

TRUMP INDICTMENT

What happens now?

AFP, Washington

In a political bombshell, Donald Trump has been indicted by a New York grand jury, the first ever serving or former US president to face criminal charges. Here's what happened on Thursday and what is expected to happen next:

CRIMINAL CHARGES

The grand jury, which meets in secret, voted to indict the 76-year-old former Republican president following an investigation led by the Manhattan district attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat. While the indictment remains under seal, the charges against Trump are believed to relate to hush money payments made to porn star Stormy Daniels ahead of the 2016 presidential election.

The grand jury, which has been meeting since January, indicted Trump after hearing testimony from a number of witnesses. Among those who testified was Trump's ex-personal lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen, who has admitted arranging a \$130,000 payment to Daniels to buy her silence about an affair she had with Trump in 2006. Trump was invited to testify in person but declined.

SURRENDER

Bragg said his office had been in touch with Trump's attorneys to "coordinate his surrender" for arraignment in New York at a future date. At an arraignment, a defendant is presented with the charges facing them and generally enters a plea.

A judge then decides whether they should be released on bail or taken into custody.

Extra security has been in place for days around the Manhattan courthouse where Trump is expected to make his first appearance. CBS News, citing Trump's defense team, said the plan is for the former president to surrender early next week.



EXTRADITION

Trump, who insists he is "completely innocent," could refuse to surrender to the New York authorities, forcing them to seek his extradition from his Florida residence.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a potential Trump rival for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, said that his state would "not assist in an extradition request." Legal experts said any attempt to fight extradition would at best result in a delay and Trump would eventually have to appear in New York to face the charges.

NEXT JUDICIAL STEPS

Once Trump is arraigned and enters a plea, there will be a series of preliminary court hearings to set a date for a trial and decide on witnesses and evidence. A defendant can avoid going to trial by entering into a plea agreement with prosecutors, in exchange for a lighter sentence, for example.

2024 WHITE HOUSE CANDIDACY

Trump can -- and undoubtedly will -- pursue his 2024 White House campaign despite facing criminal charges. Nothing in the Constitution prevents someone from running for president while facing charges, and even a conviction would not bar them from the nation's highest office.

The 14th Amendment does prohibit anyone who has "engaged in insurrection or rebellion" from holding elected office. The House of Representatives impeached Trump for "incitement of insurrection" for the January 6, 2021 attack on Congress by his supporters, but he was acquitted by the Senate. A special counsel is currently looking into Trump's role in the January 6 assault on Congress and the former president could still potentially face charges on that front.



A US soldier, right, supervises as a Philippine soldier fires an AT4 84mm anti-tank round during a joint army-to-army exercise between the Philippines and the US at Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija province, Philippines yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

China stages combat readiness patrols

9 aircrafts cross Taiwan Strait's median line as President Tsai set to meet US House Speaker

REUTERS, Taipei

Nine Chinese aircraft crossed the Taiwan Strait's median line yesterday carrying out combat readiness patrols, Taiwan's defence ministry said, days after Beijing threatened retaliation if President Tsai Ing-wen meets US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

China, which claims democratically ruled Taiwan as its own territory despite the strong objections of the island's government, has been angered by what it sees as stepped up US support for Taiwan.

Tsai arrived in the United States on Wednesday, stopping off on her way to Central America.

She is expected to meet McCarthy in Los Angeles on her way back to Taipei in April, and China on Wednesday threatened unspecified retaliation if that meeting were to go ahead.

Taiwan's defence ministry said the nine Chinese aircraft crossed at points in the north, centre and south of the strait's median line, which used to serve as an unofficial buffer between the two sides.

Taiwan's armed forces responded

using its own aircraft and ships to monitor the situation using the principle of "not escalating conflicts or causing disputes", the ministry said.

"The communist military's deployment of forces deliberately created tension in the Taiwan Strait, not only undermining peace and stability, but also has a negative impact on regional security and economic development," it said in a statement.

The ministry condemned what it called "such irrational actions".

There was no immediate response from China.

Tsai, on her first US stopover since 2019, told an event held by the Hudson Institute think tank in New York on Thursday that the blame for rising tensions lay with China.

A senior Taiwan official familiar with security planning told Reuters the Chinese aircraft had only "slightly" encroached across the median line, and that no unusual movements by Chinese ships had been stopped.

China staged war games around Taiwan last August following the visit to Taipei of then US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.



WEST BENGAL

Police arrest 36 after clashes at procession

REUTERS, Kolkata

At least 36 people have been arrested in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal after violent clashes disrupted a religious procession, a senior state police official said yesterday.

A few vehicles were set ablaze and some shops were ransacked on Thursday as warring groups threw stones at each other in a neighbourhood of the industrial city of Howrah before police and security forces secured the area, the official said.

Skirmishes continued yesterday in Howrah's Shibpur district, where Hindus and Muslims have lived together for generations, said the official.

Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal's chief minister, said the clashes began after a procession celebrating the Hindu festival of Ram Navami on Thursday diverted from its route to an unauthorised area.

Russia adopts new anti-West global strategy

AFP, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin yesterday signed off on a new Russian foreign policy strategy aimed at curtailling Western "dominance" and identifying China and India as key partners for the future. The new document cements the deep Cold War-style rupture between Russia and the West over Moscow's offensive in Ukraine. "The Russian Federation intends to give priority to the elimination of vestiges of the dominance of the United States and other unfriendly countries in world politics," the strategy document said. The term "unfriendly countries" is used by Russia to refer to those countries, particularly in Europe and North America, that have condemned Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine and adopted sanctions.

US illegally froze Iranian assets: ICJ

REUTERS, The Hague

In a partial victory for Iran, judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Thursday ruled Washington had illegally allowed courts to freeze assets of some Iranian companies and ordered the United States to pay compensation but left the amount to be determined later. However, in a blow for Tehran, the ICJ said it did not have jurisdiction over \$1.75 billion in frozen assets from Iran's central bank. Acting Legal Adviser Rich Visek of the US State Department said in a written statement that the ruling rejected the "vast majority of Iran's case," notably where it concerned the assets of the central bank. "This is a major victory for the United States and victims of Iran's state-sponsored terrorism," Visek added. On its Twitter account, Iran's foreign ministry claimed victory, saying the decision was proof of Iran's "righteousness and violations by US government".

PAKISTAN PARLIAMENT

New law to curtail CJ's powers passed

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's parliament has passed a new law to curtail the powers of the Supreme Court's chief justice, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said yesterday, a move that comes amid a row between the higher judiciary and the government. Tarar had introduced the bill in the lower house of the parliament on Wednesday and it was passed by the senate, or upper house, on Thursday. "The parliament has passed the bill," Tarar told reporters yesterday. Prime Minister Shehbaz Shari's government is currently involved in a row with the Supreme Court over the holding of snap polls in two provinces where former leader Imran Khan had dissolved the local governments earlier this year in a bid to force early elections.

Child daycare

FROM PAGE 12

officer, a teacher, a health instructor, two cooks, four caregivers, two security guards, and a cleaner on staff.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs has set up 20 additional daycare centres in 11 districts across the country, catering to children aged four months to six years.

These centres are divided into four age groups, with service fees based on the child's age and the parent's income level.

Speaking on the matter, DWA Director General Farida Pervin said daycares for low-income families have 80 seats and the ones for middle-income families have 60 seats each.

"Although the daily cost of keeping each child is Tk 90, thanks to government subsidies, we are able to charge low-income families only Tk 100," she added.

The official also said the DWA had already started setting up 20 new daycare centres while also planning on opening 60 additional centres across the country to meet the needs of women with families that make up the large female workforce.

Many essential

FROM PAGE 12

of Ramadan, ordinary people found it difficult to buy daily essentials at high prices.

"That pressure has subsided now. The prices of daily essentials have also dropped in Dhaka city. The price of onion has come down. We have reduced onion imports from India to ensure fair prices for locally produced onions," he said.

The minister said during his recent official visit to Bhutan, fruitful discussions were held on trade and commerce between the two neighbouring countries.

The visit will facilitate the use of transit and exchange of goods between the two countries, he added.

Bloomberg lauds PM's

FROM PAGE 12

being penalised at the ballot box. Prime Minister Hasina isn't one of them.

Her quick execution of IMF mandates have stood out in South Asia where Pakistan is still fiddling with fuel subsidies just as it inches closer to reviving a bailout. Sri Lanka has delayed local municipal polls as it raised taxes and interest rates to clinch IMF funds last week.

Bangladesh, which in July became the last of the three countries to ask for IMF support, was the first to get loans approved after swiftly raising energy prices.

"Gas and electricity supply can be provided if all agree to pay the purchasing costs," she said a week after \$4.7 billion in IMF loans was secured on January 31. "How much subsidy can be given? And why should we continue subsidies?"

Such comments are typically unheard of as elections approach: All three nations face key votes over the next 18 months. But unlike leaders in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, Hasina is widely expected to win a fourth straight term in national polls expected by January 2024 -- not least because many of her opponents are behind bars or ensnared in legal cases.

"If the ruling party manages to maintain economic stability, that could preempt anger or public sentiment that works against the government," said Michael Kugelman, director of the Wilson Center's South Asia Institute. "Hasina certainly has the credibility to pull this off."

In contrast, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif polled low in a survey ahead of elections later this year and has been blamed by voters for the economic crisis. While Sri Lankan leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has pushed through reforms, he depends on the support of a party run by a powerful clan and will need to seek a new mandate in presidential elections due September 2024.

Hasina is banking on her

government's move to go to the IMF to show to markets and voters that she has prevented the \$460 billion Bangladeshi economy from going the way Sri Lanka has with a default. Pakistan is also facing the prospect of a default, said the article.

Bangladesh went to the IMF as it grappled with an energy crisis with commodity prices soaring last year due to Russia's war in Ukraine, while the rising costs of imports widened the trade deficit. The local currency depreciated by a fifth and reserves fell to the lowest in three years.

By winning access to IMF funds, Hasina's government is gaining some time to fix the economy before the elections. Signs of a weakening economy could well trigger public anger against the premier who has overseen growth of more than 6 percent on average for the past 14 years though it slowed to about 3.5 percent during the pandemic.

The first review of the IMF programme is set for the second half of 2023, and Bangladesh Mission Chief Rahul Anand sees the authorities "taking comprehensive steps" to unwind subsidies and move to a market-driven exchange rate.

Bangladesh has received \$476 million under the facility so far. Further disbursements depend on the government ensuring reforms for the financial sector, ranging from the central bank pursuing an independent monetary policy to reducing non-performing loans and spurring climate change funding, the article added.

Honey bees can

FROM PAGE 12

There are also unseen urban dwellers -- microorganisms -- that play a key role in maintaining this ecosystem.

While past research has focused on the microbiome of indoor environments, not much is known about the ecosystem services provided by microbiomes of the outdoors, particularly in urban habitats.

Seven arrested

FROM PAGE 12

Through these incidents, the constitutional right of journalists to freely express their opinion is being undermined, it added.

According to the organisation, at least 40 journalists were humiliated, harassed and tortured in the course of their professional duties last month.

On March 17, UK-based journalist Zulkarnain Saer Khan's brother Mahinur Ahmed Khan was attacked and injured by miscreants in Dhaka's Mirpur.

The involvement of police, public representatives, chairman and councillors can be seen in most cases of harassment and torture of journalists, said the rights body.

According to the report, 170 political activists, including two women activists of BNP and Jamaat, were arrested in five cases in March.

One person became a victim of extrajudicial killing in March. Another was seriously injured in the same incident.

There are three incidents of people being picked up by individuals introducing themselves as members of law enforcement agencies.

According to the report, two people, including a woman, died in the custody of law enforcement agencies last month. Death of an accused in law enforcement agency's custody is undesirable and unacceptable, it said.

According to the report, six people died in prison custody last month who were declared dead at outside hospital.

Ukraine

FROM PAGE 12

In Geneva, UN rights chief Volker Turk warned Russia's war in Ukraine had made severe rights violations "shockingly routine" and was distracting humanity from battling existential threats to its survival.

Belarus strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko, who is a close ally of the Kremlin, meanwhile urged Moscow and Kyiv to broker a "truce" in Ukraine and start negotiations.

Donald Trump indicted

FROM PAGE 1

Stormy Daniels, a 44-year-old adult movie actress.

Trump's lawyer Susan Necheles told AFP she expects he will be arraigned on Tuesday next week.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office confirmed that it had contacted Trump's lawyers Thursday evening to "coordinate his surrender" in New York -- with the felony charges against him to be revealed at that point.

Trump slammed the indictment as "political persecution and election interference," raging against prosecutors and his Democratic opponents and vowing that it would backfire on his successor, President Joe Biden.

Biden himself has not commented publicly on the case, but former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a long-time critic of Trump, tweeted that "No one is above the law, and everyone has the right to a trial to prove innocence."

Trump earlier took to his own social media platform, Truth Social, to say that he does not expect a fair trial.

"They only brought this Fake, Corrupt, and Disgraceful Charge against me because I stand with the American People, and they know that I cannot get a fair trial in New York!" he wrote.

Surrendering for arraignment over what CNN has reported could be as

Quake hit one-fifth of Turkey's food production: UN

AFP, Rome

The devastating earthquake that hit southern Turkey and neighbouring Syria in February damaged more than 20 percent of Turkey's agricultural production, the UN's food agency said yesterday.

The 7.8-magnitude quake on February 6, and its aftershocks, killed more than 55,000 people and left many more in dire conditions.

many as 30 counts related to business fraud would normally involve being fingerprinted and photographed, and potentially handcuffed.

In the Republican camp, Trump's allies and sons denounced what they say is a vendetta aimed at derailing his 2024 campaign -- while his expected challenger for the party nomination, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, slammed the indictment as "un-American."

Kevin McCarthy, the top House Republican, said the indictment had "irreparably damaged" the country. Trump's former vice president and possible 2024 challenger Mike Pence called it an "outrage" that would only "further serve to divide" the United States.

But the top Democrat Adam Schiff -- lead prosecutor of Trump's first impeachment in 2019 -- called it "a sobering and unprecedented development."

"The indictment and arrest of a former president is unique throughout all of American history," Schiff said in a statement. "But so too is the unlawful conduct for which Trump has been charged."

Daniels welcomed the development with her characteristic aplomb.

"I have so many messages coming in that I can't respond... also don't want to spill my champagne," she tweeted while also plugging her #TeamStormy merchandise.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said initial assessments in Turkey revealed "severe damage to agriculture, including crops, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, as well as rural infrastructure in affected areas".

"The earthquake severely impacted 11 key agricultural provinces affecting 15.73 million people and more than 20 percent of the country's food production," it said in a statement.