

‘Honor the ancestors’

Kamala Harris appeals directly to Black voters

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Democratic vice presidential hopeful Kamala Harris made a direct appeal to Black men Friday, defending her record as a prosecutor, blasting President Donald Trump as ‘racist’ and vouching for Joe Biden as a man capable of addressing systemic racism and leading a diverse country.

‘I’m not going to tell anybody, including Black men, that they’re supposed to vote for us. We need to earn that vote,’ Harris told a roundtable of Black men in one of several stops across Atlanta, the Democratic base of Georgia, an emerging battleground state.

The California senator warned that Trump wants to ‘turn 20% of Black men in favor of him,’ a mark that could tilt a range of battleground states in the South and Upper Midwest to the president. But Harris, the first Black woman on a major party’s national ticket, said Trump’s pitch is rooted in ‘spinning’ and misrepresenting her record and the Democratic ticket’s proposals.

‘Joe Biden has the ability to say the words ‘Black Lives Matter,’ unlike that other fella,’ Harris told a group of students from Atlanta’s historically Black college campuses.

Her Georgia itinerary — small events with Black audiences, a stop at an iconic Black-owned restaurant near Atlanta’s HBCU campuses and a drive-in rally at Morehouse College, whose alumni include Martin Luther King Jr. — highlighted how critical the Biden campaign sees Harris in its efforts to urge Black turnout.

‘We’re not going to let anyone mess with our right to vote,’ she said at Morehouse, calling voting a way ‘to honor the ancestors.’



The drop-off in Black votes from president Barack Obama’s reelection in 2012 to the 2016 election was a critical factor in Trump managing narrow victories over Democrat Hillary Clinton in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, a trio of Great Lakes states that gave the president his Electoral College majority.

Higher Black turnout also could push North Carolina, Georgia and Florida into the Democratic column.

Harris visited Georgia a day after the final presidential debate, which Trump used to claim that ‘nobody has done what I’ve done’ for Black Americans, ‘with the exception of Abraham Lincoln — possible exception.’ The president blamed Biden for the mass incarceration of ‘young Black men’ via a sweeping 1994 federal crime bill when Biden was a senator representing Delaware.

Citing her time as a local district attorney and state attorney general, Harris said she learned that the ‘war on drugs was, by every measure, a failure, and Black men were hit the hardest.’

She told the group of Black men that Trump is ‘spinning’ her record and Biden’s to obscure his own priorities on race and ethnicity, from his ‘birtherism’ lies about Obama’s birthplace to his insults of certain political opponents and entire nations.

Trump, Harris said, pushed ‘the theme that the first Black man to be president of the United States was illegitimately there’ and referred ‘to countries on the continent as ‘shithole’ countries’ and ‘refused to condemn white supremacists.’



Joe Biden speaks about his plan to beat Covid-19 in Delaware and Donald Trump addresses a rally in Florida.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump effect: EU-US ties ‘on life support’

AFP, Frankfurt am Main

Back in 2016, German Chancellor Angela Merkel greeted Donald Trump’s victory with an extraordinary warning: that she would work with the US president on the condition that he respect democratic values. Things did not improve from there.

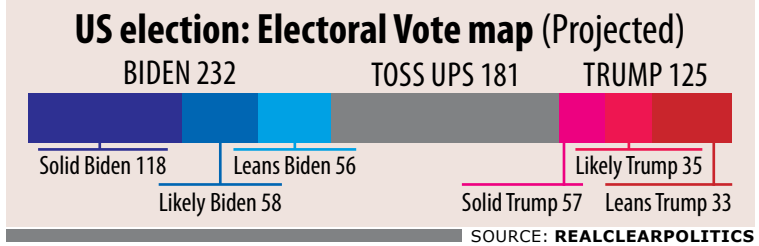
Four years later, Trump’s abrasive foreign policy moves, often unveiled in all-caps tweets, have alienated not just Germany but much of Europe.

‘The transatlantic relationship is practically on life support,’ said Sudha David-Wilp, a senior transatlantic fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

Even if Democratic challenger Joe Biden wins the November 3 election, experts said there will be no magical healing of the EU-US rift.

Recent surveys by the Pew Research Center found that America’s image among Europeans has plummeted to record lows, with just 26 percent of Germans now holding a favourable view of the superpower.

From pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran



nuclear deal to slapping tariffs on EU steel and aluminium, and defanging the World Trade Organization, Trump has dealt blow after blow to multilateralism, a much-valued European approach to global challenges.

He stunned allies by describing the European Union as a foe on trade, and ‘scared people’ by cosying up to Russia, said Bruce Stokes, an associate fellow at Chatham House, a British think-tank.

Trump also regularly targeted European allies its failure to meet Nato’s defence spending targets.

Should Biden win, he ‘will see the need to revitalise relationships with allies,’ said David-Wilp.

Expect the former vice president to make a trip to Europe early on, rejoin the climate pact and restart nuclear talks with Iran, experts say. But areas of friction will remain on military spending, Nord Stream 2, and Washington’s campaign against Chinese tech giant Huawei.

Faced with a Covid-19 battered economy, Biden will probably eschew Trump’s more protectionist tendencies but some sort of ‘America First’ vision for sensitive industries will likely live on.

Should Trump be reelected, expect ‘a great sucking in of breath’ across European capitals, Stokes said, and ‘another four years of a very rocky ride’.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Trump suggests Egypt may ‘blow up’ Ethiopia dam

US President Donald Trump on Friday voiced anger at Ethiopia over its construction of a huge dam on the Nile River and appeared to suggest that Egypt may destroy it. Trump made the remarks as he announced a breakthrough normalization deal between US ally Israel and Sudan, which like Egypt fears that Ethiopia will use up scarce water resources. ‘It’s a very dangerous situation because Egypt is not going to be able to live that way,’ Trump told reporters in the Oval Office with leaders of Sudan and Israel on speakerphone. ‘They’ll end up blowing up the dam. And I said it and I say it loud and clear — they’ll blow up that dam. And they have to do something,’ Trump said. Ethiopia says that the \$4 billion project is indispensable for its electrification and development needs and has voiced hope of beginning operations in early 2021.

Israel will not oppose US sale of F-35 to UAE

Israel said on Friday it will not oppose US sales of ‘specific weapons systems’ to the United Arab Emirates, in an apparent reference to the F-35 warplanes sought by Abu Dhabi. Under a principle of preserving Israel’s ‘qualitative military edge’, the United States consults with it on proposed sales of advanced arms to other countries in the region. Israel has reiterated a need to maintain its military superiority even since forging official ties with the UAE and its fellow Gulf Arab state Bahrain under deals brokered by US President Donald Trump last month. Washington agreed to consider allowing the UAE to buy F-35 stealth jets in a side deal to a normalisation agreement between Israel and the UAE.

Erdogan says Macron needs ‘mental checks’

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday slammed his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, over his policies toward Muslims, saying that he needed ‘mental checks.’ ‘What can one say about a head of state who treats millions of members from different faith groups this way: first of all, have mental checks,’ Erdogan said in a televised address. Macron’s proposal to defend his country’s secular values against radical Islam has angered the Turkish government, adding to a growing list of disputes between the French leader and Erdogan. Macron this month described Islam as a religion ‘in crisis’ worldwide and said the government would present a bill in December to strengthen a 1905 law that officially separated church and state in France. He announced stricter oversight of schooling and better control over foreign funding of mosques.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



PHOTO: AFP

NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

New clashes after Washington talks

REUTERS, Baku/Moscow

New clashes broke out between Azerbaijan and ethnic Armenian forces over Nagorno-Karabakh a day after talks in Washington to try to end the deadliest fighting in the enclave in more than a quarter of a century.

Azerbaijan’s defence ministry reported fighting in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, a mountainous part of Azerbaijan populated and controlled by ethnic Armenians.

It said the areas of Lachin and Gubadli had come under rocket and artillery fire from inside Armenian territory.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, local officials accused Azerbaijan’s forces of firing Smerch missiles into residential buildings in Stepanakert, the largest city in the region, which Baku denied.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had met separately with the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia on Friday in a new attempt to end nearly a month of bloodshed that Russian President Vladimir Putin said may have killed 5,000 people.

The collapse of two Russia-brokered ceasefires had already dimmed the prospect of a quick end to fighting that broke out on Sept 27 over Nagorno-Karabakh.

AstraZeneca, J&J vaccine trials back on track in US

AFP, Washington

Two major clinical trials for experimental Covid-19 vaccines got back on track in the United States -- providing a glimmer of hope as the number of cases skyrocket across the country.

Covid-19 has now killed more than 223,000 Americans, and the health crisis is a top issue in the presidential election pitting incumbent Donald Trump against Joe Biden.

AstraZeneca announced that the trial of its vaccine candidate, developed with Britain’s University of Oxford, has resumed in the US, the only country where it remained suspended following a participant’s illness six weeks ago.

The trial was suspended worldwide on September 6, but resumed shortly thereafter in Britain, and in the following weeks in South Africa, Brazil and Japan, with authorities determining the illness was not apparently linked to the vaccine.

The AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine project is one of the most promising and advanced in the world to combat the global

pandemic, which has now claimed the lives of 1.1 million people. Many countries are counting on using the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine to inoculate their populations.

It is one of 10 vaccine candidates being tested on tens of thousands of people in so-called phase 3 trials.

In the United States, the two top candidates vying to get a green light from the FDA are those made by Pfizer and Moderna. Both expect to request approval next month.

The drugmaker pre-sold hundreds of millions of doses on several continents, and signed partnership deals with other producers to ensure the doses could be made locally.

Shortly after AstraZeneca’s announcement, Johnson & Johnson said it was preparing to resume recruitment for its parallel trial, which was suspended last week after a volunteer fell ill.

Just before Friday’s announcements, a top US official involved with Operation Warp Speed, the government’s vaccine initiative, said he expected the J&J trial to resume quickly.

Myanmar vote ban dashes hope for ethnic minorities

AFP, Yangon

For many marginalised ethnic minority groups in conflict-plagued regions of Myanmar, next month’s national elections had at least offered a glimmer of hope for empowerment.

But a decision to exclude swathes of their homelands from the vote -- ostensibly over security concerns -- has instead filled them with anger and despair, with nearly two million people now disenfranchised.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) is widely expected to be returned to power in the November 8 polls -- only the second since the country emerged from outright military rule.

Last week the election commission announced a long list of constituencies where voting will not take place, leaving more than a million disenfranchised



in Rakhine and hundreds of thousands more elsewhere.

One community in Rakhine state was notably unaffected by this latest decision, but only because they were already disenfranchised. Myanmar’s Rohingya Muslims have had their citizenship and rights stripped away over decades.

In total nearly two million people of voting age will now be unable to cast a ballot -- about five percent of the electorate.

Other states across the country -- notably in Shan, Kachin and Karen -- have also been left reeling by the announcement.

Kachin State People’s Party MP Dwe Bu accused the government of letting down ethnic minorities.

‘We believed the NLD government would strive for democracy and work for the public,’ she said.

‘But now, I feel they’re even worse.’

EU adopts crucial biodiversity plan

AFP, Brussels

EU environment ministers on Friday adopted a biodiversity strategy aimed at protecting ecosystems, a move deemed essential to tackling climate change and reducing the risk of future pandemics.

Meeting in Luxembourg, the 27 national ministers backed the EU Commission’s strategy of placing at least 30 percent of the EU’s land maritime areas under special protection.

The European governments now expect the EU commission -- the bloc’s executive arm -- to integrate the biodiversity policy objectives in relevant future legislative proposals.

A Monday report by the European Environment Agency (EEA) warned that more than 80 percent of the European Union’s natural habitats were in poor or bad condition.

The European Parliament also easily passed a massive farm subsidy bill on Friday, to the fury of environmental activists who say it fell well short of EU commitments to fight climate change.

‘It’s five minutes to midnight on the climate emergency clock, but our governments are stalling,’ said Greenpeace EU climate policy adviser Sebastian Mang. ‘Meanwhile, the gas industry, the industrial farming lobby, airlines and carmakers are shooting holes in the EU Green Deal, and our chance of a safe climate for people and nature is fading.’



A man feeds seagulls as he stands on the banks of Yamuna river, on a smoggy morning in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS