VOA NEWS

October 26, 2019

This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

As many as a million Chileans are protesting in the capital, Santiago, in the biggest demonstrations yet since violence broke out a week ago over entrenched inequality in the South American nation.

Demonstrators waving flags, blowing whistles and horns, and wafting incense and bearing placards urging political and social change streamed through the city streets on Friday.

Also protesters tried to force their way onto the grounds of Chile's Congress in Valparaiso. Police fired tear gas to fend off hundreds of demonstrators on the perimeter as some lawmakers and administrative staff hurried out of the legislative building.

At least 19 people have died in the turmoil that has swept the South American nation. The unrest began as a protest over a 4-cent increase in subway fares and soon morphed into a larger movement over growing inequality in one of Latin America's wealthiest countries.

At least 42 people were killed in Iraq on Friday when security forces used tear gas and an Iranian-backed militia opened fire to try to quell renewed demonstrations against corruption and economic hardship.

The Iraqi Human Rights Commission said at least 30 people were killed by gunshots or tear gas canisters in the capital, Baghdad, and four southern provinces.

Several people died while trying to storm the offices of Asaib Ahl al-Haq, an armed faction in two southern cities.

The Iraqi parliament is scheduled to meet Saturday to discuss the protests.

The bloodshed is the second major bout of violence in Iraq this month. A series of clashes two weeks ago left 157 people dead and more than 6,000 wounded.

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U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Friday the United States will bolster its forces currently protecting oil fields and facilities in eastern Syria from the Islamic State terror group.

Speaking at a NATO summit in Brussels, Esper said that the new troops would be around the oil fields even as other troops are being pulled out of the country.

"We are reinforcing that position. It will include some mechanized forces. Again, I'm not going to get into the details, but the mission in Syria remains what their mission in Syria began with. It's always been about defeating the ISIS coalition."

The secretary's announcement came after President Trump tweeted Friday morning that U.S. troops have left or are leaving Syria and American troops are coming home.

The president has ordered the withdrawal of nearly all U.S. forces in Syria and Russia and Turkey have divided security roles in the region.

Mourners bid a final farewell to the late U.S. congressman and civil rights advocate Elijah Cummings in his hometown of Baltimore Friday.

AP's Ed Donahue reports.

Speakers included people who considered Elijah Cummings a mentor. They were colleagues like Speaker Nancy Pelosi who called him "the North Star of Congress. Our guiding light."

Jennifer Cummings thanked her father for teaching her the dual power of her beauty and her brilliance.

"We weren't just dad and daughter. We were confidants and friends and daddy I will miss that the most."

Former President Bill Clinton recalled Cummings' talent for speaking and "his booming voice."

Former President Barack Obama says Cummings parents passed on strength and grit, but also kindness and faith.

"There's nothing weak about being honorable. You're not a sucker to have integrity and to treat others with respect."

Obama said that when the path ahead looked difficult, that's when Elijah Cummings' voice mattered most.

I'm Ed Donahue.

A federal judge who oversaw the special counsel's Russia investigation is ordering the Justice Department to give secret grand jury testimony to House Democrats, leading the impeachment inquiry.

AP's Jackie Quinn reports.

The Justice Department says it's reviewing the order from Chief U.S. District Beryl Howell, who said the redacted grand jury material mentioned in the Mueller report must be released to members of Congress within days.

It's not clear if anything new will be gleaned from that material but the judge said the Justice Department was wrong to withhold it.

She's also rejected the government argument that impeachment is not a judicial proceeding. it rejected that their stance that the inquiry isn't legitimate because the House didn't take a formal vote to launch the impeachment inquiry.

Jackie Quinn, Washington.

And California's governor has declared a state of emergency as firefighters across the state are fighting blazes in both the north and the south.

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