

U.S. judge validates impeachment probe

Orders Trump administration to hand over secret material from Mueller inquiry to Congress panel

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

The Democratic-led impeachment investigation of President Donald Trump resumed with testimony from a senior State Department official on Saturday, a day after a judge buoyed the probe by dismissing a central Republican objection.

Philip Reeker, the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs, was due to meet with the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs, Intelligence and Oversight Committees behind closed doors at the U.S. Capitol.

‘Resolution not needed’
On Friday, U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell rejected the claim that the impeachment process is illegitimate. He also ordered the Republican Trump administration to give the House Judiciary Committee secret material from former Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s reporting on Russian meddling in the



An anti-Donald Trump rally in Florida earlier this year. ■AP

2016 U.S. election. Judge Howell said the House did not have to approve a resolution formally initiating the effort for the impeachment inquiry to be valid, something Republicans have been insisting is the case. Mr. Reeker, 54, is a career diplomat whose current portfolio includes Ukraine, the country central to the investigation of Trump. Mr. Reeker has held his position on an acting basis since

March 18. The impeachment inquiry has underscored what current and former U.S. officials describe as a campaign by Mr. Trump against career diplomats. Several have already met with congressional investigators. Another career diplomat involved in those communications, George Kent, testified last week that he was told to “lie low” on Ukraine

and instead defer to three of Mr. Trump’s political appointees. Marie Yovanovitch, who was abruptly dismissed as Ambassador to Ukraine in May by Mr. Trump, has also testified, accusing the administration of recalling her based on false claims and of eviscerating the State Department.

Call to Ukraine

At the heart of the impeachment inquiry is a July 25 phone call in which Mr. Trump asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden, a leading Democratic contender to face Mr. Trump in the 2020 election, and his son Hunter, who had been a director of a Ukrainian energy company.

The Trump administration was withholding \$391 million in security assistance for Ukraine when the call took place, and investigators are looking into whether Mr. Trump improperly tied the release of the aid to getting

Ukraine’s help in probing the Bidens. Mr. Trump denies wrongdoing. And, backed by his fellow Republicans in Congress, insists he is being treated unfairly.

The administration has refused to hand over documents requested by the congressional committees, and sought to prevent current and former officials from giving interviews.

The committees have scheduled several depositions next week, following Mr. Reeker’s appearance on Saturday, all behind closed doors.

Democratic members of the three committees said they feel they have gathered a great deal of evidence and do not expect this phase of the investigation to last many more weeks, before public hearings. “We’ve heard a lot of compelling testimony. We feel like we know a lot of what’s happened,” Representative Tom Malinowski told reporters at the House this week.

Microsoft beats Amazon, wins Pentagon cloud computing bid

The process was mired in conflict of interest allegations

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

Microsoft Corp. has won the Pentagon’s \$10 billion cloud computing contract, the Defense Department said on Friday, beating out favourite Amazon.com Inc.

The contracting process had long been mired in conflict of interest allegations, even drawing the attention of President Donald Trump, who has taken swipes at Amazon and its founder Jeff Bezos. Mr. Trump in August said his administration was reviewing Amazon’s bid after complaints from other companies.

The Joint Enterprise Defense Infrastructure Cloud (JEDI) contract is part of a broader digital modernisation of the Pentagon meant to make it more technologically agile. Specifically, a goal of JEDI is to give the military better access to data and the cloud from battle-



fields and other remote locations. Oracle Corp had expressed concerns about the award process for the contract, including the role of a former Amazon employee who worked on the project at the Defense Department but recused himself, then later left the Defense Department and returned to Amazon Web Services.

In a statement, an Amazon Web Services (AWS) spokesman said the company was “surprised about this conclusion.” The company said that a “detailed assessment purely on the comparative offerings” would “clearly lead to a different conclusion,” according to

the statement. AWS is considering options for protesting the award, said a person familiar with the matter.

Some companies were concerned that a single award would give the winner an unfair advantage in follow-on work. The Pentagon has said it planned to award future cloud deals to multiple contractors.

In a book slated for publication October 29, retired Navy commander Guy Snodgrass, who served as a speech writer to former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, said Mr. Trump called Mattis and directed him to “screw Amazon” by preventing it from bidding on the JEDI contract, according to an excerpt of the book.

“We’re not going to do that,” Mr. Mattis later told other Pentagon officials, according to the excerpt. “This will be done by the book, both legally and ethically.”

20 Vietnamese among those found dead in U.K.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NGHE AN

As many as 20 Vietnamese citizens are feared among 39 people found dead in a truck in Britain this week, families and community organisers said Saturday, as one of the alleged truck owners denied involvement in the tragedy.

British police initially said all of the 31 men and eight women found early on Wednesday in a refrigerated lorry in an industrial park in Grays, east of London, were believed to be Chinese nationals. Four people have

been held over the incident, which has shocked Britain and shed light on dangerous trafficking routes into Europe taken by undocumented migrants. Several Vietnamese families now fear their relatives, who may have been carrying falsified Chinese passports, are among the victims.

Britain-based community group VietHome said it had received “photos of nearly 20 people reported missing, age 15-45” from Vietnam, a popular source for smuggled migrants looking to better their lives in the U.K.

U.S. bars flights to all Cuban cities except Havana

Trump administration acts to roll back historic Obama-era relaxations

REUTERS
WASHINGTON/HAVANA

The U.S. government said on Friday that it would bar U.S. airlines from flying to all destinations in Cuba besides Havana starting on December 10 as the Donald Trump administration boosts pressure on the Cuban government.

The U.S. Transportation Department said in a notice it was taking the action at the request of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to “further the administration’s policy of strengthening the economic consequences to the Cuban regime for its ongoing re-



Airport workers in Santa Clara welcome the first commercial flight between the U.S. and Cuba in over 50 years in 2016. ■AP

pression of the Cuban people and its support for Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela.”

The move will bar U.S. air carrier flights to any of the

nine international airports in Cuba other than Havana and impact about eight flights a day. The prohibition does not impact charter flights.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said in a tweet that his country strongly condemned the move and that it “strengthened restrictions on U.S. travel to Cuba and its citizens’ freedoms.”

Mr. Rodriguez said sanctions would not force Cuba to make concessions to U.S. demands.

These restrictions are aimed at squeezing the island nation economically and expanding Mr. Trump’s steady rollback of the historic opening to Cuba by his predecessor, Barack Obama.

Trump laments loss of iPhone home button

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump took a swipe at Apple chief Tim Cook with a Tweet lamenting the removal of the iPhone home button.

“To Tim: The Button on the iPhone was FAR better than the Swipe!” he tweeted on Friday.

Mr. Trump switched from an Android mobile to an iPhone in March 2017, the same year Apple dropped the physical home button from its top models. This earlier shift seemed to be

the target of presidential ire.

This is not the first time Mr. Trump has cast a critical eye over the tech giant’s design choices. “I cannot believe that Apple didn’t come out with a larger screen iPhone. Samsung is stealing their business. STEVE JOBS IS SPINNING IN GRAVE,” he had tweeted in September 2013.

Friday’s tweet also comes after a gaffe in March when he referred to Cook as “Tim Apple”. Mr. Trump later claimed the naming was deliberate and a “time saving” measure.

Sharif suffers angina attack

It is caused by reduced flow of blood to the heart

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAHORE

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Saturday suffered angina pain while undergoing treatment at a Lahore hospital, according to a media report. Angina is a type of chest pain caused by reduced blood flow to the heart.

Mr. Sharif suffered angina pain in the morning while undergoing treatment at the hospital, the Dawn News reported quoting Services Institute of Medical Sciences (SIMS) principal Dr. Mahmood Ayaz. However, Dr. Ayaz refuted reports in a section of media that Mr. Sharif, 69, has suffered a heart attack.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Sharif’s lawyer Khawaja Haris



Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Lahore. ■AP

claimed that Mr. Sharif had suffered a “minor heart attack” last night and that his “life is in danger”. Speaking to reporters at the hospital, Dr. Ayaz said Mr. Sharif’s platelet count is now rising. He is administered around 16 injections of intravenous im-

munoglobulin (IVIg) every day. The Lahore High Court on Friday granted bail to Mr. Sharif, who is undergoing treatment, after being diagnosed with an acute immune disorder, which reduced his blood platelet count to dangerous levels.

The three-time Prime Minister was in Kot Lakhpat jail but early this month was sent to the custody of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), which is probing the Sharif family in the Chaudhry Sugar Mills case.

“The medical reports of the PML-N supreme leader have been sent to doctors abroad for their opinion,” a party leader said. Mr. Sharif’s daughter Maryam Nawaz, 45, is also under treatment at the same hospital.

10 killed as storms ravage eastern Japan

REUTERS
TOKYO

The death toll from torrential rains that caused flooding and mudslides in Japan climbed to 10 on Saturday, with three others missing, public broadcaster NHK reported, just two weeks after the region was hit by a powerful typhoon.

Landslips ripped through waterlogged areas in Chiba and Fukushima prefectures, in eastern and northeastern Japan, on Friday.

Although the storm had moved away from Japan by Saturday, hundreds of residents were still in evacuation centres and some rail and bus services remained suspended.

Iraqi security forces clamp down on protesters

Nearly 200 people have died in anti-government protests this month

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BAGHDAD

Iraqi security forces sought to clamp down on protests in Baghdad and across the south on Saturday. A parliamentary session scheduled for Saturday afternoon to discuss the renewed protests was cancelled after it failed to reach a quorum.

Since anti-government rallies first erupted on October 1, nearly 200 people have died and thousands were wounded in Baghdad and across the country’s Shia-majority south.

Almost a quarter of them, 42, succumbed on Friday alone from live rounds, tear gas canisters or while torching government buildings or offices belonging to powerful paramilitary factions.



Iraq's anti-government protesters trying to break into the provincial council building during a demonstration in Basra on Friday. ■AP

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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4	7	9	3	8	5	1	6	2
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9	3	1	6	5	4	2	8	7
7	6	8	1	3	2	9	5	4
1	9	3	2	6	7	5	4	8
5	8	2	9	4	3	7	1	6
6	4	7	5	1	8	3	2	9

Tamil groups place their demands ahead of election

Seek international probe of war crimes, repeal of terrorism law and investments from Tamil diaspora

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

In a show of strength and solidarity, five Tamil parties in Sri Lanka recently came together and put down their expectations of presidential candidates seeking their support in the November 16 election.

The initiative, led by students of the University of Jaffna and the Eastern University in Batticaloa, culminated in a 13-point proposal.

Call for federal structure

The demands include evolving a political solution through a federal arrangement, with a recognition of a “separate sovereignty” status for the Tamils and their right to self-determination; conducting an international probe of war crimes; repealing the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act; stopping Sinhala-Buddhist “colonisation” of the north and east; and enabling investments from Tamil diaspora to enhance development in the



Sri Lankan Tamils holding a rally in Jaffna in September. ■AP

war-affected areas. Leaders of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi, Tamil Belam Liberation Organisation, People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam – which are constituents of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) – along with two other groups signed the document.

The Tamil National People’s Front decided to stay out of the exercise. Its leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam accused India of backing the initiative in order pressure Mr. Gotabaya for its own interests in the island, in

countering China’s. The TNPF also called for a boycott of polls, arguing that choosing a candidate solely to defeat Mr. Gotabaya weakens the Tamils’ bargaining power with little certainty that the alternative will deliver.

However, students who led the effort offered a different perspective. A decade after the war, the community is still struggling to move ahead and the Tamils ought not to stop engaging, in their view. “The demands reflect our collective aspirations.

We felt it was important to articulate them in one voice. We first looked at individual proposals from the different parties and then combined them based on several rounds of discussion,” said S.P.S. Babilaraj of the Jaffna University Students’ Union.

Neither of the two main contestants – Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Sajith Premadasa – has so far agreed to engage on the demands that some, even among Tamils, deem unrealistic, given past experience. The position of the Tamil leadership, particularly the TNA – the main political formation representing Tamils of the North and East in Parliament – is being closely watched.

The TNA has so far not declared support for any candidate explicitly. According to its leader R. Sampanthan, the demands broadly reflect the contents of earlier, historic agreements on the national question signed by the Tamil leadership with popular Sinhalese leaders.

In 2015, the Tamil vote from Sri Lanka’s north and east, along with the Muslim and hill country Tamil votes, played a major role in dislodging then President Maithripala Sirisena.

Failed promises

Today, the Tamil constituency and leadership are disillusioned. While acknowledging the incremental gains made in the last five years, they point to the many failed promises of the incumbent government. The average Tamil voter may yet not be ready to cast her vote for a Rajapaksa but the other options do not seem particularly enticing either.

However, the Tamil vote – about 18 % – could make a difference. And that is why some worry that a boycott – like the one enforced by the LTTE in 2005 – would strengthen Mr. Gotabaya’s bid, much like it did his brother’s then.

ELSEWHERE



Hong Kong medical workers join protests

HONG KONG
Hundreds of Hong Kong medical workers and other anti-government protesters rallied in the city’s financial centre on Saturday, angry at perceived police brutality during more than four months of sometimes violent unrest. The demonstrators gathered peacefully on Saturday, occasionally chanting “Hong Kong people, resist!” **REUTERS**

Wildfires destroy homes in south California

LOS ANGELES
Wildfires raged across California on Friday, destroying homes and forcing evacuations, as over 1,000 firefighters tackled flames in the southern part of the State alone. Tens of thousands of residents near Santa Clarita fled their homes as the fire scorched over 4,000 acres and was only 10% contained by Friday evening. **AFP**