

TRUMP'S INFLUENCE ON REPUBLICAN POLITICS A poisonous kingmaker

REUTERS, Washington

It is still Donald Trump's Republican Party - at least for now. The vote by 43 of the 50 Republican senators to acquit Trump on the charge of inciting last month's deadly riot at the US Capitol, with only seven voting for conviction, highlights just how powerful a grip he has on the party he remade in his image over the past five years.

The former president commands fervent loyalty among his supporters, forcing most Republican politicians to pledge their fealty and fear his wrath. But after two impeachments, months of false claims that his election loss to Democrat Joe Biden was rigged, and an assault on the US Capitol by his supporters that left five people dead, Trump is also political poison in many of the swing districts that often decide American elections.

That leaves Republicans in a precarious position as they try to forge a winning coalition in the 2022 elections for control of Congress and a 2024 White House race that might include Trump as a candidate.

"It's hard to imagine Republicans winning national elections without Trump supporters anytime soon," said Alex Conant, a Republican strategist and aide to Senator Marco Rubio during his 2016 presidential primary race against Trump. "The party is facing a real Catch 22: it can't win with Trump but it's obvious it can't win without him either," he said.

"Whether he does run again is up to him, but he's still going to have an enormous amount of influence on both the direction of the policy and also in evaluating who is a serious standard-bearer for that message," one adviser said. "You can call it a kingmaker or whatever you want to call it."

While Trump maintains control over the party for now, several Republican senators said during the impeachment trial that the stain left by the Capitol riot would cripple his chances of winning power again in 2024.

Republican Senator John Cornyn, a Trump ally, said the former president's legacy had suffered permanent damage.

"Unfortunately, while President Trump did a lot of good, his handling of the post-election period is what he's going to be remembered for," Cornyn said. "And I think that's a tragedy."



A Buddhist monk holding a sign stands next to an armoured vehicle during a protest against the military coup, in Yangon, Myanmar, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Biden aide resigns over comments to reporter

The White House said Saturday it has accepted the resignation of a staffer who allegedly threatened to "destroy" a reporter who was asking about his personal life. White House Deputy Spokesman T.J. Ducklo was originally suspended for one week without pay, but now the administration of President Joe Biden has accepted his resignation, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement. According to Vanity Fair magazine, Ducklo called Politico reporter Tara Palmeri after she began asking questions about his months-old personal relationship with a reporter from Politico rival Axios, Alexi McCammond. "I will destroy you," Ducklo allegedly said to Palmeri in a phone call shortly after Biden's January 20 presidential inauguration. According to Vanity Fair, Ducklo "made derogatory and misogynistic comments" to Palmeri and called her "jealous." Psaki said Ducklo apologized to the reporter.

First bodies recovered from Indian flood disaster tunnel

Rescuers yesterday pulled the first bodies from a blocked tunnel at a power complex in a northern Indian valley devastated by a flash flood a week ago, where 161 people remain missing. Scores were killed in Uttarakhand state when the deluge - thought to have been triggered by a chunk of glacier sliding down a mountainside or a glacial lake breaching its banks - swept down the Rishiganga valley in minutes, destroying roads, bridges and buildings. Amid warnings that river levels could rise again, the corpses of three victims were retrieved from the tunnel, where at least 30 people are thought to have been trapped by mud and rocks. Initially there were hopes that those inside might still be alive in air pockets. 43 bodies have been recovered so far.

Putin accuses West of using Navalny to 'contain' Russia



Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday accused the West of using jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny to try to "contain" Russia. "Our opponents or our potential opponents... have always relied on - and used - ambitious, power-hungry people," Putin said in an interview with Russian media. Putin suggested that the wave of protests recently held across Russia in the wake of Navalny's arrest and imprisonment had also been fed from abroad, against the backdrop of the widespread "exhaustion, frustration and dissatisfaction" arising from the coronavirus pandemic. Navalny, a persistent thorn in Putin's side, was arrested on his return from Germany, where he had been recovering from a poisoning he claims was carried out by the Kremlin and the Russian security services, FSB.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Junta faces mass strike

Workers in govt departments join civil disobedience movement; army gets sweeping powers to detain people

AGENCIES

Hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets in Myanmar for a ninth day of anti-coup demonstrations yesterday, as the new army rulers grappled to contain a strike by government workers that could cripple their ability to run the country.

Trains in parts of the country stopped running after staff refused to go to work, local media reported, while the military deployed soldiers to power plants only to be confronted by angry crowds.

COUP IN MYANMAR

As evening fell, armoured vehicles were seen in the commercial capital of Yangon for the first time since the coup, witnesses said.

A civil disobedience movement to protest against the Feb. 1 coup that deposed the civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi started with doctors. It now affects a swathe of government departments.

The junta ordered civil servants to go back to work, threatening action. The army has been carrying out nightly mass arrests and on Saturday gave itself sweeping powers to detain people and search private property.

The military regime yesterday warned the public not to harbour fugitive political activists after issuing

arrest warrants for veteran democracy campaigners supporting massive nationwide anti-coup protests.

Security forces have stepped up arrests of doctors and others joining a civil disobedience movement that has seen huge crowds throng streets in big urban centres and isolated frontier villages alike.

Richard Horsey, a Myanmar-based analyst with the International Crisis Group, said the work of many government departments had effectively ground to a halt. "This has the potential to also affect vital functions - the military can replace engineers and doctors, but not power grid controllers and central bankers," he said.

Nearly 400 have been arrested in the days since the coup, including many of Suu Kyi's top political allies. The country's new military leadership has so far been unmoved by a torrent of international condemnation.

But traditional allies of the country's armed forces, including Russia and China, have dissociated themselves from what they have described as interference in Myanmar's "internal affairs".

The junta insists it took power lawfully and has instructed journalists in the country not to refer to itself as a government that took power in a coup.

Won't implement CAA if voted back to power

Says Rahul in Assam, slams BJP's divisive tactics

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party and its ideological mentor RSS of dividing Assam, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday said his party, if voted back to power in the state, will never implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Addressing his first public rally in Assam ahead of the assembly elections due in March-April in the north eastern state, he said Assam needs its "own Chief Minister" who will listen to the voice of the people and not one who listens only to Nagpur (RSS headquarters) and Delhi from where the BJP-led federal government rules India.

"The Assam Accord has brought peace and it is the protector of the state. I and my party workers will protect each principle of the Accord. There will not be a single deviation from it," Rahul said.

The tripartite 1985 Assam Accord between Assam government, Indian government and All Assam Students

Union (AASU) ended years of violent street protests led by AASU in Assam against "foreigners" which was a euphemism for "illegal" migrants from across erstwhile East Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Rahul said illegal immigration is an issue in Assam and exuded confidence that the people of the state have the capability to resolve it through dialogue.

Alleging that BJP and RSS are trying to divide the state on the issue of Assam Accord, he said, "If Assam is divided, then Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Home Minister Amit Shah will not be affected but the people of Assam and the rest of India will be affected."

Rahul's comments on CAA came a day after the Chief Minister of the southern Indian state of Kerala Pinarayi Vijayan said his government will not implement the contentious CAA.

Amit Shah last week said that the process of implementation of the CAA would start after the Covid-19 vaccination drive.



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