VOA NEWS

November 17, 2019

This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

The House Intelligence Committee heard testimony from an Office of Management and Budget official in the impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump on Saturday.

Mark Sandy is a career officer with the OMB who complied with a congressional subpoena after three other Trump administration appointees had refused to testify.

Democratic Congressman Eric Swalwell of California said Sandy's testimony related to a "hold" that the administration placed on millions of dollars to Ukraine.

"We learned more about this investigation and actually it's a former prosecutor what is remarkable about this investigation is that it is almost entirely driven by witness accounts."

Meanwhile, Republican Lee Zeldon of New York said that Sandy's testimony did not help what he called "the Democrat charade."

"One day it was 'quid pro quo,' last Sunday they changed it to the word 'extortion,' over the course of this past week, he changed it to the word 'bribery.' And today was a sobering reminder of just how ridiculous this impeachment charade is."

Whether President Trump pressured Ukraine to investigate his political rivals in exchange for releasing hundreds of millions of dollars of military aid is at the heart of the impeachment inquiry.

Fires were blazing on the doorstep of Hong Kong Polytechnic University's entrance into the early hours of Sunday as protesters hurled gasoline bombs and police fired volleys of tear gas in some of the most dramatic scenes in more than five months of protests.

Thousands of students and activists have blocked the entrances to five universities in the city. They have stockpiled gasoline bombs, catapults, bows and arrows and other weapons.

Hours earlier, squads of Chinese People's Liberation Army soldiers emerged from their barracks to help clear debris that have blocked some key roads in the city.

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Drivers and protesters blocked traffic in Tehran Saturday after President Hassan Rouhani's government imposed gasoline rationing and price hikes of at least 50 percent. We get more from Edward Yeranian in Cairo.

Dozens of protesters in the capital of Iran's Azerbaijan province, Tabriz, clashed with government security forces Saturday, pelting them with stones on a major highway through the city. Amateur video showed traffic stopped as police charged protesters in an attempt to chase them off the roadway.

Protesters also blocked traffic using cars and buses in the capital, Tehran, amid an unseasonal snow storm.

Protests were reported Saturday in dozens of Iranian towns and cities for the second straight day, following a government decision to raise fuel prices.

A number of people reportedly were killed or wounded, but reports were conflicting over the exact casualty count.

Edward Yeranian, for VOA news, Cairo.

Scuffles between Paris police and activists marred the anniversary of the birth of the yellow vest movement against government policies seen as favoring the rich. Lisa Bryant reports from the French capital.

Demonstrators smashed store windows and bus stops in Paris, setting bonfires in some streets. Police and firemen responded with tear gas and water hoses. At least one of the demonstrations was canceled because of the violence.

Paris has been mostly calm in recent weeks but not Saturday. Some yellow vest and young thugs known as "Black Blocs" were back on the streets as the protest movement for greater economic justice marks its first year.

Lisa Bryant, for VOA news, Paris.

Tourists and residents in Italy have been allowed back into St. Mark's Square after tidal waters swept through most of the lagoon city. AP's Sarah Bassett has more.

Despite sunny skies, the city remained on edge due to possibly more wind-propelled high tidal waters.

Late Tuesday, water levels in Venice reached 6 feet, 1 inch above sea level, the highest flooding since 1966.

Luigi Brugnaro, the city's mayor, estimated damages from the flooding would reach at least $1.1 billion.

The flooding has left Italians exasperated at the incompletion of the city's long-delayed Moses flood defense project. Completion of the multibillion-euro project, under construction since 2003, has been delayed by corruption scandals, cost overruns and opposition from environmentalists worried about its effects on Venice's delicate lagoon ecosystem.

I'm Sarah Bassett.

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