



Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi (3L) joins with other leaders to protest against the new citizenship law at the parliament house in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pompeo vows US support for Ukraine ‘will not waver’

AFP, Kiev

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said yesterday Washington's support for Ukraine was unwavering during a delicate visit to the country at the heart of the US impeachment process.

After talks with Pompeo, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he appreciated US support, but that Washington should be more involved in resolving his country's conflict with Moscow-backed separatists.

Ukraine is walking a careful line in its relations with the United States -- keen to maintain US backing in the war but wary of being further entangled in US domestic politics.

Pompeo is the most senior US official to visit Ukraine since the start of the impeachment process against US President Donald Trump, who is accused of withholding military aid to push Kiev into investigating his Democratic rival Joe Biden.

Pompeo said there could be no doubts about Washington's support for Ukraine, calling it "a bulwark between freedom and authoritarianism in eastern Europe".

"The United States sees that the Ukrainian struggle for freedom, democracy and prosperity is a valiant one. Our commitment to support it will not waiver," he said at a press conference with Zelensky.

Zelensky, who allegedly faced the pressure from Trump in a July 25 phone call, called on Washington to "be more actively involved in the peace process in eastern Ukraine" and to appoint a special representative on the conflict.

Washington has been an important backer of Ukraine in its conflict with the separatists in the country's east, providing both military aid and diplomatic support.

That support is at the centre of the impeachment process, with Trump accused of withholding \$400 million in assistance to demand dirt on Biden, whose son was on the board of a Ukrainian company.

A Senate trial of Trump is underway in Washington, but the Republican majority in the US upper house all but guarantees an acquittal. A vote to acquit could come as soon as yesterday.

Pompeo is himself under pressure over Ukraine. He was among senior officials who listened in on the phone call with Zelensky and has been accused of not doing enough to defend Marie Yovanovitch, the former US envoy to Kiev who Trump removed last year.

Pompeo yesterday also met with Ukraine's Foreign Minister Vadym Prystaiko and the head of the newly independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Yepifaniy.

He visited Kiev's golden-domed Saint Michael's Cathedral -- torn down by the Soviet Union but rebuilt after Ukraine's independence -- and a memorial wall with photographs of soldiers killed in the conflict in the country's east that broke out in 2014.

Washington's support for Kiev has included not only military assistance but diplomatic backing, including the imposition of US sanctions against Russia following its 2014 annexation of Crimea.

Zelensky, a comedian with no previous political experience who won a landslide election victory last year, has made ending the conflict a key plank of his presidency.

Bangabandhu's nation-building

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the people are fulfilled. Officials would do well to remember that the people have undergone a revolutionary transformation and would not tolerate high handedness and being exploited, Bangabandhu adds.

53 GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS REMOVED

A government press note declares that those officials who received 'honours' during Bangladesh's occupation by Pakistani Junta are removed with immediate effect. However, Bangabandhu has promised that those officials will have an opportunity to explain the circumstances in which they had to accept the 'honours'.

Ministry of Housing and Public Works decides to remove all contractors who were listed or promoted between March 25 and December 16, 1971.

BANGABANDHU CONSOLES MARTYRS' FAMILIES

Wives of martyred DU teachers call on Bangabandhu at his government residence. He assures them of providing all kinds of support including regular allowance, job and free education for family members of the deceased professors.

US SENATORS FOR RECOGNITION OF BANGLADESH

17 US senators have sponsored a resolution advocating the US government's diplomatic recognition of Bangladesh. Senator Ernest Hollings, Democrat, the original co-sponsor of the resolution along with William Saxbe, Republican, told the Senate that the US should take the initiative in recognition rather than waiting for other Western nations to act.

BANGLADESHI REFUGEES

RETURN HOME

Indian Rehabilitation Ministry

informs that 66,45,676 Bangladeshi refugees have so far gone back to their homes. All the evacuees, nearly 10 million, are expected to return home by next March.

MOSCOW-DHAKA REGULAR FLIGHT BEGINS

With the arrival of Soviet Aeroflot SU 547 at Dhaka in the afternoon, regular air link between Dhaka and Moscow is established.

MASS GRAVES FOUND IN COMILLA

Eight mass graves with severed parts of human skeletons sticking out are found near Comilla Cantonment. Torn leaves of a book, Bangla Sankalan, and a blue shirt with buttons on the tip of the collar over a grave suggests that some unlucky schoolboy was amongst those who were killed and buried there by the Pakistani occupation force.

Sources: February 2, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Daily Ittefaq and The Azad.

New kind of northern lights

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there are a whole host of different kinds, each of which are formed in their own particular ways.

The new discovery began when the University of Helsinki's Minna Palmroth looked to collect these different kinds of northern lights, in collaboration with enthusiasts. Those hobbyists took photographs of thousands of different examples of the northern lights, which she picked through and categorised for a book to guide those watching the aurora borealis.

But as the hobbyists collected those images through Facebook, they found that many of them included a kind of auroral form that was not part of the existing classification. Those were set

aside to be examined later, and the book was published.

Just days after it came out, enthusiasts spotted the mysterious form again: they saw a green-tinged, even set of waves that looked similar to dunes on a sandy beach. They told Professor Palmroth, who was able to get to work looking into it.

"One of the most memorable moments of our research collaboration was when the phenomenon appeared at that specific time and we were able to examine it in real time", says Northern Lights and astronomy hobbyist Matti Helin in a statement.

The hobbyists and space researchers worked together to collate photos from across Finland. Combining the

images -- and looking for clues such as stars in the background -- allowed the scientists to discover where exactly the lights were coming from.

They noted that the glowing dunes appeared relatively low down, just 100 kilometres up. Their waveform stretched 45 kilometres across.

That height put them in a particularly neglected part of the sky: it is where the Earth's atmosphere collides with the edge of space, and is difficult for satellites to see.

"Due to the difficulties in measuring the atmospheric phenomena occurring between 80 and 120 kilometres in altitude, we sometimes call this area 'the ignorosphere'," she said in a statement.

Worker dies

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Without informing anyone, the employers then sent the body to Tanvir's village home in Sunamganj where his family members were preparing for a funeral.

Being informed, police retrieved the body and sent it to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital for an autopsy, said Sajal Kumar Kanu, officer-in-charge of Companiganj

Police Station, adding that the body was later handed over to his family.

Police arrested manager of the quarry Abdul Hannan in connection with the death, OC Kanu said.

Police filed a case accusing six named people, including the manager, and four unnamed people in connection with the incident, he added.

The five others are Sohrab Mia, Toyob Mia, Anju Mia, Akbar Mia and

Abdur Mia.

All of them are owners of the company that has long been extracting stone illegally from the government-owned land, UNO Suman said.

"We are conducting regular drives at the stone pits to stop all illegal extraction in the upazila," he added.

Earlier on January 20, another stone worker Liton Miah, 22, died at an illegal stone pit in the same area.

UK quits EU

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West, torpedoed what is left of the United Kingdom's global clout, undermine its economy and ultimately lead to a more insular and less cosmopolitan set of islands in the northern Atlantic.

DIS-UNITED KINGDOM

Brexit was always about much more than Europe. The June 2016 Brexit referendum showed a divided and triggered soul-searching about everything from secession and immigration to empire and modern Britishness.

Such was the severity of the Brexit meltdown that allies and investors were left astonished by a country that was for decades touted as a confident pillar of Western political stability.

At home, Brexit has tested the bonds that bind together the United Kingdom: England and Wales voted to leave the bloc but Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to stay.

Scotland's First Minister will use the moment to spell out her next steps towards holding a second independence referendum with a poll on Thursday suggesting a slim majority of Scots would now back a split because

of Brexit.

So on "Brexit Day", some celebrated and some wept -- but many Britons died neither. Many are simply happy that more than three years of tortuous political wrangling over the divorce are over.

"I did not vote for it and I did not want it to happen, but now I just want it over," said Judith Miller, a resident of London. "I am tired, I have had enough, I am sick of it on the news and we are just going to have to deal with it."

NEW DAWN

It is unclear how Brexit will play out for either the United Kingdom or the European Union.

Brexiters hope 'independence' will herald democratic and economic reforms that will reshape the United Kingdom, propelling it ahead of its European rivals which they say are chained to the doomed euro.

Pro-EU supporters say the United Kingdom will atrophy and have little option but to move closer to US President Donald Trump. The Times newspaper showed a cartoon of Johnson leaping out the EU frying pan

into the fire of Trump's orange hair.

Euro-sceptic newspapers heralded the impending departure.

"A New Dawn for Britain," the Daily Mail said on its front page and the Sun's headline was "Our Time Has Come". The pro-EU Guardian had a different slant: "Small island," its headline said, adding it was the biggest gamble in a generation.

Johnson chaired a cabinet meeting in Sunderland, the first city to declare support for leaving the EU in the June 2016 referendum. Brexiters celebrated on Parliament Square while some opponents of Brexit also gathered.

A Union Jack in the building of the European Council in Brussels lowered at 7:00 pm yesterday, and put away with the flags of non-EU countries.

With sorrow, some support for Brexit and even hope of a return, Europeans from across the EU bade farewell.

"I am very sorry that the United Kingdom is exiting. I think it is a very, very bad thing for Europe, for the United Kingdom, for everything," said Sara Invitto, from Milan. "Goodbye!"

Senate poised

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Four Republican votes are needed to allow new witnesses but Republican Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, who had been considered a possible swing vote, issued a statement late Thursday saying there was no need for more evidence.

"It was inappropriate for the president to ask a foreign leader to investigate his political opponent and to withhold United States aid to encourage that investigation," Alexander said.

"But the Constitution does not give the Senate the power to remove the president from office and ban him from this year's ballot simply for actions that are inappropriate," he said.

Republican Senator Susan Collins of Maine said she would support the call for witnesses, and Utah Senator Mitt Romney has said he was "very likely" to do so.

Another wavering Republican -- Lisa Murkowski of Alaska -- has said she plans to announce her decision in the morning.

In the event of a 50-50 tie, US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, who is presiding over the trial, could be called upon to end the deadlock. If he declines to vote, the motion calling for witnesses would fail.

PARTISAN IMPEACHMENT

Chief Democratic prosecutor Adam Schiff, in a last-ditch bid on Thursday to win over Republican senators wary of a drawn-out process, proposed a one-week time frame to secure new witness testimony.

"Let's have a reasonable accommodation here," the California lawmaker told the 100 senators sitting as jurors at the historic trial. "We'll take one week, and you'll continue with the business of the Senate."

Trump's defence team rejected the Democratic calls for more witnesses.

"They said for weeks it was an overwhelming case," said White House deputy counsel Patrick Philbin. "If that's their position, why do they need more witnesses?"

White House counsel Pat Cipollone argued for an early acquittal, saying it "would be the best thing for our country."

"We're dealing with a purely partisan impeachment," Cipollone said, accusing Democrats of using impeachment "as a political weapon."

Voters -- not the Senate -- should decide Trump's fate in the November presidential election, he said.

Cipollone and Schiff made their remarks during an occasionally testy Senate session during which Democratic and Republican senators directed questions to the House prosecutors and White House defence team.

House impeachment managers

expressed outrage over an assertion by one of Trump's lawyers, Harvard professor emeritus Alan Dershowitz, that a president can do almost anything he wants if he believes his re-election was "in the public interest."

Schiff said the claim echoed the Watergate case of disgraced president Richard Nixon 45 years ago.

"What we have seen in the last couple of days is a descent into constitutional madness," Schiff said.

"Almost half a century ago, we had a president who said, 'Well, when the president does it that means it is not illegal.'"

"Have we learned nothing in the last half century?" Schiff asked.

"That is the normalization of lawlessness," he said. "I would hope that every American would recognize that it's wrong to seek foreign help in an American election."

DISGRACE

Trump's defence team has argued alternatively that the impeachment is politically driven, that Trump did not tie Ukraine aid to the investigations he sought, that he had reason to seek a probe into his political rival and that he had the legal right to do so as president.

The president has repeatedly denied wrongdoing, calling the entire process a politically driven "witch hunt" and a "disgrace."

Speaking at a campaign rally on Thursday in Des Moines, Iowa, Trump said, "We're having the best years in the history of our country and I just got impeached."

Democrats are to hold their first vote in Iowa on Monday in the process of selecting a candidate to face Trump in November's presidential election.

US gender wage gap narrowed significantly since 1980: study

AFP, Washington

American women are catching up to men, at least in terms of wages, according to a study published Thursday showing the pay gap between the sexes has narrowed considerably since 1980.

Wage gains for women have been driven by the rapid increase in jobs requiring "social" skills and higher skills, such as critical thinking, where women now represent a majority, according to the report by the Pew Research Center, an independent American research institute.

In less than 40 years, the average hourly wages of women have jumped 45 percent, to \$22 dollars in 2018 from \$15, while pay for men increased 14 percent in that period.

Freedom of expression

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violation of their rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, it further says.

In October, Abrar Fahad, a student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology was beaten to death at his dormitory "days after criticising the government's agreement with India on Facebook," the report said.

"Heavy-handed tactics employed by the student wing affiliated to the ruling party demonstrate they have little patience for people who disagree with their views and policies.

"The risks associated with exercising the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are becoming increasingly high in Bangladesh. The authorities must respect and protect people's right to express and organise themselves without fear and repression," said Zakaria.

VIOLENCE AND EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

The report says last year more than 388 people were killed by the security forces in alleged extrajudicial executions, carried out as part of the country's "war on drugs" campaign.

In some cases, victims were forcibly

disappeared for months before they were killed in what the authorities claimed were "gunfights."

In addition, at least 13 people were forcibly disappeared last year.

There were at least 4,732 reported incidents of violence against women and girls, including 2,448 rapes and 400 attempted rapes.

In September 2019, there were 232 reported cases of rape -- the highest in a single month since 2010, it says.

THE ROHINGYA

Bangladesh continued to host nearly a million Rohingya refugees in camps in the Cox's Bazar district.

In November, the wheels of justice for the Rohingya began to turn as the judges of the ICC authorised an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity and persecution committed by the Myanmar military.

However, the Rohingya faced many restrictions within Cox's Bazar, including on their freedom of movement and access to education for children, says the report.

They were also the subject of a smear campaign within Bangladesh that portrayed them as a "burden" and even a threat to "national security", it says.

7 detectives suspended

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that night.

Nazrul Islam, office-in-charge of DB-South of the district police said that after a primary investigation, they found part of the allegation to be true and submitted a report to SP office in this regard.

Sohel's family said fear had gripped them as they received threats soon after filing the complaint with the police and district administration.

"My son is receiving death threats from unknown numbers... we are in fear. We filed the complaint as we want justice and the money to be returned. But now we are in a state of uncertainty," Sohel's wife, Sabrina Abedin, told The Daily Star yesterday.

According to the complaint lodged by Sohel, a group of five to six people, identifying themselves as detectives, picked up Sohel on Wednesday. They took him to Keraniganj crossing on the Buriganga river inside a microbus with no registration plate.

"They blindfolded me, took me to an unidentified place and injured my fingers with pointers. They beat me up with sticks, pointed a gun at me and threatened to implicate me in a false case or kill me in a crossfire," Sohel said, adding they demanded Tk 5 lakh from his family for his release.

The DB men used Sohel's mobile phone to call his family members to demand the ransom, the family said.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sabrina said that they then managed Tk 4.5 lakh from her relatives and paid the ransom to the abductors near Bosila Bridge around 11:30pm that night.

"They released my husband after getting the money but threatened to kill and disappear the body if we disclosed the incident to anyone," she alleged. Contacted for comment on the allegations, SI Mahmudul said he was unaware of the incident. Asked about his suspension, he said the news was incorrect and hung up.