

International

From slavery to police abuse, museum documents US racism

Legacy Museum traces direct link racism and today's inequalities

WASHINGTON: Slavery, lynchings, segregation, mass incarceration and police abuse: A museum that opens Friday in the state of Alabama traces a direct link between the racist past of the United States and today's inequalities. The Legacy Museum in the state capital of Montgomery is located on a site where Black people were once forced to labor in bondage.

"It's a museum about the history of America, with a focus on the legacy of slavery," Bryan Stevenson, the head of Equal Justice Initiative, a civil rights organization in Alabama, told AFP. "I can't think of another institution in America that has more profoundly shaped our economy, our politics, our social structures. And our character." "Our understanding of slavery is very very incomplete," he said. It is this information void that the Legacy Museum aims to fill, while prompting Americans to campaign against the inequality that persists today, according to Stevenson.

"The only way we can make progress in this country is if we engage both our minds and our hearts in a serious commitment to truth and justice to eliminating racial injustice," he said. The museum, inspired by memorials to the Holocaust in Berlin or to apartheid in Johannesburg, offers an immersive experience, with videos and sculptures that capture the terror of enslavement after a perilous journey across the Atlantic. Another space is dedicated to the violence experienced by slaves, including sexual violence.

One wing is dedicated to the thousands of victims of lynchings of Black Americans, which occurred between 1877 and 1950. The National

Lynching Memorial, located near the museum, is devoted to the same topic. The museum also conveys the "humiliation of segregation" in the South after World War II, Stevenson said. Stevenson's organization provides legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted of crimes, unfairly sentenced, or abused in jail, a widespread problem for African Americans.

The group has succeeded in acquitting several



One wing is dedicated to victims of lynchings

people who had been sentenced to death. In the museum, visitors can listen to them tell their stories. The museum is part of a national reckoning on race and racism in America, which has grown more intense since the murder of African American George Floyd by a white police officer in May 2020. Stevenson lamented that the efforts are meeting resistance on the part of conservatives. Still, he was optimistic. "The good news is that we have the capacity to get past that fear, to get past that preference for silence," Stevenson said. "I believe we will make that choice." — AFP



ALABAMA: Photo shows an exhibit at the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama. — AFP

News in brief

North Korea fires missile

SEOUL: North Korea has successfully fired a new anti-aircraft missile, state media said Friday as the UN Security Council failed to issue a statement after an emergency meeting on the recent flurry of weapons tests by the nuclear-armed nation. The anti-aircraft missile had a "remarkable combat performance" and included twin rudder controls and other new technologies, the official Korean Central News Agency said. A picture in the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper showed the missile ascending at an angle into the sky from a launch vehicle on Thursday. It is the latest in a series of tension-raising steps by Pyongyang, which had until recently been biding its time since the change in US administrations in January. — AFP

'Unprecedented' malnutrition in Tigray

ADDIS ABABA: The UN warned of "unprecedented" malnutrition among pregnant and lactating women in Ethiopia's war-hit Tigray region, in a report published hours after the government sparked outrage by expelling senior UN officials. The latest situation report from the UN's humanitarian coordination office, posted online late Thursday, also described "alarming" malnutrition among children as fears of mass starvation grow nearly 11 months after northern Ethiopia erupted in conflict. "Of the more than 15,000 pregnant and lactating women screened during the reporting period, more than 12,000 women, or about 79 per cent, were diagnosed with acute malnutrition," the report said. — AFP

Guinea coup leader sworn in

CONAKRY: Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, who led last month's coup in Guinea, promised to respect the country's international commitments while transitioning to civilian rule as he was sworn in as interim president on Friday. Doumbouya, who led the overthrow of president Alpha Conde on September 5, was sworn in by Supreme Court head Mamadou Sylla for a transition period of unspecified length. The new interim president spoke of his "commitment" that neither he nor any member of the junta would stand in any future elections that the military has promised to organize after the transition period. His administration's mission, he said, is to "re-found the state" by drafting a new constitution, fighting corruption, reforming the electoral system and then organizing "free, credible and transparent" elections. — AFP

Nigeria's Twitter ban

LAGOS: Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari on Friday said he had ordered the country's ban on Twitter to be lifted once the social media giant has met conditions set by his government. Nigeria banned Twitter in June, days after the platform deleted a remark from Buhari's account, provoking outcry over freedom of expression in Africa's most-populous country. Nigerian officials defended the ban saying Twitter was used to promote fake news and for destabilizing activities, especially by separatists in the southeast. Buhari's government and Twitter have been in talks over a list of conditions for ending the suspension, including discussions on taxes, content, and registering locally in Nigeria. — AFP

Battle for abortion rights hits America's streets

WASHINGTON: The abortion rights battle was taken to the streets across America yesterday, with hundreds of demonstrations planned as part of a new "Women's March" aimed at countering an unprecedented conservative offensive to restrict the termination of pregnancies. The fight has become even more intense since Texas adopted a law on September 1 banning almost all abortions, unleashing a veritable legal guerrilla warfare and a counterattack in Congress, but with few public demonstrations until now.

Two days before the US Supreme Court, which will have the final say on the contentious issue, is due to reconvene, nearly 200 organizations have finally called on abortion rights defenders to make their voices heard from coast to coast. The flagship event will be held in the nation's capital Washington, where thousands are expected to march to the Supreme Court, which nearly 50 years ago recognized the right of women to have an abortion in its landmark Roe v. Wade ruling.

Now the court, stacked by former president Donald Trump with conservative justices, seems ready to head in the opposite direction. It has already refused to block the Texas law and has accepted reviewing a restrictive Mississippi law that could provide an

opportunity to overturn its precedent. Rallies are planned in these two conservative states' capitals, Austin and Jackson, as well as in more than 600 cities in all 50 states. According to the organizers, nearly a quarter million people are expected to turn out across the United States.

"Together, we are joining hands to advocate for a country where abortion isn't just legal - it's accessible, affordable and destigmatized," said the organizers of the Rally for Abortion Justice in a statement. The group called on Congress to enshrine the right to abortion in federal law, to protect it from any possible reversal by the Supreme Court. A bill to that effect was adopted a week ago in the House of Representatives, which is controlled by Democrats, but has no chance of passing the Senate where Republicans have enough votes to block it.

'Patriarchal desire'

In 2017, a first "Women's March" was held the day after Trump's inauguration, rallying millions of opponents of the Republican billionaire who had been accused of sexism. Since then, other demonstrations have failed to turn out such huge numbers, in part due to internal divisions over accusations of anti-Semitism leveled at one of the organizers.



BOGOTA: Demonstrators kick a fence during a demonstration demanding the decriminalization of abortion during the Global Day of Action for Legal and Safe Abortion in Latin America and the Caribbean in Bogota. — AFP

But that page seems to have been turned. "This year, we are united with a coalition of nearly 200 organizations," the organizers said. Participants will include small feminist groups, community and local organizations as well as the giant of family planning, Planned Parenthood. "We're taking to the streets once again, for the first time in the (Joe) Biden era," the statement said. "Because a change in the Oval Office hasn't stopped the politicized, perverse, and patriarchal desire to regulate our bodies. If anything, it's only gotten even more intense."

That escalation has been spurred on

by Trump's appointment of three conservative justices to the Supreme Court, emboldening local conservative elected officials across the country to embark on an anti-abortion offensive. So far this year, 19 states have adopted 63 laws restricting access to abortions. If the high court were to overturn Roe v. Wade, every state would be free to ban or allow abortions. That would mean 36 million women in 26 states - nearly half of American women of reproductive age - would likely lose the legal right to an abortion, according to a Planned Parenthood report released Friday. — AFP

Georgia holds vote after ex-president Saakashvili's arrest

TBILISI: Georgians were voting yesterday in closely watched municipal elections, a day after ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili's arrest on his return from exile deepened a protracted political crisis in the Caucasus nation. The detention of Georgia's foremost opposition figure raised the stakes in the elections seen as a key test for the increasingly unpopular ruling party.

Saakashvili founded Georgia's main opposition party, the United National Movement (UNM), and was president between 2003-2013. The 53-year-old said Friday he had returned from Ukraine, where he heads a Ukrainian government agency steering reforms. The flamboyant pro-Western reformer was detained shortly afterwards over a 2018 conviction in absentia on abuse of office charges. He denies wrongdoing and had denounced his sentence of six years in jail as politically motivated.

His jailing will almost certainly spark upheaval in the small ex-Soviet nation that has been plagued for years by political instability. "I want to ask you all to go to the elections so that not a single vote is lost," he wrote on Twitter yesterday, posting a picture of a letter to supporters from prison. "My freedom and, more importantly, the freedom of Georgia depends entirely on your actions and fighting ability." Prior to his arrest, he posted a video message on Facebook calling on supporters to take to the streets against the government.

Protracted crisis

The municipal elections are being watched inside and outside Georgia for signs of the ruling party Georgian Dream backsliding on democracy. Saakashvili - who commands a fiercely loyal follow-



TBILISI: This screengrab shows former Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili escorted by police officer as he was detained in Tbilisi on October 1, 2021. — AFP

ing - called in one video Friday for his supporters to gather on the main thoroughfare in the capital Tbilisi today.

Critics have accused Georgian Dream - in power since 2012 - of using criminal prosecutions to punish political opponents and journalists. Interpol turned down requests from Tbilisi to issue a red notice against Saakashvili. Opposition parties decried widespread fraud and refused to take their seats after parliamentary elections in October last year, which Georgian Dream won narrowly. The EU mediated an agreement in May, under which Georgian Dream pledged to hold a snap parliamentary vote if it wins less than 43 percent in yesterday's local elections.

Georgian Dream, which was founded by the country's richest man and a former prime minister, withdrew from the agreement in July, but Saakashvili insists it remains in place. Georgia's Western partners urged the EU-aspirant country's government to implement the agreement that envisaged sweeping political and judiciary reforms. With concerns mounting in the West over the ruling party's democratic credentials, the United States has hinted at possible sanctions against Georgian Dream officials. — AFP

Bloodbath in Latin America's prisons

GUAYAQUIL: At least 118 inmates died in rioting in an Ecuador jail this week before police regained control Thursday. Following the latest carnage, here is a look at the deadliest clashes in recent years in Latin America's notoriously overcrowded prisons.

Deadliest

Over the past three decades, there have been several massive prison riots that left more than 100 inmates dead. In 2005, a fire ripped through an overcrowded prison in the Dominican Republic's eastern city of Higüey after a dawn riot, leaving at least 135 people dead. In 1994, 121 inmates were killed after prisoners set fire to three prison blocks during a riot at Sabaneta prison in Venezuela's northern city of Maracaibo. In 1992 in Brazil, 111 prisoners were killed when security forces put down a riot at the enormous Carandiru jail outside Sao Paulo. The massacre was later portrayed in an acclaimed 2003 film, "Carandiru."

Ecuador's 'war'

Tuesday's bloodshed in Guayaquil is believed to be linked to a "war" between Mexican drug gangs. It is the fifth major incident in the port city's prison in just over a year. In all, some 200 inmates have died in violence in Ecuador's jails so far this year as they have become a battleground for thousands of prisoners with ties to powerful Mexican cartels. More than 100 died in clashes last year - with many beheaded - with corruption allowing inmates to smuggle in arms and ammunition. Ecuador's prison system has 65 facilities designed for about 30,000 inmates but a population of 39,000, watched over by 1,500 guards - a shortfall of about 2,500, according to experts. — AFP