



Malaysian police chief publicly confirms murdered man was Kim Jong Nam

On Friday, March 10, 2017, Malaysia's Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar spoke to reporters and confirmed the man murdered in Kuala Lumpur International Airport was indeed Kim Jong Nam, half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. "We have fulfilled the requirement of the laws on his identification," he said.

Malaysian authorities had been very cautious about calling the murdered man Kim Jong Nam in public, referring to him instead as "Kim Chol," the name on one of his passports. Although he did not say whether Malaysian authorities' request for a Kim family DNA sample had been granted or whether any such sample had been used in the identification, Khalid dismissed a report in the *New Straits Times* on Saturday claiming Kim had been identified by the pattern of moles on his face, saying "No. Not True. That is not enough for us."

Two women, Indonesian Siti Aisyah and Vietnamese Doan Thi Huong, were charged with Kim's murder. Both women protest their innocence, claiming they thought they had been hired to spray passengers with harmless baby oil, but Malaysian police say Kim died of VX nerve agent, which the United Nations classifies as a weapon of mass destruction. North Korean authorities claim Kim died of a heart attack. Aisyah has been the subject of protests outside the Malaysian embassy in Jakarta. Members of workers' and religious groups waved banners saying "Siti Aisyah is only a victim of political conspiracy interests" and "Save Siti Aisyah."

The murder and its investigation have driven up tensions between North Korea and Malaysia. Both countries temporarily barred each other's citizens from leaving, though North Korea recently allowed two Malaysian employees of the United Nations World Food Programme to leave North Korea. Nine Malaysians were believed to still be on North Korean soil, embassy workers and their families.

UK chancellor raises national insurance payments for self-employed in new budget

UK chancellor Philip Hammond announced his 2017 budget on Wednesday, March 8, 2017, which included a £2 billion pledge to social care and a tax hike on the self-employed. It was accused of breaking Conservative Party manifesto promises.



Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond, from file, 2016.

Image: Andrej Klizan. (CC0 1.0/Public Domain)

It was announced there will be a 2% increase in national insurance contributions for the self-employed, with chancellor Philip Hammond citing worries that people were choosing to

become self-employed in order to pay lower taxes and his perception of unfairness in the different rates paid by employees and self-employees. There were accusations this change in policy goes against the manifesto promises the Conservative Party ran on in 2015, which promised four times that there would be no increase in national insurance rates. Conservative MP Anna Soubry tweeted saying she believed these new measures would be unpopular as many would see them as unfair. The leader of the opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, claimed the new measures will not clamp down on people whose self-employment is just for tax benefits, instead causing problems for those legitimately self-employed, arguing that if they are to start paying similar tax rates to the employed then they should get rights such as statutory maternity pay. The think tank Resolution claimed, however, this increase is outweighed by other government policies and is, therefore, a good move.

In addition to this, the chancellor announced a £2 billion pledge to social care over the next three years, saying he was aware of the stress the ageing population is having on the NHS and social care. Liberal Democrat Norman Lamb described the amount as "wholly inadequate", saying much more is needed to pay for an increase in care demands due to the ageing population. The lowest threshold at which shareholders pay dividend taxes is to be lowered from £5,000 to £2,000 claiming that the taxes for dividends provided "an extremely generous tax break for investors with substantial share portfolios". Other budget announcements include an additional £325 million for the NHS, £90 million transport spending for the North of England, £20 million to support campaigning against violence against girls and women and a slight increase in funding for the devolved governments.

Scientists say excess cerebrospinal fluid may serve as early sign of autism

In a study that appeared on Monday, March 6, 2017, in *Biological Psychiatry*, scientists from the Universities of California and North Carolina, with several other universities in the United States and Canada, report a strong correlation between the abnormal distribution of cerebrospinal fluid in infants and later development of autistic symptoms.

"The more extra-axial CSF present at six months, the more severe the autism symptoms when the kids were diagnosed at 24 months of age," said first author Dr Mark Shen, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of North Carolina.

The study covered 343 children examined aged six months, twelve months, and twenty-four months, 221 of whom had older siblings with autism. Children with higher than usual volumes of cerebrospinal fluid in the subarachnoid space — the area just around the brain — were more likely to be diagnosed with autism later in life, with a strong correlation in the high-risk group. Ultimately, cerebrospinal volume was able to provide an early diagnosis of probably ASD in high-risk children with 70% accuracy. The six-month-old babies who later went on to a diagnosis of autism had an average of 18% more CSF by volume than those who were not so diagnosed. This built on the findings of a 2013 study that covered only 55 children.

Researchers said it is not clear whether a large amount of cerebrospinal fluid actually causes autism or not. While studies have shown that cerebrospinal fluid, once thought to act solely as a cushioner and shock absorber for the brain, can influence the way neurons grow, Shen speculated that the large amount of fluid may itself be a symptom: "We believe that extra-axial CSF is an early sign that CSF is not filtering and draining when it should. The result is that there could be a buildup of neuroinflammation that isn't being washed [a]way."

Currently, coauthor David Amaral said, children are not diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders until they are old enough for their behaviour to change, usually at two or three years old. Researchers said these findings could be used to develop an early diagnostic system usable when the patient is as young as six months old.

Travel ban 2.0 exempts Iraqis, US permanent residents

On Monday, March 6, 2017, US president Donald Trump signed in the Oval Office a revised version of his executive order barring entry to the United States by refugees and individuals from certain Muslim-majority countries. While the previous ban, which caused chaos at airports and drew considerable criticism from within and outside of the US government, covered seven countries, this one names only six and specifically exempts legal permanent residents and anyone who already has a visa to enter the country, or a visa revoked by the earlier executive order.

Residents of Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen must now wait 90 days for visas. Iraq was removed following concerns that people who had helped the United States military and Iraqi government during and after the Iraq War might be left in danger. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said this was because the US State Department and Iraqi government improved the vetting process, though he did not say what exactly changed. The Iraqi government also lobbied heavily. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi spoke with President Trump by phone and Vice President Pence in person. A senior official with the Trump administration also told reporters the Iraqi government had promised "timely repatriation" for Iraqi nationals whom the US has decided to deport.

There is still a 120-day moratorium on accepting refugees into the US, though the ban on Syrian refugees is no longer indefinite. The new order omits language that gave priority to religious minorities, which critics such as National Public Radio's Domenico

Montanaro read as "Christians." Claims of religious discrimination against Muslims contributed to the first order's overturn by the judiciary.

Under the previous travel ban, permanent residents in possession of a green card were concerned that if they were to visit their home countries they might be barred from returning to the United States. The new executive order exempts them.

Representative Adam Schiff, a Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said both orders have "the same fundamental flaws." Representative Andre Carson of Indiana, who is Muslim, referred to this as "Muslim ban 2.0" on Twitter. Senator Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York, called for the order's repeal, saying, "A watered-down ban is still a ban."

Not all of the response has been negative. "I have always shared President Trump's desire to protect our homeland," said Senator Lindsay Graham, a Republican and a critic of the first executive order. "This Executive Order will achieve the goal of protecting our homeland and will, in my view, pass legal muster."

The order is set to go into effect on March 16. The White House continues to affirm that the original travel ban was legal and the issue may still be heard before the US Supreme Court.

Wikileaks publishes files on CIA hacking abilities

On Tuesday, March 7, 2017, WikiLeaks, the organisation behind the Edward Snowden leaks, released files going into detail about the CIA's hacking capabilities.

The collection, which WikiLeaks dubbed "vault 7", contains 8761 files including claims the CIA can bypass the encryption of many popular encrypted messaging apps including WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, Weibo, Confide, and Cloackman, and hack all major phone and computer operating systems, including 24 individual Android exploits, and Samsung smart TVs. It is

claimed the CIA can use the Samsung F8000 TV to spy while seemingly turned off, a technique WikiLeaks claimed was a collaborative development of the CIA with MI5. It also alleges the US consulate in Frankfurt is used as a "sensitive compartmentalised information facility", a secret base from which US spies hack Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

WikiLeaks compared the surveillance technology with George Orwell's novel *1984*, in which the TVs watch the citizens. The CIA said, "We do not comment on the authenticity or content of purported intelligence documents", though no spokesperson from the home office was available to comment. However, Edward Snowden, ex-CIA hacker and whistleblower who previously leaked CIA documents, said he thought they looked authentic, claiming the documents contained inside information.

Events from the last week on Wikinews

US Attorney General Jeff Sessions bows out of Russia investigation over contact with ambassador

US Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from any investigation of Russia's alleged interference in the 2016 US presidential race but reserved the right to make decisions "on a case-by-case basis" about other issues involving Russian hacking.

"I have decided," Sessions told the press, "to recuse myself from any existing or future investigations of any matters related in any way to the campaigns for President of the United States."

Politically concerned movie *Zootopia* wins Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film

Disney's *Zootopia* won the Oscars award for the Best Animated Feature Film at

the 89th Academy Awards ceremony held at Los Angeles. Pixar's animated short *Piper* won the Oscar for Best Animated Short Film and Disney's *The Jungle Book* won for Visual Effects.

Others competing with *Zootopia* in the category were *Kubo and the Two Strings*, *My Life as a Zucchini*, *The Red Turtle*, and Disney's *Moana*. This was the first Oscar for directors Byron Howard and Rich Moore who were previously nominated for, respectively, *Bolt* and *Wreck-It Ralph*.

In the acceptance speech, director Byron Howard said, "About five years ago, almost six now, [...] we got this crazy idea of talking about humanity with talking animals in the hopes that, when the film came out, it would make the world just a slightly better place." The Disney movie addresses several social problems such as racism, sexism, prejudice, stereotyping, and fear. *The New York Times* said the parental guidance (PG) rated movie was "Funny, smart, thought-provoking — and musical, too."

Siti Aisyah and Doan Thi Huong to be charged with murder of Kim Jong Nam with VX nerve agent

Malaysian Attorney General Mohamed Apandi Ali has announced Siti Aisyah and Doan Thi Huong will be formally charged tomorrow with the murder of Kim Jong Nam, who was killed in Kuala Lumpur International Airport on February 13.

After weeks of speculation, both the US and South Korean authorities have stated Kim was the target of a political assassination on the orders of the North Korean government, which is currently headed by his half-brother, Kim Jong Un. North Korea has continued to deny involvement, calling these "false reports."

Invited or not, news outlets criticise White House decision to pick and choose their peers

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer held an informal "gaggle" press briefing but made a point of excluding certain news outlets. The White House's decision has drawn ire from across the field, including organizations invited to the briefing, such as Fox News and *The Wall Street Journal*.

The New York Times and CNN, as well as the BBC, *The New York Daily News*, *Al Jazeera*, the *LA Times*, BuzzFeed, *The Hill*, and *The Daily Mail*, were all barred from attending the meeting, while Reuters, NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox News, Bloomberg, and the heavily conservative news outlets Breitbart News, One America News Network, and *The Washington Times* were admitted. *Time*, the Associated Press, and some other outlets were invited to the briefing but refused to attend in protest.

Syrian peace talks begin in Geneva

Peace talks between the Syrian government and its opposition officially began in Geneva, Switzerland. The talks, organized by the United Nations, aim toward a political solution to the Syrian Civil War that has lasted for more than five years.

The peace conference is being held at the United Nations Office at Geneva. After an opening ceremony which the opposition delegation nearly missed due to internal disagreements, the UN envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura formally announced the start of the first day of talks. The government and opposition delegations sat opposite each other with a UN assembly serving as a mediator.

Google performs first successful collision attack on SHA-1 security algorithm

Google announced that it had performed a successful collision attack on the popular SHA-1 cryptographic hash function for the first time — that they know of. The collision attack demonstrated an algorithm for making two distinct inputs map to the same hash output, putting at risk the usage of SHA-1 for verifying data integrity. Google published a blog post and made a website about the collision attack.

A successful attacker would be able to add a malicious file to the system to damage a backup relying on SHA-1 for checking data integrity, deliver a malicious update to clients using SHA-1 to verify the update file, attack and decrypt an encrypted connection to a website where the user's browser is using SHA-1 to identify the connection certificate, replace a file revision history using SHA-1 to identify commits, and perform other actions that would substitute for valuable files with something seemingly identical but misleading or malicious in practice. Similar systems not using SHA-1 would not be affected.

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