

‘Calling vote unfair doesn’t make it so’

US court tells Trump, rejects challenge of Pennsylvania race

AFP, Washington

A federal appeals court on Friday flatly dismissed President Donald Trump’s claim that the election was unfair and refused to freeze Joe Biden’s win in the key state of Pennsylvania.

In a scathing review of the Trump campaign’s arguments that the president was cheated in his November 3 reelection bid, three appeals court judges unanimously said that allegations of unfairness were not supported by evidence.

“Charges of unfairness are serious. But calling an election unfair does not make it so,” the court said.

In appealing a lower court ruling, the Trump campaign claimed discrimination, the judges noted.

“But its alchemy cannot transmute lead into gold,” the court said.

It was the latest in more than two dozen court defeats around the country for the Trump campaign and Republicans who have alleged fraud and other misconduct contributed to the president’s loss.

Trump persists in arguing that Biden’s clear victory is invalid.

“Just so you understand, this election was a fraud,” he told reporters on Thursday.

Last week a Pennsylvania state court rejected arguments by Trump’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani that the millions of votes in the state should be thrown out due to fraud.

The judge in that case, however, embarrassed Giuliani by forcing him to admit that none of his precise claims before the court involved fraud or anything more than technical issues in overseeing the vote count.



Students of Iran’s Basij paramilitary force burn US and Israeli flags during a rally in front of the foreign ministry in Tehran, yesterday, to protest the killing of prominent nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh a day earlier near the capital.

PHOTO: AFP

REFORMS TO MONARCHY

Thai protesters move to suburbs in Bangkok

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thai anti-government protesters demonstrated in Bangkok’s outskirts yesterday with a duck parade and speeches demanding the removal of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, a new constitution and reforms to the monarchy.

Protests have been stepped up this week despite threats by Prayuth, a former junta ruler, to use all available laws against protesters who break them and charges of insulting the monarchy against several protest leaders.

Hundreds of people gathered in both Nonthaburi and Bang Na, to the northwest and southeast of Bangkok respectively.

“We have had too many years of corrupt dictatorship. We want an election in which our voices are really heard,” said one graduate.

Israel aims for ‘chaos’

Says Iran’s Rouhani after assassination of top nuke scientist, vows to retaliate ‘in due time’

AFP, Tehran

Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani yesterday accused arch-foe Israel of acting as a “mercenary” for the US and seeking to create chaos, blaming it for the assassination of a top Iranian nuclear scientist.

Rouhani vowed a response “in due time”, pledging his country will not fall into a “trap” and alluding to changing power dynamics in the wake of the US election, while Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for the “punishing (of) the perpetrators and those responsible” for the killing.

Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was “martyred” after being seriously wounded when assailants targeted his car and engaged in a gunfight with his bodyguards outside the capital Tehran on Friday, according to Iran’s defence ministry.

“The nation of Iran is smarter than to fall in the trap of the conspiracy set by the Zionists,”



Rouhani said in televised remarks.

“They are thinking of creating chaos, but they should know that we have read their hands and they will not succeed,” Iran’s president said, after earlier pinning the blame for the killing on “the wicked hands of the global arrogance, with the usurper Zionist regime as the mercenary”.

A little later, Iran’s supreme leader Ali Khamenei called for “following up on this crime

and certainly punishing the perpetrators and those responsible,” in a short statement on his official website.

Khamenei also called for a continuation of Fakhrizadeh’s “scientific and technical efforts ... in all of the fields he was working in.”

Iran, a major Shia power, generally uses the term “global arrogance” to refer to the United States, where outgoing President Donald Trump has been hawkish on Tehran, unilaterally withdrawing in 2018 from a multilateral nuclear deal with the Islamic republic and re-imposing crippling sanctions.

“This barbaric assassination shows that our enemies are in stressful weeks, during which they feel... their pressure declining, the global situation changing,” the Iranian president added. The assassination of Fakhrizadeh comes less than two months before US President-elect Joe Biden is to take office, after defeating Trump in elections earlier this month.

Heavy shelling hits capital of Ethiopia’s Tigray

AFP, Addis Ababa

Heavy shelling rocked the capital of Ethiopia’s Tigray region yesterday as the city of half a million braced for an all-out offensive by government forces against its dissident leaders.

Ethiopia’s military “has started hitting with heavy weaponry and artillery the centre of Mekele”, the local government said. Two humanitarian officials with staff in the city confirmed the strikes.

“The Tigray regional state calls upon all who have a clear conscience, including the international community, to condemn the artillery and warplane attacks and massacres being committed,” the statement said.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, winner of last year’s Nobel Peace Prize, announced November 4 he had ordered military operations against Tigray’s ruling party, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF).

More than three weeks of fierce fighting has left thousands dead “including many civilians as well as security forces”, the International Crisis Group said Friday.

Tens of thousands of refugees have streamed over the border into Sudan. Abiy announced Thursday he had ordered a “final” offensive on TPLF leaders, and Ethiopia’s military says it has encircled the city.

A communications blackout in Tigray has made it difficult to verify claims from both sides about how the fighting is going.

A spokesman for a crisis committee formed in response to hostilities in Tigray did not immediately respond to a request for comment yesterday about reported shelling in Mekele, which has already been hit by air strikes.

A spokeswoman for Abiy’s office referred AFP to past statements indicating military operations would be undertaken “strategically” to avoid undue harm to civilians.



Farmers react as they burn an effigy during a protest against the newly passed farm bills at Singhu border near Delhi, India yesterday. Modi’s laws, enacted in September, let farmers sell their produce anywhere, including to big corporate buyers like Walmart Inc, not just at government-regulated wholesale markets where growers are assured of a minimum procurement price.

PHOTO: REUTERS

26/11 MUMBAI ATTACK MASTERMIND

US announces reward of up to \$5m for info

ANI, WASHINGTON

Twelve years after the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, the United States has announced a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to the arrest or conviction of Lashkar-e-Taiba member Sajid Mir for his role in the attacks in Mumbai in 2008.

According to an official statement issued by the US Rewards for Justice program, “Sajid Mir, a senior member of the Pakistan-based foreign terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), is wanted for his involvement in the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India. The Rewards for Justice program is offering a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to the arrest or conviction in any country of Sajid Mir for his role in these attacks.”

On November 26, 2008, 10 terrorists, trained by the Pakistan-based terrorist organisation LeT, carried out a series of coordinated attacks against multiple targets in Mumbai — the Taj Mahal Hotel, the Oberoi Hotel, the Leopold Cafe, the Nariman (Chabad) House, and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus — killing 166 people.

In these gruesome attacks, nine terrorists were killed and the lone survivor, Ajmal Amir Kasab, was caught and sentenced to death. On November 11, 2012, Kasab was hanged at Yerwada Central Jail in Pune.

However, Pakistani authorities continue to deny culpability and are yet to take action on the multiple dossiers shared by India. A trial under way in a Pakistani anti-terrorism court against seven suspects has made little headway in more than a decade, as Pakistani officials serially question the sufficiency and legitimacy of evidence against them.

Pakistan has long been criticised for cultivating terror proxy groups and the country currently faces renewed pressure to act against terrorists.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Brexit talks resume in London as clock ticks down

European Union chief negotiator Michel Barnier resumed make-or-break Brexit talks with British counterpart David Frost in London yesterday with the clock ticking for a deal on future trading arrangements. It is the first time they have met face-to-face since Barnier went into self-isolation after a member of his team caught coronavirus. A failure to reach an agreement would see Britain and the EU trading on World Trade Organization terms, with tariffs immediately imposed on goods travelling to and from the continent. Britain has been largely trading on the same terms with the EU since it officially left the bloc in January as part of a transition agreement that expires at the end of the year.

India deploys marine commandos to Pangong lake



Amid the ongoing stand-off between India and China, the Marine Commandos (MARCOS) of the Indian Navy have been deployed to the Pangong lake area in eastern Ladakh. The idea behind the deployment of the MARCOS in Eastern Ladakh where Indian Air Force’s Garud operatives and Indian Army’s Para Special Forces, which have been there since day one of the conflicts, is to enhance the integration of the three services and provide the naval commandos exposure to extreme cold weather conditions, government sources told ANI. “The MARCOS have been deployed in the Pangong lake area where the Indian and Chinese forces have been engaged in a conflict situation since April-May timeframe this year,” the sources said.

China’s domestically made nuke reactor goes online

China has powered up its first domestically developed nuclear reactor -- the Hualong One -- a significant step in Beijing’s attempts to become less dependent on Western allies for energy security and critical technology. The reactor, which was connected to the national grid on Friday, can generate 10 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity each year and cut carbon emissions by 8.16 million tons, according to China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC). “This marks China breaking the monopoly of foreign nuclear power technology and officially entering the technology’s first batch of advanced countries,” CNNC said in a statement.

SOURCE: AFP, TOI

‘Piles of cash at home’

HK leader says US sanctions mean she has no bank account

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said she has “piles of cash” at home as she has no bank account after the United States slapped sanctions on her in response to a draconian security law China imposed on the city.

Lam was targeted, along with 14 other senior city officials, in the toughest US action on Hong Kong since Beijing imposed the new law on the territory in late June.

The move by Washington freezes the American assets of the 15 officials and criminalises any financial transactions in the United States.

In an interview with local English TV channel HKIBC aired on Friday night, Lam said she was “using cash every day for all the things” after being sanctioned.

“Sitting in front of you is a chief executive of the Hong Kong SAR (Special Administrative Region) who has no banking service made available to her,” Lam told HKIBC.

“I have piles of cash at home, the government is paying me cash for my salary,” she added.

Lam said that it was “very honourable” to be “unjustifiably sanctioned” by the US government and does not want to deter anyone from serving in public office.

Earning HK\$5.21 million (US\$672,000) a year, Lam is one of the highest paid leaders in the world.

Her remarks sparked a public backlash, with social media users posting photos of coins in their piggy banks at home to contrast with Lam’s wealth.

Others questioned how her large salary would be transported to her residence in cash.

Tough security for J&K’s first vote since autonomy cancelled

AFP, Srinagar

Voters in Indian-administered Kashmir went to the polls yesterday amid a heavy security presence in the first direct elections in the disputed region since the government stripped its semi-autonomy last year.

Under high alert for attacks by separatist militants, dozens of police and paramilitaries carrying machine guns surrounded each voting station while the army kept up street patrols.

Observers said only small numbers braved the security, coronavirus fears and snow-covered terrain to elect members of their local councils. Voting is to be held over eight days up to December 19 with the count to start three days later.

At a polling booth in the Kashmir valley, Faizi, 70, told AFP she had voted “to facilitate development work, like paving the roads.”

The Himalayan region, which is

also claimed by Pakistan, has been under a heavy security blanket since the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government imposed direct rule in August 2019.



Two soldiers were killed in an ambush blamed on militants in the main city Srinagar on Thursday.

Thermal scanners were set up at polling booths and staff handed out facemasks and hand sanitiser as precautions against the coronavirus.

While the local councils have

only limited powers, several Kashmir political parties, including the influential National Conference and Peoples Democratic Party have formed an alliance to campaign for the restoration of the region’s political autonomy.

The alliance has accused the government of harassing its candidates while helping those from the BJP. The local election commission denied the allegations.

A day before polling, authorities restricted PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti to her home and police stopped reporters from attending a press conference she called.

Mufti was among scores of political leaders held under house arrest for months after the clampdown.

Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since their bitter split at independence in 1947. Both claim the territory in full.