AFP, Washington

TRUMP'S IMPEACHMENT TRIAL

US Speaker, Senate leader trade barbs

US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell sparred on Monday over the ground

rules for President Donald Trump's trial in the Senate on

Pelosi, the speaker of the Democratic-controlled House

of Representatives, said she is not yet ready to name her

House managers will prosecute the case against Trump

Pelosi has not yet sent the impeachment articles passed by the House last week over to the Senate amid a standoff

Democrats have been pushing for four current and

"President Trump blocked his own witnesses and

former White House aides with direct knowledge of

Trump's Ukraine dealings to testify in the Senate. Trump

documents from the House, and from the American

people, on phony complaints about the House process,"

McConnell, speaking on the Fox & Friends television

The House voted along party lines last week to impeach

Trump for abuse of power for pressuring Ukraine's president

to investigate his potential 2020 election opponent,

Democrat Joe Biden. Trump is accused of withholding

military aid to Ukraine to push Kiev to investigate Biden.

show on Monday, said Pelosi "apparently believes that she can tell us how to run the trial." McConnell chided Pelosi

for not sending the articles over to the Senate yet.

in the Senate in a trial expected to begin in January. Trump's

Republicans have a 53-47 seat edge in the chamber.

with McConnell over the form the trial will take.

blocked all four from testifying in the House.

Pelosi said. "What is his excuse now?"

team for Trump's trial in the Republican-majority Senate.

charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

Indonesia bus tragedy kills 27

AFP, Palembang

At least 27 people have died and more than a dozen were injured after a bus plunged into a ravine in Indonesia, officials said yesterday. The bus careered into a 150-metre ravine in South Sumatra province just before midnight on Monday and ended up in a river. According to a passenger manifest, the regional bus left Bengkulu province for Pagar Alam with 27 on board but some survivors told police there were around 50 people inside when the accident happened.

Pakistan to rejoin **US military training**

AFP, Washington

The United States will allow Pakistan to rejoin a military training program suspended two years ago when President Donald Trump froze security aid to the country. Resuming the program, which represents only a part of the halted aid, is one sign of warming relations between Washington and Islamabad. In January 2018, Trump froze the assistance, saying Pakistan was not doing enough to target bases of the Afghan Taliban and its affiliated Haqqani group.

8 killed in Russian strikes on Idlib

AFP, Beirut

At least eight people, including five children, were killed yesterday in Russian air strikes on a school in northwest Syria sheltering some three million displaced civilians, according to a war monitor. The strikes targeted the village of Jubass near the town of Sarageb in southern Idlib province, killing civilians sheltering in and near a school. Idlib is dominated by the country's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.



India's federal cabinet yesterday approved funds for a census and population survey to be conducted next year, amid fears that the database could be used to build a controversial citizens register, against which there have been widespread protests. PHOTO: AFP

The masterminds walk free

Khashoggi verdict condemned globally but backed by US AFP, Riyadh

A Saudi court verdict that exonerated the crown prince's top aides over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi has been globally condemned as a travesty of justice, but won the backing of ally Washington.

Five unnamed people were sentenced to death on Monday while three others were handed jail terms totalling 24 years over the Washington Post columnist's killing last year in Saudi Arabia's Istanbul consulate.

The verdict underscores Saudi efforts to turn the page on one of its worst diplomatic crises that tarnished Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's global reputation and sparked intense scrutiny of the kingdom's human rights record.

However, the case is still likely to remain a headache for Saudi Arabia even as it seeks to reboot its international image ahead of next year's G20 summit in Riyadh.

A US State Department official hailed the verdict as "an important

step" in holding the perpetrators Twitter, calling the verdict a "mockery". accountable.

which called it a "scandalous" outcome that had granted "impunity" to those who had dispatched the killers, in an apparently veiled reference to Prince Mohammed.

Riyadh has described the murder



as a "rogue" operation that did not involve the crown prince.

But both the CIA and UN special envoy Agnes Callamard have directly linked Prince Mohammed to the killing, a charge the kingdom vehemently denies.

"Bottom line: the hit-men are guilty, sentenced to death," Callamard said on

"The masterminds not only walk But it was lambasted by Turkey, free. They have barely been touched by the investigation and the trial."

Khashoggi, a 59-year-old Saudi insider-turned-critic, was strangled and his body cut into pieces by a 15man Saudi squad inside the consulate, according to Turkish officials. His remains have not been found.

Saudi prosecutors had said deputy intelligence chief Ahmed al-Assiri oversaw Khashoggi's killing and the US Treasury had claimed the royal court's media czar Saud al-Qahtani was "part of the planning and execution" of the operation that led to the murder.

Qahtani was investigated but not indicted "due to insufficient evidence" and Assiri was charged but eventually acquitted on the same grounds, the public prosecutor's office said.

Both aides were part of Prince Mohammed's tight-knit inner circle and were formally sacked over the killing, but only Assiri appeared in the court hearings, according to Western sources. The verdict can be appealed.

US tracking Santa - and any 'Christmas gift' from N Korea

REUTERS, Denver

While the North American Aerospace Defense Command stays alert for any signs of a North Korea missile launch - what officials in Pyongyang have described as a "Christmas gift" - it is also tracking the legendary figure who delivers presents to children across the world, the command said on Monday.

Based in Colorado Colorado, Springs, NORAD is a combined Canadian and military command whose mission is to issue aerospace and maritime warnings and controls across North America.

For more than six decades, it has also offered real-time animated tracking of Santa Claus, also known as Kris Kringle, as his reindeer-powered sleigh traverses the globe delivering Yuletide gifts to children.

NORAD's Santa tracking website www. noradsanta.org gets nearly 15 million unique visitors from more than 200 countries and territories across the globe.

NORAD in recent years has been tracking North Korean long-range missile tests. Pyongyang warned Washington earlier this month of a possible "Christmas gift". That came after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un gave the United States until the end of the year to propose new concessions in talks over his country's nuclear arsenal and reducing tensions between the two longtime adversaries.

> NORAD's Santatradition tracking started in 1955 when a Colorado Springs department misprinted the phone number to the North Pole in a newspaper

store

advertisement, according to its website.

The first call came from a little girl and went to US Air Force Colonel Harry Shoup, director of what was then known as the Continental Air Defense Command.

The colonel assured the girl that Santa was on en route, and when more children called the command center, the military added a new task to its defense mission.

Russia tests 'sovereign' internet amid fears of online isolation

AFP, Moscow

Russia carried out tests Monday to ensure the "security" of its internet infrastructure in case of a foreign cyberattack as part of measures that rights activists worry could also tighten censorship and lead to online isolation.

A controversial law that allows the country to cut internet traffic from international servers came into force in November, but the communications ministry has denied that the government is gearing up to isolate the Russian segment of the internet and said ordinary users would not notice the tests.

The ministry said that the drills are aimed at ensuring the "integrity" of the access to banned websites. internet.

on the whole both authorities and service providers are ready to effectively react to emerging risks and threats and ensure the reliable work of both the internet and the single telecommunication network," deputy communications minister Alexei Sokolov told reporters.

Apart from testing the safety of the Russian segment of the internet in case of an attack, authorities also tried to ensure the safety of mobile users and whether it was possible to intercept traffic and text messages, Sokolov said. "The purpose of the task is to ensure

the reliable operation of the internet in Russia in any conditions and under any circumstances," he added, referring to the drills. The law, which Putin signed in May,

requires Russian internet providers to install equipment provided by the authorities to enable centralised control of data traffic. They will also filter content to prevent

At his annual news conference last week, "The results of the tests have shown that Putin defended Russia's internet policies, promising that the country was not "moving towards closing off the internet."

"A free internet and a sovereign internet are two concepts that aren't mutually exclusive," he said.

The new system is set to go online in



Zografyon Greek High School principal Yani Demircioglu, accompanied by school children and members of Greek Orthodox community, plays an accordion during a Christmas celebration at the main shopping and pedestrian street of Istiklal in Istanbul, Turkey, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

WhatsApp wars divide families

AFP, New Delhi

With their parents bombarding them on WhatsApp with misinformation and even abuse over their stand on India's new citizenship law, young women are hiding their identities on social media to voice outrage and find alternative families.

Young people, particularly women, have been at the forefront of the ongoing wave of protests over the law, but this can be dangerous in a largely conservative and patriarchal society.

When Priya takes part in protests, for example, the fear of the riot police -- 25 people have died in the past almost two weeks -- comes second to the terror of her bigoted Hindu father finding out her whereabouts and halting her education.

"He just has this hatred of Muslims -- every opportunity he has lost in life, he blames them," says Priya, 20, too scared to give her real name in case her New Delhi family find out.

"I have tried so many times to talk to him. But every conversation we have ends with him threatening to pull me out of college and get me married off," the student tells AFP.

Her story is reflected across India's dining tables, FaceTime chats and WhatsApp family groups in what is turning out to be the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he rose to power in 2014.

"My father keeps spamming me on WhatsApp with fake news

ANTI-CAA PROTESTS IN INDIA

and videos - it's really frustrating," says Priya.

to fact-checking websites before his threats to end her education forced Thomson Reuters Foundation, Mumbai her to hide her political views from her parents.

identity.

a crowdsourced news website Bangladesh and Pakistan. focussing on India's youth.

"Young people today care enormously about having a ethnic minority, who live in India, including about 60,000 voice and being heard," Tewari tells AFP, pointing to the pro- in camps in southern Tamil Nadu state, according to the democracy protests in Hong Kong and climate change marches : home department. around the world.

But unlike their global counterparts, young Indians have to find forefathers were born in India, said S Velayutham, an ways to express themselves against the backdrop of a culture which places a huge premium on parental authority.

"In many cases, Indian parents feel entitled to decide who their : Chennai. children should love, how they should live and even how they should think," says Tewari.

to the lives of young women, he adds. Like Priya, the Mumbai-based video editor has been actively: They do not know any country but India, but now they involved in the demonstrations against the citizenship law, which

she calls "a gross violation of human rights".

INDIA'S CITIZENSHIP LAW

100,000 Sri Lankan She used to hit back with links refugees not eligible

Nearly 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees living in India are not Her father, she says, has no idea eligible for citizenship under a new law, sparking concerns about her Twitter account, where they may be forced to return to the island nation they fled she uses a handle that shields her : during a decades-long civil war, many with no homes to

WhatsApp wars have India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) aims to upended personal: fast-track citizenship for persecuted Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs, relationships, says Anshul Tewari, : Buddhists, Jains and Christians who arrived in India before editor-in-chief of Youth Ki Awaaz, December 31, 2014, from Muslim-majority Afghanistan,

The law excludes nearly 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamils, an

Most of these refugees are Hindu or Christian, whose advocacy officer at the non-profit Organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation in the southern city of

"Many were sent by the British as indentured labourers on Sri Lankan tea plantations, and hoped for a better life in That sense of control is particularly pronounced when it comes : India when they came here during the war," he said.

"Some 25,000 children were also born in the camps. may have no choice but to go to Sri Lanka," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Taliban kill 15 in attack on Afghan security checkpoint

Taliban militants ambushed a government checkpoint in Balkh province in Afghanistan's north, killing at least 15 members of the security forces, local officials said yesterday, the latest in an escalating series of insurgent attacks. Mohammad Yousuf, the district governor of Dawlatabad where the incident took place said. said dozens of Taliban insurgents targeted a checkpoint manned jointly by Afghan soldiers and intelligence agents, killing 15. More than 18 years after US-led forces toppled the hardline Taliban regime, Afghan forces are suffering record casualties with Afghan and US officials warning that the toll is not sustainable.

Nepal detains 122 Chinese for cyber crime, bank fraud

Police in Nepal have detained 122 Chinese men and women in its biggest crackdown on crime by foreigners entering the country on tourist visas, officials said yesterday. The chief of police in the capital Kathmandu said the suspects were rounded up in raids on Monday following information that they were engaged in suspicious activities. The Chinese are suspected of cyber crime and hacking into bank cash machines, the police chief, Uttam Subedi, said. Another senior police officer, Hobindra Bogati, said the Chinese embassy knew about the raids and had supported the detentions. Last week, authorities in the Philippines arrested 342 Chinese workers in a raid on an unlicensed gambling operation.

Queen admits 'bumpy' year in Christmas message



Queen Elizabeth II called 2019 "quite bumpy" in a Christmas message at the end of a chaotic year which saw Britain bitterly divided over its split from the European Union and her scandal-plagued son Prince Andrew withdraw from public life. The year was filled with disappointments for the queen -- a seminal figure in British public life who assumed the throne in 1952 and is beloved by much of the nation. The queen will point to the life of Jesus as an example of how reconciliation can be achieved and "how small steps taken in faith and in hope can overcome long-held differences and deep-seated divisions" in her speech, which will be broadcast on Christmas Day. The remarks were widely interpreted as a reference to the Brexit debate that has torn Britain apart since it voted to leave the EU in a 2016 referendum. SOURCE: AFP