

The body of an Afghan government employee who also worked as a part-time journalist in western Farah region has been found three days after he was kidnapped by the Taliban, local officials said Wednesday.

US-China trade talks conclude as hopes of a deal build

Chinese and US teams ended trade talks in Beijing on Wednesday that lasted longer than expected and officials said details will be released soon, raising hopes an all-out trade war that could badly disrupt the global economy can be avoided.

The talks were extended into an unscheduled third day, showing both sides were "serious", China's Foreign Ministry said, Reuters reported.

Share prices jumped in Asia and markets in Europe and the United States were expected to follow suit as the longer talks fueled optimism that the world's largest economies were inching toward an agreement.

US Undersecretary of Agriculture for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs Ted McKinney said the US trade delegation would return to the United States later on Wednesday after a "good few days".

"I think they went just fine," McKinney said of the talks.

"It's been a good one for us," he told reporters at the delegation's hotel, without elaborating.

Speaking at a daily news briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang confirmed both sides had agreed to extend the talks beyond Monday and Tuesday as originally scheduled.

Asked if that meant the talks had been difficult, Lu said: "I can only say that extending the consultations shows that the two sides were indeed very serious in conducting the consultations."

This week's meetings are the first face-to-face talks since US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed in December to a 90-day truce in a trade war that has roiled global financial markets.

The editor of a state-run Chinese newspaper said in a social media post he expected China and the United States to release statements early on Thursday.

"From what I know, the trade talks, though arduous, were conducted in a pleasant and candid atmosphere. Neither side has made a briefing, because the US delegation is on the plane now," wrote Hu Xijin, editor of the Global Times, pub-



The photo shows trade negotiators including US Undersecretary of Agriculture for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs Ted McKinney (R) in Beijing on January 9, 2019.

lished by the ruling Communist Party's official People's Daily.

"The two sides will release messages at the same time on Thursday morning Beijing time," Hu said.

The extra day of talks came amid signs of progress on issues including purchases of US farm and energy commodities and increased access to China's markets.

However, people familiar with the negotiations told Reuters on Tuesday the two sides were further apart on Chinese structural reforms that the Trump administration is demanding in order to stop alleged theft and forced transfer of US technology, and on how China will be held to its promises.

If no deal is reached by March 2, Trump has said he will proceed with raising tar-

iffs to 25 percent from 10 percent on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports, at a time when China's economy is slowing significantly, Beijing has retaliated in turn to US tariffs.

But as meetings wound down in Beijing on Tuesday evening, Trump tweeted: "Talks with China are going very well!"

The US team is led by Deputy US Trade Representative Jeffrey Gerrish, and includes undersecretaries from the US Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Energy and Treasury, as well as senior officials from the White House.

Vice Commerce Minister Wang Shouwen heads the vice ministerial level talks for China, though Vice Premier Liu He, a top economic adviser to Xi, made an appearance at a meeting on Monday.

China is keen to put an end to its trade dispute with the United States but will not make any "unreasonable concessions" and any agreement must involve compromise on both sides, state newspaper the China Daily said on Wednesday.

The paper said in an editorial that Beijing's stance remained firm that the dispute harms both countries and disrupts the international trade order and supply chains.

In what was widely seen as a goodwill gesture, China on Tuesday issued long-awaited approvals for the import of five genetically modified crops, which could boost its purchases of US grains as farmers decide which crops to plant in the spring.

On Monday, Chinese importers made another large purchase of US soybeans, their third in the past month.

N. Korea's Kim ends Beijing visit as Trump summit looms

Kim Jong-un's train left Beijing on Wednesday after the North Korean leader visited his key ally on a trip seen as a strategy session ahead of his expected summit with the US President Donald Trump.

Kim arrived in Beijing on Tuesday for his fourth visit to Pyongyang's major diplomatic friend, meeting President Xi Jinping and reportedly visiting a factory.

in state media even in the nightly news broadcast hours after the train's departure.

Kim met for one hour with the Chinese president on Tuesday and the two later dined with their wives at Beijing's Great Hall of the People, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

"Chairman Kim Jong-un's visit to China was at the invitation of President Xi Jinping, of course President

Kim chose China for his maiden official trip abroad last year before holding meetings with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Trump.

The American leader said Sunday that the United States and North Korea are negotiating the location of their next summit.

Discussions between the US and North Korea over Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal have stalled since Kim and Trump's high-profile summit in Singapore in June where they issued a vaguely worded declaration about denuclearization.

The US insists that UN sanctions must remain in place until North Korea gives up its weapons, while Pyongyang wants them immediately eased. China also wants the sanctions to be relaxed.

Yonhap, citing unidentified sources, reported that Kim toured a factory operated by medicine firm Tongrentang for about half an hour in an economic zone in the Chinese capital.

"For North Korea itself, 2019 is his strategic turning point. If he wants to shift his focus to the development of the economy, he needs China's cooperation," said Lu Chao, a North Korea expert at China's Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences.

In the New Year speech, Kim focused on North Korea's economy, saying that improving people's lives was his top priority and tackling energy shortages was an urgent task.

The visit coincided with negotiations between US and Chinese officials in Beijing to resolve a bruising trade war between the world's two biggest economies.

Italy, Poland want 'new spring' in Europe – Salvini

Italy's far-right Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini said on Wednesday he wants his country and Poland to join forces to reshape Europe in his quest for a Euro-sceptic alliance ahead of elections in May.



SLAWOMIR KAMINSKI VIA REUTERS

"Poland and Italy will be part of the new spring of Europe, the renaissance of European values," he said at a press conference in Warsaw with Poland's Interior Minister Joachim Brudziński, Reuters reported.

The meeting was initiated by Brudziński, who said the two discussed migration and EU border security. Salvini added that they spoke about Poland and Italy's cooperation on building a new continent, "The Europe that will come to form in June (after May's European Parliament elections) will lead us all rather than the one that exists today and is run by bureaucrats."

Salvini will also meet with Poland's ruling party leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski on Wednesday in Warsaw to discuss the new Euro-sceptic alliance.

Salvini, who heads Italy's anti-immigrant League Party, has repeatedly criticized the EU and says the May elections are vital for creating a "reformist" bloc that can overhaul Brussels institutions from within. Poland's government, run by the Law and Justice (PiS) party, has also demanded the EU offer more sovereignty to member countries and meddle less in national affairs.

UK government defeated as MPs vote for quick action if Brexit deal rejected

Compiled from Dispatches

The British government was defeated in Parliament on Wednesday as members of Parliament voted for a procedural change that reduces the time it has to come up with an alternative plan if Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal is defeated next week.

The 308 to 297 defeat tries to force the government to come back within three working parliamentary days with a plan B, rather than the 21 days specified in Brexit law. The change is unlikely to supersede the 21 day time limit in law, but adds political pressure, Reuters reported.

If May's deal is voted down next week, ministers have to say in a parliamentary motion how they plan to proceed within 21 days.

Angry protests

Some protesters wrap themselves in the flag of the European Union and noisily interrupt politicians' television appearances. Others yell "Nazi" and "traitor".

Britain's lawmakers are split on how to handle Brexit but they agree that the atmosphere in the public spaces outside Parliament – often populated with angry demonstrators – has become ugly and intimidating.

This increasingly raucous brand of street activism has raised questions about what has happened to British politics in recent



HANNAH MCKAY/REUTERS

Pro-EU supporters hold flags outside the Houses of Parliament in Westminster London, Britain, on December 19, 2018.

years, and where the boundaries of free speech now lie.

More than 2-1/2 years since Britain voted by 52 to 48 percent to leave the European Union, the country remains divided. Demonstrators who back Brexit and others who want to stay in the European Union have become a fixture in the gardens opposite Parliament.

The area is also used by media for interviews and while protests have generally been peaceful, politicians and journalists say the atmosphere has turned increasingly nasty in recent weeks.

Roadmap to second referendum

Pro-European Union campaigners in Britain have set out for the first time their preferred path for how Parliament could force the government to call a fresh vote on Brexit, arguing that there is still time for another referendum.

The future of Brexit remains deeply uncertain – with options ranging from a disorderly exit to another referendum – because British lawmakers are expected on Jan. 15 to vote down the deal that the prime minister struck with the EU in November.

May has repeatedly rejected the idea of a second referendum on leaving the EU, but the campaign for a so-called "People's Vote" on the deal that May has agreed, has won support from some in Parliament.

The People's Vote campaign said in a report that lawmakers should amend that motion by calling for another referendum. This would happen around the middle of February.

Britain would then be forced to ask for an extension to its timetable for leaving the EU to allow enough time for another referendum campaign, which may take around four months.

World Bank warns brewing...

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Kose, who heads the World Bank's Development Prospects Group – which twice a year produces the global economic forecasts – said he hoped for a resolution but meanwhile urged governments to prepare for a difficult road ahead.

"Global growth is still robust but whether a storm will hit or it will clear highly depends on how policymakers are going to react," he said.

"Though the bank still sees a low probability of recession in the United States, even a small slowdown has an outside effect. And if the United States and China slow by a full percentage point, it will cut global growth by nearly the same amount, with dire consequences for many countries."

"Trade tensions are already affecting activity around the world," Kose said, and it could get worse.

The report sharply downgraded the growth forecasts for key emerging market economies like Mexico, South Africa and Russia, as well as for crisis-struck countries Turkey and Argentina. So far India and Indonesia have escaped that fate.

But the United States and China together account for about a third of global GDP and 20 percent of global trade.

"How they resolve their differences is going to be very important how global economy is going to shape this year," said Kose. "Trade is an engine of growth and has been a driving force in terms of poverty reduction," he said. "Our hope is that these differences are going to be resolved."



KCNA VIA KNS/AFP KCNA VIA KNS

The North Korean leader's motorcade was spotted entering the Beijing central railway station on Wednesday afternoon, and the train departed shortly after on a day-long ride back to the northeast border, according to AFP journalists.

The unannounced trip was largely shrouded in secrecy. Beyond confirming his presence in Beijing, no details have been provided by either North Korea or China on his schedule, with no coverage

Xi would hold meetings and talks with him," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said at a regular press briefing, adding that more details would be released later.

Tuesday's meeting focused on Kim's expected meeting with Trump, according to Yonhap.

In a New Year speech, Kim warned that Pyongyang may change its approach to nuclear talks if Washington persists with sanctions.