

International

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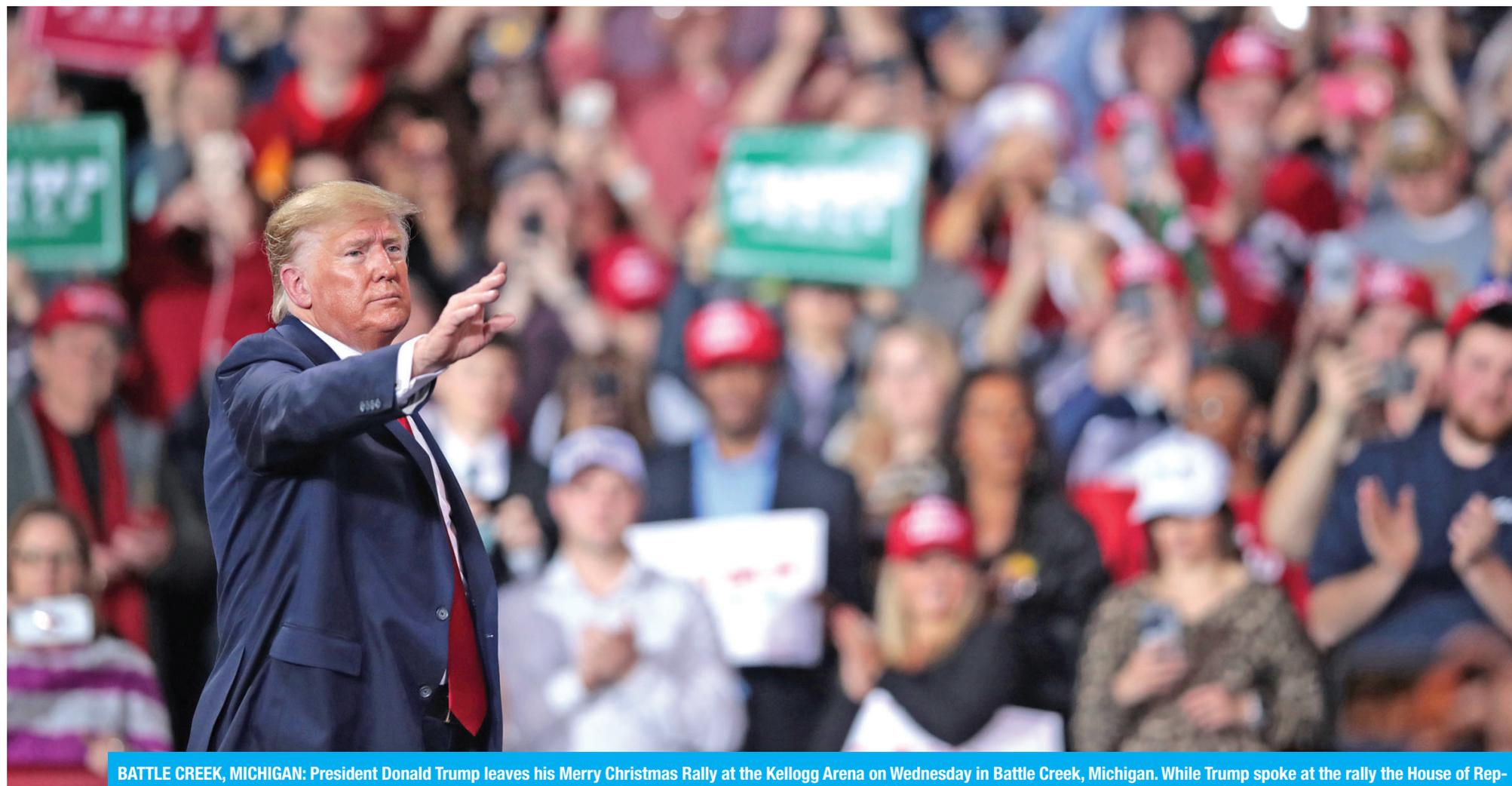


Progress of non-Muslims 'left us in lurch', Malaysia tells Islamic summit

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Delhi cuts mobiles as India protests rage nationwide



BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN: President Donald Trump leaves his Merry Christmas Rally at the Kellogg Arena on Wednesday in Battle Creek, Michigan. While Trump spoke at the rally the House of Representatives voted, mostly along party lines, to impeach the president for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, making him just the third president in US history to be impeached. — AFP

US House votes to impeach Trump

Alternate realities on display as Americans get a striking split-screen view

WASHINGTON: Americans got a striking split-screen view on Wednesday of just how divided their politics have become. As the US House of Representatives voted to impeach President Donald Trump on a charge of abusing his power over his dealings with Ukraine, the president strode fist-pumping onto the stage of a campaign rally in Michigan and declared he had done nothing wrong. "It doesn't really feel like we're being impeached," he said.

Fifteen minutes later, he was. It was a remarkable side-by-side illustration of a political split in the United States so wide and deep that it appears many Americans embrace not merely two competing views of a controversial president, but two alternate realities. On Wednesday, they played out in real time on television and social media.

In one, Trump's conduct toward Ukraine was an abuse of his office so grave he should be expelled from the White House. In the other, he was himself the innocent victim of political abuse.

Wednesday's vote made Trump the third US president to be impeached by the House, a historic rebuke of his administration's efforts to pressure officials in Ukraine to announce investigations of Democratic presidential contender Joe Biden and

his son Hunter Biden that would benefit Trump politically as he seeks re-election in 2020. Members of the Democratic-controlled House, divided almost entirely along party lines, voted to impeach Trump on charges that he had abused the power of his office and obstructed Congress. The Senate, controlled by Trump's fellow Republicans, is likely to acquit him in a trial next month. The tumultuous journey to Trump's impeachment has riven Americans for months. Slightly less than half of Americans supported impeaching Trump, the first step in removing him from office. A roughly equal number opposed it, according to polling by Reuters/Ipsos on Monday and Tuesday.

Behind that split is a deeper political schism. More than eight in 10 Democratic voters said they thought Trump deserved to be impeached, and about the same number of Republicans said he should not be. Few Americans have yet to make up their minds. The depth of that disagreement was on display all day - first as lawmakers from both parties used the House floor to deliver alternating, and irreconcilable, views of the president and later as he delivered a defiant speech to his cheering supporters. Trump took the stage at an arena in Battle Creek in western Michigan,

waving and smiling, at the same moment Democratic leaders finished delivering their case against him. "The country is doing better than ever before," he said. "We did nothing wrong."

As the final votes came in on the first charge - abuse of power - Trump talked about new ships and planes for the US military. As lawmakers voted to approve a second article of impeachment, Trump delivered an extended discussion about how hard it was to pronounce the last name of one of his potential Democratic challengers in the 2020 election, Pete Buttigieg.

Trump did not break stride. "They've been trying to impeach me from day one," he said. "They think the Washington swamp should be able to veto the results of an election."

Little common ground

News networks displayed the events side by side - the House chamber tallying its votes and the president's rally. Vice President Mike Pence told reporters that Trump timed his remarks to coincide with the votes. Since House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced an impeachment investigation into Trump on Sept. 24, warring US political factions have seen little common ground on

the president's actions regarding Ukraine. Democrats have nearly unanimously blasted what they call an illegal effort to induce foreign interference in the next election. Republicans have said that Trump's demand for investigations in Ukraine amounted to little more than an effort to target foreign corruption and that Democrats had not come up with evidence showing any wrongdoing. In rapid-fire speeches lasting no more than a minute or two in the House on Wednesday, Democratic lawmakers said Trump had obviously abused his office, while Republicans accused their counterparts of a "coup" and an effort to overturn the 2016 election that put Trump in office.

As lawmakers debated, Trump weighed in on Twitter, quoting Fox News commentators and saying: "THIS IS AN ASSAULT ON AMERICA, AND AN ASSAULT ON THE REPUBLICAN PARTY!!!!"

The latest Reuters/Ipsos poll found that fewer than a quarter of Republicans believed Trump "pressured Ukraine to investigate" the Bidens, and even fewer thought Congress should launch an impeachment inquiry against a president who uses the powers of his office for an unfair political advantage. — Reuters