

IMPEACHMENT TRIAL

WHO SAID WHAT?

The US Senate on Wednesday acquitted President Donald Trump on impeachment charges of abusing his office and obstructing Congress, despite Republican Mitt Romney becoming the first senator in history to vote for the conviction of a president from his own party. Here are some quotes from a historic day at the US Capitol:

“Sadly, because of the Republican Senate’s betrayal of the Constitution, the president remains an ongoing threat to American democracy, with his insistence that he is above the law and that he can corrupt the elections if he wants to.”

US Speaker Nancy Pelosi

“What he did was not ‘perfect’ — no, it was a flagrant assault

on our electoral rights, our national security interests, and our fundamental values. Corrupting an election to keep oneself in office is perhaps the most abusive and destructive violation of one’s oath of office that I can imagine.”

Republican Senator Mitt Romney

“The verdict of this kangaroo court will be meaningless. By refusing the facts — by refusing witnesses and documents — the Republican majority has placed a giant asterisk, the asterisk of a sham trial, next to the acquittal of President Trump, written in permanent ink.”

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer

“This partisan impeachment will end today. But I fear the threat to our institutions may not, because this episode is one of a symptom of something much deeper.”

Senator majority leader Mitch McConnell

SOURCE: REUTERS

NEWSIN

brief

2 killed in Italy rail derailment

AFP, Lodi

Two rail workers were killed and about 30 people injured yesterday when a high-speed train derailed before dawn near Milan in northern Italy, authorities said. The crash occurred just after 5:30 am near the town of Lodi, about 50 kilometres south of Milan. None of the injured are in danger and all casualties had been taken to hospital.

Turkey probes pilots over plane accident

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey will investigate two pilots for possible negligence after their plane skidded off an Istanbul runway killing three passengers, state media reported yesterday. A total of 174 passengers and six crew were injured after the Boeing 737, operated by Turkish low-cost carrier Pegasus Airlines, flew into Sabiha Gokcen airport from the western city of Izmir late on Wednesday. The aircraft’s black box was being examined for clues to the cause of the crash.

Maldives nabs 3 over stabbing of foreigners

REUTERS, Male

Maldives police yesterday arrested three men over the stabbing of two Chinese nationals and an Australian. A Maldivian radical group affiliated with Islamic State had taken responsibility for the attack in a video posted online. One of the three masked men seen in the video accused the Maldivian government of being run by infidels and warned more such attacks were coming.

How far will unleashed Trump go?

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump was acquitted of high crimes in his impeachment trial Wednesday -- but could the unpredictable president now decide he’s above the law?

The question hangs over a nervous, divided Washington.

History books will record that the Republicans’ Senate majority delivered not guilty verdicts on the two charges.

For Trump, those votes are vindication of his insistence that he did nothing wrong in trying to get Ukraine to dig up dirt on Democratic election rival Joe Biden.

But even several Republicans concede that Trump’s behavior was wrong, if not impeachable. One of them, Mitt Romney, broke ranks to convict.

And with the folding up of the impeachment court, Trump’s critics say the unchastened president is now likely to abuse his office without fear.

“He will not change,” said Adam Schiff, the Democratic congressman who led the impeachment case. “A man without character or ethical compass will never find his way.”

Rick Wilson, a Republican strategist opposing Trump, wrote a Daily Beast column Wednesday in which he imagined an “unhinged and unbound” Trump dreaming that “vengeance is



coming.”

Ever since his shock rise to power in 2016, Trump has relished breaking norms -- or, critics say, laws.

That goes all the way from swearing in public to pushing the byzantine scheme in Ukraine against Biden that ultimately led to his impeachment.

Trump comes from a business background where the CEO is used to getting what he wants. As a reality TV show personality, he played the character of an omnipotent boss firing employees

with a mere point of his finger.

With no political experience, he clearly chafed at the traditions, endless rules and multiple layers of security surrounding the presidency.

In the early days, reported journalist Bob Woodward, frantic aides would literally swipe damaging documents from Trump’s desk before he could sign them, like a letter abruptly ending a trade agreement with South Korea.

One by one, though, those pushing back from inside the White House

disappeared. If they didn’t resign, like defense secretary James Mattis, they were fired, like national security advisor John Bolton.

Outside the White House, Trump likewise imposed his will.

A huge investigation into his commercial and political relationship with Russians -- and allegations that his election campaign colluded with Kremlin operatives -- ended in a whimper.

His impeachment, launched by Democrats after a whistleblower revealed the secretive machinations in Ukraine, also petered out.

Trump once again had proved himself stronger.

Maureen Dowd, a veteran New York Times columnist and often scathing Trump critic, labelled Trump a “Godzilla” ready to run wild.

“The Republican Party has now lost whatever control they could exert over this president, any oversight they could have. It’s gone.”

But John Mueller, a political science professor at Ohio State University, told AFP that Washington’s political class should take a deep breath.

“I doubt that Trump will be more unbound,” Mueller said.

“He’s already run all over immigration and tariff rules, etcetera,” he said. “He may have learned his lesson.”



US astronaut returns to Earth after longest mission

Nasa’s Christina Koch returned to Earth safely yesterday after shattering the spaceflight record for female astronauts with a stay of almost 11 months aboard the International Space Station. Koch touched down at 0912 GMT on the Kazakh steppe after 328 days in space, along with Luca Parmitano of the European Space Agency and Alexander Skvortsov of the Russian space agency. Koch, a 41-year-old Michigan-born engineer, on December 28 last year beat the previous record for a single spaceflight by a woman of 289 days, set by Nasa veteran Peggy Whitson in 2016-17. Koch also made history as one half of the first-ever all-woman spacewalk along with Nasa counterpart Jessica Meir -- her classmate from NASA training -- in October last year.

Iraq protesters defiant after 7 killed in overnight dash

Iraqi anti-government protesters yesterday vowed to push on with their wave off rallies as they buried seven fellow activists killed overnight in violence blamed on supporters of a powerful cleric. Loyalists of Shia Muslim cleric Moqtada Sadr -- a militiaman-turned-politician with a cult-like following -- had raided a protest camp in Iraq’s shrine city of Najaf late Wednesday. Seven anti-government demonstrators were killed by bullets to the head or chest, medics in the city said, and dozens more were wounded. In the melee, tents where protesters had slept for weeks were burned down. Nearly 490 people have been killed and 30,000 wounded, most of them demonstrators, according to a count compiled by AFP from security and medical sources.

Big Tim, one of Kenya’s last giant ‘tusker’, dies



One of Africa’s last remaining giant “tusker” elephants has died in Kenya aged 50, the country’s wildlife service (KWS) has said. Big Tim died in Mada area of Amboseli National Park from natural causes, KWS said in a statement on Wednesday. Big Tim’s carcass was found at the foot of the snowcapped peak of Kilimanjaro, the Amboseli Trust for Elephants said. An elephant is technically a “tusker” when its ivory tusks are so long that they scrape the ground. Usually, only old bull elephants grow their tusks long enough to reach this acclaimed status.

SOURCE: AFP



This photo taken on February 5, 2020 shows a patient covered with a bed sheet at an exhibition centre converted into a hospital in Wuhan in China’s central Hubei province. China scrambled to find bed space for thousands of newly infected patients yesterday, as the toll from a deadly new virus jumped again with more than 28,000 people known infected nationwide and 563 deaths.

PHOTO: AFP

563 dead, 28,000 infected

AFP, Beijing

China’s coronavirus crisis deepened yesterday with the death toll soaring to 563, as thousands of people trapped on quarantined cruise ships added to the global panic about the epidemic.

More than 28,000 people have now been infected across China as authorities struggle to contain the outbreak despite compelling millions to stay indoors in a growing number of cities.

Two dozen countries have confirmed cases of the respiratory disease which emerged from a market selling exotic animals in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

Thousands of people on cruise ships in Hong Kong and Japan now face an agonising wait to find out if more among them have been infected.

At least 20 people on board the Diamond Princess have tested positive so far, while some 3,700 passengers and crew from over 50 countries have been confined to quarters aboard the cruise ship off Yokohama since Monday night.

In Hong Kong, 3,600 people were preparing to spend a second night confined aboard the World Dream as authorities conducted health checks after eight former passengers tested positive for the virus.

Health officials in the financial hub yesterday said they were also asking some 5,000 Hong Kongers who had taken trips on the ship since

mid-January to contact them.

Panic buyers in the semi-autonomous city left shelves of toilet paper empty at supermarkets following false online claims of shortages, prompting authorities to appeal for calm.

One person has died after contracting the

CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC

Thousands of passengers trapped on quarantined cruise ships off Japan, HK

Authorities setting up second field hospital offering 1,600 beds in Hubei’s capital Wuhan

Air France-KLM, Virgin, Iberia extend China flight suspensions

virus in Hong Kong so far.

While the death toll continues to rise in China, health experts have stressed that at two percent, 2019-nCoV is far less deadly than the SARS pathogen, which killed around 10 percent of the people it infected 17 years ago.

But the outbreak has been declared a global health emergency, prompting several governments to warn against travel to China and ban new arrivals from the country, while airlines have halted flights.

In the latest international actions, Saudi Arabia banned its citizens and resident foreigners from travelling to China, while Air France-KLM, Virgin and Iberia said yesterday they would extend their initial suspension of flights to China.

A newborn was among the new cases in Wuhan, suggesting the baby was infected by the mother during pregnancy or immediately after.

With medical facilities in Hubei’s capital Wuhan overwhelmed with patients, authorities were due to open a second field hospital, offering 1,600 beds.

The city of 11 million is facing a “severe” lack of beds, said Hu Lishan, a senior official in Wuhan, noting that there were 8,182 patients admitted to 28 hospitals that have a total of 8,254 beds.

There is also a shortage of equipment and materials, Hu said.

Human Rights Watch yesterday accused China of suppressing criticism of its response to the deadly novel coronavirus and said it had made the outbreak worse.

HRW chief Kenneth Roth also criticised the Chinese government’s lockdown on various cities in an attempt to contain the virus as a “sledgehammer” approach.

Hollywood legend Kirk Douglas dead at 103

AFP, Los Angeles

Kirk Douglas, one of the last superstars of Hollywood’s golden age of cinema who was renowned for his intense, muscular performances in “Spartacus” and “Paths of Glory,” died Wednesday aged 103.

The US leading man, producer and director came to prominence in the late 1940s and never lost his popularity, taking on nearly 100 movies over a six-decade career.

His death at his family home in Beverly Hills was confirmed by his son Michael, the Oscar-winning actor and filmmaker.

Tributes poured in from across Hollywood and around the world on social media, with many declaring “I am Spartacus!” in a nod to Douglas’s legendary role as a rebellious Roman slave.

Douglas, born Issur Danielovitch to Jewish-Russian immigrants in New York in 1916, began as a stage actor before serving in the US Navy during WWII. He graduated to movies when “Casablanca” producer Hal Wallis signed him in 1946, and he became a star for his portrayal of a double-crossing and womanizing boxer in 1949’s “Champion.”



Israeli-Palestinian violence rises after Trump ME plan

AFP, Jerusalem

A car-ramming targeting Israeli troops in Jerusalem wounded 14 people early yesterday as an uptick of violence hit the Palestinian territories following Washington’s controversial Middle East peace plan.

Three Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire -- in annexed east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank -- during clashes that have escalated since US President Donald Trump unveiled his long-delayed proposals last month. A manhunt was underway for the driver in the car-ramming, who fled the scene in the heart of west Jerusalem after the attack, which took place shortly before 2:00 am.

The attacker struck on the street where the soldiers had been marching, the army said.

One of the soldiers was “severely injured” and rushed to hospital.

Public radio said they were new recruits on their way to an induction ceremony at Jerusalem’s Western Wall, the holiest site

where Jews can pray.

“During the incident, a terrorist sped his car toward soldiers,” the army said.

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said the driver had been identified.

“The vehicle was found and now there is a manhunt taking place by counterterrorism and military units for the terrorist. We know his identity,” Rosenfeld told AFP at the scene.

The Islamist Hamas movement, which controls Gaza, hailed the car-ramming as a “practical response” to Trump’s controversial Middle East peace plan.

In a statement, Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said the attack was part of the “resistance operation” but stopped short of claiming responsibility.

In an interview published on Hamas’s official website, the group’s leader Ismail Haniya rejected calls to disarm and said the group would “continue in our strategy of building up force, including in the West Bank and Jerusalem, until we can liberate our homeland.”

Three Palestinians killed by Israeli fire

16 Israeli troops hurt in car-ramming



A Palestinian man looks as an Israeli soldier aims a weapon at protesters during a protest against the US President Donald Trump’s Middle East peace plan, in Hebron in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP