

Trump pulling out of pact that discounted foreign postal deliveries

Change to benefit US merchants, shippers, including Amazon

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration will begin withdrawing from a United Nations pact that offered low rates for foreign postal deliveries of small packages in the United States, the latest move to challenge practices it sees as unfairly advantageous to China. White House officials said on Wednesday the United States would start the process of leaving the Universal Postal Union (UPU), a Switzerland-based organization that connects postal services worldwide.

The White House said the UPU enables foreign postal services to take advantage of cheap shipments to the United States, creating an unfair cost advantage over US companies that ship goods, and hurting the US Postal Service. Shares of internet-based mailing and shipping provider Stamps.com fell nearly 9 percent after the announcement. Online shoppers in the United States have often benefited from the arrangement, gaining access to foreign goods at little cost.

US President Donald Trump is distancing the United States from international multilateral organizations and accompanying policies that he says hurt US interests. Trump has announced US withdrawal from the Paris agreement to mitigate climate change and an international deal with Iran to curb Tehran's nuclear program. The White House will seek to renegotiate the terms of the UPU rules during the year-long withdrawal process, officials said.

"If negotiations are successful, the adminis-

tration is prepared to rescind the notice of withdrawal and remain in the UPU," White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said in a statement. China's foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said that China regretted the US decision to pull out of the UPU, adding that the pact has had a positive effect on trade and communications. China's consistent position was to safeguard multilateralism and it would continue to participate in and support the work of the union, he told a regular news briefing.

UPU Director General Bishar Hussein said he would seek meetings with US officials to discuss the matter. "The UPU remains committed to attainment of the noble aims of international collaboration by working with all its 192 member countries to ensure that the treaty best serves everyone," he said in a statement. One senior White House said the treaty's "subsidy" had facilitated the transfer of a high level of counterfeit goods and the narcotic and fentanyl trade.

Another official said the system allowed for a 40 to 70 percent discount on small packages arriving in the United States from China compared to what it would cost to send them domestically, costing \$300 million. The official described it as an economic distortion that the administration wanted to correct. A change could benefit US merchants and shippers, including Amazon.com Inc, which have called on US officials for years to address foreign postal services' access to low



CALIFORNIA: This file photo shows a mailbox for United States Postal Service (USPS) and other mail outside a home in California. — Reuters

rates. Amazon declined to comment. The National Association of Manufacturers called the agreement "outdated" and said it "contributes

significantly to the flood of counterfeit goods and dangerous drugs that enter the country from China." — Reuters

Freed Vietnam blogger 'Mother Mushroom' arrives in US

CHICAGO: A dissident Vietnamese blogger known by her pen name 'Mother Mushroom' has arrived in the United States after her surprise release from prison, telling a large crowd of supporters she will "never keep silent" in her fight for democracy in the one-party state. Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, 39, was quietly freed from a jail on Wednesday in Vietnam and put on a plane with her elderly mother and two young children who were seen smiling and hugging her in images shared on social media.

Her unexpected release after two years behind bars came as US defense chief Jim Mattis visited Vietnam as part of warming ties between the former foes, who are eager to counter China's rising influence in Asia. Neither the Pentagon nor the Vietnamese government commented on the timing of Quynh's release, though the US embassy in Hanoi said they welcomed the move.

The outspoken blogger, whose name comes from her daughter's nickname "mushroom", smiled and spoke to a large crowd of friends and supporters, many livestreaming



TEXAS: In this handout photo, Vietnam dissident blogger Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, center, is surrounded by well-wishers as she arrives at Houston George Bush airport in Houston, Texas. — AFP

the chaotic scene on Facebook, at Houston's George Bush airport where she arrived just before midnight on Wednesday. She said it was not an easy move leaving her country but vowed to "never keep silent" in her fight for rights issues back home.

"I will continue to raise my voice until there is human rights in Vietnam, real human rights," she told AFP by phone before getting into a car with her family. Quynh has been behind bars since her arrest in 2016 when she was arrested while visiting a fellow activist in prison. She was later convicted for "anti-state propaganda" for publishing damning Facebook posts about deaths in police custody, a toxic spill in central Vietnam and the criticisms of the ruling communist party.

She was sentenced to 10 years in jail last year, a heavy ruling that drew swift rebuke from the US, the EU and UN. Earlier this year police moved her to a prison hundreds of kilometres from her hometown Nha Trang in central Vietnam, which she said had taken a toll on her family who were exhausted by the travel. "It was time for me to think of my family, I made this final decision (to leave) for the future of my two kids," she said. The US embassy in Hanoi said Quynh had requested to go to the US if released and urged Vietnam to free other activists. "We will continue to call on the government of Vietnam to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience," embassy spokeswoman Karen Tang said. —AFP

Military men on threshold regaining power in Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO: More than three decades after the end of military dictatorship, army men look to be on the threshold of returning to power in Brazil, this time through elections in a crime-ridden country whose official motto is "Order and Progress." The comfortable favorite in an October 28 presidential run-off is Jair Bolsonaro, a former army captain who has chosen a newly retired general, Hamilton Mourao, as his vice president if he wins.

At least four others with military backgrounds are tipped to enter government under a president Bolsonaro. The 63-year-old candidate has vowed to rule "with authority, but without authoritarianism"—though his nostalgic talk of the 1964-1985 dictatorship he served, his promises to arm "good" citizens, and his talk in favor of torture have chilled many voters.

In Brazil, a 1979 amnesty gave immunity to those responsible for the 434 murders and the torture of thousands during the dictatorship, counted by a national truth commission. A declassified CIA report revealed that the elimination of opponents was ordered at the highest levels of the government at the time. In many democracies, evoking such brutal rule positively in a campaign would be anathema. But in Brazil today, with more than 62,000 murders annually and a constant fear of armed robberies, the law and order evoked by past military times has lent it support among younger voters. — AFP