VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd in Washington.

President Donald Trump has been reliving his 2016 election victory and assailing House lawmakers for pushing more investigations of him in front of a friendly crowd of conservatives meeting outside the nation's Capitol.

AP correspondent Ben Thomas has details.

"I was probably more of a conservative than a Republican. People just didn't quite understand that."

President Trump hailed his own outsider campaign in a two-hour address to the Conservative Political Action Conference. He also bore in on special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election.

"This phony thing that now looks like it's dying so they don't have anything with Russia. There is no collusion. So now they go in and morph into 'Let's inspect every deal he's ever done. We're going to go into his finances.'"

House Democrats have been pushing for further probes after the president's former personal lawyer Michael Cohen labeled him "a con man" and "a cheat" in a congressional hearing this week.

Ben Thomas, Washington.

Meanwhile, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders held his first public rally of the 2020 presidential campaign, pledging to fight for social, economic and political justice.

AP's Julie Walker has details.

At the rally in Brooklyn, New York, where he pointed out how he grew up in a working class family there, the Democrat pledged a campaign of social justice from immigration to Medicare-for-all to climate change to a living wage.

"... the underlying principles of our government will not be greed, hatred and lies."

Bernie Sanders also called Donald Trump "the most dangerous president in modern American history" and says Trump wants to divide us while he wants to unite America.

Julie Walker, New York.

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U.S.-backed Syrian defense forces continued their assault on the so-called Islamic State's last enclave in Baghuz, Syria, Saturday.

Reuters correspondent Saskia O'Donoghu reports officials are confident the battle for the small village near the Euphrates will not last much longer.

The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF, removed several hundred people on Friday, separating women and children from men who were taken for interrogation.

The SDF then launched an attack to seal four years of international efforts to roll back a "caliphate" that redrew the map of the Middle East.

On Saturday, the SDF said they expect the battle to take Islamic State's last enclave to be over soon.

Some 40,000 people have crossed out of the jihadists' diminishing territory in the last three months as the SDF sought to drive the militants from remaining pockets.

Their final advance was slowed for weeks by the jihadists' extensive use of tunnels and human shields. They have not ruled out the possibility that some militants have crept out, hidden among civilians.

Saskia O'Donoghu of Reuters.

Pakistan confirmed Saturday that two of its soldiers were killed in ongoing military skirmishes with India across the disputed Kashmir border.

The army's media wing said the soldiers were killed in the early hours of Saturday morning in the Nakiyal sector on the Line of Control which separates the Pakistani and Indian portions of the divided Himalayan region.

This comes one day after Pakistan, in a "gesture of peace," returned an Indian pilot who was captured alive when his plane was shot down in a dogfight. The overture does not seem to have affected the situation in Kashmir, which continues to be the scene of relentless heavy mortar and artillery shelling between Pakistan's and India's militaries.

Tens of thousands of people marched in Italy's financial capital, Milan, on Saturday against policies by the populist government that they say promote racism.

The Milan city official in charge of migrant policy put the number of marchers under the banner "People First" at 200,000.

He wrote on Twitter: "Salvini, count us." That's aimed at the leader of the northern League [policy], or political party, that is, Matteo Salvini, who as Italy's interior minister has blocked the arrival of humanitarian ships that rescued migrants fleeing from Libya.

Meanwhile, French yellow vest demonstrators were protesting for a 16th straight weekend in Paris and other cities Saturday to show they are still mobilized against the government's economic policies they see as favoring the rich.

The protests started in November to oppose fuel tax hikes but have expanded into a broader public rejection of President Emmanuel Macron's economic policies.

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