutrition this year.

## Turkish soldiers accused of Erdogan assassination attempt go on trial

Prosecutors called for life sentences for more than 40 Turkish soldiers on Monday at the start of their trial for attempting to assassinate President Tayyip Erdogan during last year's failed coup, according to the indictment obtained by Reuters.

Under tight security, the defendants were bussed in to a courthouse in the southwestern city of Mugla, not far from the luxury resort where Erdogan and his family narrowly escaped the soldiers, fleeing in a helicopter shortly before their hotel was attacked.

plead. One of the first defendants to testify admitted to accepting a mission to seize, but not kill, Erdogan.

"My mission was to take the president and bring him to Akinci airbase safe and sound," Gokhan Sonmezates told the court, referring to a base outside Ankara that briefly functioned as a command center for the coup plotters.

Turkey says the coup was orchestrated by a US-based opposition figure, Fetullah Gulen, who has lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999. He has denied the

of Gulen's network.

"It was for the country, for the nation, to stop the decay domestically, to put an end to the bribery, to protect my country from the PKK," he told the court, referring to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The suspects, who include Erdogan's former aide-de-camp, were wearing suits when they were brought from prison to the courthouse. They were met by a crowd of some 200 people waving flags and calling for their execution.

Turkey formally abolished



More than 240 people were killed during the July 15 failed coup, when a group of rogue soldiers commandeered tanks, warplanes and helicopters, attacking Parliament and attempting to overthrow the government.

On Monday, prosecutors in Mugla charged 47 suspects, almost all of them soldiers, with charges including attempting to assassinate the president, breaching the constitution and membership of an armed terrorist organization.

It was not immediately clear how all the suspects would

charges and condemned the coup.

Since the failed coup, more than 40,000 people have been arrested and more than 100,000 have been sacked or suspended from the military, civil service and private sector.

Turkey launched its first criminal trial related to the coup in December and more trials are expected.

Sonmezates, a former brigadier general, was described in the indictment as a leader of the mission, something he denied in court. He also denied charges that he was a member

of the death penalty as part of its 2002 European Union accession talks. Since the coup, crowds have repeatedly called for it to be restored, a move that would likely spell the end of Turkey's bid to join the EU.

According to the indictment, 37 soldiers were charged with having a direct role in the storming of the luxury Grand Yazici Club Turban, others are those who provided assistance to the operation.

The soldiers in helicopters descended on the hotel in Marmaris, on ropes, shooting, just after Erdogan had left.

## Report: Washington prepares to bring N. Koreans to US for talks

Preparations are underway to bring senior North Korean officials to the United States for talks with former US officials, the first such meeting in more than five years, The Washington Post reported.

The talks would be the clearest indication yet that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un wants to communicate with the new US administration.

Planning for the "Track 1.5 talks" is still in a preparatory stage the Post reported, citing multiple people with knowledge of the arrangements.

That name, reflecting planned contact between former US officials and current North Korean ones, is a reference to what are known as "Track 2" talks involving former officials on both sides, Reuters reported.

The US State Department has not yet approved the North Koreans' visas for the talks, the newspaper said.

A State Department spokesman commented to Reuters only that Track 2 meetings "routinely" take place on a variety of topics around the world and occur independent of the US government.

A White House official commented that the US government had no plans to meet with North Korea.

North Korea's testing of an intermediate-range ballistic missile drew international condemnation last week. President Donald Trump told a news conference after the test: Obviously North Korea is a big, big problem and we will deal with that very strongly."

Han Tae-song, the new Ambassador of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the UN in Geneva, addressing the UN-backed Conference on Disarmament, said, "The various test fires conducted by DPRK for building up self-defense capabilities are, with no exception, self-defense measures to protect national sovereignty and the safety of the people against direct threats by hostile forces."

## German minister: Greece's EU-IMF lenders reach 'common position'

Greece's EU-IMF lenders reached a "common position" on Greece that should allow them to return to Athens to resolve a deadlock over its bailout, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaueble said Monday.

"I am working on the principle that the (creditor) institutions now have a common position and that we have come far enough for the technical mission to go back to Athens," Schaueble said, as he met eurozone colleagues in Brussels, AFP reported.

Pro-austerity hawk Schaueble added that he was confident the International Monetary Fund would continue to participate in Greece's bailout, despite being at odds with the eurozone on key issues of debt relief and budget targets.



getty images

Jeroen Dijsselbloem, who heads the Eurogroup of finance ministers from the 19-country currency area, said it was a "good step".

"We've had intense talks with the institutions and Greek government in order to clear

## US defense secretary: No plan to seize Iraq oil

The US military is not in Iraq "to seize anybody's oil", Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said, distancing himself from remarks by President Donald Trump at the start of a visit to Iraq on Monday.

Mattis, on his first trip to Iraq as Pentagon chief, is likely to face questions about Trump's remarks and actions, including a temporary ban on travel to the United States and for saying America should have seized Iraq's oil after toppling Saddam Hussein in 2003.



He is also hoping to assess the war effort as Iraqi forces launch a new push to evict Daesh terrorists from their remaining stronghold in the city of Mosul, Reuters reported.

Trump told CIA staff in January: "We should have kept the oil. But okay. Maybe you'll have another chance."

Mattis, however, flatly ruled out any such intent. "We're not in Iraq to seize anybody's oil," he told reporters traveling with him.

His remarks are the latest example of his policy differences with Trump.

Trump has acknowledged that Mattis did not agree with him about the usefulness of torture as an interrogation tactic but, in a sign of Mattis' influence, said he would defer the matter to his defense secretary.

Mattis has also distanced himself from Trump's labeling of the media as "the enemy of the American people," saying he had no problems with the press.

A retired Marine general who led American troops in Iraq, Mattis has also sought an exemption from Trump's travel ban for Iraqis who served with US troops, including translators.

He said he had not seen a new executive order which the administration is considering. "But I right now am assured that we will take steps to allow those who have fought alongside us, for example, to be allowed into the United States," Mattis said.

## Egypt court upholds death sentences over football riot

An Egyptian court upheld Monday death sentences against 10 people convicted over rioting that claimed 74 lives at a stadium in Port Said in 2012, judicial and security officials said.

The ruling by the Court of Cassation, which is final, excluded an 11th defendant who remains at large after his death penalty was also confirmed in June 2015 by another court, AFP reported.



The court upheld prison sentences for around 40 other people, including a five-year term against Port Said's security chief at the time, a judicial official said.

Monday's ruling was welcomed by relatives of those who died in the rioting, who celebrated outside the court in Cairo. The riot, the country's deadliest sports-related violence, broke out when fans of home team Al Masry and Cairo's Al Ahly clashed after a premier league match between the two clubs.

the ground for the mission to return to Athens," Dijsselbloem, who is also the Dutch finance minister, told reporters.

"In the Eurogroup we will discuss whether we have reached that point. We've covered a lot of ground, we will see if we've done enough."

Greece's eurozone and International Monetary Fund creditors have been locked in a months-long stalemate, while Athens has been resisting further reforms.

Financial markets have been spooked by fears of a return of the "Grexit" crisis, with Athens soon needing the latest tranche of the huge 86-billion-euro (\$91 billion) bailout agreed in 2015 so it can afford to repay seven billion euros in debt in July.