

House panel holds Barr in contempt

AG failed to turn over Robert Mueller’s unredacted inquiry report; Justice Department denounces move

NICHOLAS FANDOS
WASHINGTON

The House Judiciary Committee voted on Wednesday to recommend that the House hold Attorney General William P. Barr in contempt of Congress for failing to turn over Robert Mueller’s unredacted report, hours after President Donald Trump asserted executive privilege to shield the full report and underlying evidence from Congress.

The committee’s 24-16 contempt vote, taken after hours of debate over the future of American democracy, was the first official House action to punish a government official in the stand-off over the Mueller report.

The Justice Department denounced the move as unnecessary and intended to stoke a fight. After the vote, Judiciary Committee chairman Rep. Jerrold Nadler (Democrat) swatted away questions about possible impeachment, but added: “We are now in a constitutional crisis.”

The contempt vote raised the stakes in the battle over



U.S. Attorney General William Barr being sworn in ahead of a testimony before the Senate on May 1. • AP

evidence and witnesses as Democrats investigate Mr. Trump over behaviour detailed by Mr. Mueller, the Special Counsel, in his report on Russian election interference and possible obstruction of justice.

By the day’s end, it seemed all but inevitable that the competing claims would have to be settled in the nation’s courts rather than on Capitol Hill.

“Our fight is not just about the Mueller report – although we must have access to

the Mueller report,” Mr. Nadler said during a debate. “Our fight is about defending the rights of Congress, as an independent branch, to hold the President, any President, accountable.”

Contesting claims

The Justice Department, the White House and House Republicans lined up to contest that claim, shooting back that Democrats were the ones abusing their powers to manufacture a crisis.

In a statement, a spokes-

woman for the Justice Department, Kerri Kupec, deplored the contempt vote as “politically motivated and unnecessary”, and the two sides traded blame over who had cut off weeks of negotiations over a possible compromise.

“Regrettably, Chairman Nadler’s actions have prematurely terminated the accommodation process and forced the President to assert executive privilege to preserve the status quo,” Ms. Kupec said. “No one, including Chairman Nadler, will force the Department of Justice to break the law.”

Though Mr. Trump has repeatedly tried to withhold information from Congress, and pledged to object to all House subpoenas, the executive privilege assertion is his first use of the secrecy powers as President.

The Justice Department, which asked the President to step in, described the assertion as a “protective” measure that would give Mr. Trump time to fully review the materials before making a final decision about executive privilege. NY TIMES

Senate subpoenas Trump’s son

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The Republican-led Senate Intelligence Committee on Wednesday took the surprise step of issuing a subpoena to President Donald Trump’s son, Donald Trump Jr., to testify as part of its investigation into Russian election interference, U.S. media reported.

It was the first known legal summons issued to a member of the President’s family to force testimony in the ongoing investigation.

Mr. Trump Jr., 41, has testified voluntarily in private once to the committee.

Citing a person close to Mr. Trump Jr., *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the President’s son had offered to answer questions in writing from the committee, and planned to fight the subpoena, which demands he testify in person.

Ruling ANC takes comfortable lead in South Africa election

Party takes 57% of the vote, while Opposition secures 22%

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JOHANNESBURG

The ruling African National Congress (ANC) held a comfortable lead on Thursday with more than half the votes counted from South Africa’s presidential and parliamentary election, but it received much lower support than in the last ballot five years ago.

Opposition parties made widespread allegations of corruption against the ruling ANC party a major part of their campaigns ahead of Wednesday’s vote and voter apathy also appears to have affected turnout, which fell to 65% from 74% in 2014.

Reduction in vote share

The ANC, led by President Cyril Ramaphosa, won 57% of the votes with 60% of the polling districts counted, according to results announced by the Electoral Commission. It received 62% of the votes five years ago. The Democratic Alliance (DA) received 22% of the vote so far, the most of



Poll count: An electoral worker emptying a ballot box for counting in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Wednesday. • AP

any Opposition party.

Mmusi Maimane, leader of the DA, campaigned vigorously on the corruption issue. Speaking at the Electoral Commission’s results centre on Thursday evening, he said that his party appeals to South Africans of all races. “We will never be a party for whites. We will never be a party for blacks,” said Mr. Maimane. “We are a party for all South Africans.”

The populist, leftist Economic Freedom Fighters, which also made graft a

main campaign issue, increased its share of the vote to nearly 10% support. More than 40 smaller parties also took part in the ballot.

In South Africa, the President and Parliament are not elected directly. The number of votes won by each party determines how many representatives are sent to the 400-seat legislature. The President of the country is the leader of the party that gets the most votes. Final results may not be announced until Saturday.

Won’t capitulate to U.S. pressure on trade: China

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

China rejected U.S. accusations of backtracking in trade talks and warned that it would not “capitulate to any pressure” as the two sides headed into make-or-break negotiations on Thursday.

The United States has raised the stakes with plans to increase tariffs on \$200 billion in Chinese goods from 10% to 25% on Friday, prompting Beijing to vow to hit back with “necessary countermeasures”.

“The U.S. has assigned a lot of labels, such as backtracking, going back on one’s word, and so on. Lots of promises have been foisted on China,” Chinese Commerce Ministry spokesman Gao Feng told reporters in Beijing.

“The Chinese side has kept its promises and this has never changed,” he added.

“China will not capitulate to any pressure, and we have the determination and ability to defend our own interests,” Mr. Gao said.

N. Korea fires missiles as U.S. envoy visits Seoul

This comes less than a week after the test-firing of multiple rockets by Pyongyang

REUTERS
SEOUL/WASHINGTON

North Korea fired what appeared to be two short-range missiles on Thursday in its second such test in less than a week, and the U.S. announced it had seized a North Korean cargo ship as tensions again mounted between the two countries.

U.S. President Donald Trump said “nobody is happy” at the missile launches, which South Korea said were likely a protest by Pyongyang against Mr. Trump re-

fusing to ease economic sanctions on the North.

U.S. seizes vessel

The U.S. has given no sign of willingness to budge on sanctions and on Thursday the Justice Department announced the seizure of a North Korean cargo vessel it said was involved in the illicit shipping of coal.

“The relationship continues... I know they want to negotiate, they’re talking about negotiating. But I don’t think they’re ready to

negotiate,” Mr. Trump told reporters on Thursday.

Less than a week ago, Mr. Kim oversaw the test-firing of multiple rockets and a missile and the latest tests coincided with a visit to the South Korean capital by U.S. special envoy for North Korea, Stephen Biegun.

The two missiles fired on Thursday went east from the northwestern area of Kusong, South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

They covered distances of 420 km and 270 km and

reached an altitude of about 50 km before falling into the sea, they said.

“North Korea seemed to be discontented it could not reach a deal in Hanoi,” South Korea’s President Moon Jae-in told South Korean broadcaster KBS, referring to the summit in Hanoi with Mr. Trump. Mr. Moon also said that he saw the tests as a sign that North Korea wanted to negotiate, and said he planned to push for a fourth inter-Korean summit with Mr. Kim.

U.S. man pleads guilty to providing support to LeT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

A U.S. national on Wednesday pleaded guilty to the charges of helping and supporting Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Michael Kyle Sewell, 18, who was arrested in February, admitted to encouraging an individual, identified in court documents only as ‘co-conspirator I’, to join the LeT.

Sewell now faces up to 20 years in federal prison and a fine of up to \$2,50,000. The sentencing is scheduled for

August 12. According to the guilty plea, Sewell provided the co-conspirator, who he spoke to on social media, with contact information for an individual he believed could facilitate the co-conspirator’s travel to Pakistan to join the LeT.

The facilitator turned out to be an undercover FBI agent.

In February, Sewell was charged by the FBI with using social media to recruit people on behalf of the LeT and send them to Pakistan for terrorist training.

ELSEWHERE



Pope issues decree on reporting of sex abuse

VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis issued a landmark decree on Thursday making Bishops directly accountable for sexual abuse or covering it up, requiring clerics to report any cases to Church superiors and allowing anyone to complain directly to the Vatican. The Pope’s edict obliges the world’s one million priests and nuns to report all suspicion of sexual abuse by clerics of any level. REUTERS

Chinese agency removes ‘Arunachal’ references

BEIJING

China’s largest online travel agency Ctrip has removed from its platform products offering travel and accommodation services to Arunachal Pradesh following objections raised by Chinese netizens. China claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of southern Tibet. India firmly maintains that the State is an integral and inalienable part of the country. PTI

U.S. charges ex-analyst over intelligence leak

WASHINGTON

A former intelligence analyst, Daniel Everette Hale, was charged on Thursday with leaking secrets about the U.S. military’s drone-based targeted assassination programme that formed the basis of a powerful expose by The Intercept. REUTERS

Pakistan remands 11 Chinese over trafficking

LAHORE

Eleven Chinese were among 13 suspects remanded by a Lahore court on Thursday for a probe into a gang allegedly involved in prostitution of Pakistani girls and an organ trade racket. Judicial Magistrate Amir Raza directed the Federal Investigation Agency to finish the probe within two days and produce the suspects in court on May 11. PTI

Europe rejects Iran’s ‘ultimatum’ but stands by nuclear agreement

Tehran has warned that it will defy the deal’s provisions

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SIBIU

European powers denounced Iran’s threat to resume nuclear work on Thursday but vowed to save a landmark deal with Tehran despite U.S. pressure.

Iran said it would defy some limits it accepted under the 2015 agreement, and threatened to go further if Europe, China and Russia fail to deliver sanctions relief within 60 days.

EU diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini and France, Germany and Britain – the three European signatories to the deal – voiced “great concern” at President Hassan Rouhani’s dramatic intervention. “We strongly urge Iran to continue to implement its com-



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. • AP

mitments under the JCPOA in full as it has done until now and to refrain from any escalatory steps,” they said in a joint statement, referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

“We reject any ultimatums and we will assess Iran’s compliance on the ba-

sis of Iran’s performance regarding its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA.”

Trump open to talks

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday urged Iran’s leadership to sit down and talk with him about giving up nuclear programme and said he could not rule out a military confrontation.

“What they should be doing is calling me up, sitting down. We can make a deal, a fair deal, we just don’t want them to have nuclear weapons – not too much to ask. And we would help put them back to great shape,” he said, adding: “They should call. If they do, we’re open to talk to them.”

Show of might



Day of triumph: President Vladimir Putin vowed to ensure Russia’s military strength as the country on Thursday marked Second World War Victory Day. Picture shows Mr. Putin and others with portraits of war soldiers. • AFP

Will reopen schools in Sri Lanka: church

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka’s Catholic Church on Thursday announced that it will reopen its schools next week for the first time since Easter Sunday bombings killed 258 people.

Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith said the schools would open on Tuesday. “We have decided to open all Catholic schools on May 14,” Cardinal Ranjith told reporters in Colombo following a meeting between the country’s 12 Bishops and President Maithripala Sirisena in Colombo on Thursday.

He also said regular Sunday services would resume at all Catholic churches in Colombo from Sunday while a special service will be held Thursday at Negombo, north of the capital.