

Trump Org, CFO plead not guilty in tax fraud case

REUTERS, New York

Donald Trump's longtime financial chief and an affiliate of the former US president's company pleaded not guilty yesterday to criminal charges in a sweeping indictment from a probe by Manhattan's district attorney into Trump and his business practices.

Allen Weisselberg, chief financial officer of the Trump Organization, was charged in the 15-count indictment with avoiding taxes on \$1.7 million of income, while an affiliate of the company was charged with scheming to defraud.

The charges were announced one day after a grand jury indicted the organization and its executive.

"This was a 15-year long tax fraud scheme involving off the books payments," prosecutor Carey Dunne said at the arraignment in Manhattan Criminal Court.

"It was orchestrated by the most senior



executives who were financially benefiting themselves and the company, by getting secret pay raises at the expense of state and federal taxpayers," he said.

The indictment could undermine the relationships of Trump's company with banks and business partners.

It could also complicate Trump's political future, as he resumes holding rallies and mulls a 2024 White House run.

Weisselberg, 73, wore handcuffs as he was led to the courtroom.

Cyrus Vance, the district attorney, began his still-ongoing investigation nearly three years ago, and has been working in recent months with the office of New York Attorney General Letitia James.

They both are Democrats.

In a statement, the Trump Organization said prosecutors were using Weisselberg, who has worked for the Trump family business for 48 years, as "a pawn in a scorched earth attempt to harm the former president."

Trump is not expected to be charged this week, his lawyer Fischetti has said.

Charges could increase pressure on Weisselberg to cooperate with prosecutors, which he has resisted. That cooperation could become crucial to any future case against his longtime boss.

The Trump Organization operates hotels, golf courses, and resorts around the world.



Participants wave national and party flags as balloons are released at the end of the event marking the 100th founding anniversary of the Communist Party of China, on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

China's rise 'irreversible'

Says Xi, warns against foreign bullying as China marks party centenary; pledges reunification with Taiwan; Hong Kong falls silent

AGENCIES

President Xi Jinping hailed China's "irreversible" course from colonial humiliation to great-power status at the centenary celebrations for the Chinese Communist Party yesterday, in a speech reaching deep into history to remind patriots at home and rivals abroad of his nation's -- and his own -- ascendancy.

Speaking above the giant portrait of Mao Zedong which dominates Tiananmen Square, from the podium where the famous chairman proclaimed the People's Republic of China in 1949, Xi said the "era of China being bullied is gone forever", praising the party for raising incomes and restoring national pride.

Drawing a line from the subjugation of the Opium Wars to the struggle to establish a socialist revolution in China, Xi said the party had brought about "national rejuvenation" lifting tens of millions from poverty and "altered the landscape of world development".

Xi, wearing a Mao-style jacket, added that the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has entered an irreversible historical course" and vowed to continue to build a "world-class" military to defend national interests.

"The Chinese people will never allow any foreign forces to bully, oppress, or enslave us," Xi said in his speech, to great applause.

"Whoever wants to do so will face bloodshed in front of a Great Wall of steel built by more than 1.4 billion Chinese people."



On the self-ruled island of Taiwan -- which Beijing views as part of its territory -- Xi was unflinching as he called for the "complete reunification of the motherland".

"All sons and daughters of China, including compatriots on both sides of the strait, must work together and move forward in solidarity, and resolutely crush any 'Taiwan independence' plots," he said.

In the summer of 1921 Mao and a clutch of Marxist-Leninist thinkers in Shanghai founded the Communist Party, which has since morphed into one of the world's most powerful political organisations.

It now counts around 95 million members, garnered over a century of war, famine and turmoil, and more recently a surge to superpower status butting up against Western rivals, led by the United States.

In a ceremony of pomp and patriotism, a fly-by of helicopters in formation spelling '100' -- a

giant hammer and sickle flag trailing -- and a 100-gun salute followed, while young communists in unison pledged allegiance to the party.

Xi has presented a defiant face to overseas rivals, revving up nationalist sentiment. He has batted back criticism of his government's actions in Hong Kong, attitude towards Taiwan and treatment of the Uyghurs Muslims.

The president, whose speech braided the economic miracle of China with the longevity of the party, has cemented his eight-year rule through a personality cult, ending presidential term limits and declining to anoint a successor.

And the party has pivoted to new challenges; using tech to renew its appeal to younger generations -- 12.55 million members are now aged 30 or younger -- while giving a communist finish to a consumer economy decorated by billionaire entrepreneurs.

Yesterday also marks the 24th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to Chinese rule -- a date once met with mass demonstrations against Beijing inside the former British colony.

One year ago, China imposed a draconian national security law on the city in response to huge, often violent, pro-democracy protests.

The measure has seen activists charged, anti-China slogans criminalised and even the closure of a critical newspaper as the law sinks the once free-wheeling city into what Amnesty International calls a "human rights emergency".

NEWS IN brief

AZ shot 94pc protective against death in over 65s

Two doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine gives an estimated 94% protection against death from the disease in people over 65, Public Health England said yesterday in a weekly surveillance report of real-world data. PHE also said that for the under 40s, early estimates suggested a single dose of Pfizer's vaccine is 61% effective against symptomatic disease and a single dose of the Moderna vaccine is 72% effective.

182 more unmarked graves found in Canada

Another 182 unmarked graves were discovered at a third former indigenous residential school in Canada. The Lower Kootenay Band said experts using ground-penetrating radar mapping located what are believed to be the remains of pupils aged seven to 15 at the former St Eugene's Mission School near Cranbrook, British Columbia. The Catholic Church operated the school on behalf of the federal government from 1912 until the early 1970s. The grim development follows the discovery of remains of nearly 1,000 children in unmarked graves at other mission schools. Until the 1990s, some 150,000 Indian, Inuit and Metis youngsters were forcibly enrolled in the schools, where students were physically and sexually abused by headmasters and teachers who stripped them of their culture and language.



Feud put aside as William, Harry unveil statue to Diana

British Princes William and Harry put their differences aside yesterday when they unveiled a statue to their late mother Princess Diana on what would have been her 60th birthday. The brothers, whose falling out has been the subject of intense media focus, displayed a united front as they revealed the statue they commissioned in honour of Diana in the Sunken Garden of Kensington Palace in central London, her former home. Diana was killed in a Paris car crash in 1997.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Indigenous people take part in a protest against a proposed bill allowing commercial agriculture and mining on protected tribal reservations, curtailing indigenous land rights, in Brasilia, Brazil, on Wednesday. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro fired a health official on Wednesday after he reportedly asked for a bribe in a coronavirus vaccine deal, the latest graft accusation to rock the government and spark fresh calls for the president's impeachment.

PHOTO: REUTERS

ACTIONS TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE IN FRANCE

Court gives govt 9 months

AFP, Paris

France's top administrative court yesterday gave the government a nine-month deadline to take "all the necessary steps" to reach its targets for combatting climate change.

Ruling on a case brought by the northern coastal town of Grande-Synthe, the State Council said France was set to miss its target of reducing emissions by 40 percent by 2030 compared with 1990 levels, unless it took corrective action.

As a result the court ordered Prime Minister Jean Castex to take "all the necessary steps to curb greenhouse gas emissions" by March 31, 2022.

The deadline falls in the final weeks of campaigning in France's presidential election, meaning that President Emmanuel Macron, who is expected to seek a second term, will be under intense scrutiny on an issue shaping up as a key theme in the vote.

The council's ruling comes two days after the High Council on Climate, a body that advises the government, warned that France was still far off its target on fighting global warming -- despite emissions falling by an unprecedented 9.2 percent last year, at the height of the Covid-19 crisis.

Despite his headline 2017 promise to "make our planet great again" -- a swipe

at former US President Donald Trump, a global-warming denier -- Macron has been criticised for failing to meet France's targets under the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

Faced with what they see as the state's inaction, French activists, like those in other countries, have begun using courts to pressure governments into action.

In a ruling February that was hailed as historic by campaigners, a Paris court held that the state was liable for its failure to take sufficient measures to halt climate change and ordered it to pay a symbolic one euro in damages.

The court ruling also comes after a landmark draft report from the UN's climate science advisors warned that climate change will fundamentally reshape life on Earth in the coming decades, even if humans can tame planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions.

Species extinction, more widespread disease, unliveable heat, ecosystem collapse, cities menaced by rising seas -- these and other devastating climate impacts are accelerating and bound to become painfully obvious before a child born today turns 30. The choices societies make now will determine whether our species thrives or simply survives as the 21st century unfolds, it said.

Quote of the day



Biden is destroying our country, and it all started with a fake election. If you don't have good elections, and if you don't have a strong border, you don't have a country.

FORMER US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP AT A RALLY NEAR US-MEXICO BORDER AS HE TRIES TO REGAIN THE NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT AHEAD OF US MID-TERM POLLS

A DESTABILIZED MIDEAST AND DISGRACEFUL USE OF TORTURE

Donald Rumsfeld's legacy

AGENCIES

In the days leading up to Donald Rumsfeld's death, the US targeted Iranian proxy fighters along the Iraq-Syria border with airstrikes in what the Pentagon said was a "defensive" response to drone attacks on American forces in the region.

The fighting between the US and Iran-backed militias is intrinsically tied to Rumsfeld's legacy. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq and removal of its dictator created a power vacuum that Iran took advantage of.

As former President George W Bush's secretary of defense from 2001 to 2006, Rumsfeld was one of the main architects of the 2003 Iraq War and a proponent of the torture methods that damaged America's global standing. He played a central role in selling the false notion that Saddam Hussein was actively developing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) that posed a direct threat to the US. Later, Rumsfeld referred to his baseless assertions about WMDs in Iraq as "misstatements."

Rumsfeld also oversaw the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 to oust the Taliban leaders who had harbored the al-Qaeda leaders responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States. As he did in Iraq two years later, Rumsfeld sent a small force to Afghanistan, quickly chased the Taliban from power and then failed to establish law and order.



In one of his most infamous statements about the Iraq war, Rumsfeld once dismissed looting that occurred shortly after the invasion by simply stating: "Stuff happens."

Only Vietnam War-era defense secretary Robert McNamara served as defense secretary for longer than Rumsfeld, who had two stints -- from 1975 to 1977 under President Gerald Ford, for whom he also served as White House chief of staff, and from 2001 to 2006 under Bush.

The "global war on terror", which started under his watch, claimed over 800,000 lives, displaced at least 37 million, and the US government places the price-tag around \$6.4 trillion, according to the Brown University's Costs of War project, which estimated that

as many as 308,000 people directly died as a result of the war's violence.

Rumsfeld in his 2011 memoir said he had no regrets about the 2003 Iraq War because it took out Saddam Hussein, which he said helped stabilized the Middle East. History tells a different story.

Years before the 2003 invasion, Rumsfeld served as the Reagan administration's special Middle East envoy. At the time, he met with Hussein and offered the Iraqi leader assistance -- even though the US knew that Hussein was using chemical weapons against Iran amid a devastating conflict.

The 2003 Iraq invasion also helped catalyze the rise of the Islamic State or ISIS, a terrorist organization that has claimed

responsibility for devastating attacks across the globe. ISIS was initially founded as "Al Qaeda in Iraq" in 2004. ISIS lost its territorial holdings and has seen top leaders killed, but is still viewed as a threat by the US and its Western allies.

Rumsfeld was also a documented proponent of enhanced interrogation techniques -- or torture. A December 2008 Senate report also concluded that Abu Ghraib torture scandal at the Guantanamo Bay was a product of the interrogation techniques approved by Rumsfeld and other top Bush administration officials.

Human rights groups and civil liberties groups like the ACLU filed unsuccessful lawsuits against Rumsfeld over his involvement in America's use of torture. Such organizations pointed to this legacy as they reacted to the news of Rumsfeld's death.

"Rumsfeld may be dead, but other senior Bush administration officials are alive and well and available for criminal investigation into torture," Andrea Prasow, deputy director at Human Rights Watch, said in a tweet. Jameel Jaffer, the executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, tweeted that the "top of every obituary" should state that he "gave the orders that resulted in the abuse and torture of hundreds of prisoners in US custody in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Guantanamo Bay."



JULY 02

1937 - Amelia Earhart and co-pilot Fred Noonan disappeared over the Pacific while trying to fly around the world.

1961 - Ernest Hemingway, the American novelist best known for "A Farewell to Arms" and "For Whom the Bell Tolls", shot himself.

1964 - US President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, prohibiting racial discrimination.

2004 - Marlon Brando, the reclusive Oscar-winning star of "The Godfather", died aged 80.

2013 - Earthquake hits Indonesia's Aceh province, killing hundreds.

SOURCE: REUTERS

WWW source code NFT sells for \$5.4m

AFP, New York

Tim Berners-Lee's source code for the World Wide Web sold Wednesday for \$5.4 million in the form of non-fungible token (NFT).

Sotheby's in New York organized the weeklong sale of the program that paved the way for the internet we know today more than 30 years after its creation.

The lot included an animated version of Berners-Lee's nearly 10,000 lines of code and a letter from the British-born computer scientist himself.

In 1989, while working at CERN in Geneva, Berners-Lee envisioned a system of information sharing that would allow scientists to access data from anywhere in the world. He named the new network the World Wide Web (WWW).

In 1990 and 1991, he wrote the program that created the first internet browser, laying the practical foundations for the web.