

International

Ex-lawyer blames Trump 'dirty deeds' as he gets three years

Cohen pleads guilty to making false statements to Congress

NEW YORK: Donald Trump's former lawyer apologized Wednesday for covering up the "dirty deeds" of his ex-boss as he was sentenced to three years for multiple crimes including hush money payments implicating the US president. Pleading for leniency in a packed Manhattan courtroom before US District Court Judge William H. Pauley III, Michael Cohen said he had been led astray by misplaced admiration for Trump.

An emotional Cohen, 52, Trump's longtime "fixer," told the court he accepted responsibility for his personal crimes and "those involving the President of the United States of America." Cohen's lawyers had argued for no jail time after he admitted charges brought by federal prosecutors in New York of tax evasion, providing false statements to a bank and illegal campaign contributions.

Cohen also pleaded guilty to making false statements to Congress—a charge stemming from Special Counsel Robert Mueller's probe into whether Trump's 2016 presidential campaign colluded with Russia to get him elected. But Pauley said Cohen—as a lawyer—"should have known better" and sentenced him to three years in federal prison, ordering him to surrender to custody by March 6. He was also ordered to pay \$2 million in fines and restitution.

"Each of these crimes standing alone warrant considerable punishment," Pauley said, adding that Cohen was "motivated by personal greed and ambition." "A significant term of imprisonment is fully justified in this highly publicized case to send a message," the judge said. Before Pauley passed sentence, Cohen addressed the court, saying it was his devotion to Trump that caused him to choose "a path of darkness over light."

"Today is the day that I am getting my freedom back," he said. "I have been living in a personal and mental incarceration ever

since the day that I accepted the offer to work for a real estate mogul whose business acumen I deeply admired," Cohen said. "I now realize there was little to admire," he said.

Dirty deeds

Cohen referred to a recent tweet from Trump calling him "weak," saying his only weakness had been "blind loyalty" to his former boss. "Time and time again I felt it was my duty to cover up his dirty deeds rather than to listen to my own inner voice and my moral compass," he said. Among the charges against Cohen was making secret payments to silence two women threatening to go public during the election campaign with claims they had affairs with Trump.

Cohen told prosecutors the payments totaling \$280,000 to porn actress Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal were made "in coordination with and at the direction" of Trump—referred to by prosecutors as "Individual-1." Both women have claimed to have had sexual encounters with Trump before he was the Republican candidate for president and prosecutors have characterized the payments as illegal campaign contributions intended to influence the election.

"Cohen deceived the voting public by hiding alleged facts that he believed would have had a substantial effect on the election," prosecutors said. The payment to McDougal was funneled through American Media Inc, publisher of the National Enquirer, and prosecutors announced following Cohen's sentencing that AMI had been granted immunity from prosecution in exchange for its cooperation.

Trump this week sought to minimize the importance of the payments to the two women saying they were a "simple private transaction" and were "wrongly" being called campaign contri-



WASHINGTON: This combination of pictures shows Michael Cohen, left, President Trump's personal lawyer and US President Donald Trump. — AFP

butions. "Cohen just trying to get his sentence reduced," Trump tweeted. "WITCHHUNT!" There was no immediate reaction from Trump to Cohen's sentencing.

While federal prosecutors said Cohen's cooperation was limited and selective, the Special Counsel's office said Cohen had "gone to significant lengths" to assist their investigation. Last month, Cohen acknowledged that he had lied to Congress about his contacts with Russia during the election campaign about building a Trump Tower in Moscow and the extent of Trump's own involvement in the negotiations. — AFP

Brazil 'healer' denies avalanche of sex abuse accusations

ABADIANIA, Brazil: A famous Brazilian "spiritual healer" who has been accused of sexual abuse by hundreds of women who sought treatment from him told followers Wednesday he was innocent. Joao Teixeira de Faria, 76, known internationally as "Joao de Deus" or "John of God," told a crowd of white-clad faithful waiting for him "I am not guilty." He left after less than 10 minutes, with volunteer staff saying he was too affected by the allegations to carry out his usual "healing" session.

Police are investigating complaints by more than 450 women in several Brazilian states saying that Faria forced them into sex acts under pretext of curing them. The avalanche of accusations followed allegations made by a dozen women late last week to Brazilian outlets Globo TV and O Globo newspaper. One of the women who spoke to Globo TV, a Dutch choreographer named Zahira Lieneke Mous, said Faria had also raped her.

The appearance was Faria's first in public since the accusations were made. Wednesday is the usual day he receives people believing in his supernatural powers to treat illnesses ranging from depression to cancer. Faria was greeted with cries, applause and tears by his faithful, who were all dressed in white, several of them foreigners. "I think the accusations are false," said Duncan Ryan, a 66-year-old American with skin cancer.

"I know many, many Brazilian women and foreign women who volunteer here at the casa, and who have been in private with John of God many, many times—and even very beautiful women—and they've never had any problem with him," he said. Jose Carlos, a 63-year-old Brazilian seeking cures for his wife, suffering a brain



ABADIANIA, Brazil: Brazilian spiritual healer Joao Teixeira de Faria, center, known as 'Joao de Deus' (John of God) is escorted by supporters, upon arrival at his healing center Casa de Dom Inacio de Loyola, in Abadiania, 120 km southwest of Brasilia, state of Goias. —AFP

tumor, and his daughter, in psychological treatment, said: "Up to now I haven't seen any evidence shown against him. They should also talk about the cures he's done."

Around 40 percent of the 10,000 people who flocked to see him each month before the accusations were foreigners, according to the mayor of Abadiania, where Faria's center is located. Some hailed from as far as the United States, Australia and Europe, drawn by reports of Faria's "miracles." His fame rocketed in 2013 when US celebrity Oprah Winfrey broadcast a show on him, based on a visit she had made the previous year. On Wednesday, that episode was removed from Winfrey's YouTube video archive. The steady flow of visitors is an important revenue source for Abadiania, a tiny rural town of 15,000 inhabitants, and there were fears that could dry up if Faria's reputation is irredeemably tarnished. —AFP

Couple sentenced to US prison for kidnapping grandson

CHICAGO: A federal judge in Texas on Wednesday sentenced a Brazilian couple to short prison terms for helping to kidnap their grandson from the US. A Houston jury had convicted Carlos and Jemima Guimaraes in May for helping their daughter relocate their grandson Nico Brann to Brazil five years ago, without his American father's permission. The grandparents faced up to three years in prison, but a federal judge sentenced Carlos Guimaraes to three months and Jemima to one month. They were each also fined \$75,000.

The case generated international headlines after the couple in their 60s were arrested in February while arriving in Miami for vacation. The couple's daughter Marcelle Guimaraes relocated her then-three-year-old child to Brazil in 2013 under allegedly false pretenses and without the permission of his American father Chris Brann, a Houston physician. They divorced in 2012. Brann claims his ex-wife told him the trip would only last a few weeks, but the child was never brought back to the US.

Guimaraes's parents allegedly helped her hide her motives, before the South American country's legal system granted the mother full custody. The grandparents presented evidence during trial that the child's mother was fleeing domestic violence, according to local media. "The world needs to know the truth because I married a monster," Marcelle Guimaraes, who is now a fugitive wanted by the FBI, told Houston TV station KHOU prior to the sentencing. —AFP