

US top court upholds Obamacare

AFP, Washington
The US Supreme Court yesterday upheld a disputed portion of President Barack Obama's landmark health care reform, in a major legacy-building victory for his administration.

By a margin of six to three, the judges ruled in favor of allowing the federal government to subsidize health insurance by giving tax credits to consumers nationwide.

A triumphant Obama quickly hailed the ruling, calling it a win for "hard-working Americans all across this country."

"This law is working and it's going to keep doing just that," he said.

Opponents of the Affordable Care Act -- better known as "Obamacare" -- had argued that it was unconstitutional for the federal government to subsidize insurance in this way in states that refused to set up their own insurance exchanges.

The narrow question before the court was whether some seven million people who signed up for Obamacare via the government's website were actually entitled to tax subsidies that make the coverage affordable.

But the high court ruled that the law should stand, with two usually conservative justices joining the four generally liberal members of the panel to overturn the challenge.

Republicans have mounted several legislative attacks on the law in parallel to the legal assaults and this is the second time in three years that the court has saved it.

For Obama, the ruling marked a major victory that cements his signature domestic policy achievement.

Republicans reacted angrily.

"Republicans will continue to fight tooth and nail to repeal this oppressive law," declared Senator John Cornyn, the party's number two leader in the senate.



Smoke billow from the Syrian town of Kobane, as seen from the Turkish side of the border in Suruc in Sanliurfa province, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

ISIS attacks Kobane again

Militants launch two-pronged Syria offensive after recent setbacks

AFP, Beirut

The Islamic State group launched a two-pronged offensive in northern Syria yesterday after several setbacks, re-entering the symbolic battleground town of Kobane and seizing parts of the city of Hasakeh.

In southern Syria, an alliance of rebel groups, including al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra Front, also attacked government-held areas of the city of Daraa in another potentially serious blow to the regime.

Analysts said the surprise ISIS assaults were aimed at diverting Kurdish forces after they scored a series of victories and advanced on the jihadists' Syrian stronghold of Raqa.

Kobane, on the border with Turkey, became an important symbol in the battle against ISIS after the group launched a bid to take it last year.

Kurdish forces backed by US-led air strikes waged a four-month battle to repel the group, finally securing the town in January.

But yesterday, the jihadists returned, detonating a suicide car bomb near the border crossing adjacent to Kobane as

they launched an assault.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said at least 35 civilians and Kurdish fighters were killed in the car bomb and subsequent fighting in the centre of the town, along with eight ISIS militants.

A few hours later, two more car bombs detonated near the border, but there were no immediate details on casualties.

WAR ON ISIS

In a statement posted on jihadist forums, ISIS said its fighters exploded "several" suicide bombs around Kobane, and "carried out multi-pronged attacks on several fronts" in the surrounding countryside.

ISIS forces also entered a Kurdish village some 20 kilometres south of Kobane yesterday morning, executing at least 23 residents, among them women and children, the Observatory said.

The ISIS assault on Kobane prompted angry Kurdish accusations that Turkey had allowed the jihadists to enter Syria from its territory, a claim Turkish officials

dismissed as "baseless".

Since being pushed out of Kobane at the start of the year, ISIS has suffered a string of defeats at the hands of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and their Arab rebel allies.

On June 16, the YPG seized the border town of Tal Abyad, a key transit point for ISIS, and then drove south towards Raqa, the jihadists' de facto Syrian capital.

As the Kobane attack began yesterday, ISIS forces also entered the north-eastern city of Hasakeh.

Charles Lister, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Doha Centre think tank, said the dual assault was a diversionary tactic after Kurdish forces advanced to within 55 kilometres of Raqa this week.

At least 30 government loyalists and 20 jihadists were killed in the fighting in Hasakeh, and civilian residents were fleeing to the north of the city, the monitor added.

More than 230,000 people have been killed in Syria since the conflict began with anti-government demonstrations in March 2011.

FINAL NUCLEAR DEAL - 5 DAYS TO GO

Iran, powers gear up for final showdown

AFP, Vienna

Washington and Tehran have set the stage for a heated last weekend of nuclear talks, with Iran's leader sticking to tough "red lines" and US Secretary of State John Kerry warning failure remains possible.

Whether or not Iran can satisfy the world that its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful "will be determined in the last days, by whether or not the outstanding issues that we've been very clear about are in fact addressed," Kerry said Wednesday.

"If they are not addressed there won't be a deal," said Kerry, who is due to leave today for the talks in Vienna.

His Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif is expected tomorrow in the Austrian capital, state media reported. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius will arrive the same day, an aide said yesterday.

Iran and the "P5+1" -- the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany -- aim by June 30 to finalise a historic agreement putting an Iranian nuclear bomb out of reach.

Several officials have said that the talks may be extended, but only by a few days.

"We may not make June 30, but we will be close," a senior administration official said.

In April, Iran and the six powers agreed the main outlines of the deal in bruising talks in Lausanne, Switzerland. After two missed deadlines, this built on an interim deal struck in November 2013 in Geneva.

Under the Lausanne framework, Iran will downsize its nuclear activities by slashing the number of centrifuges enriching uranium, which can be used in nuclear power but also for a bomb when highly purified.

In return, UN and Western would gradually lift sanctions. But Khamenei, who will have the last word for Iran in the talks, said that banking and economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations and the US must be lifted immediately when the agreement is signed.

Khamenei also reiterated that Iran would not permit the IAEA, which he described as "neither independent or fair", to visit military sites or conduct "unconventional inspections" at other facilities.



A serviceman looks through a spyglass at a position of Ukrainian forces near the frontline with pro-Russian separatists in Krymske village, yesterday. Nato head Jens Stoltenberg yesterday warned there was still a risk of heavy fighting in Ukraine and urged Russia to halt its support for pro-Moscow rebels.

PHOTO: AFP

S Africa may quit ICC over Bashir row

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa yesterday said it may withdraw from the International Criminal Court after an outcry over the government's refusal to arrest Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on genocide charges.

Bashir, who is wanted by the ICC on genocide charges, left the country last week after attending an AU summit despite a court in Pretoria barring his departure while it ruled whether he could be arrested.

"South Africa may as a last resort ... consider withdrawing from the ICC," Minister in the Presidency Jeff Radebe told reporters. "Such a decision will only be taken when SA has exhausted all remedies available to it in terms of the Rome Statute," he added.

'You're in my house'

Obama shames heckler during speech

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

President Obama does not appreciate being interrupted in his own house - especially by guests eating his food and drinking his booze.

This was what one audience member discovered after they were publicly shamed by the President for heckling him as he spoke at a White House event marking LGBT Pride Month.

Obama was addressing guests in the East Room when a voice in the audience shouted "President Obama!".

Obama, a seasoned speech-giver who has dealt with more than his fair share of hecklers during his time in office, patiently replied: "Hold on, I was speaking."

Undeterred, the heckler continued to interrupt, forcing Obama to take a tougher approach. "Ok, you know what? No, no, no, no, no. Listen you're in my house ... it's not respectful."

The heckler, who was protesting against US policies on immigration, continued to be disruptive, leading to their swift removal from the East Room.

"As a general rule I am just fine with a few hecklers," he said after. "But not when I'm up in the house."

Obama added that any guests who come into his home "eating the hors d'oeuvres and drinking the booze", will always be expected to behave respectfully.

"Anyway", he continued smoothly, "where was I?"

ALLEGED US SPYING ON FRENCH LEADERS

Assange urges legal action

AFP, Paris

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange told French television Wednesday that the time had come for legal action over US snooping after leaked documents revealing Washington had spied on three French presidents sparked fresh outrage.

Speaking on TF1, the anti-secrecy campaigner urged France to go further than Germany: by launching a "parliamentary inquiry" into the foreign surveillance activities and referring "the matter to the prosecutor-general for prosecution".

German prosecutors had carried out a probe into alleged tapping on Chancellor Angela Merkel's phone, but later dropped the investigation due to a lack of hard evidence.

Assange also said other important revelations were coming.

"I think from a policy perspective what is to come is much more significant than what

we have published so far," he said.

"But now the question really for (President Francois) Hollande and the French leadership is what are the opportunities in their response to address this situation."

France expressed anger earlier Wednesday after leaked documents labelled "top secret" appeared to reveal US spying on Hollande and his two predecessors, Nicolas Sarkozy and Jacques Chirac, between 2006 and 2012.

The disclosures were published by WikiLeaks along with French newspaper Liberation and the Mediapart website.

France's foreign minister summoned the US ambassador for a formal explanation in response, while Hollande spoke by phone by with US President Barack Obama, who gave fresh assurances that spying on European leaders had ended.

But Assange accused the US of playing "word games", as it did after revelations of US eavesdropping on Merkel.



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- ◆ You have led a team of at least 600 sales professionals and 400 distributors
- ◆ The monthly turnover of your current company is at least Tk. 100 crores
- ◆ You are willing to stay overnights at outstations at least for 15 days a month
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- ◆ Age : Maximum 40 years

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- ◆ Age : Maximum 35 years

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'I am sorry for the lives that I've taken'

Boston bomber apologises to victims

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Moments before he was sentenced to die for the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev rose to his feet at the defence table and attempted to offer remorse to the surviving victims and the families of those who were killed. "I pray for your relief, for your healing," he said.

He made his apology at his formal sentencing after several of those survivors read their own statements about the horror of the April 2013 attack which left three people dead and injured 260 more, many of them grievously. In an atmosphere thick with emotion, some looked at Tsarnaev in the face describing their pain and calling him "cowardly" and "disgusting".

Throughout the statements by victims, Tsarnaev appeared barely to listen and few experts, or indeed survivors, had expected him to take up the opportunity to make his own statement before receiving sentence. But breaking a silence of more than two years, the 21-year-old former student and immigrant from Chechnya spoke for five minutes, peppering his remarks with references to his Muslim faith.

"I am sorry for the lives that I've taken, for the suffering that I've caused you, for the damage that I've done, irreparable damage," he told the hushed court. "I pray to Allah to bestow his mercy on you. I pray for your relief, for your healing, for your well-being, for your health." He added: "I am guilty of it. If there is any doubt of that, let there be no more."

The jury from his trial had already concluded that Tsarnaev should pay for his crimes with his life. He and his brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, unleashed carnage close the marathon's finishing line with bombs made with pressure cookers. His brother was later killed during a shoot-out with Boston police.

In his statement, Tsarnaev offered no explanation for what he had done. Nor did he renounce terrorism.

All federal capital cases have an automatic right of appeal built in. It is likely that process will last years.