



Trump campaign ad quote misleading

Says Fauci as president hits election trail again

AFP, Washington

Top government scientist Anthony Fauci said Sunday that an ad aired by Donald Trump's reelection campaign was edited to make him seem to endorse the president's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

"In my nearly five decades of public service, I have never publicly endorsed any political candidate," Fauci, the longtime director of the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, said in a statement sent to AFP.

The 30-second campaign ad cites Trump's personal experience with the virus -- "President Trump is recovering from the coronavirus, and so is America," it says -- before including a brief clip in which Fauci appears to praise the president's response to the pandemic.

"I can't imagine that anybody could be doing more," Fauci is shown as saying, creating the clear impression he is referring to Trump.

But a complete clip of Fauci's comments, made during an interview in March with Fox News, shows the doctor saying, "The comments attributed to me without my permission in the GOP campaign ad were taken out of context from a broad statement I made months ago about the efforts of federal public health officials."

Trump, who returned to the campaign trail yesterday, defended the clip, and his handling of pandemic, and rebutted the doctor's criticism.

"They are indeed Dr. Fauci's own words. We have done a 'phenomenal' job, according to certain governors," the president wrote in a tweet.



An aerial picture shows Hue city, submerged in floodwaters caused by heavy downpours, in central Vietnam yesterday. At least 18 people died and more than a dozen are missing after floods submerged homes in central Vietnam and rough seas capsized fishing boats, authorities said.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF



Sharp rise in natural disasters in last 20 yrs: UN

There has been a dramatic increase in extreme weather events in the past 20 years, which are taking a heavy human and economic toll worldwide and are on track to expand further, and Asia has been hardest-hit, the United Nations said yesterday. China (577) and the United States (467) recorded the highest number of disaster events from 2000 to 2019, followed by India (321), the Philippines (304) and Indonesia (278), the U.N. said in a report issued the day before the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction. Eight of the top 10 countries are in Asia. Some 7,348 major disaster events were recorded globally, claiming 1.23 million lives, affecting 4.2 billion people and causing \$2.97 billion in economic losses during the two-decade period.

Trump's Supreme Court pick faces Senate hearings

The US Senate was set to start confirmation hearings yesterday for Judge Amy Coney Barrett, nominated to the Supreme Court by President Donald Trump despite opposition from the Democrats, who appear largely powerless to block the move before the November 3 election. The 48-year-old conservative law professor was named by

Truce strained by new attacks

EU expresses 'extreme concern' over intense shelling by rivals

REUTERS, Baku

Azerbaijan and ethnic Armenian forces yesterday accused each other of launching new attacks in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, increasing strains on a two-day old humanitarian ceasefire intended to end heavy fighting over the mountain enclave.

Russia, which brokered the ceasefire, appealed for both sides to respect it and Luxembourg reiterated European Union calls for Turkey, an ally of Azerbaijan, to do more to secure an end to hostilities that have killed hundreds of people.

The fighting, the deadliest over Nagorno-Karabakh in over 25 years, is being watched closely abroad partly because of the proximity of the fighting to Azeri gas and oil pipelines and the risk of regional powers Turkey and Russia being dragged in.

Both Ankara and Moscow are under growing pressure to use their influence in the region to end the fighting.

The humanitarian ceasefire is meant to allow ethnic Armenian forces

NAGORNO-KARABAKH



and Azerbaijan to swap prisoners and bodies of people killed in two weeks of fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh, which is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan but governed and populated by ethnic Armenians.

But the ceasefire has frayed quickly. Azerbaijan said on Sunday it launched airstrikes against an Armenian regiment, following what it said was an Armenian rocket attack on an apartment building. Armenia denied carrying out such an attack. [nL8N2H105C].

Yesterday, Azerbaijan's defence

ministry said Armenian forces had tried to attack its positions around the Aghdere-Aghdam and Fizuli-Jabrail regions, and were shelling territories in the Goranboy, Terter and Aghdam regions inside Azerbaijan.

Nagorno-Karabakh said its forces had inflicted losses on Azeri forces and that large-scale military operations were continuing in the Hadrat area of the mountain enclave.

Reuters could not independently verify the reports.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia, which has a defence pact with Armenia, was monitoring the events and asked Azeri and ethnic Armenian forces to respect the ceasefire.

The EU's diplomatic chief expressed his deep concern over reports of violations of the ceasefire.

"We note with extreme concern the reports of continued military activities, including against civilian targets, as well as civilian casualties," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement.

TENSIONS ALONG LAC

India, China hold fresh talks on ending faceoff

AP, Srinagar

Senior Indian and Chinese military commanders were holding fresh talks yesterday aimed at ending a months-long standoff along their disputed border in the remote Ladakh region.

The talks were being held on the Indian side of the frontier in the Chushul area. No details were immediately available.

The negotiations come as tens of thousands of rival soldiers on both sides backed by artillery, tanks and fighter jets brace for a harsh winter in the cold-desert region where temperatures can fall to minus 50 degrees Celsius (minus 58 Fahrenheit).

India and China have held several rounds of talks by military, diplomatic and political officials, including negotiations between their foreign ministers and defense ministers in Moscow last month. Although the standoff has persisted, the talks seem to have calmed the situation along the border as no new military aggression has been reported for a month.

Indian soldiers also are engaged in nearly daily fighting along the de facto frontier with Pakistan in disputed Kashmir, the Himalayan region divided between the two archrivals and claimed by both in its entirety.

Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh said yesterday that China and Pakistan were creating conditions that suggest "a border dispute is being created under a mission."

Singh made the remarks while virtually inaugurating 44 bridges in areas bordering with China and Pakistan that officials say will facilitate easier movement of the Indian troops.



the Republican president on September 26 to succeed women's rights champion and liberal justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who died of cancer eight days earlier at the age of 87. By law, the Republican-led Senate has to approve the nomination to the country's highest court, where conservatives currently occupy five of the nine seats.

Mumbai hit by massive power outage

A major grid failure caused a widespread power outage in India's financial capital Mumbai and surrounding areas yesterday, the first such blackout in more than two years that stranded thousands of train passengers and delayed college exams. The failure was caused by "technical problems" during maintenance work, the energy minister of Mumbai's home state of Maharashtra said in a video message. Power has now been restored to many areas of the city, officials and witnesses said. Mumbai's international airport and two main stock exchanges located in the city were operating normally.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



PHOTO: AFP

Farmers shout slogans as they chain their hands while blocking a railway track during a protest against the recent passing of agriculture reform bills in the Parliament, on the outskirts of Amritsar, India yesterday.

PUTIN CRITIC NAVALNY POISONING

EU agrees to sanctions on Russians: diplomats

AFP, Brussels

The EU yesterday lined up sanctions against Russian officials over the poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny and against Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko over the crisis in his country.

Foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg agreed in principle to sanctions proposals made last week by France and Germany, which said Russia was responsible for the poisoning of Navalny with the Soviet-developed nerve agent Novichok, three diplomatic sources told AFP.

On Belarus, the ministers said they were ready to sanction strongman leader Lukashenko, as the bloc seeks to step up pressure over his regime's crackdown on protesters.

The EU has already imposed travel bans and asset freezes on 40 Lukashenko allies for rigging an election in August that returned him to power and then orchestrating a

crackdown on the mass protests that have rocked the country since the vote.

The bloc had held back from penalising Lukashenko, hoping to persuade him to open a dialogue with opposition forces to resolve the crisis.

But a fresh outbreak in Minsk on Sunday -- police using water cannon and stun grenades on protesters and making hundreds of arrests -- prompted ministers to give political approval to sanctioning the strongman leader.

In their formal conclusions on Belarus, the ministers said the list of sanctioned people and entities would be put "under constant review".

As he arrived for the meeting in Luxembourg, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas had urged his counterparts to expand the sanctions list. "The violence continues, perpetrated by the Lukashenko regime... so we have to consider how to proceed," said Maas.



COVID TREATMENT

Anti-microbe drug shows promise

AFP, Hong Kong

An affordable anti-microbial drug used to treat stomach ulcers and bacterial infections has shown promise in combating the coronavirus in animals, scientists in Hong Kong announced yesterday.

Researchers set out to explore whether metalloodrugs -- compounds containing metal that are more commonly used against bacteria -- might also have anti-viral properties that could fight the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus.

Using Syrian hamsters as test subjects, they found that one of the drugs, ranitidine bismuth citrate (RBC), was "a potent anti-SARS-CoV-2 agent".

'Arctic Ocean is dying'

Scientists warn of ice-free summers in just decades

AFP, Bremerhaven

Researchers on the world's biggest mission to the North Pole returned to Germany yesterday, bringing home devastating proof of a dying Arctic Ocean and warnings of ice-free summers in just decades.

The German Alfred Wegener Institute's Polarstern ship returned to the port of Bremerhaven after 389 days spent drifting through the Arctic trapped in ice, allowing scientists to gather vital information on the effects of global warming in the region.

Mission leader Markus Rex said he and his team of 300 scientists from 20 countries had witnessed "a place of truly fascinating and unique beauty".

"We should really make every effort to preserve this world... for future generations and to use the small chance we still have to do so," he told a press conference.

Ahead of their return, Rex told AFP the scientists had seen for themselves the dramatic effects of global warming on ice in the region considered "the epicentre of climate change".



"We witnessed how the Arctic ocean is dying," Rex said. "We saw this process right outside our windows, or when we walked on the brittle ice."

Underlining how much of the sea ice has melted away, Rex said the mission was able to sail through large patches of open water, "sometimes stretching as far as the horizon".

"At the North Pole itself, we found badly eroded, melted, thin and brittle ice."

If the warming trend in the North Pole continues, in a few decades we will have "an ice-free Arctic in the summer", Rex said.

The Polarstern mission, dubbed MOSAIC,

spent more than a year collecting data on the atmosphere, ocean, sea ice and ecosystems to help assess the impact of climate change on the region and the world.

To carry out the research, four observational sites were set up on the sea ice in a radius of up to 40 kilometres around the ship.

The researchers collected water samples from beneath the ice during the polar night to study plant plankton and bacteria and better understand how the marine ecosystem functions.

The 140-million-euro (\$165 million) expedition has also brought back 150 terabytes of data and more than 1,000 ice samples.

The team measured more than 100 parameters almost continuously throughout the year and are hoping the information will provide a "breakthrough in understanding the Arctic and climate system", Rex said.

Thomas Krumpen, sea ice physicist said: "For us the second phase is starting -- the analysis of data. A lot of data has returned with the ship and we will likely be busy with it over the next ten years."



Local firefighters respond to a house fire in the aftermath of Hurricane Delta in Lafayette, Louisiana, US, on Sunday. The fire was most likely caused by a damaged electrical line, firefighters on the scene said.

PHOTO: REUTERS