

# US Supreme Court kicks off potentially explosive session

AFP, Washington

Sexual minority rights, abortion, immigration and guns -- the Supreme Court convenes today to address an incendiary list of cases as the American political scene reaches fever pitch over efforts to impeach President Donald Trump.

The court's balance has shifted to the right under Trump, who appointed judges Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh in his first term, and who is now gearing up to fight for re-election next November.

The court kept a low profile during its 2018-2019 session after Kavanaugh's Senate confirmation descended into a mud-slinging battle over sexual assault allegations that he strenuously denies.

In its last term, the court "seemed to do everything it could to rise above the partisan rancor, to not be divided along partisan lines," David Cole, legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) said.

But Cole warned that "this term, it's going to be harder for the court -- they already have cases involving very hot-button, ideologically divided issues."

With election campaigning ramping up over the coming months, the court's rulings will be closely watched by rival political camps.

Conservatives are now seen in the majority among the nine judges after Kavanaugh's appointment, and liberals are on the defensive.

In the last election, Trump secured victory after wooing voters -- including evangelical Christians -- with promises to appoint right-wing judges who oppose abortion and defend the right to own guns.

- Ethics, and politics -

The court will on Tuesday dive into the issue of whether it is legal to fire someone because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Trump's Republican administration argues that lawmakers in the past were not addressing gay rights when employment discrimination over "race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" was banned.

LGBTQ campaigners, who won a major victory in 2015 when the court guaranteed the right to gay marriage, are calling on judges to ensure gay and transgender people are covered by the discrimination ban.

What's the point of gay marriage if "you can get married on Saturday and fired on Monday?" ACLU lawyer Jay Kaplan asked ahead of the new session.

The court will also hear a challenge to a restrictive abortion law in Louisiana state -- another flashpoint issue.

The date has not yet been set for when the judges will examine the merits of the abortion law adopted in 2014 in Louisiana.

## BCL activist

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morning. She then pushed the victim inside a room and locked it from outside.

Shangram, who was already in the room, then raped the victim and fled the scene. Hearing the victim scream, locals rushed to the spot and rescued her, the case statement added.

The victim was sent to Jashore General Hospital for medical tests, the OC said.

Meanwhile, all the family members of Shangram, including Mukta, went into hiding after the case was filed, said the OC, adding they were leaving no stone unturned to arrest all the accused.

### 2 SENT TO JAIL IN ANOTHER RAPE CASE

Meanwhile, a Gazipur court sent two youths to jail for their alleged involvement in raping two sisters and recording footage of the rape scene in the district's Sreepur upazila.

The accused are Abdur Razzak, 35, and Azizul Haque, 25, both residents of Sreepur's Noagoan village.

One of the two victims, with help of locals, filed a case with Sreepur Police Station on Saturday night, said Akhter Hossain, inspector (investigation) of Sreepur Police Station.

According to the case statement, the accused interrupted the victims when they were going to a local furniture shop on September 30. They then took the girls to Razzak's house at gunpoint and raped them multiple times.

The accused recorded the rape scenes and threatened the victims to share the footage on social media if they shared their experience with anyone. They then released the victims. Later, discussing with locals, one of the victims went to police station and filed the case, added the case statement.

Police then conducted raids and arrested the accused, said the OC.

The victims were sent to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital for medical tests, he added.

Our Benapole and Gazipur correspondents contributed to this report



Children from the Harijan community being taught by a member of the online forum Gouripur Helpline in Gohata area of Mymensingh's Gouripur upazila. The forum was started by some 20 college students who have taken it upon themselves to provide pre-primary education to these often neglected children.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Caring for the not cared for

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had brought relief, he said.

Ten-year-old Rajon Banshfur, who attends the classes, said, "I am happy that now I am attending classes with other children of my community."

Rupa Banshfur, 8, said that now she could learn without any fear of being

isolated as all her classmates were from the same community.

Gouripur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Farhana Karim said she was aware of the initiative. "I had arranged text books for the children after Gouripur Helpline started the programme in February."

The Harijans are a kind of community who are under the subdivision of Sudra caste in Hindu society. The term "Harijan", meaning the "Children of God", was first used by Mahatma Gandhi to refer to the "Dalits" in 1932.

## Fresh violence rocks HK

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"The anti-mask law just fuels our anger and more will people come on to the street," Lee, a university student wearing a blue mask, said yesterday, as he marched on Hong Kong island.

"We are not afraid of the new law, we will continue fighting. We will fight for righteousness. I put on the mask to tell the government that I'm not afraid of tyranny."

Pro-democracy lawmakers went to the High Court yesterday morning seeking an injunction against the mask ban, arguing the emergency powers bypassed the legislature and contravened the city's mini-constitution.

But a senior judge dismissed their case, reported AFP.

Authorities had braced for two major protests yesterday, fearing a recurrence of Friday night's violent protests which saw the Asian financial centre virtually shut down the next day.

Only hours after Hong Kong's embattled leader Carrie Lam invoked emergency powers last used more than 50 years ago, mask-wearing protesters took to the streets on Friday, setting subway stations on fire, smashing mainland China banks and clashing with police.

The rallies on Hong Kong island and across the harbour in Kowloon had been largely peaceful until police began to try and disperse the

crowds yesterday, saying they were participating in unlawful assemblies, blocking major roads, and ordered protesters to leave immediately.

Hong Kong's four months of protests have plunged the Chinese city into its worst political crisis in decades and pose the biggest popular challenge to Chinese President Xi Jinping since he came to power six years ago.

What started as opposition to a now-withdrawn extradition bill has swelled into a pro-democracy movement against what is seen as Beijing's increasing grip on the city, undermining its "one country, two systems" status promised when Britain handed Hong Kong back to China in 1997.

China dismisses the accusation, saying foreign governments, including Britain and the United States, have fanned anti-China sentiment.

Protesters yesterday chanted "Hong Kongers, revolt" and "Fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong", as riot police monitored them from overhead walkways and footbridges, some taking photographs and filming the marchers.

Some roads clogged with protesters resembled a field of flowers, with thousands of colourful umbrellas. Umbrellas are a symbol of an earlier pro-democracy movement, but were being used yesterday simply to keep off the rain.

Protesters handed out face masks to encourage people to defy the ban. One masked protester carried a mask-wearing "Buzz Lightyear" doll from Walt Disney Co's "Toy Story" animation film, reported Reuters.

As the day wore on protesters started to target subway stations and China banks, just as they did on Friday, which forced the unprecedented closure of the city's metro railway.

A branch of China Construction Bank (Asia) near Prince Edward station was vandalised yesterday with "No China" sprayed on its wall. Wan Chai station, closed with a neon sign saying serious vandalism, had a protester sheet draped over it which read: "this way to HELL".

Protesters set alight a blaze at the Mong Kok MTR station, with a placard nearby reading: "If we burn, you burn with us".

Friday night's "extreme violence" justified the use of emergency laws, Beijing-backed Lam said on Saturday, but the laws have sparked further violent protests.

The current "precarious situation", which endangered public safety, left no timely solution but the anti-mask law, Matthew Cheung, Hong Kong's chief secretary, wrote on his blog yesterday. He urged people to oppose violence ahead of grassroots district council elections set for November 24.

## From 'best organiser' to pariah

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name by carving an empire based on illegal gambling and extortion business in the capital, saw his house of cards come crashing when Rab arrested him from Cumilla yesterday.

Twenty days into being the shining star of Jubo League, the Dhaka City (South) unit Jubo League president's arrest led to his immediate expulsion from the youth front of AL.

"For his involvement in anti-social activities and breaching discipline of the organisation, he has been expelled," read an SMS sent by Mizanul Islam Mizu, education affairs secretary of the Jubo League.

Omar Faruk also changed his tune yesterday while announcing Samrat's expulsion from the party.

According to Jubo League sources, however, Omar was the man under whose patronage Samrat became the kingpin of the capital's illegal casinos.

In fact, after Samrat's name emerged over his involvement in illegal gambling following the drive against it on September 18, Omar was quick to jump to his defence.

During a September 19 programme at Mirpur, Omar brushed aside allegations against Samrat and said it was a conspiracy hatched against Jubo League's "best unit and best organiser".

That Omar threw his weight behind Samrat in such trying times spoke of the latter's penchant for politics, something Samrat spent years

studying up to class eight and became involved in Chhatra League politics in 1990. But before that, he had made a name for himself during HM Ershad's rule when he was with Chhatra Samaj, the student wing of Jatiya Party, according to Jubo League leaders close to Samrat.

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Afterwards, during the BNP-led four-party rule between 1991-96, he joined forces with Jubo League and was elected organising secretary of its Dhaka City (South) unit.

It was at this time when he developed a close bond with the then unit general secretary Nurunnabi Chowdhury Shaon.

According to Jubo League sources, this association led to Samrat's rise, resulting in his being elected the unit president through the council held on July 14, 2012.

Omar Faruk was also elected chairman of the youth front.

But as Samrat indulged in various forms of corruption, his indiscretions soon came to the notice of party higher-ups.

His name came into discussion last year after he demanded ransom from Anjuman Mofidul Islam (AMI), a voluntary organisation providing humanitarian services to the poor, for the construction of its headquarters at Kakrail.

Even the AL president received a complaint against Samrat for this, said sources.

According to them, on September 21, Sheikh Hasina expressed her annoyance over the matter and asked that the Jubo League unit be dissolved when leaders of the party and its front organisations went to see her off at the airport before her departure for the UN summit.

Jubo League chairman and General Secretary Harun-Or-Rashid were present there, they said.

But due to the "blessings" of the chairman and some senior leaders of the party, Samrat escaped Hasina's wrath.

The support he had from within the party was very evident.

The Jubo League unit office Samrat had set up in his own personal office at Kakrail remained surrounded by hundreds of activists from early morning to midnight every day.

During a visit there yesterday, digital posters of Samrat with the Jubo League chairman and general secretary were seen displayed at the entrance of the Bhuiyan Mansion, the

office building.

Samrat used the fourth, seventh, eighth and top floor of the eight-storey building to carry out his activities.

Apart from using his office to carry out his business activities, Samrat also used it for organisational activities. It was also the place where he met out punishment to those he didn't like or those who didn't follow his orders.

Besides controlling the capital's casino scene, Samrat himself was a regular gambler and used to travel to Singapore frequently for it.

His second wife Sharmin Chowdhury, while talking to reporters at her Mohakhali DOHS residence, yesterday claimed that gambling was the only addiction her husband had.

But perhaps Samrat's gambling extended beyond cards and tables, infiltrating his very politics and eventually leading to his spectacular fall.

Noticing this correspondent, a woman also went there with her 18-year-old mentally-challenged son, who had a bandage on his head.

"See, this is my son. His name is Prince. You can ask 10 people here. All will say he is mentally-challenged. Police didn't even spare him," said the woman with tears rolling down her cheeks.

Seven-year-old Junayed was seen with shotgun pellet injuries on his forehead and 10-year-old Shoyeb on his right hand.

Over 50 people, including 15 policemen, were injured in the clashes between the Geneva Camp residents and police. The Urdu-speaking people alleged that the police action in the camp was aided by some ruling party fall.

Refuting all the allegations, Anisur Rahman, deputy commissioner (Tejgaon division) of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said, "We had been directed not to go after women and children. We took action against those involved in violence."

Anisur said seven people were arrested in two cases following the incident.

The residents did not pay electricity bills worth Tk 33 crore to Dhaka Power Distribution Company, the police official said.

## Second Trump

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dozen US officials expressing concern that Trump was using the power of his office to solicit interference from a foreign country as he seeks re-election in 2020.

It also alleged that Trump leveraged \$400 million in aid to secure a promise from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to investigate a Democratic rival, former Vice President Joe Biden, and his son Hunter Biden, who served as a director on a Ukrainian energy company.

"I can confirm that my firm and my team represent multiple whistleblowers in connection to the underlying August 12, 2019, disclosure to the Intelligence Community Inspector General," Andrew Bakaj, a second lawyer, said on Twitter.

Mark Zaid said on Twitter that the second whistleblower "also made a protected disclosure under the law and cannot be retaliated against." He told ABC News earlier the second official has been interviewed by the inspector general.

Confirmation of a second whistleblower followed stirrings of discontent within Trump's own Republican Party after he called on China on Friday to investigate Biden's son, who had business dealings in China.

Republican US Senators Mitt Romney, Ben Sasse and Susan Collins expressed concerns about Trump

reaching out to foreign countries to help him in his 2020 re-election bid.

However, other Republicans stood firmly in support of Trump yesterday, echoing the president's insistence that the call was not significant.

Trump railed against the "do-nothing" Democrats' impeachment on Twitter with a string of retweets from supporters, touting his high approval ratings among Republicans and reprimanding his criticism of Romney.

The telephone call with Zelenskiy, a summary of which was released by the White House, and the whistleblower complaint prompted House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi to launch an impeachment inquiry on September 24. She said Trump's attempts to solicit foreign interference jeopardised US election integrity and threatened national security.

Democrats said any finding that Trump withheld taxpayer money, already approved by Congress to help Ukraine, in exchange for a favour from Zelenskiy would strengthen the case against him.

Trump has maintained there was no "quid pro quo" in his request of the Ukrainian president, but text messages released by congressional committees leading the inquiry showed otherwise.

The committees released the texts involving Trump's Ukraine envoy, Kurt Volker, after he testified behind closed doors on Thursday.

## Gambling

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reporters when Rab raided their Mohakhali DOHS residence yesterday afternoon, hours after Samrat was arrested in Cumilla.

Sharmin, the second wife of the alleged casino king, also claimed, "Samrat has no asset at all and he spent whatever he earned from gambling on the party."