

News

Masses surge to Dakar for opening of mega-mosque

DAKAR: Hundreds of thousands of people from across Senegal converged on the capital Dakar on Friday for the inauguration of a huge mosque, claimed to be the largest in West Africa. Muslim faithful arrived by bus, car or on foot in the poor district of Bopp, home to the new Massalikul Jinaan mosque, capable of hosting 30,000 worshippers. The mosque has been built by the Mouride Brotherhood - part of the Sufi strand of Islam that predominates in Senegal, a country with a long tra-

Democrats press Trump...

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"The Committees are investigating the extent to which President Trump jeopardized national security by pressing Ukraine to interfere with our 2020 election and by withholding security assistance provided by Congress to help Ukraine counter Russian aggression," they said. Public support is growing for impeachment after the release of an anonymous whistleblower's complaint on Thursday, reportedly made by a CIA analyst who had worked in the White House.

It accused Trump of pressuring Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky in a July 25 phone call to supply dirt on former vice president Joe Biden, the favorite to represent Democrats against Trump in the 2020 presidential election. The complaint also revealed that White House aides, alarmed at Trump's implicit offer to release aid in exchange for Zelensky's help, sought to hide the record of the call in a highly secure computer system normally used only for the country's most top-secret intelligence.

Congressional investigators on Friday announced interviews starting next week with five State Department officials, including former ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch, whom Trump reportedly

dition of religious tolerance.

Huge traffic jams several kilometres long built up on highways leading to the site, where some people had starting camping out two days before the long-awaited ceremonies. Thousands of women in colourful robes, men dressed in festive white along with children packed the streets. "I'm here to celebrate God, the Prophet and Serigne Touba, (one of the holy names used for the brotherhood's founder) whose work is being rewarded here," said Malick Mar, a mechanic who was among the worshippers. "It is a triumph for all Muslims."

When the mosque guards opened the mosque's doors, there was a frenzied rush and worried police used electric batons to try to restore order. Unable to get inside, thousands of faithful unrolled their prayer mats on the mosque's outside esplanade.

Work on the mosque began a decade ago on a

forced out earlier this year for resisting his efforts to pressure Kiev to probe Biden. The list also includes US special representative on Ukraine Kurt Volker, who resigned Friday after being ordered to answer questions in the impeachment investigation, a source familiar with the matter told AFP. The whistleblower complaint said Volker met senior Ukrainian officials on how to "navigate" Trump's demands of Zelensky.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi declared that the impeachment investigation would move quickly, saying evidence from the whistleblower's complaint against Trump of abuse of power and an attempted cover-up was unambiguous. "The clarity of the president's actions is compelling and gave us no choice but to move forward," Pelosi said.

In a series of tweets Trump attacked Democrats - including Adam Schiff, the lawmaker named by Pelosi to lead the impeachment probe - calling them liars, while also taking aim at the "partisan" whistleblower and the "Fake News Media and their partner, the Democrat Party". In a video leaked from a private gathering Trump held Thursday with US diplomats in New York, Trump made clear he was battling for his survival. "We're at war. These people are sick," Trump says in the video obtained by Bloomberg.

Schiff said Friday his committee will issue more subpoenas next week and conduct a closed-door briefing with the Inspector General of the Intelligence Community, the official who conducted a preliminary investigation into the whistleblower complaint and deemed it credible. "We

Kellyanne Conway, Senator and 2020 presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Mayor of the District of Columbia Muriel Bowser.

In remarks to KUNA, Sheikhha Rima expressed her honor to be named one of the 2019 Washingtonian's 150 Most Powerful Women, saying she gets this power from her loving and supporting family. She added she is forever grateful to her country Kuwait and the support it gives her to do the work she feels so passionate about. She said it reflects "our leader, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who is passionate about Kuwait's role in addressing a range of humanitarian causes". In 2018, the United Nations Women for Peace Association (UNWFPA) presented Sheikhha Rima with the prestigious Peace Award for her extraordinary philanthropic work for over a decade. — KUNA

Rozeena Khan, a teacher originally from Indian Kashmir, said she could not speak to her 86-year-old father and was concerned for his welfare. "Kashmir is a prison, the world's largest prison right now," she said. "I feel like my brain, my heart, is with my family there. I should concentrate on my job but I will tell you honestly, sometimes when I think, I cry at my job, I cry."

Security forces in Srinagar, the summer capital of India's former Jammu and Kashmir state, imposed tough new restrictions on Friday, fearing protests surrounding the twin speeches in New York. They erected concrete and razor-wire barricades as troops in bulletproof gear guarded deserted streets following orders to stop any public rallies.

Khan said that the conditions in Kashmir were radicalizing a new generation and that he himself would take up arms in their situation. "I've been locked up for 55 days. I've heard about rapes, Indian army going in homes," he said, imagining himself as a Kashmiri. "Would I want to live this humiliation? Would I want to live like that? I would pick up a gun. You're forcing people. You are forcing people into radicalization."

Stephane Dujarric, the UN chief's spokesman, later told reporters Antonio Guterres had raised his concerns over Kashmir both publicly and privately and favored dialogue. "He of course remains very concerned about any potential escalation between Pakistan and India over the situation in Kashmir," Dujarric said. Alice Wells, the top US State Department official for South Asia, on Thursday said that Washington is pressing New Delhi to quickly ease its restrictions in Kashmir, while also calling on Khan to dial down his rhetoric.

India has long resisted efforts to internationalize Kashmir and Modi did not mention it in his speech. The Indian leader instead chose to focus on domestic policies such as improving access to toilets and helping millions open bank accounts. He did, however, make a veiled reference to Pakistan, telling fellow leaders: "We belong to a country that has given the world, not war, but Buddha's message of peace. And that is the reason why our voice against terrorism, to alert the world about this evil rings with seriousness and outrage." — AFP

Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said the policies - adopted by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber - and the specialized reform committee formed on Dec 18, 2013 had led to the current achievement and World Bank acknowledgment. Saleh thanked all governmental authorities and entities who work very hard to improve Kuwait's business and economic status, which earned international recognition, hoping for further efforts to introduce more reforms.

The ministry of commerce and industry underlined its eagerness to improve its various services in efforts to push the state forward on international indices. A statement issued by the ministry yesterday attributed the accomplishment to various factors, chief among them a ministry initiative to introduce e-services as well as efforts to protect the rights of investments, added the statement. With business procedures now much more simplified in Kuwait, the state will be better able to lure foreign investment, pushing it closer towards its goal of becoming a global economic hub, it said. — KUNA

swampy six-hectare area of land donated by the government of the 90-percent Muslim nation, and the inauguration has been preceded by an outpouring of national and religious fervor. The mosque's name of Massalikul Jinaan ("The Paths to Paradise") comes from the title of a poem by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacke, the 19th-century founder of the Brotherhood, who is revered by followers as a saint.

With a Carrara marble exterior and boasting five minarets - the tallest 78 m high - the mosque has a capacity of 15,000 worshippers inside, and another 15,000 on the esplanade. The lavish interiors include a gold-leaf dome, giant chandeliers and decorations hand drawn by Moroccan workmen. An Islamic institute, residence and museum are scheduled to be added in the future. The builders say the mosque is the biggest in West Africa, although the edifice is dwarfed by mosques

have to flesh out all of the facts for the American people. The seriousness of the matter and the danger to our country demands nothing less," Schiff said.

Meanwhile, more concerning allegations against Trump came to light late Friday, with The Washington Post reporting Trump told Russia's foreign minister and ambassador to the US he was unconcerned about Moscow's interference in the 2016 US elections because Washington did the same in other countries. The paper cited three former officials who requested anonymity to discuss details of the May 2017 Oval Office meeting, during which he famously revealed highly classified information on the Islamic State group. The comments reportedly alarmed White House officials who restricted access to a memorandum describing the meeting to those with only the highest security access.

More than 300 high-level professionals from the national security community have signed a letter backing the impeachment investigation. "President Trump appears to have leveraged the authority and resources of the highest office in the land to invite additional foreign interference into our democratic processes. That would constitute an unconscionable abuse of power," they said.

Meanwhile public support for impeachment jumped, according to two new polls. The Hill-HarrisX survey showed support up 12 percentage points to 47 percent, against 42 percent opposed, while Politico's poll showed support up seven points to 43 percent, now equal to those opposed. Democrats said articles of impeachment

British tanker in Dubai after...

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of the emirate overnight, according to data from ship tracking website MarineTraffic.com. Pool reporters at the commercial port confirmed the ship had moored and the Swedish-owned vessel was seen surrounded by several small boats, including at least one flying the United Arab Emirates flag.

The CEO of Stena Bulk, the firm that owns the vessel, had said the ship's sailing was "obviously a relief" and that the priority was those on board. Seven of its 23 crew members were released on Sept 4. "When we reach Dubai we will firstly take care of the crew and then try and get the ship in operational order again," Erik Hanell told AFP on Friday. The tanker's crew are "safe and in high spirits" and arrangements had been made for them to return to their families upon arrival in Dubai, he said.

"The crew will have a period of time to be with their families following 10 weeks of detainment on the vessel. Full support will be offered to the crew and families in the coming weeks to assist with their recovery." Photos released by the Iranian agency Fars News yesterday showed the black and red-hulled tanker sailing from Bandar Abbas in southern Iran the previous day. The images also showed the captain apparently signing the ship's release documents before it left port, and the crew - dressed in red overalls and safety gear - lifting anchor

Saudi enforces 'decency' amid...

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Alcohol remains illegal, which could deter some tourists. It also remains unclear if unmarried foreign men and women would be permitted to share a hotel room. But the ban on women driving has been lifted and public entertainment, including once banned cinemas, has flourished. Many restaurants and cafes have removed physical barriers separating genders and no longer stop serving customers at prayer times. Some women now wear more colorful abayas, the loose fitting robes worn over their clothes that are usually black, or no longer wear the robes at all, despite the risk of provoking archconservatives.

"We make history" today, tourism chief Ahmed Al-Khateeb said before an official gala to mark the launch of the visas in Diriyah, a historical site near Riyadh. "For the first time, we are opening our country to tourists from all over the world." Citizens from 49 countries are eligible for online e-visas or visas on arrival, including the United States, Australia and several European nations, the statement said.

Kick-starting tourism is one of the centerpieces of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 reform program to prepare the biggest Arab economy for a post-oil era. Khateeb said there will be no restrictions on unaccompanied foreign women, who will also not be obliged to publicly wear an abaya although they will be expected to dress modestly. Men and women must avoid "tight fitting clothing" or clothes with "profane language or images", read an instruction on an English language website launched by the tourism authority. "Women should cover shoulders and knees in public," it said.

The relative easing of the dress code for foreign women is unlikely to go down well with Saudi women, who are required to wear an abaya in public even though many have long demanded an end to the restriction. Visas in the desert kingdom, endowed with rich bedouin heritage and archaeological sites, had until now been restricted to expat workers, their dependents and the Muslim pilgrims travelling to Islam's holiest sites. Riyadh last year began issuing temporary visas to visitors to attend sporting and cultural events.

In an effort to change perceptions, Prince

in the Arab world. In Morocco, the Hassan II mosque in Casablanca can accommodate 105,000 worshippers and has a minaret spiralling 210 m.

The cost of more than A\$30 million (\$33 million) came from private donations, while the government contributed lighting, sanitation and roadworks worth A\$10.5 million as well as the land - a sign of the Brotherhood's clout. The group's leader, Mountakha Mbacke, received a stream of religious, traditional and political leaders in the run-up to the inauguration. The ceremonies were also attended by President Macky Sall and former leader Abdoulaye Wade, who shook hands after a long period of frosty relations. The Mourides are one of four important Sufi brotherhoods followed by Senegal's Muslims, who overwhelmingly practice a moderate version of Islam while following the teachings of local spiritual guides. — AFP

- formal charges - against Trump could be completed in as soon as a month and then swiftly debated and voted on in the House, where the party has a majority solid enough to ensure passage.

The case would then be handed to the Senate to try Trump - who, for the moment, appears able to count on a Republican majority in the chamber to prevent his conviction and removal. "As a former prosecutor, I should tell you that cases are made much easier when the defendant cops to the act, and here the president is not denying what he said," Democrat Eric Swalwell, a member of the House Intelligence Committee, said on CNN.

Meanwhile, a US newspaper's publication of information on the whistleblower has sparked controversy and debate. The New York Times reported that the whistleblower is a CIA officer once posted to the White House who is an expert on European issues and the political situation in Ukraine. Lawyers for the whistleblower have deemed those revelations to be dangerous for their client, both personally and professionally.

Calls to cancel subscriptions to the Times, circulated under the hashtag #CancelNYT, have proliferated on social media, where some have demanded the resignation of executive editor Dean Baquet. Baquet defended the decision, saying that Trump and some of his supporters had attacked the whistleblower's credibility, and that the publication of the information was aimed at allowing readers to "make their own judgments about whether or not he is credible". — AFP

ahead of the journey.

Tensions have risen in the Gulf since May last year when US President Donald Trump unilaterally abandoned a 2015 nuclear deal between major powers and Iran and began reimposing crippling sanctions in a campaign of "maximum pressure". They flared again this May when Iran began reducing its own commitments under the deal and the US deployed military assets to the region. Since then, ships have been attacked, drones downed and oil tankers seized.

In June, Trump called off air strikes against Iran at the last minute after the Islamic republic's forces shot down a US drone. This month, twin attacks on Saudi oil infrastructure, which knocked out half the kingdom's production, drew accusations of blame against Iran not only from the US but also from its European allies. Tehran has denied any involvement in the attacks, which were claimed by Iran-backed rebels fighting a Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.

The US has since formed a coalition with its allies Australia, Bahrain, Britain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to escort commercial shipping in the Gulf. Tehran has warned that the planned US-led International Maritime Security Construct will cause more, not less instability. It has proposed a rival security plan of its own. Speaking at the UN General Assembly in New York, President Hassan Rouhani this week announced a plan dubbed the "Hormuz Peace Endeavour" or "HOPE". He gave no details but called on all of Iran's Gulf neighbors to join, saying: "Security cannot be provided with American weapons and intervention." — AFP

Mohammed has relaxed some of the kingdom's most rigid rules - lifting a ban on cinemas and women drivers while allowing gender-mixed concerts and sporting extravaganzas. "Saudi Arabia is opening. We are opening our economy. We are opening our society," Khateeb said. "There are clearly interesting places to visit in Saudi Arabia," Ellen Wald, author of the book "Saudi Inc.", told AFP. "The big question is whether a significant number of tourists will feel comfortable given the gender and religious restrictions, the lack of alcohol and the lack of freedom of expression."

The government on Friday said it signed memoranda of understanding worth around 100 billion riyals (\$27 billion) with regional and international investors, including hotels and real estate developers. Saudi Arabia, reeling from low oil prices, says it hopes tourism will contribute up to 10 percent of Gross Domestic Product by 2030 - compared to three percent currently - thanks to a targeted 100 million annual visits by both Saudi and foreign tourists.

But the kingdom currently lacks the infrastructure to accommodate visitors in such high numbers, with officials estimating 500,000 new hotel rooms will be required nationwide over the coming decade. The sector is expected to create up to one million tourism jobs, the government says, as it battles high youth unemployment. Saudi Arabia has splurged billions in an attempt to build a tourism industry from scratch.

In 2017, the kingdom announced a multi-billion dollar project to turn 50 islands and other pristine sites on the Red Sea into luxury resorts. Last year, construction of Qiddiya "entertainment city" was launched near Riyadh, which would include high-end theme parks, motor sport facilities and a safari area. The country is also developing historic sites such as the centuries-old Mada'in Saleh, home to sandstone tombs of the same civilization which built the rose pink city of Petra in Jordan.

The changes have been viewed at home and abroad as proof of a progressive trend, although constraints remain. The authorities have detained women's rights activists for the past year amid a broader crackdown on dissent. The crown prince's image abroad has also been tarnished by last year's murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the kingdom's Istanbul consulate, and a devastating war in Yemen. The Gulf country, which shares borders with Iraq to the north and Yemen to the south, boasts vast tracts of desert but also verdant mountains, pristine beaches and historical sites including five UNESCO World Heritage Sites. — Agencies

Kuwait among top 20 improvers...

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developing the structure of the local economy for external investment.

HH the Amir affirmed efforts exerted in this regard over the past years and the progress achieved by Kuwait in this international indicator are a model to be followed by all government bodies and a motive for further giving to serve the dear nation and the citizens. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf sent a similar cable to HH the Prime Minister.

Kuwait's inclusion is due to proper and relentless reforms carried out by the government, said a minister Friday. In a press release, Deputy Prime Minister and