

US chief justice, senators sworn in for Trump impeachment trial

Agencies
WASHINGTON - The United States Congress opened the impeachment trial of President Donald Trump on Thursday, with House Democrats reading the formal charges from the well of the US Senate before the swearing-in of all 100 senators as jurors for only the third impeachment trial in US history. "Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye!" said the Senate's sergeant at arms, calling the proceedings to order. Seven legislators prosecuting the charges, led by Representative Adam Schiff of the

Justice John Roberts administered the jurors' oath to senators who swore to deliver "impartial justice". The events, unfolding during an election year as Trump seeks another term, will be a test not only of his presidency but also of the nation's three branches of power and its system of checks and balances. Several senators are running for the Democratic Party's nomination to challenge Trump in November.

New evidence emerges

The president calls the impeachment a "hoax", even as new



Intelligence Committee and Representative Jerrrod Nadler of the Judiciary Committee, made the solemn walk across the Capitol for a second day. It's the start of ceremonial protocol that shifts the proceedings out of Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Democratic-run House to the Republican-majority Senate.

Schiff, standing in the well of the Senate usually reserved for senators, began reading the resolution, "Impeaching Donald John Trump, president of the United States for high crimes and misdemeanors."

Later in the day, Chief Jus-

information emerges about his actions towards Ukraine that led to the charges against him.

Pelosi said new allegations from an indicted associate of Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, Lev Parnas, only reinforces the need for the Senate to consider further testimony about the president's actions towards Ukraine.

Pelosi noted that typically a special prosecutor would investigate but she doubted that would happen.

"This is an example of all of the president's henchmen," Pelosi said, "and I hope that the senators do not become part of the president's henchmen."

Israeli Aircraft Bomb Gaza Strip For 2Nd Time In 24 Hours

Agencies

GAZA - Israeli military aircraft have carried out a fresh round of airstrikes against targets in the northern part of the Gaza Strip as the Tel Aviv regime continues with its acts of aggression against the besieged Palestinian coastal sliver.

The Israeli military said in a statement that a combat helicopter attacked infrastructure used for by the Hamas resistance movement late on Thursday. No immediate reports of casualties in the aerial assaults were available.

The statement added that the attack was conducted after two balloons with explosives were flown from the Gaza Strip into Israeli-occupied territories earlier in the day.

Video published by Israel's Kan news network purported to show Hamas members leaving a post ahead of the strike.

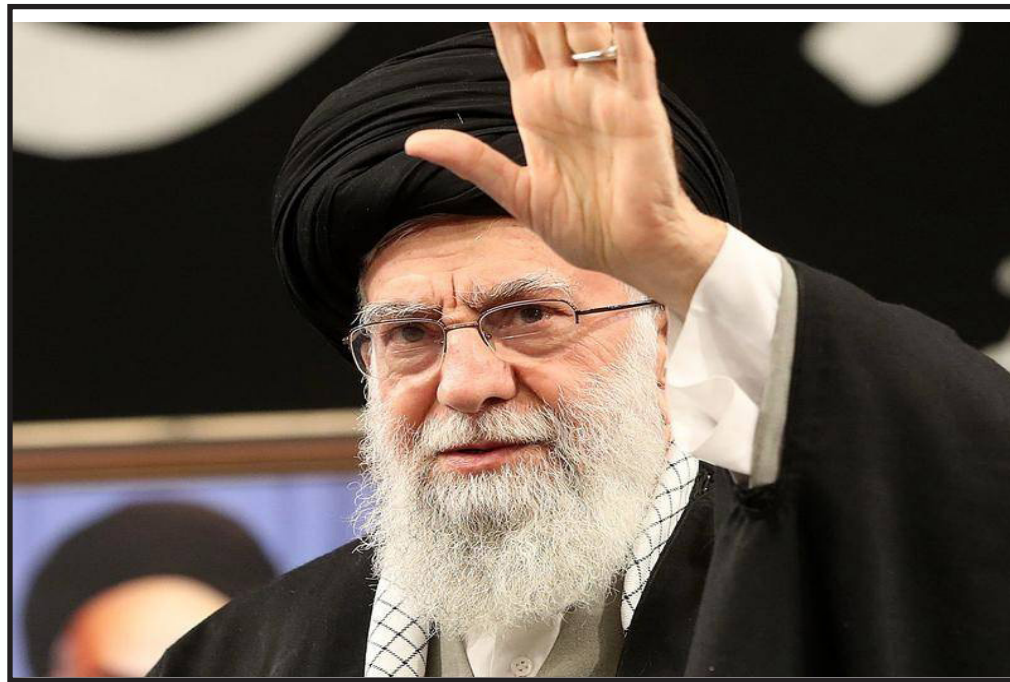
Israeli police said at least two clusters of balloons carrying explosive devices were launched from the Strip into the southern sector of Israeli-occupied territories earlier in the day.

One of the clusters apparently landed in an open field and the other got tangled in a tree. Sappers were called to the scenes in the Sdot Negev region east of Gaza.

One of the devices purportedly went off as the sappers arrived at the scene. The explosion caused no injuries or damage.

Late on Wednesday, Israeli warplanes carried out several airstrikes in the Gaza Strip, targeting a number of areas in the north and the northwest of the coastal enclave.

Palestinian media reported that one of the airstrikes targeted a Hamas position. The attack caused an explosion and material damage to nearby buildings.



Iran Leader Calls Trump 'Clown' With 'Poisonous Dagger'

Agencies

TEHRAN - Iran's supreme leader said President Donald Trump is a "clown" who only pretends to support the Iranian people but will "push a poisonous dagger" into their backs, as he struck a defiant tone in his first Friday sermon in Tehran in eight years.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the mass funerals for Iran's top general, who was assassinated by the U.S in Baghdad earlier this month, show that the Iranian people support the Islamic Republic despite its recent trials. He said the "cowardly" killing of Soleimani had taken out the most effective commander in the battle against the Islamic State group.

In response, Iran launched a barrage of ballistic missile strikes targeting U.S. bases inside Iraq. Ayatollah Khamenei said the strike had dealt a "blow to America's image" as a super-

power. The missile attack was a "military blow in the first place, but more important it was a blow to America's fearsome image", the leader said.

In part of the Ayatollah sermon delivered in Arabic, he said the "real punishment" would be in forcing the U.S. to withdraw from the Middle East.

As Iran's Revolutionary Guard braced for an American counterattack that never came, it mistakenly shot down a Ukrainian jetliner shortly after it took off from Tehran's international airport, killing all 176 passengers on board, mostly Iranians.

Ayatollah Khamenei called the shoot-down of the plane a "bitter accident" that saddened Iran as much as it made its enemies happy. He said it should not overshadow Soleimani's "sacrifice" for the country.

He said Iran's enemies had seized on the crash to question the

Islamic Republic, the Revolutionary Guard and the armed forces.

Iran leader said the Quds Force, which supports resistance groups in the region including Hezbollah and Hamas, "should be considered a humanitarian organization... its members are fighters without borders."

He also lashed out at Western countries, saying they are too weak to "bring Iranians to their knees." He said Britain, France and Germany, which this week triggered a dispute mechanism to try and bring Iran back into compliance with the unraveling 2015 nuclear agreement, were "contemptible" governments and "servants" of the United States.

He said Iran was willing to negotiate, but not with the United States. Hundreds of thousands of people attended the Friday prayers, occasionally interrupting his speech by chanting "God is greatest!" and "Death to America!"

Pakistan appoints Maj Gen Iftikhar as new military spokesman

Agencies

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan on Thursday appointed Maj Gen Babar Iftikhar as the new military spokesman replacing incumbent Maj Gen Asif Ghafoor, who has been posted as the General Officer Commanding Okara in Punjab province, bordering India.

Maj Gen Iftikhar will be the Director-General of the military's media wing - the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

The announcement came after Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa called on Prime Minister Imran Khan, DawnNewsTV reported, citing sources. During the meeting, professional matters relating to the military were discussed, it said.

Ghafoor was appointed as DG ISPR in December 2016. His three-year tenure ended last month.

He has been posted as the general officer commanding of the army's 40th Infantry Division Okara in Punjab. He has commanded an artillery brigade at



the Line of Control, infantry brigade on the eastern border and a division at Swat, Malakand.

Ghafoor posted a farewell message on Twitter, thanking the public and the media for their support during his stint as army spokesman.

During his stint as the DG ISPR, Ghafoor was very active on the social media and on several occasions he tweeted controversial posts and fake news.

Early this month, Ghafoor praised Bollywood star Deepika Padukone as a "brave person" for standing with the protesters at the JNU, but soon deleted the tweet.

Maj Gen Iftikhar was commanding an Armoured Division before being appointed as DG ISPR. He is a graduate of the Command and Staff College Quetta, National Defence University Islamabad and Royal Command and Staff College Jordan.

Iran has a 'shockingly strong' war crimes case against Trump over Soleimani's killing - and it could win

MITCH PROTHERO / BUSINESS INSIDER

Tehran : Iran will pursue war crimes charges against President Donald Trump at the International Criminal Court in the Hague over the January 3 assassination of its top commander Qasem Soleimani outside Baghdad's international airport, according to Gholam Hossein Esmaeili, the spokesman for Iran's top judicial authorities.

"We intend to file lawsuits in the Islamic Republic, Iraq and The Hague Court [International Court of Justice] against the military and government of America and against Trump," Esmaeili said during a Tuesday press conference.

"There is no doubt that the US military has done a terrorist act assassinating Guards Commander Lt. Gen. Soleimani and Second-in-Command of Iraq Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis ... and Trump has confessed doing the crime."

Since the killing, Iran's leadership has vowed political, military and legal revenge for that they call an unlawful killing of one of their greatest military heroes. Soleimani was notorious throughout the Middle East for his diplomatic and military acumen.

The US faces a PR embarrassment if the case gets to trial - because Iran could win

Iran's response to the assassination so far has, however, been complicated by the accidental downing of a Ukrainian airliner last week.

While the US is not a signatory to the international court - US presidents have long contended the venue could be used by America's enemies in cases like this to pressure its foreign policy - it still faces a public-relations burden if the case comes to gets to trial.

This is because according to at least one internationally recognized expert, Iran could well win.

Shortly after Soleimani's death, Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial Executions, tweeted that the bar for lethal action by a nation claiming self-defense - as the Trump administration has repeatedly claimed - is extremely high and requires an imminent threat that the US has thus far failed to identify.

"The targeted killings of Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al Muhandis most likely violate international law [including] human rights law," she wrote.

"Lawful justifications for such killings are very narrowly defined and it is hard to imagine how any of these can apply to these killings."

An attack needs to be imminent to justify such a killing, and this one may not meet the standard

In another tweet, Callamard explicitly broke down how the Trump administration's claims that Soleimani posed an imminent and ongoing threat to US interests failed to reach the bar set by international law.

China's Birth Rate Hits Lowest Level Since 1949; Population Now At 1.4 Billion

Press Trust Of India

Beijing - China's birth rate dropped last year to its lowest level since the Communist country was founded in 1949, adding to concerns that an ageing society and shrinking workforce will pile pressure on a slowing economy.

To avoid a demographic crisis, the government relaxed its one-child policy in 2016 to allow people to have two children, but the change has not resulted in more pregnancies.

In 2019, the birth rate stood at 10.48 per 1,000 people, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) released on Friday.

The number of births has now fallen for three consecutive years.

There were 14.65 million babies born in 2019, after 15.23 million in 2018 and 17.23 million in 2017.

Still, China's population stood at 1.4 billion by the end of 2019, increasing by 4.67 million from the year before.

China's workforce continued to shrink last year.

The NBS said there were 896.4 million people aged between 16 and 59 - its population of working age - a drop from the 897.3 million in 2018.



This marks the eighth consecutive year of decline, and the workforce is expected to decline by as much as 23 percent by 2050.

Although China's limit on family sizes could be removed, the rising cost of living has discouraged many of child-bearing age to have bigger families.

China's economy grew by 6.1 percent in 2019, its slowest pace since 1990 as it was hit by weaker demand and a bruising trade war with the United States.

NEWSMAKERS

Recipe for solidarity: How Indian protesters are being fed

Akshita Nagpal / Aljazeera

New Delhi, India - A group of Sikh farmers from the northern state of Punjab arrived at New Delhi's Shaheen Bagh, picked a spot under a pedestrian bridge, and began to unpack its wares - a gas stove, huge utensils, and provisions - and fired up a community kitchen, or "langar".

Shaheen Bagh is the epicentre of ongoing protests, led by Muslim women, against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), an amendment to Indian citizenship law 1955 that is seen as anti-Muslim.

The Sikhs, helped by the protesting women who rolled "chapati" (bread) for them while continuing their sit-in, prepared breakfast and lunch for more than a 1,000 people, including children, protesting against the CAA, which was passed last month.

The new law aims to grant Indian citizenship to "persecuted" minorities from Muslim-majority Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan while blocking naturalisation

for Muslims.

Muslims see their exclusion from the law that makes religion the basis of citizenship as yet another attempt by the Narendra Modi government to "marginalise" them.

Coupled with a proposed nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC), the community fears the moves are intended to strip millions of Indian Muslims of their citizenship. People from other disadvantaged caste and gender identities, as well as women, are vulnerable before NRC.

Since December 11 when the law was passed, millions of citizens across India have rallied against the CAA despite prohibitory orders and a brutal police crackdown, in which at least 28 people have been killed.

'An act of kindness'

Marching alongside the protesters, with no pomp or waving banners, is an army of people providing them with food and beverages.

At New Delhi's India Gate - the



iconic World War I memorial - on a windy December evening, the mercury dropped to a chilly 13 degrees Celsius. But that did not deter 44-year-old Mohammad Fuaad from leaning on a yellow police barricade and calling out to passers-by, holding out a rectangular packet.

"Biryani le leeejiye, Sir, veg

biryani (Please have biryani, Sir, it's vegetarian biryani)," he called out, assuring people that the rice had been cooked with potatoes instead of meat, to avoid any trouble at a time when meat and the eating of it has become deeply polarised in light of rising Hindu nationalism under the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Fuaad was not trying to sell his biryani, he was offering it for free. In a space barricaded before the British-era monument, thousands of protesters were reading the preamble to the Indian constitution on a loop.

"You know, a dark law has been brought in to threaten India's unity and integrity, and students from across the universities are standing up against it," said Kamran Khan, Fuaad's colleague from Khidmat Foundation, a social welfare collective.

"We have come here to support them in this mission," Khan, who lived in the older part of the Indian capital, told Aljazeera.

At approximately 8pm, when police asked the protesters to wrap up, Khidmat's 80 kilogrammes (176 pounds) of biryani were almost finished. Its fiery aroma lingered and met that of a winter comfort few metres away: "Chai langar" or tea offering by members of Khalsa Aid, a Sikh charity organisation.

"At a protest like this where

people are there regardless [of their identities], I saw this as an act of kindness," said 26-year-old Manpreet Kaur, who works as a travel agent.

Community bonds

Amarpreet Singh, Khalsa Aid's managing director in the Asia Pacific region, told Aljazeera it was the brutal police violence at two predominantly Muslim institutions - New Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia university (JMI) and Uttar Pradesh state's Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) - that caused them to step in.

In near-simultaneous attacks on the evening of December 15, police stormed the two campuses 130km (80 miles) apart, firing tear gas and live ammunition, attacking students with batons, and vandalising property. More than 100 students were wounded in the attacks, one losing an eye and another a limb. Students at both universities had been protesting against CAA.