

IMPEACHMENT PROBE

# Trump invited to attend hearings

AFP, Washington

The House Judiciary Committee said Tuesday it would begin hearings on December 4 in the next phase of the impeachment inquiry into Donald Trump, inviting the US president and his lawyer to attend.

Lawmakers in the Democratic-led House of Representatives spent the last two weeks publicly questioning witnesses including White House officials and diplomats over allegations Trump abused the power of his office when he pressured Ukraine to launch investigations that would help him politically.

With that stage complete, chairman Jerry Nadler of the Judiciary Committee, which is tasked with considering whether to draft articles of impeachment against the president, said the first public hearing before his panel would begin at 10:00 am (1500 GMT).

"The committee looks forward to your participation in the impeachment inquiry as the committee fulfills its constitutional duties," Nadler said in a letter to Trump.

The hearings will address "the historical and constitutional basis of impeachment," and "whether your alleged actions warrant the House's exercising its authority to adopt articles of impeachment," he added.

Under procedural rules passed by the House last month, Trump is invited to attend the judiciary committee hearings, and "the president's counsel may question any witness called."

Nadler in his letter reminded Trump that if he continued to refuse to allow administration personnel to testify or turn over documents sought by the inquiry, the chair may "impose appropriate remedies," including denying presidential requests to question witnesses.



**Iraqi demonstrators rally at a roadblock on Al-Ahrar bridge amid ongoing anti-government protests in the capital Baghdad yesterday. Inset, an injured demonstrator receives treatment near the central bank on Al-Rashid street in Baghdad. For nearly two months, the country's capital and Shia-majority south have been gripped by the largest protests since 2003, paralysing daily life in many towns and cities, with schools intermittently closed, streets shuttered and government offices empty.**

PHOTO: AFP

## NEWSIN brief

### HK police plan to enter ransacked campus

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police plan to send officers this morning into the ransacked remains of a university campus where authorities faced off for days with barricaded pro-democracy protesters, an official said yesterday. The announcement came as university leaders called for police to lift their siege given the sprawling facility appeared to be deserted. Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) was the epicentre of the territory's increasingly violent protest movement when clashes broke out on November 17 between police and protesters.

### China now has more diplomatic posts

AFP, Sydney

For the first time, China has more diplomatic missions around the world than the United States, according to a study published yesterday that offered fresh evidence of Beijing's global ambitions. Australia's respected Lowy Institute reported that China's "rapid" rise up the rankings of diplomatic networks continued in 2019, boosted by the opening of diplomatic posts in countries that had previously recognised Taiwan.

### Iran FM meets top Taliban official

REUTERS, Geneva

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held talks in Tehran with a Taliban delegation led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, one of the group's founders, the official IRNA news agency reported yesterday. Zarif expressed Iran's willingness to support dialogue between all Afghan parties with the participation of the Afghan government, according to IRNA. The Taliban have refused to talk to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's government, denouncing it as a US puppet.

# Vast conspiracy defeated

Says Iran's Khamenei, blames US for stirring up street unrest

REUTERS, Geneva

Iran's top leader yesterday denounced an outbreak of deadly unrest as a "very dangerous conspiracy" as authorities reported about 731 banks and 140 government sites had been torched in the disturbances.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the protests amounted to a plot that Iranians had defeated, referring to the worst anti-government unrest in Iran since authorities put down demonstrations against election fraud in 2009.

The disturbances began on November 15 after the announcement of gasoline price hikes, but quickly turned political, with protesters demanding top leaders step down.

In response, the government has blamed "thugs" linked to exiles and the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia for stirring up the street unrest.

"A deep, vast and very dangerous conspiracy that a lot of money had been spent on ... was destroyed by the people," Khamenei said in a meeting with members of the paramilitary Basij force which took part in the crackdown against protests, according to his official website.

Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli meanwhile said about 731 banks and 140 government sites were torched in the unrest.

More than 50 bases used by security forces were attacked and approximately 70 gas stations were also burned, he said, in remarks published by the official IRNA news agency, without specifying where the attacks took place.

According to IRNA, Rahmani Fazli also said up to 200,000 people took part nationwide in the unrest.

London-based Amnesty International said on Monday it had recorded at least 143 protesters killed in the protests.

Iran has rejected Amnesty's death toll. It says several people, including members of the security forces, were killed and more than 1,000 people arrested. The Center for Human Rights in Iran, a New York-based advocacy group, said the number of arrests was probably closer to 4,000.

The United States said it had received thousands of messages from Iran about protests after appealing to demonstrators to defy restrictions on the internet.

"We've received to date nearly 20,000 messages, videos, pictures, notes of the regime's abuses through Telegram messaging services," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said, referring to the encrypted app.

The protests took place as new US sanctions imposed this year cut off nearly all of Iran's oil exports, and as similar protest movements erupted in Iraq and Lebanon against governments that include heavily armed pro-Iran factions.

Hundreds of banks, govt sites burned in unrest  
US says received 20,000 messages from protests



# Israeli fighter jets strike Hamas targets in Gaza

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel struck a series of military targets in the Gaza Strip overnight yesterday in response to rockets fired from the Palestinian enclave, the Israeli army said.

"Fighter jets struck a number of Hamas terror targets in the southern Gaza Strip," an army statement said yesterday.

It said a weapons manufacturing site and underground infrastructure were among the sites targeted.

At least two Hamas sites were hit, in addition to one for allied group Islamic Jihad, a security source in Gaza said.

There were no immediate reports of any casualties.

Islamists Hamas control Gaza and Israel holds the group responsible for any rockets launched from the strip, even if fired by smaller groups.

The strikes came in response to two rockets fired at Israel late Tuesday, one of which was intercepted by the Iron Dome anti-missile system, the army said.

The rockets caused sirens to sound around the Israeli town of Sderot, close to the border with Gaza.

On Monday evening, another rocket was launched from Gaza into Israel and fell in an open area, without even setting off alarms in nearby border communities.

The latest incident comes after a brief flare-up between Israel and the Islamist-ruled territory ended two weeks ago.

On November 12, Israeli fire killed a top Islamic Jihad commander in Gaza, sparking immediate retaliatory rocket fire from the group.

The Israeli military said around 450 rockets were fired at its territory in that episode and air defences intercepted dozens of them.

After two days of clashes which killed 34 Palestinians and no Israelis, a ceasefire began on November 14.

Israel occupied east Jerusalem and the West Bank in 1967, in moves never recognised by the international community.

More than 600,000 settlers live in the two territories in communities considered illegal by the international community, alongside more than three million Palestinians.

RETALIATORY ROCKET FIRE



Relatives grieve over the casket bearing the remains of Nguyen Dinh Luong in Can Loc district, Ha Tinh province yesterday after being repatriated from Britain. The first remains of the 39 people found dead in a truck in Britain last month arrived in Vietnam early yesterday, capping a weeks-long wait by families eager to bury their loved ones.

PHOTO: AFP

# Death toll reaches 30

Rescuers race against time to find survivors

AFP, Thumane

Emergency workers in Albania yesterday pulled dusty bodies from the ruins of buildings gutted by a violent earthquake and searched desperately for survivors as the death toll reached 30 with hundreds injured.

Tirana declared a state of emergency in the areas hardest-hit by Tuesday's pre-dawn 6.4 magnitude earthquake: the coastal city of Durres and the town of Thumane, where victims were trapped by toppled buildings.

With the help of dogs and more than 200 experts flown in from across Europe, rescuers raced against time to locate survivors of the most powerful earthquake in the country in decades.

Early yesterday in Thumane, tormented relatives wept as search teams retrieved the remains of a married couple, Pellumb and Celike Greku, from one of the buildings torn down by the force of the earthquake.

Their son Saimir was rescued alive from the rubble Tuesday night but later died

in hospital, according to relatives and neighbours.

"Terrible, terrible," an elderly woman dressed in black shouted as the bodies were carried away, tearing at her hair.

Another local, 60-year-old Valbona Cupi, said Saimir had been visiting his parents from abroad when the earthquake struck before dawn on Tuesday.

"They went to heaven together, they were very honest and poor people," she said in tears.

Nearby, rescue teams were combing another crumbled building in hopes of reaching a young woman they believed may still be alive after the more than 24-hour ordeal.

Earlier in the day they pulled out the body of a young man.

By yesterday morning, the official death toll was up to 28 while 45 people had been rescued, the defence ministry said.

There was no estimate on how many people remained missing.

Some 650 people have been treated for injuries, mostly minor, according to Albania's health ministry.

ALBANIA QUAKE

CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) BILL

# Protests continue in India's Assam

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Protests continued in Assam yesterday against the Indian government's move to introduce the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, that seeks to give citizenship to non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan, in the current winter session of parliament.

Leading youth organization Asom Jatiyabadi Yuba Chhatra Parishad (AJYCP) took out a huge protest rally in Guwahati in protest against the Bill.

Holding banners and placards, the protesters marched from Guwahati Club point demanding that the Bill be scrapped as it "goes against the existence of the indigenous people of Assam and other North East states".

The AJYCP has been protesting against the Bill since early this year along with influential All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and social organization Krishak Mukti Sangram Parishad (KMSS) saying the legislation will not be accepted at any cost by the people of the state.

AJYCP general secretary Palash Changmai, who led the march, told reporters that "the BJP-led government at the Centre in its political interest to hold on to power wants to impose this legislation on us which threatens the existence of the people of Assam and the Northeast."

"Chief Minister of Assam is today silent on CAB when his counterparts in the N-E are strongly opposing it," he said.

"We demand a plebiscite on CAB and then the government take a decision whether to or not bring the law based on its outcome", maintained the leader of AJYCP.

# 'Why are they here?'

Demonstrators say local, int'l forces are failing to keep them safe from deadly attacks; UN launches probe into protest death

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Protests against United Nations peacekeepers in northeast Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have spread from Beni to other towns in the region, as anger mounts over the perceived failure to protect civilians from deadly rebel attacks.

Yesterday, demonstrators in the city of Goma blocked the main road leading to Beni further south where the first protests against the UN mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) broke out on Sunday.

Al Jazeera's Catherine Wambua-Soi, reporting from Goma, said demonstrators in the capital of North Kivu province used sticks and stones to block traffic on the city's main thoroughfare.

"Police have been forced to use tear gas and to fire live bullets in the air," Wambua-Soi said.

"Everybody here seems to be very angry, they are all saying that they do not want MONUSCO here, they want them gone," she added.

Demonstrators on Tuesday attempted to find their

way to a UN base near the Goma airport, before being driven back by government soldiers, but Wambua-Soi said protesters were determined to try again yesterday.

"People are asking, 'Why is the UN here?' and also saying that their army is quite disorganised and do not feel protected at all," Wambua-Soi said.

The UN peacekeeping mission in DR Congo said yesterday it was launching a probe after gathering evidence that its troops may have killed a young demonstrator.

Protests also spread to Butembo, 57km (35 miles) south of Beni, where a protester was killed on Tuesday after clashes with security forces. The mostly young protesters on Tuesday tried to attack several UN staff at the Kikyo reception

centre, according to Butembo Mayor Sylvain Kanyamanda. Police used tear gas and warning shots to disperse them.

Demonstrators accuse both the DRC's security forces and MONUSCO - the world's biggest peacekeeping mission that has operated in DRC for the past two decades - of not doing enough to stop rebel attacks on civilians.

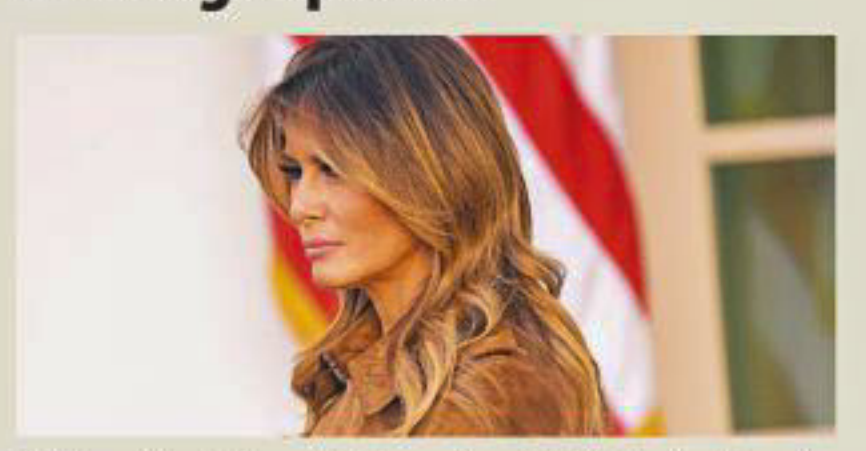


DR CONGO PROTESTS

### Japan MPs' disaster helmet drill sparks Twitter debate

Some Japanese lawmakers giggled this week during a drill to practice the use of disaster prevention helmets, at least one of which was put on backwards, prompting Twitter users to question if they were making light of a life-and-death matter. Video images broadcast on television and other media showed Finance Minister Taro Aso smiling after successfully donning one of the collapsible plastic helmets, and Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi wore a broad grin. "You never know when disaster will strike," Tadamori Oshima, the lower house speaker, said at the end of Tuesday's session, wearing one of the white helmets with grey chinstraps that are reminiscent of traditional samurai headgear.

### Melania Trump gets booed at drugs speech



US President Donald Trump's wife Melania faced rare boos Tuesday when she gave a speech on the dangers of drug addiction in the east coast city of Baltimore. First ladies are usually spared the rougher edges of US politics and Melania Trump has been no exception, despite the bruising nature of her husband's presidency. Boos and shrieking erupted from the audience of mostly middle and high school students when she walked on stage at the Baltimore Youth Summit on Opioid Awareness. Loud talking continued in the audience as she began her brief speech, in which she wished the children "a healthy and drug-free life." There were more boos, as well as cheers, at the end.

### US teen's TikTok video on Xinjiang goes viral

A TikTok post by a young woman, pretending to give eyelash curling advice while actually condemning China's crackdown on Muslims in Xinjiang, has gone viral on the Chinese-owned app that has been accused of censoring anti-Beijing content. The clip by US teen Feroza Aziz, who describes herself as "17 Just a Muslim", had millions of views across several social media platforms by yesterday. But Aziz said she has been blocked from posting on the hugely popular video platform TikTok for a month after uploading Sunday's clip slamming China, a claim disputed by the app. Human rights groups and outside experts say more than one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been rounded up in a network of internment camps across the fractious region of Xinjiang. SOURCE: REUTERS, AFP