

Turkey to set up Syria security zone: Erdogan

Istanbul, Turkey

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday that Ankara would set up a "security zone" in northern Syria suggested by US President Donald Trump.

Erdogan's comments came a day after he held a telephone call with Trump in a bid to ease tensions after the US leader threatened to "devastate" the Turkish economy if Ankara attacks Kurdish forces.

Turkey has welcomed Washington's planned withdrawal of some 2,000 US troops from Syria but the future of US-backed Kurdish militia forces labelled



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

terrorists by Ankara has poisoned ties between the NATO allies.

Erdogan said he held a "quite positive" telephone conversation with Trump late on Mon-

day where he reaffirmed that "a 20-mile (30 kilometre) security zone along the Syrian border... will be set up by us."

Trump on Sunday tweeted the United States would "devastate Turkey economically if they hit Kurds", a threat that drew angry retorts from Ankara.

The Turkish army has launched two major operations in Syria dubbed "Euphrates Shield" in 2016 and "Olive Branch" in 2018 to combat against Syrian Kurdish fighters as well as Islamic State jihadists.

But the last offensive sought to roll back gains by Syrian Kurdish fighters who have governed parts of northern Syria

since 2012.

The deployment of Turkish troops and their proxy forces in areas of northwest Syria has drawn accusations by some critics of a Turkish military occupation.

Erdogan dismissed the label and said: "Comparing Turkey's presence in Syria with that of any other state or power is an insult to both history and our civilisation.

"If we did not have a presence there, if we turned our back on what is going on over there, closed our borders and our hearts to people coming from there, then we would have betrayed ourselves, indeed."

Serena made sure baby's first doll 'Qai Qai' was black



Serena Williams with her family. (Source: Serena Instagram)

Melbourne, Australia

Serena Williams says she made sure the first doll her daughter Alexis Olympia received was black, and her second one will be white as she teaches a message of "love for each other".

The tennis great, in Melbourne in her bid to win a 24th Grand Slam title, is married to Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian with their first child born in late 2017.

Williams, 37, said she rarely came across black dolls when she was growing up and wanted to make sure her baby had one.

"Qai Qai is a doll I got for her. I wanted her to have a black doll," she said after easing into the tournament second round Tuesday.

"Growing up, I didn't have that many opportunities to have black dolls. And I was just thinking, like, I want her first doll to be black.

"And her heritage, obviously she's mixed, she's Caucasian and black, but I feel like that was her first doll and I said her second doll would be Caucasian.

"I definitely want to always teach her love and teach her just that humans should always have love for each other, no matter what colour they are," she added.

Qai Qai is described on the social media platform as "daughter and best friend of @olympiaohanian and



Bizarrely, the doll has its own Instagram page with more than 87,000 followers, and growing.

granddaughter of @serenawilliams".

Williams said the name Qai Qai came from her nephew.

"We were all sitting in our living room, and we were running around names, and he said, 'call her Qai Qai'. He actually is the magic behind the name," said the American.

Williams last played the Australian Open in 2017, when she won the tournament while eight weeks pregnant. She assured reporters she wasn't expecting again as she reflected on life on the road with a child.

"It's definitely different to travel with a toddler as opposed to a baby, an infant," she said.

"Infants I think are easier, and everyone said it's easier. I didn't quite understand.

"Olympia takes a lot more attention now, which is why I'm trying to get out of here (press conference room). It's cool. It's really cool to be a mom and to be her mom, in particular. I feel really special."

Explosion, gunfire at Nairobi hotel, office complex

Nairobi, Kenya

Gunfight was underway following a blast at a hotel and office complex in a leafy Nairobi neighbourhood yesterday.

A blast at the DusitD2 compound, which includes a hotel and several office buildings housing international companies, was heard from AFP's offices some five kilometres (three miles) away.

Simon Crump, who works at

one of the offices, said workers had barricaded themselves inside their offices after "several" explosions.

"We have no idea what is happening. Gunshots are coming from multiple directions," he told AFP, adding that the people were terrified.

Police sirens echoed through the city and a helicopter buzzed overhead.

A reporter sent to the scene said the gunmen and security forces were exchanging gunfire.



Two men stand next to burning cars at the scene of an explosion at a hotel complex in Nairobi

Bird sparks a flap on 12 hr Singapore to London flight



The bird appeared calm in the video CREDIT: FACEBOOK

Singapore, Singapore

A bird caused a flap on a Singapore to London flight after it suddenly appeared in the plane's business class section 12 hours into the journey, an airline said yesterday.

A video circulating on social media showed the bird perched on top of a headrest, about two hours before the flight was due to arrive in the British capital.

An initial attempt by a member of cabin crew on the Singapore Airlines flight to catch the creature failed -- prompting some of the passengers to join the hunt.

"It was subsequently caught by cabin crew with the assistance of some of the passengers on board and handed over to authorities in charge of animal quarantine upon the aircraft's arrival in London," the airline said in a statement.

The statement did not say how the stowaway was able to sneak on to Flight SQ322 on January 7.

But the animal -- reported to be a myna, a dark brown bird native to southern Asia -- made the journey without paying the hefty price tag.

According to Singapore Airlines' website, a return flight to London from the city-state in business class costs around Sg\$6,000 (\$4,400).

Seoul drops 'enemy' reference to North Korea

Seoul, South Korea

Seoul crossed out a reference to nuclear-armed North Korea as its enemy in a defence white paper published Tuesday, amid rapidly warming ties despite stalled nuclear talks between Pyongyang and Washington.

The 1950-53 Korean War ended with an armistice

rather than a peace treaty, placing a heavily fortified border across the peninsula and leaving it still technically at war.

For years South Korea and the United States have carried out large-scale military drills against potential attacks from the North, while Pyongyang has repeatedly threatened to turn Seoul into a sea of fire.

Scientist see mounting ice loss in Antarctica

Tampa, United States

Global warming is melting ice in Antarctica faster than ever before -- about six times more per year now than 40 years ago -- leading to increasingly high sea levels worldwide, scientists warned on Monday.

Already, Antarctic melting has raised global sea levels more than half an inch (1.4 centimeters) between 1979 and 2017, said the report in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), a peer-reviewed US journal.

And the pace of melting is expected to lead to disastrous sea level rise in the years to come, according to lead author Eric Rignot, chair of Earth system science at the University of California, Irvine.

"As the Antarctic ice sheet continues to melt away, we expect multi-meter sea level rise from Antarctica in the coming



Representative picture

centuries," Rignot said.

A rise of 1.8 meters (six feet) by 2100, as some scientists forecast in worst-case scenarios would flood many coastal cities that are home to millions of people around the world, previous research has shown.

For the current study, researchers embarked on the longest-ever assessment of ice mass in the Antarctic, across 18

geographic regions.

Data came from high-resolution aerial photographs taken by NASA planes, along with satellite radar from multiple space agencies. Researchers discovered that from 1979 to 1990, Antarctica shed an average of 40 billion tons of ice mass annually.

By the years 2009 to 2017, the ice loss had increased more than sixfold, to 252 billion tons per

year.

Even more worrying, researchers found that areas that were once considered "stable and immune to change" in East Antarctica, are shedding quite a lot of ice, too, said the study.

"The Wilkes Land sector of East Antarctica has, overall, always been an important participant in the mass loss, even as far back as the 1980s, as our research has shown," Rignot said.

"This region is probably more sensitive to climate than has traditionally been assumed, and that's important to know, because it holds even more ice than West Antarctica and the Antarctic Peninsula together."

Warming ocean water will only speed up ice loss in the future, Rignot said.

Recent research has shown that oceans are heating up faster than previously thought, setting new heat records in the last few years.