

International

Bolivia Attorney General orders arrest of ex-president Morales

Morales charged with sedition and terrorism

LA PAZ: Bolivia's attorney general on Wednesday ordered the arrest of exiled former president Evo Morales after the interim government accused him of sedition and terrorism. Public prosecutors in La Paz signed a warrant for police to detain the 60-year-old—who is in Argentina—and take him to the attorney general's office.

Morales fled Bolivia last month after civil unrest broke out following his re-election in an October 20 poll widely dismissed as rigged. The former trade union leader denounced the arrest order as “illegal, unfair and unconstitutional” on Twitter. “I’m not worried. As long as I’m alive I’ll continue with greater strength in the political and ideological struggle for a free and sovereign Bolivia,” he said.

Morales ruled the South American country for almost 14 years before resigning last month and leaving Bolivia. He initially received asylum in Mexico and then arrived in Argentina last week.

The allegations against him stem from an audio recording released by Arturo Murillo, the interim government's interior minister. In the recording, Morales allegedly tells one of his supporters to block trucks and interrupt the food supply to several cities. Morales was in Mexico at the time, the complaint alleges.

Food, fuel shortages

Murillo began legal action against Morales

in November, after weeks of road blocks caused food and fuel shortages in the capital La Paz following his resignation. The ex-president countered by accusing the interim government of manufacturing the audio to damage him politically.

The controversial October poll in which Morales was re-elected was annulled following an Organization of American States (OAS) audit that found clear evidence of vote rigging.

Right-wing deputy senate leader Jeanine Anez took over as interim president and has vowed to call new elections early next year, although no date has been set. The interim government has barred Morales from standing in the ballot. Bolivia's constitution limits a president to two consecutive terms but Morales stood for a potential fourth term in October. Ahead of the last two elections, the constitutional court—filled with Morales loyalists—made controversial decisions authorizing him to run again.

His detractors accused him of corruption and authoritarianism. Speaking from Buenos Aires on Tuesday, Morales pledged to back another candidate from his Movement for Socialism party this time around. “I’m convinced that we’ll win the next elections. I won’t be a candidate but I have a right to be in politics,” Morales told reporters.

“My obligation now that I’m not a candidate, now that I’m not president, is to accompany can-

didates so that they can win the elections,” added Morales, who was Bolivia's first ever indigenous president.

Previously he insisted he'd been the victim of a coup and has launched near-daily Twitter attacks against Anez and her allies. Earlier on Wednesday he claimed US President Donald Trump—who hit out against Morales on Tuesday for provoking violence in Bolivia from afar—was behind the “coup.” — AFP



LA PAZ: Legislators take part in an ordinary session of the Bolivian Legislative Assembly to elect members of the Supreme Electoral Court (TSE) in La Paz on Wednesday. — AFP

At campaign rally, embattled Trump gives withering review of vote

BATTLE CREEK, Mich./WASHINGTON: An embattled President Donald Trump condemned the Democratic-led impeachment vote against him on Wednesday, irked that he made US history in a bad way but assured that Republicans in the Senate will save him from being ousted. “This lawless, partisan impeachment is a political suicide march for the Democrat Party,” Trump told a rollicking rally for his re-election campaign in Michigan just as the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives voted to impeach him.

The vote, while along party lines, cast a cloud over the image-conscious Trump, putting him in a category as one of only four presidents out of 45 who have faced possible ouster through impeachment. Only one, Richard Nixon, actually left office and did so before a House impeachment vote occurred. Assurances from Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell that the Republican-controlled Senate will not convict him in a trial early next year were something of a cold comfort for Trump, who has frequently complained that the “nasty” word of impeach-

ment was being associated with him. In Michigan, a state that helped carry him to victory in 2016 and will be critical next November, Trump expressed pride that Republicans in the House were united in opposition to impeachment and that three Democrats had also voted against it.

He said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Democrats had given themselves an “eternal mark of shame” and that tens of millions of people will show up next year to overturn Democratic control of the House and “vote Pelosi the hell out of office.” “They’re the ones who should be impeached, every one of them,” he said of Democrats.

The rally was a convenient venue for Trump to address the matter at hand and let the rhetoric fly. Scheduled weeks ago, it just happened to take place on the day of the House vote.

There was no sign from supporters in the crowd that their enthusiasm for him had waned. “Four more years!” they chanted. Trump waited for the House to begin voting before coming on stage to address thousands of cheering supporters, setting up a dramatic split-screen image for television viewers.

His case now goes to the Senate, where McConnell has vowed impeachment will die. McConnell, a close Trump ally, plans a trial in early January and has assured the White House that the necessary 67 votes from the 100-senator chamber will not be there to convict him and remove him from office.

White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham released a statement after the House vote expressing confidence that Trump would be “fully exonerated.” — Reuters

Hard currency elusive in Havana as reform looms

HAVANA: “I’m buying dollars, I’m buying euros,” Roly, 28, whispers furtively to tourists outside a hotel in Havana. Roly, who declined to disclose his last name for fear of reprisals, works as a “mule”, traveling abroad to buy goods to sell back in Communist-run Cuba where the black market booms due to shortages and high prices in the state-run economy.

But like many Cubans, he says that he is struggling to acquire the hard currency he needs as it has become near impossible in recent weeks to obtain it legally at the country's banks and exchange houses. Analysts say the recent elusiveness of hard currency is likely due to a deteriorating economic situation and increased demand as the government steps up moves to end Cuba's labyrinthine dual currency system.

Among those affected are Cubans who want to protect themselves from any kind of possible depreciation this complex process could entail by parking their savings in hard currency and those, like Roly, wanting to travel abroad. Neither of Cuba's two currencies - the peso or the dollar-equivalent convertible peso

(CUC) - are legal tender outside the island, where all financial institutions are state-run.

“There's been no money available at the banks or exchange houses for weeks, you have to look elsewhere,” said Roly. “I've spent half a day on the streets under the sun and I haven't managed to buy a single dollar.” Cuba's foreign exchange earnings have declined in recent years in tandem with the economic woes of its ally Venezuela and a tightening of the decades-old US trade embargo under President Donald Trump, including increased restrictions on US travel.

Several countries such as Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador have also ended over the past year contracts under which they hired thousands of Cuban doctors from the state. Such service exports make up most of Cuba's hard currency earnings. In October, Cuba opened around a dozen stores selling appliances, car parts and other items for dollars, with a bank card. Economists said this should help authorities rake in some hard currency and stem capital flight through the activity of mules such as Roly.

Some say establishing the “dollar stores” could also be a sign the government is bringing back the greenback to stabilize the economy during elimination of the dual currency system, at least during a transition phase. “The economy is already being dollarized, even if no-one says it” said Cuban economist Omar Everleny. — Reuters