

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT

Senate opens historic trial

Congressional watchdog faults White House on Ukraine aid

REUTERS, Washington

The Senate impeachment trial on whether to remove US President Donald Trump from office formally began on Thursday even as a congressional watchdog found that the White House broke the law by withholding security aid for Ukraine approved by Congress.

The assessment from the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) was a setback for Trump, but it was unclear if it would figure in his trial in the Republican-led Senate given that key questions such as whether witnesses will testify or new evidence will be considered remain unanswered.

Democrat Adam Schiff, who heads a team of seven House of Representatives members who will serve as prosecutors, appeared on the Senate floor to read the two charges passed by the House on December 18 that accused Trump of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress arising from his dealings with Ukraine.

US Chief Justice John Roberts, wearing his black judicial robe, took an oath to preside over the trial and then swore in the assembled senators who will serve as jurors, asking if they would “do impartial justice.”

The 99 senators present signed their assent one by one. One senator - Republican Jim Inhofe - was in his
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Japan court halts nuke reactor restart

AFP, Tokyo

A Japanese nuclear reactor near a fault line must remain shut because of the risk of its being struck by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, a high court ordered yesterday.

All nuclear power stations were shut down after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident following a catastrophic tsunami, and many remain closed.

The Japanese public has turned against atomic power, despite Prime Minister Shinzo Abe insisting the nation needs nuclear plants to power the world's third-largest economy, and the court decision was a boost for the country's anti-nuclear movement.

The move by the Hiroshima

High Court reversed a lower court decision in March that would have allowed the reactor at the Ikata nuclear plant in western Japan to resume operations.

The plant's operator, Shikoku Electric Power, wanted to resume work at the reactor, which had been halted for routine inspections, and said it will appeal the high court's ruling.

The case was originally lodged by residents of a neighbouring region who complained the utility failed to properly evaluate the risks posed by a local volcano and seismic faultlines.

High court presiding judge Kazutake Mori revoked the lower court ruling that paved the way for the reactor to come online.

Govt okay with change of date

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He hoped that the EC would reach an acceptable solution in this regard, respecting a religion.

Taking a dig at Mirza Fakhru'l Islam Alamgir, Quader alleged that the BNP secretary general was spreading misleading information over the EVM use in the upcoming city polls.

“He himself was elected in a seat [in the last general election] where EVMs were used. A BNP candidate also won a municipality election in Bogura where voting was held using EVMs,” the AL general secretary mentioned.

Coming down heavily on Conoforum chief Dr Kamal Hossain for one of his remarks on the city polls, Quader said the election schedule was announced by the EC. The government did not do any wrong in this regard and that is why Dr Kamal's remarks were not fair at all, he added.

Replying to a query, the AL leader said BNP leaders were making derogatory remarks on Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina and other AL leaders, but the AL did not file any case against them.

“They will not find such freedom in any other part of the world,” he added.

Quader urged AL leaders who are contesting the city elections as councillor candidates without the party's consent to withdraw their candidatures.

10 FALL SICK

Ten DU students, including Jagannath Hall union General Secretary Kajal Das, its Social Welfare Secretary Pradip Das, and two general students of the hall Apurbo Chakrabarty and Arka Saha, fell sick while observing the hunger strike, said hall union Vice-president Utpal Biswas.

Apurbo and Arka were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Kajal and Pradip were being

administered intravenous saline.

Around 50 DU students have been observing the programme since Thursday noon.

SOLIDARITY

Expressing solidarity with the demonstrators, VC Akhtaruzzaman said their demand was logical. He also urged the authorities to reconsider the polls date.

Meanwhile, Jago Hindu Parishad, a platform of the Hindu community, staged demonstrations on the campus, demanding the polls deferral.

Members of the community and others have been demanding deferral of the polls date since January first week. Later, DNCC AL mayoral candidate Atiqul Islam and the BNP-led Jatiya Oikyafront joined them.

An appeal was filed with the Supreme Court on Thursday, challenging the High Court verdict that rejected a writ petition for changing the election date.

Despite growing pressure, the EC appears to be sticking to its guns, saying it is ready to hold the election on January 30. It, however, said it would change the polls date only if the SC asks it to do so.

POLLS OFFICIALS WARNED

Meanwhile, Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam yesterday said they had no intention to hurt any religious sentiment while deciding the polls would be held on January 30.

He made the comment while training presiding and assistant presiding officers of DSCC at Azimpur Government Girls School and College.

The commissioner warned the election officials that they had to take responsibility if they failed to ensure a free and fair election atmosphere.

He added that there was still a scope for casting false vote, even though the polls would be held using the electronic voting machines.

Punjab passes anti-CAA

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citizenship law, passed by the Parliament in December, has “caused countrywide anguish and social unrest in the country including Punjab”.

The resolution says the ideology behind the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is “inherently discriminatory and as far away as it can be from being a humanitarian measure.”

“It is evident that the CAA violates the secular identity of India, which is basic feature of our Constitution; therefore, the House resolves to urge the Government of India to repeal the CAA to avoid any discrimination on the basis of religion in granting citizenship and to ensure equality before law for all religious groups in India,” the resolution read.

“Given the apprehensions about National Register of Citizens and that the National Population Register is a prelude to the National Register of Citizens designed to deprive a section of persons from citizenship of India and implement Citizenship Amendment Act, this House further resolves that Central

government should amend the forms/ documentation associated with the National Population Register to allay such apprehension in the minds of the people and only thereafter undertake work of enumeration under National Population Register,” the resolution added.

The resolution also said the amended law on citizenship seeks to negate the very secular fabric on which the Constitution of India is based.

The Kerala government became the first government to challenge the new Citizenship (Amendment) Act in the Supreme Court amid nationwide protests against the religion-based citizenship law. The Supreme Court is already hearing over 60 petitions against the law.

While the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), eases the path for non-Muslims in the neighbouring Muslim-majority nations of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh to become Indian citizens, the critics fear that the CAA, along with a proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), will discriminate against the Muslims.



Relatives of a road crash victim in tears outside the Chattogram Medical College Hospital yesterday. The accident happened earlier in the day when two buses collided head-on on Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway in Shantirhat area of Patiya upazila. Three people, including a couple, were killed and six others injured in the accident.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Road crashes claim 4 lives in the capital

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Ahmed Nawajis, sub-inspector of Jatrabari Police Station, said the bus run over the duo around 11:30pm when they were crossing a road.

Locals rushed them to DMCH where doctors declared them dead early yesterday, he added.

Driver of the bus managed to flee the scene, he further added.

According to Shaheda Begum, wife of Anwar, her husband and nephew used to supply water jars in Motijheel area.

“The bus killed the sole breadwinner of my family... I demand justice for my husband and my nephew,” she said.

Talking to The Daily Star, Abdullah, a witness of the accident, said he and some other people took the duo to the hospital.

In Chattogram, three people, including a couple, were killed and six others were injured as two buses

collided head-on on Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway yesterday.

The dead are Jahed Hossain, 41, his wife Nigar Sultana, 32, of Cox's Bazar, and Omar Faruk, 35, of Noakhali.

The injured were receiving treatment at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Bimal Chandra Bhowmik, officer-in-charge of Patiya Highway Police Station, said a bus of Shyamoli Paribahan collided head-on with a local bus in Patiya upazila around 11:00am.

All the victims were passenger of the local bus, he added.

Drivers of both the buses fled the scene.

Jahed's uncle Syed Golam Haider Mintu, a ward councilor of Chattogram City Corporation's ward-16, told The Daily Star that four-year-old son of Jahed and Nigar lost his parents in the accident and became helpless.

In Jhenidah, a four-year-old boy

was killed in a road crash at Kaliganj upazila on Thursday afternoon.

Victim Adnan Hossain was returning home with his grandfather when a human hauler hit them from behind. The boy skidded off the road and the human hauler ran him over. He died on the spot, said Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kaliganj Police Station.

His grandfather sustained injuries and was admitted to a local health complex, our local correspondent reported.

Meanwhile, a motorcyclist was killed after his motorcycle collided head-on with a private car on Thakurgaon-Pirganj road in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila on Thursday night.

The dead was Rafiqul Islam, 30, of Krisnapur village in the upazila, said Golam Mortuza, inspector (operation) at Thakurgaon Police Station, reported our local correspondent.

Stop recurrence of scams

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Bangladesh Bank to have a sustainable economy.

“It is to be kept in mind that all the banks are doing business with the depositors' money i.e. public money and so their management, including Board of Directors, must be transparent and accountable to the regulatory body,” it said.

The HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Md Khairul Alam delivered the verdict on November 3 last year following a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh in February that year.

In the petition, the HRPB challenged the failure and inaction of the authorities concerned in stopping various irregularities and corruption in sanctioning loans and offering waiver of interest payments against bank loans in the last 20 years.

In the full text of the verdict, the HC said the BB, as a regulatory body,

should not brush aside suggestions given by economists and former bankers and recommendations in reports of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

It also directed the BB to constitute a nine-member committee, comprising banking experts, in 90 days of receiving the judgement. The committee will identify the loopholes in sanctioning loans.

“The committee will also prepare guidelines/suggestions regarding prudential banking, management, risk management and internal control. The Bangladesh Bank shall take support from the instructions and recommendations to be made by the aforementioned nine-member committee,” it said.

The HC directed the board of directors of all banks to take clearance/approval from the BB while promoting and or recruiting and removing top five officials in their respective institutions.

Fees taken, service not ensured

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He said he was not aware of the RFID feature until the correspondent told him about it. “Does it work at all?” he asked.

Besides, no system has been developed in over seven years for coordination between the BRTA and Anti-vehicle Theft Team of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Law enforcers sometimes gather information using traditional methods that are time-consuming and make tracking of vehicles very difficult, officials said.

Prof Shamsul Haque, former director of the Accident Research Institute at Buet, said forcing people to pay and not giving them the service was an injustice.

The BRTA should have increased the number of RFID reading facilities and employed dedicated manpower to provide the services to people, he said.

Apparently to rid itself of about 5 lakh plates and tags that are waiting to be installed, the BRTA earlier this month asked motorists to take the plates and RFID tags by January or face legal action.

Contacted, BRTA Chairman Kamrul Ahsan admitted that people were not getting the service they had expected.

A plan to set up more check posts on different highways didn't see the light of day due to fund shortage, he

said.

“We are now trying to revive the plan and will start looking for donors,” he told The Daily Star.

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT FOR?

The BRTA on October 31, 2012, introduced the retroreflective plates with RFID tags to check tax evasion, carjacking, and use of vehicles in criminal activities, a BRTA official said.

The Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BMTF) got the contract for preparing and maintaining the plates and tags for 15 years. The BRTA pays Tk 1,805 to BMTF for each plate for bikes or three-wheelers and Tk 3,652 for four-wheelers.

For the first five years, the BRTA paid around Tk 560 crore to BMTF and, for the next five years, it is expected to pay another Tk 600 crore, which is subject to change, depending on the volume of plates and tags supplied.

When a vehicle passes through an RFID reader, the latter can retrieve its registration information, fitness certificate status, and tax owed, if any.

The plates are readable from about 40 feet away even at night. Tag reading devices can read the tags from 11 metres away and tell which way the vehicle is going.

The tag-reading stations send the data to the BRTA database. The police or the vehicle owners can obtain information from there.

EU warns of WTO challenge if China-US deal creates ‘distortions’

AFP, Beijing

The European Union will challenge the China-US trade agreement at the World Trade Organization if it creates “distortions” in the market that harm EU companies, the bloc's envoy to Beijing said yesterday.

Ambassador Nicolas Chapuis told reporters the 28-nation EU “will monitor the implementation” of the “phase one” deal that was signed on Wednesday by President Donald Trump and Chinese Vice Premier Liu He.

“In our opinion, quantitative targets are not WTO-compatible if they lead to trade distortions,” Chapuis said. “If it were to be the case, we will go to the WTO to settle this matter.”

He said that during a meeting at the Chinese foreign ministry, he was given “formal assurances that in absolutely no way would European businesses be affected by the US-China deal”.

The WTO's principle of most-favoured-nation treatment says countries cannot discriminate between trading partners.

Turkey releases images of alleged Ghosn accomplices

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey's state news agency has published images of two men accused of helping fugitive businessman Carlos Ghosn escape via an Istanbul airport, as he fled a corruption trial in Japan.

The security camera images, first made public on Thursday, show Michael Taylor and George Antoine Zayek at passport control in Istanbul Airport, according to state news agency Anadolu.

The Wall Street Journal described Taylor as a former US special forces operative now working as a private security contractor.

Russell scripts

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run from the 19th over and picking up the wicket of Robbie Frylinck.

Earlier, Irfan Sukkur's only fifty of the tournament could not have come at a better time for Rajshahi Roays. The left-hander's 35-ball 52, complemented by unbeaten quickfire knocks from skipper Andre Russell and Mohammad Nawaz at the death, saw Rajshahi post a challenging 170 for four.

After being asked to bat, Rajshahi lost in-form opener Afif Hossain in the third over. Although Liton Das played a 28-ball 25-run knock and Irfan contributed with a blazing fifty, Rajshahi were in a spot of bother at one stage at 99 for four after 14.2.

Had it not been for the late surge from Russell and Nawaz, Rajshahi may not have seen a challenging total on the board. Nawaz struck an unbeaten 20-ball 41, laced with six fours and two maximums, while Russell, who played a match-winning knock in the second qualifier against Chattogram Challengers, remained unbeaten for a 16-ball 27.

EC doubles budget

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on the EVM.

Besides, the presiding officers, assistant presiding officers, and polling officers will have higher payments this year compared to those of the last election, he added.

The EC budget wing officials said each presiding officer would get Tk 4,000, assistant presiding officer Tk 3,000 and polling officer Tk 2,000. In 2015, the commission had paid such officers Tk 3,000, Tk 2,000 and Tk 1,000 respectively.

They said around Tk 20 crore will be spent for holding the polls to each of the two city corporations. An allocation will be kept aside for training of polls officials.

The EC for the first time will use EVMs at all polling centres on January 30. For this, the commission will install 35,000 machines. Two army men will be deployed at each polling centre for providing technical assistance to the polls officials on operating the EVMs.

According to the EC, the DNCC has 30.35 lakh and the DSCC 23.67 lakh voters.

A total of 7,516 polling booths will be set up at 1,349 voting centres in the DNCC area. There will be 5,998 polling booths at 1,124 polling centres in the DSCC area.

About 4,3015 polling officials will carry out their duties on the polling day.

Meanwhile, the EC will hold a meeting with the law enforcement agencies at its office in the city's Agargaon on January 22. The meeting will discuss law and order ahead of the city polls. The police, Rab, Border Guard Bangladesh and Ansar and VDP will place their demands at the meeting.

According to a primary estimation, 25,000 police, 35,000 Ansar and 1,000 APBN members will be deployed on the election day.

It's a case of

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Ali Imam Majumder, rights activists Hameeda Hossain, Sultana Kamal, Rahnuma Ahmed, Khushi Kabir, Shireen Haq, Maleka Begum, Farida Akhter, Nur Khan Liton, former election commissioner M Sakhawat Hossain, economist Debapriya Bhattacharya, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman, Suján Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar, lawyers ZI Khan Panna, Sara Hossain, Jyotirmoy Barua, local government expert Tofail Ahmed, jurist Shahdeen Malik, Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Zafurullah Chowdhury, Prof Anu Muhammad, Prof Gitirani Nasreen, Dr CR Abrar, Prof Ali Riaz, Prof Asif Nazrul, Sumaiya Khair, Shahnaj Huda, Firdous Azim, Robaet Ferdous, Sayeed Ferdous, Swapan Adnan, environment activist Syeda Rizwana Hasan, photographer Shahidul Alam, Parwin Hassan, Mirza Taslima Sultana, Faustina Pereira, Omar Tareque Chowdhury, child neurologist Naila Zaman Khan, Jakir Hossain, Golam Mortoza, Hasnat Kayum, Rezaur Rahman Lenin, Arup Rahee, Hasibur Rahman, Sinthia Farid and Hana Shams Ahmed.