

TRUMP SAYS BOWE BERGDAHL SHOULD HAVE BEEN EXECUTED

LAS VEGAS: Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump said Thursday that Army Sgt Bowe Bergdahl should have been executed for leaving his post in Afghanistan. "We're tired of Sgt Bergdahl, who's a traitor, a no-good traitor, who should have been executed," Trump said to cheers at a rowdy rally inside a packed Las Vegas theater at the casino-hotel Treasure Island.

"Thirty years ago," Trump added, "he would have been shot." It was practically an aside in a litany of complaints at the end of a more than hour-long, free-wheeling speech that included a large dose of media-bashing and a claim that he was behind Rep Kevin McCarthy's decision to drop out of the race

for House speaker. Bergdahl was charged in March with desertion and misbehavior before the enemy. The Army conducted a hearing on his case earlier this month. His attorney, Eugene Fidell, said in a statement that Trump "has become a broken record on this subject." "If he took the time to study what actually emerged at the preliminary hearing he would be singing a different tune," Fidell said.

Trump has, in the past, pantomimed a firing squad, Fidell said. Bergdahl has been accused of leaving his post in southeastern Afghanistan in June 2009. He was held prisoner by the Taliban for five years, then exchanged for five Taliban commanders

being held by the US. Trump has long railed against the deal.

The speech was punctuated by shouts of support from the crowd that filled about 1,620 seats in the Las Vegas Strip casino theater normally reserved for acrobatic Cirque du Soleil productions. At one point, in a moment that appeared to be impromptu, Trump brought a supporter in the audience to the stage who declared she is Hispanic and voting for Trump. Myriam Witcher, 35, of Las Vegas, waved an issue of People magazine with Trump and his family on the cover, asking Trump to sign it.

Afterward, the Colombian immigrant, who noted she came to the United States

legally, called Trump her "No 1 person in the United States." His speech spanned a spider-web of topics that included his disdain for media coverage, many of his fellow Republican presidential candidates and current political leadership as well as Thursday's news that McCarthy had dropped out of a race for House speaker. "You know, Kevin McCarthy is out. You know that, right?" he asked the crowd. "And they're giving me a lot of credit for that because I said you really need somebody very, very tough and very smart. ... We need smart, we need tough, we need the whole package." Trump didn't identify who had given him credit for McCarthy dropping out. — AP



OREGON: Gary Shamblin of Winston prepares to leave a parking lot in his 1934 International truck displaying a sign he made reflecting his views on President Barack Obama's planned visit to the area. — AP

OBAMA FOCUS ON CONDOLENCES, NOT GUN LAWS, IN OREGON VISIT

MUTING MESSAGE ON STEMMING VIOLENCE

WASHINGTON: President Barack Obama is bringing words of comfort and sympathy to grieving families of victims of the shooting rampage at an Oregon university, muting his message about the need for new laws to stem gun violence as he visits an area where firearms are popular.

Obama will talk with family members at the start of a four-day West Coast trip. Eight community college students and a teacher in the town of Roseburg were killed before the gunman fatally shot himself in front of his victims after he was wounded by police. Staunchly conservative Douglas County is bristling with gun owners who use their firearms for hunting, target shooting and self-protection. A commonly held opinion in the area is that the solution to mass killings is more people carrying guns, not fewer.

"The fact that the college didn't permit guards to carry guns, there was no one there to stop this man," said Craig Schlesinger, pastor at the Garden Valley Church. Referring to potential protesters,

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said: "Those individuals have nothing to fear. The fact is the president has made clear that the goal of his visit is to spend time with the families of those who are so deeply affected by this terrible tragedy."

Poignant moments

In the wake of the shooting, a visibly angry Obama said that thoughts and prayers are no longer enough and that changes to the nation's gun laws are needed. Some of the most poignant moments of Obama's presidency have occurred in his role as consoler-in-chief. In Charleston, South Carolina, he led the grieving in singing "Amazing Grace" after a gunman killed nine black churchgoers. He read the first names of the 20 elementary school students killed in Newtown, Connecticut, and asked how the nation can honestly say it's doing enough to keep its children safe from harm.

This time, the White House says, the meeting is private. Obama was already

scheduled to go to the West Coast trip when the shooting occurred, and the White House adjusted his schedule to include Roseburg. The shooting has sparked new talk about gun violence, though history suggests that prospects for enacting legislation are highly unlikely. Republican lawmakers are talking about the need to take up legislation designed to improve mental health care. Democrats are pitching the formation of a special committee to investigate gun violence, similar to what the Republican-led House established to investigate the 2012 attacks in Benghazi, Libya, that killed four Americans.

"No proposal is going to stop every shooting, but we can come up with solutions that stop some tragedies," said Democratic Rep. Mike Thompson of California, the leader of the proposal for a special committee. Earnest has cited requiring background checks for all firearms purchases at gun shows "as the kind of obvious thing that we believe that Congress should do." — AP

TRAIN ATTACK HERO STABBED IN BRAWL

LOS ANGELES: One of three Americans who helped thwart a terror attack on a Paris-bound train was stabbed in his home state of California—apparently after coming to a woman's rescue, authorities said Thursday.

Airman Spencer Stone, 23, was stabbed in Sacramento after he got into a fight with a group of men as he was leaving a bar with friends, Ken Bernard, the city's deputy chief of police, told reporters. He said police received a call at 12:46 am from a passerby who witnessed the incident. Bernard said officers who arrived at the scene found Stone with multiple stab wounds to his upper torso.

He was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was listed in serious condition after undergoing two hours of surgery. "He is currently being treated for what appears to be non-life threatening but very significant injuries," Bernard said, adding that two male Asian suspects were being sought in connection with the attack. A source close to the investigation told AFP that Stone was apparently trying to defend a woman being harassed by a group of men outside the bar when an argument escalated and he got stabbed. It was unclear if the woman was with Stone.

"A woman was being harassed and he got involved," said the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The source said several of those in Stone's group—three women and another man—were drunk but it was unclear if Stone himself was inebriated. Video footage of the incident caught by a nearby surveillance camera and released by US media shows Stone fighting off a group of men who scatter when what appears to be a police car arrives at the scene. A red stain can be seen spreading on Stone's white shirt. Another surveillance video released by police shows the two alleged suspects involved in the altercation running and getting into a car that quickly drives off.

Heroes parade

Bernard said the assault was in no way related to a terrorist act or to the train attack that Stone and two of his friends helped foil while vacationing in France. Just weeks ago, the town of Sacramento staged a "Heroes Parade" in honor of the trio. Stone suffered deep slash wounds as he helped to overpower a heavily-armed gunman, 25-year-old Moroccan Ayoub El Khazzani, on August 21. Armed with a pistol, an assault rifle and 270 rounds of ammunition, Khazzani is accused of seeking to massacre passengers on the Amsterdam-Paris train. Stone was awarded the Legion of Honor, France's highest decoration, along with Army National Guard Specialist Alek Skarlatos and Anthony Sadler, a civilian.

The trio was also invited to the White House by President Barack Obama and Stone received a Purple Heart and an Airman's Medal from the Pentagon. Stone had only just returned to work at Travis Air Force Base near Sacramento. Skarlatos also had a near miss last week. The 22-year-old had been due to attend the college in Oregon where a gunman went on a rampage, killing nine people. The only reason he was not at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, he says, was the attention he has been getting since the train attack. Instead, he was in Los Angeles rehearsing for this season's "Dancing With the Stars," in which he has been invited to compete, when he heard of the shooting and rushed back to Roseburg where he is assigned to an infantry unit. "If I didn't get called for 'Dancing' I would have been on campus," Skarlatos said. "I mean, it's just absolutely insane to be in a situation like this, especially in my town, Roseburg." Skarlatos issued a message of support on Thursday, tweeting: "Everybody send prayers out to the Stone family today." — AFP