

DRONE STRIKE DEATHS

US appeals court throws out lawsuit

REUTERS, Washington

A US federal appeals court on Friday threw out a lawsuit by the families of two Yemeni men allegedly killed as innocent bystanders in a US drone strike in 2012.

The unanimous ruling by a three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in Washington upheld a lower court's finding that it lacked the authority to question decision-making by the government over the missile strike.

The case began in 2015 when the families of Salem bin Ali Jaber, an imam, and Waleed bin Ali Jaber, a police officer, filed a "wrongful death" suit against the US government, then President Barack Obama and other US officials.

They claimed the deaths were collateral damage in an August, 2012 Hellfire missile attack by a U.S. drone in the eastern Yemeni village of Khashamir targeting three extremists, court papers said. Salem had recently preached against al-Qaeda and brought Waleed, his nephew, along for protection to a meeting requested by the other three, the papers said. All five men were killed in the strike.

The families sought a court declaration that the strike violated international and US law. The lawsuit did not seek monetary relief.

The United States has been conducting counterterrorism operations in Yemen for years against militant groups like al-Qaeda. In 2013, Obama set tighter rules on drone strikes and promised greater transparency.

Monday's ruling tossing the suit said that, based on legal precedent, judges cannot second-guess the government's military judgment. It is "the Executive, and not a panel of the D.C. Circuit, who commands our armed forces and determines our nation's foreign policy," the ruling said.



(From left, clockwise) A banner which reads 'Fall of Hong Kong Since 1997' (R) is carried during a protest march in Hong Kong yesterday; Hong Kong's new Chief Executive Carrie Lam (L) takes oath from China's President Xi Jinping; and fireworks explode over Victoria Harbour to mark the 20th anniversary of the city's handover from British to Chinese rule. Xi yesterday warned that any challenge to Beijing's control over Hong Kong crossed a "red line", as thousands calling for more democracy marched through the city 20 years since it was handed back by Britain.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

'Patience is over' with N Korea

Declares Trump after meeting South's leader; targets Seoul on trade

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump declared that the US had run out of patience with North Korea over its nuclear drive Friday as he welcomed South Korea's new leader Moon Jae-In to talks at the White House.

While Moon has been arguing for greater engagement with Pyongyang as the best way to put the brakes on its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, Trump made clear that he was in no mood to pursue diplomacy with a regime he accused of having no respect for human life.

And while Moon announced that Trump had accepted an offer to visit Seoul later this year, the leaders failed to map out any kind of joint strategy on how best to deal with the threat posed by the North Korean leadership.

"Together, we are facing the threat of the reckless and brutal regime in North Korea. The nuclear and ballistic missile programs of that regime require a determined response," said Trump.

"The North Korean dictatorship has no regard for the safety and security of its people, for its neighbors and has no respect for human life."

The Trump administration has been growing increasingly exasperated with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un's regime which has staged a barrage of missile tests in recent months.

Trump had been pinning his hopes on China -- North Korea's main diplomatic ally -- to bring pressure to bear on

Pyeongyang but declared last week that their efforts had failed.

"The era of strategic patience with the North Korean regime has failed, many years it has failed. Frankly, that patience is over," Trump said at a press briefing in the Rose Garden.

And while he avoided criticizing his guest's approach, Trump made clear he was in no mood to enter dialogue with North Korea but rather saw sanctions as the best way to proceed.

"The United States calls on other regional powers and all responsible nations to join us in implementing sanctions and demanding that the North Korean regime choose a better path and do it quickly and a different future for its long suffering people," he said.

Washington, South Korea's security guarantor, has more than 28,000 troops in the country to defend it from its communist neighbor, which has been intensifying missile tests -- including five since Moon's inauguration.

Moon said there was no dispute between his government and

Trump over the nature of the threat posed by North Korea.

The two leaders also spoke about bilateral trade, with Trump saying the current \$17 billion dollar trade deficit with Seoul was unacceptable, highlighting the number of Korean-made cars on American roads.

"I'm encouraged by President Moon's assurances that he will work to create a level playing field so that American workers and businesses and especially automakers can have a fair shake at dealing with South Korea," he said.



17 wounded in US nightclub shooting

Gunman kills doctor in NY hospital

AFP, Miami

Seventeen people were wounded in a nightclub shootout in the southern US state of Arkansas, police said yesterday.

Some of the victims may also have been trampled when gunfire rang out inside the Power Ultra Lounge in downtown Little Rock around 2:30am, local KATV reported.

"We do NOT believe this incident was an active shooter or terror related incident," the Little Rock police department wrote on Twitter.

"It appears to have been a dispute at a concert."

Police released no names or any information on a suspect or suspects.

Earlier, a man opened fire in a busy New York hospital on Friday afternoon, killing a female doctor and wounding six other people before turning his weapon on himself, according to officials.

The shooter was himself a doctor and former employee of the hospital, according to Mayor Bill de Blasio and police chief James O'Neill, who ruled out a connection to terrorism.

The incident occurred at the 1000-bed Bronx-Lebanon hospital just before 3 pm (1900 GMT) as many patients were receiving consultations.

The latest incident could also re-ignite debate over gun control laws in the United States, which sees more mass shootings than any other country.



Corbyn calls for halting arms sales to Saudi Arabia

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the UK's main opposition Labour Party, has called for a halt in arms sales to Saudi Arabia and a ceasefire in Yemen.

Since the start of war in Yemen, the UK has approved arms export licences to Saudi Arabia worth \$4.1b, according to London-based Campaign Against the Arms Trade.

In an exclusive interview with Al Jazeera, Corbyn said: "We have constantly condemned the use of these weapons by Saudi Arabia in Yemen, and called for the suspension of the arms sales to Saudi Arabia to show that we are wanting a peace process in Yemen, not an invasion by Saudi Arabia."

"We've made that very clear."

Yemen has been devastated by a war between forces loyal to the internationally recognised government, led by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and a Houthi rebel movement.

Concerned by the rise of the Houthi rebels it believes to be backed by regional rival Iran, Saudi Arabia and a coalition of Sunni Arab states launched an intervention in 2015 in the form of a massive air campaign aimed at reinstating Hadi's government.

More than 10,000 people have been killed and at least 40,000 injured in Yemen since March 20, mostly from Saudi-led air strikes, according to the United Nations.

The Saudi-led air campaign and subsequent blockade has created a humanitarian disaster in the Arab world's poorest country. Cholera is on the rise and nearly 70 percent of the population is dependent on aid.



Displaced Iraqi civilians who fled from clashes ride in a military vehicle in the Old City of Mosul, Iraq, yesterday. In neighbouring Syria, US-backed fighters have launched a renewed attack on Islamic State group jihadists inside their bastion Raqa, seeking to retake a key eastern neighbourhood, a monitor said yesterday.

'Dumb as a rock' journalist

Trump renews attack at TV hosts, tweets against CNN

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump yesterday fired off another volley in his escalating feud with the US media, aiming a Twitter tirade at CNN, NBC and a morning show host he taunted as "dumb as a rock."

The outburst came at the end of a week during which the US leader railed against major news organizations as "fake news," before launching a crude personal attack on Mika Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough, who headline the "Morning Joe" program on the left-leaning MSNBC cable network.

"Crazy Joe Scarborough and dumb as a rock Mika are not bad people, but their low rated show is dominated by their NBC bosses. Too bad!" he wrote, seemingly trying to get in the final word in his clash with the journalists.

Apparently stung by critical coverage on the show, Trump on Thursday had tweeted: "I heard poorly rated @Morning_Joe speaks badly of me (don't watch anymore)."

"Then how come low I.Q. Crazy Mika,

along with Psycho Joe came to Mar-a-Lago 3 nights in a row around New Year's Eve, and insisted on joining me. She was bleeding badly from a face-lift. I said no!"

The comments sparked a major backlash, as well as condemnation from within Trump's own Republican party.

The TV hosts responded on Friday with an opinion piece in the Washington Post titled "Donald Trump is not well," questioning his "unmoored behavior" and fitness to serve.

Trump yesterday also targeted CNN, a frequent punching bag for the president.

"I am extremely pleased to see that @CNN has finally been exposed as #FakeNews and garbage journalism. It's about time!"

Three CNN journalists resigned over the article, which was posted on the network's website on June 22 before being yanked the next day.

he tweeted, referring to an article that the cable news channel retracted, which claimed Congress was investigating links between Trump's administration and a Russian investment fund.

Three CNN journalists resigned over the article, which was posted on the network's website on June 22 before being yanked the next day.



American Muslims decry Trump harsh travel ban

AFP, Chicago

American Muslim leaders Friday decried Donald Trump's rhetoric towards their community and predicted the president's travel ban would eventually be proven unlawful, a day after a weakened version of the measure came into force.

A limited version of Trump's travel ban -- temporarily barring refugees and visitors from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen -- took effect on Thursday, after the US Supreme Court allowed it to be enforced pending a full hearing in October.

The Trump administration says the ban is necessary to keep terrorists out of the country, but immigrant advocates charge that it illegally singles out Muslims -- in line with campaign pledges by Trump to bar all Muslims from the country.

Leaders of the Islamic Society of North America, which claims to be the largest Muslim advocacy group on the continent, slammed the ban as they gathered for a weekend convention in Chicago.

"His statements and his rhetoric have caused a great amount of harm to the American Muslim community," said Azhar Azeez, president of the ISNA, which believes the ban will ultimately be proven unconstitutional.

"This country has always been an inclusive nation, a tolerant nation," Azeez said, "and we as Americans have an obligation to make sure we uphold all these things."

Several participants said they had been heartened by the show of support by Americans of many religious denominations, with members of Catholic, Lutheran and Jewish faiths set to attend the three-day convention.

They pointed to the protesters who showed up at US airports, along with lawyers offering pro-bono legal help, as the new ban took effect.

"We had a lot of people come to visit in the mosque... to show support. And it was very nice," said Muhammad Abdellatif, who was attending the convention from Houston.

But others pointed to recent incidents of attacks against Muslims as evidence of increased Islamophobia, and accused far-right groups, and the US president himself, of fanning tensions.

Top militant, civilians killed in J&K firefight

REUTERS, Srinagar

Indian security forces shot dead a top Islamist militant who was accused of killing six police officers during a seven-hour gun battle in the disputed Kashmir region yesterday, police and army officials said.

Bashir Ahmad, alias Bashir Lashkari, was on India's most-wanted list and had a one million rupee (about \$15,500)-bounty on his head. Ahmad killed six police officers in an ambush in the southern Anantnag district last month, the officials said.

Another militant, who police named as Azad Malik, was also killed during Saturday's joint army and police operation in Dailigam village, part of Anantnag.

Two civilians were also killed in the clash and 17 others, who had been trapped inside a house with the militants, were rescued, a police spokesman said.

Lieutenant Colonel Rajesh Kalia, an army spokesman based in Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, said the two dead militants belonged to the Islamist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

India accuses Pakistan of training and arming militants, and helping them infiltrate across the de facto border, called the Line of Control, dividing Kashmir. Pakistan denies those allegations.

The South Asian rivals fought two of their three wars since independence in 1947 over Muslim-majority Kashmir, which they both claim in full but rule in part.

'A giant' of post-war history

Europe pays tribute to Helmut Kohl

AFP, Strasbourg

European leaders joined with former US president Bill Clinton at an emotional tribute in Strasbourg yesterday for former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the father of German reunification and a founder of modern-day Europe.

"A giant of the post-war period has left us," European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker said in an oration in French and German.

"Helmut Kohl was a German patriot, but he was also a European patriot," said Juncker, the only current leader in Europe to have worked alongside the iconic figure.

"Helmut Kohl was not just the architect of Germany unity. He contributed substantially, more than others, to the reconciliation between European history and European geography."

Kohl, who served as chancellor from 1982 to 1998, died on June 16 at age 87.

On his watch, the pro-Western and pro-Soviet states of West and East Germany reunified after the fall of the Berlin Wall in

1989, becoming one of the stablest and most prosperous democracies in the world.

With former French president Francois Mitterrand, Kohl also drove the expansion and integration of the EU.

Together, they helped to open up its membership to fledgling democracies of the former Soviet bloc, create the euro single currency and ripped away internal border controls.

"Helmut Kohl was a privileged partner for France, an essential ally, but he was also more than that, he was a friend," French President Emmanuel Macron said.

"We are here to salute his mark in history."

Kohl's coffin was to be taken by helicopter to the German city of Ludwigshafen and then taken by boat down the Rhine to the southwest town of Speyer for his funeral service on Saturday.

Kohl's death on June 16 was followed on Friday by that of Simone Veil, another colossus of European history.

Veil, a Holocaust survivor and pioneer of women's rights in France, was the first president of the European Parliament.

