VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

The 2020 presidential election season starts February third with the Iowa caucuses.

In just about an hour, six Democrats will face off in Iowa in the last debate before the nomination process gets underway. We get more from AP's Rita Foley.

"There could be a political brawl on the stage denied in Iowa," say observers. Less than three weeks before primary voting begins, there is no frontrunner.

Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders are sparring with each other. He is denying reports that he told her in 2018 that a woman couldn't beat President Trump.

Joe Biden may well take shots from rivals who say he inaccurately described his 2002 vote to authorize military action against Iraq.

Then is Billionaire Tom Steyer, who raised eyebrows last week with surprisingly strong polling.

Amy Klobuchar and Pete Buttigieg round out tonight's field.

Rita Foley, Washington.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell says President Donald Trump's impeachment trial will start next week. We get more from AP's Sagar Meghani.

The House is set to vote tomorrow on sending the articles of impeachment to the Senate which would then launch just the third ever impeachment trial of a president.

GOP chief Mitch McConnell says he is aiming for Tuesday after running into Republican opposition for a plan to simply dismiss the charges. "... our members feel that we have an obligation to listen to the arguments."

He is also under growing pressure to call fresh witnesses. "If you want the truth, you have to witnesses, you have to have documents."

Democratic leader chuck Schumer says more Republicans are coming around to that idea though McConnell says it's too early to decide on allowing new testimony.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

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Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said Tuesday a special court should be formed to probe the downing of a Ukrainian passenger jet that was mistakenly targeted by Iran forces just after takeoff, killing all 176 people aboard. Adam Reed of Reuters has more.

Iran's judiciary have arrested an undisclosed number of suspects for their role in the crash as anti-government demonstrations triggered by the disaster ended a fourth day.

After days of denying blame to the crash, Iran acknowledged on Saturday that it had shot down the plane during a high state of alert hours after it had fired missiles at U.S. target in Iraq as retaliation for the killing of Iran's most powerful military commander.

Since then, protesters including hundreds of students have held anti-government demonstrations, with some being met by a visible and violent police crackdown.

That's Reuters' Adam Reed reporting.

France, Britain and Germany triggered a mechanism Tuesday that puts the Iran nuclear deal into dispute.

As Reuters' Lucy Fielder reports, no resolution is reached. It could lead to a return to U.N. sanctions against Iran.

The deal requires Iran to curb its nuclear program which it has always insisted is peaceful. But U.S. President Donald Trump pulled the United States out in 2018, saying it was too weak.

Washington has ramped up sanctions that are severely damaging Iran's economy. Since then, Iran has reduced its compliance, saying the Trump administration's actions give it the right.

The question is now whether the European powers' step is a nail in the deal's coffin. The EU, which acts as guarantor and must now inform fellow signatories Russia, China and Iran itself, said it wanted a return to compliance, not to sanctions.

That's Lucy Fielder reporting.

U.S.-based Human Rights Watch released a scathing review of the Chinese government Tuesday, calling on the international community to push back against "the most brutal and pervasive oppression China has seen in decades."

In a video on HRW's website, Executive Director Kenneth Roth condemned Beijing's treatment of Uighur Muslims in the Xinjiang region.

"... and for the Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims of Xinjiang, China has imposed the most intrusive system surveillance the world has ever seen and has detained one million people for forced indoctrination."

In its 2020 report, the rights group chronicles abuses in 95 countries but expresses its deepest concern about an emboldened China, saying its using its growing global economic influence to silence domestic critics and deter condemnation abroad.

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