VOA NEWS

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

U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday visited communities in eastern Alabama devastated by tornadoes that tore through homes and businesses and killed 23 people.

AP's Ed Donahue has details.

The president observed a moment of silence before 23 wooden crosses to remember the victims. Around him, trees were uprooted, houses were torn from their foundations.

"We saw things that you wouldn't believe."

The president and first lady were there to listen and to hug families of the victims.

"I said how, how did it go, and she said 'I lost 10.' 10 people. And a couple of others lost two and three. It's, I've never seen anything like it."

He told people in Beauregard the government has their backs.

"FEMA is laying it out."

People are leaving a relief center.

The president posed for photographs and signed autographs.

There was also chanting. "U.S.A, U.S.A, U.S.A, ...."

A local pastor said it was an uplifting visit, adding the recovery is "a marathon, not a sprint."

I'm Ed Donahue.

Meanwhile, President Trump said Friday that his former lawyer Michael Cohen lied to Congress for a second time when he said he did not ask for a presidential pardon.

AP's Washington correspondent Sagar Meghani reports that means that the president could be called as a witness.

Cohen told a House panel last week he never sought nor would accept a pardon from Trump, who calls that a "stone cold lie."

"He's lied about a lot of things, but when he lied about the pardon, that was really a lie."

Later tweeting, he rejected a personal appeal from Cohen for a pardon, the strongest assertion yet that Cohen may have lied under oath.

Cohen tweeted minutes later saying the president's the one who is lying. But his own lawyer says Cohen directed a previous attorney to explore a possible pardon with the Trump legal team.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

For more on these stories, be sure to log on to our website voanews.com. This is VOA news.

A Chicago grand jury has indicted "Empire" actor Jussie Smollett for making a false report to police.

We get the details from AP's Mike Gracia.

Cook County, Illinois, grand jury has indicted "Empire" actor Jussie Smollett on 16 felony counts related to making a false report that he was attacked by two men who shouted racial and homophobic slurs in late January.

Smollett told police he had been physically attacked by two men in downtown Chicago as he exited a Subway restaurant at 2:00 a.m.

Smollett said the men shouted at him, wrapped a rope around his neck and poured an "unknown substance" on him.

Smollett was charged on February 20 with one count of disorderly conduct for filing a false police report.

I'm Mike Gracia.

Marches and protests were held Friday across the globe to mark International Women's Day under the slogan #BalanceforBetter with calls for a more gender-balanced world.

In New York, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres told a commemoration at U.N. headquarters that remarkable progress on women's rights and leadership in [recent days] recent decades, that is, has sparked a backlash from what he called "an entrenched patriarchy."

"We can only re-establish trust and rebuild global solidarity by challenging historic injustices and promoting the rights and dignity of all. We can only achieve sustainable development and peace by drawing on all our assets and capacities."

Millions of others around the world demanded equality amid a persistent salary gap, violence and widespread inequality.

Hundreds of thousands of protesters flooded the streets of the Algeria's capital in their third and largest Friday protest as they tried to break President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's hold on power.

One police official estimated the crowd at 500,000.

The protesters are challenging the 82-year-old Bouteflika's fitness to run for a fifth term in next month's election. The Algerian leader has been in power for 20 years but has not been in the public eye since 2013.

The U.S. economy added a much lower than expected 20,000 jobs in February.

AP's Shelley Adler has details.

It was the smallest monthly gain in almost a year and a half.

"I do think that we need to exercise caution in looking at this report. I think that there are probably some seasonal or weather-sensitive issues that may have crept into it."

Mark Hamrick, senior economic analyst at bankrate.com, assigns a slowing growth in Europe, China and here at home.

"It does appear that economies broadly are slowing, and so the risk is that ultimately that steps over into recession. We don't see that happening immediately but, you know, this is a long expansion we've had in the United States. So we know that party doesn't go on forever."

Shelley Adler, Washington.

The jobs report sent stocks down on Wall Street, with all three indices closing lower.

I'm David Byrd, VOA news.