VOA NEWS

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VOA news. I'm Christopher Cruise reporting.

Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives launched a wide-ranging investigation Monday of President Trump's 2016 campaign, his businesses, and whether as president he has obstructed justice in an effort to stop investigations of him and his family.

Mr. Trump has long denied wrongdoing involving his campaign.

AP Washington correspondent Sagar Meghani reports from the White House.

The panel has sent document requests to 81 people touching all parts of the president's life from sons, Don Jr. and Eric, to former adviser Steve Bannon and Sean Spicer.

It makes some specific request like asking Michael Cohen for any audio or video recordings of his talks with the president.

Committee Chair Jerrold Nadler says the investigation will look into obstruction of justice, corruption and abuse of power. But the document requests are a way to start "building the public record."

One official familiar with the probe says most responses are due in two weeks and the committee expects some people may eventually face subpoenas if they do not cooperate.

Sagar Meghani, at the White House.

Venezuelan opposition leader and U.S. recognized interim President Juan Guaidó returned safely to Caracas on Monday despite concerns he would be arrested for violating a travel ban imposed by the government of President Nicholás Maduro.

Maduro has called Guaidó a coup-mongering U.S. puppet and said the opposition leader could face arrest when he returned to Venezuela.

After five years of imprisonment, the prominent Egyptian photojournalist, Mahmoud Abu Zaid, was released and returned to his family Monday.

He is popularly known as "Shawkan." He said he would continue his work as a journalist despite harsh conditions placed on his release. He will remain under "police observation" for the next five years and has to check in with police every day at sunset.

This is VOA news.

Hundreds of Islamic State fighters and family members fled the northeastern Syrian village of Baghuz on Monday, taking advantage of a pause in ferocious fighting with the U.S.-backed forces that have surrounded the last patch of the terror group's self-declared caliphate.

AP correspondent ??? reports.

A spokesman for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces tweeted that the battle to retake Baghuz was going to be over soon despite the slowdown.

Later, an SDF official said some 500 people including fighters have surrendered and evacuated the village of Baghuz and its surrounding areas. Dozens of men, women and children climbed hills on foot and were later seen getting into small trucks.

I'm ???.

A coalition official told VOA on Monday that the SDF was working diligently to get any remaining civilians out of harm's way but the official admitted the number of civilians still hiding with IS fighters or being held against their will is simply not known.

Anti-government protesters in Algeria were not placated by longtime President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's promise to serve a truncated term if re-elected in April.

Demonstrations largely led by Algeria's youths continued on Monday. They included a boycott of university classes in the capital city of Algiers.

Authorities in Alabama, the southern American state, are searching for survivors after powerful tornadoes swept through the state on Sunday, killing at least 23 people. The death toll expected to rise.

AP correspondent Rita Foley reports.

The tornado that terrorized the tiny community of Beauregard may have had winds of 160 miles per hour or more as it traveled right down a county road, killing residents and knocking down homes and trees.

Liz Hickman huddled in her home with her grandchildren. "I just told them, 'Y'all just hold on tight.' And we're here. And we were just holding on each other real tight."

She told the Today Show when she peeped outside, her neighbor's home was gone.

Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones: "The damage is significant. I would put it in the category of catastrophic."

The county coroner's office was overwhelmed and called in help from the state.

I'm Rita Foley.

The lottery commission in the southeastern U.S. state of South Carolina said the winner of a $1.5 billion Jackpot has now stepped forward to claim the prize.

Officials said the person claiming the largest lottery payout to a single winner in U.S. history wishes to remain anonymous.

The winner has opted to receive the cash option, a one-time payment of almost $878,000,000.

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