

BRAZIL'S EVANGELICALS PRAY FOR SINFUL POLITICIANS

BRASILIA: If pastor Francisco Carlos Soares de Menezes's prayers are answered, Dilma Rousseff won't be the last Brazilian leader sent to the political hellfires. The 68-year-old suspended president appears set to be stripped of office when the Senate votes, starting yesterday, on whether she is guilty of fiddling the nation's accounts and taking unauthorized loans. Many of those attacking Rousseff, however, are themselves accused in criminal cases ranging from embezzlement to vote buying and bribery.

De Menezes, a pastor at Memorial Baptist Church, part of a rapidly growing evangelical Christian movement in Brazil, says sadly that sin has been around "since mankind turned from God." But now Brazil's current political turmoil, he says, is a sign that God is bringing change. De Menezes, 57, points to a vast anti-corruption probe called Operation Car Wash that has led to prosecutions and convictions of some of Brazil's most powerful men over the last year. "God is acting," he said at the sprawling church complex in the capital Brasilia. "We believe that many of the things that are happening are the answers to our prayers."



SAO PAULO: Demonstrators shout slogans against acting Brazil's President Michel Temer during a rally in support of Brazil's suspended President Dilma Rousseff in Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AP

Rising power

While Brazil is still a majority Roman Catholic country, religious and political momentum is increasingly with the upstart evangelical Christians, who now account for almost a quarter of the population. The

evangelical churches—such as the Assembly of God and the Universal Church, which are both led by multi-millionaire pastortycoons—are rapidly gathering souls and influence. In the 2014 elections, evangelical candidates not only gained a record num-

ber of seats but a Pentecostal environmentalist, Marina Silva, came close to winning the presidency from Rousseff. And now Congress's evangelical block is exercising its clout to chastise Rousseff—formally on trial for illegal budget manipulations, but essentially being blamed for Brazil's dire economy. The block threw its weight behind impeachment in April, citing "the grave economic, moral, ethical and political crisis across Brazil."

Havens

In Brasilia, a capital city renowned for political backstabbing and corruption, the Memorial Baptist Church could be seen as a sanctuary of goodness. From one building come the soaring voices of adults at choir practice. In another, children are learning about the Bible. Small groups of young people sit in circles on the grass or steps of the church playing guitar or discussing religion. Everyone smiles. "I want to thank God for my good exam results," a teenager can be heard telling friends in a soft voice. Adherents of the evangelical brand around Brazil praise its social activism and ability to rescue people from violence and crime. Evangelical churches, like the \$300 million replica of Jerusalem's

second Temple of Solomon in Sao Paulo, are often lavish affairs.

With its mirrored walls and security gates, one suburban church in Brasilia looked more like an insurance company or medical center. But in poorer neighborhoods, including in the often ignored favela communities of Brazil, small, scrappy evangelical churches are havens from drug pushers and gangs. "The more we can get people away from drugs and put them on a good path, the better," said Antonio Mendes de Lima, 42, who works as a cleaner at a Seventh Day Adventists church in the capital. Like the evangelists, that denomination promotes strict social rules and missionary work.

Who's the sinner?

But money and politics are dragging the evangelicals into sins of their own. Eduardo Cunha, who as speaker of the lower house was instrumental in getting the impeachment process started against Rousseff, made a name as a host of an evangelical radio station and he peppers speeches with religious references. Now Cunha has been stripped of his speaker's post and is fighting to hold on to his seat in the face of corruption charges. — AFP

US JUSTICE DEPARTMENT FOCUSES ON POLICE TREATMENT OF MENTALLY ILL

WASHINGTON: Justice Department lawyers investigating police agencies for claims of racial discrimination and excessive force are increasingly turning up a different problem: Officers' interactions with the mentally ill. The latest example came in Baltimore, where a critical report on that department's policies found that officers end up in unnecessarily violent confrontations with mentally disabled people who in many instances haven't even committed crimes. The report cited instances of officers using a stun gun to subdue an agitated man who refused to leave a vacant building and of spraying mace to force a troubled person - said by his father to be unarmed and off his medications - out of an apartment.

Though past federal investigations have addressed the problem, the Baltimore report went a step further: It was the first time the Justice Department has explicitly found that a police department's policies violated the Americans with Disabilities Act. The finding is intended to chart a path to what federal officials hope will be far-reaching improvements, including better training for dispatchers and officers, diversion of more people to treatment rather than jail and stronger relationships with mental health specialists.

"Through the course of our work in the last several years on this bucket of issues, we've seen how important it is to get at the mental health issues as early in the system as possible," Vanita Gupta, head of the department's Civil Rights Division, said in an interview. Civil rights officials say the Baltimore report builds on work they've done in investigating the treatment of the mentally ill in various settings. In Mississippi, the Hinds County jail in June agreed to better screening for mental illness as part of a settlement, and the Justice Department sued the state as a whole this month, saying it was illegally making mentally ill people go into state-run psychiatric hospitals.

But it's the work with police departments that often attracts the most attention. Even as police forces improve training and develop intervention teams to respond to individuals in the throes of a crisis, concerns remain that officers aren't adequately equipped for the situations and are being forced to fill the void of a

resource-starved mental health infrastructure. More than 14 percent of male jail inmates and 31 percent of female inmates are affected by serious mental illness, according to a July speech by Justice Department official Eve Hill, who said society has for too long relied on arrests and jail rather than treatment for the mentally ill.

"From the standpoint of police, they are somewhat frustrated because many of the people who are walking the streets and who are in need of help are not getting it," said Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum. "They have been out on the streets, they can't afford medication, and so the police wind up being the only one they come in contact with." The Justice Department has incorporated treatment of the mentally ill into several of its wide-ranging civil rights investigations of troubled police departments.

"I think some police departments have really made it a priority and are doing quite a bit. I don't know that that's consistent across all the departments," said Amy Watson, a mental health policy professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. A 2011 Justice Department report on Seattle criticized officers for too quickly resorting to force when encountering people with mental illness or under the influence of drugs. In Cleveland, officers were found to use stun guns against people with limited cognitive abilities, and in one case used one on a suicidal deaf man who may not have understood their commands, according to a 2014 report.

Albuquerque, New Mexico officers responding to a domestic violence complaint used the same tactic on a man who had doused himself with gasoline, the Justice Department said. Those cities have since reached court-enforceable consent decrees aimed at overhauling practices. The Portland police department, which also came under investigation, agreed to new training and accountability measures under a settlement. A federal monitor in February found the Seattle police department was sending trained crisis intervention officers to "crisis events in the great majority of instances" and had given some level of training to all officers in the last two years. — AP



WASHINGTON: US President Barack Obama arrives at The White House in Washington DC. — AFP

6 US SENATORS URGE OBAMA TO PRIORITIZE CYBER CRIME AT G20

LETTER CITES \$81 MILLION BANGLADESH BANK HEIST

NEW YORK: Six US senators have urged President Barack Obama to prioritize cyber crime at this week-end's Group of 20 summit in China, in the wake of the theft of \$81 million from Bangladesh's central bank, according to a letter obtained by Reuters. In the letter sent to the White House ahead of the Sept 4-5 summit, Sherrod Brown, a senior Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee, and five other Democratic senators say they want the US president to press leaders from the world's 20 biggest economies to commit in joint cyber-crime to a "coordinated strategy to combat cyber-crime at critical financial institutions."

The letter, dated Monday, suggests that concern among US lawmakers is growing over the February incident in which hackers breached Bangladesh Bank's systems and used the SWIFT banking network to request nearly \$1 billion from an account held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Some of the dozens of orders were filled, with much of the lost \$81 million disappearing into Philippines casinos - prompting months of international fingerprinting, an ongoing investigation, and several requests from members of Congress for answers from the Fed and from SWIFT, the secure messaging service that banks use to transfer money around the world.

"Our financial institutions are connected in order to facilitate global commerce, but cyber criminals - whether independent or state-sponsored - imperil this international system in a way few threats have," the senators, headed by Gary Peters of Michigan, wrote in the letter to Obama. "We strongly urge you

to work with your counterparts and prioritize this discussion at the G20 leaders level in September," it said of the summit to be held in Hangzhou, China, adding that "executive leadership circles across the globe" needed to pay more attention to the risks.

A senator in the Philippines has said Chinese hackers were likely to have pulled off the Bangladesh Bank heist, citing a network of Chinese people involved in the routing of the stolen funds through Manila. Beijing has dismissed the suggestion. Copies of the letter from the US senators were also sent to Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen and US Treasury Secretary Jack Lew.

Obama-Xi talks

The other senators signing the letter were Mark Warner and Martin Heinrich, both members of the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence; Kirsten Gillibrand and Debbie Stabenow, the ranking Democrat on the Senate's Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. The White House expects G20 members at the summit "to affirm their commitment to cooperate to fight cybercrime and to enhance confidence and trust in the digital economy," a senior administration official said.

Asked generally about cyber security on Monday, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said at a press conference: "I would anticipate that this issue more generally will be on the agenda" when Obama meets Chinese President Xi Jinping, the G20 summit host, later this week. At a November summit, the G20 pledged not to conduct economically

motivated cyber espionage, an agreement intended to reduce the estimated hundreds of billions of dollars worth of commercial trade secrets that are stolen by foreign governments seeking to benefit industry in their own countries.

Since then, the Bangladesh Bank attack and others that have emerged are only some of the threats posed by cyber criminals, the senators wrote. World regulators should "erect more robust defenses and collaborative systems to prevent and mitigate the impact of successful attacks," the letter said, noting that steps already taken by SWIFT are not enough. Bangladesh said it supported raising the issue at G20. "In most cases, cyber attacks and crimes take place from outside the country," said Zunaib Ahmed Palak, a junior government minister for information and communications technology. "So while addressing fast growing cyber attacks, there should be a coordinated approach involving global stakeholders."

The Fed and other US regulators said in a letter last week they were focused on cyber risks and controls at banks in the wake of the Bangladesh incident, though they offered few specifics. Peters, a member of the Senate's Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, told Reuters he is considering requesting a committee hearing on the heist. "I am concerned about the response and what steps have been taken to make sure it doesn't happen again," he said in an interview. "You just need more collaboration and sharing of information... because often times all these entities aren't talking to each other." — Reuters



CLEVELAND: Vanita Gupta, the head of Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, speaks in Cleveland. Justice Department lawyers investigating police agencies for racial discrimination and excessive force are increasingly finding a different problem: Officers' interactions with the mentally ill. — AP

TRUMP'S DEPORTATION WAFFLE SHOWS CAMPAIGN WEAKNESSES

SEATTLE: Donald Trump and his aides used to say that voters didn't care about the nitty-gritty of policy details. But now those details are tripping up his campaign. For more than a week now, as he's tried to shine the spotlight on his rival, Trump has appeared to wrestle with one of his signature proposals: A pledge to expel everyone living in the US illegally with the help of a "deportation force." At a Fox News town hall taping last week, in the face of pressing questions, the GOP nominee proceeded to poll the audience at length on the fate of an estimated 11 million people.

It was a stunning display of indecision from a candidate who has asked voters to put enormous faith in his gut instincts. Trump is now planning a major speech today, during which he's expected to finally clarify his stance. Supporters are hoping for a strong, decisive showing. But the episode underscores how little time his campaign has invested in outlining how he would accomplish his goals as president, especially when compared with the detailed plans of his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton.

And for critics, many already disposed to vote against him, his wavering on what has been his signature issue seems like a warning that he's unable to handle a central element of any president's job -

making decisions. "It's just puzzling," said Lanhee Chen, who has served as a policy adviser to several Republican presidential candidates. "This is the issue on which he rose to prominence in the primary and the issue on which he continues to stake much of his campaign."

From the start, Trump has never been the kind of candidate to pore over thick policy books. Indeed, he has clocked Clinton on the subject. "She's got people that sit in cubicles writing policy all day. Nothing's ever going to happen. It's just a waste of paper," he told Time Magazine in June. "My voters don't care and the public doesn't care. They know you're going to do a good job once you're there." To date, Trump's campaign has posted just seven policy proposals on his website, totaling just over 9,000 words.

There are 38 on Clinton's "issues" page, ranging from efforts to cure Alzheimer's disease to Wall Street and criminal justice reform, and her campaign boasts that it has now released 65 policy fact sheets, totaling 112,735 words. "I've laid out the best I could, the specific plans and ideas that I want to pursue as your president because I have this old-fashioned idea," Clinton said during a recent speech in Colorado. "When you run for president, you ought to tell people what you want to do as their president."

Trump's new campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, has said she's pushing her boss to get more specific. Yet his positions on a host of issues remain vague at best. For example, while Trump has slammed the Common Core education standards and touts the benefits of local control of education, he has no formal, detailed plans for improving public schools. He talks about student loan debt and the increasing costs of higher education, but has yet to propose solutions. He has teased plans to make child care more affordable, but has missed his own deadline for unveiling them. Trump's supporters say questions about his recent waffling on the deportation question are overblown. His running mate, Mike Pence, describes him as "a CEO at work" as he consults with various stakeholders. "You see someone who is engaging the American people, listening to the American people," Pence told CNN on Sunday. "He is hearing from all sides." But Chen, the Republican policy adviser, said a President Trump arriving at the White House without detailed plans could be limited in how much he might achieve, since a new president's power is at its apex early on. "If you're not able to hit the ground running, chances are you're going to run into serious resistance if you sit there studying something for the first 100 days," he said. — AP



NEW YORK: A family walks by a store in the ethnically diverse neighborhood of Queens in New York City. Queens County is one of the five most diverse counties in the United States with a large Latino and Asian population among other groups. Immigration has once again become a topic dividing the candidates in the upcoming US presidential election. — AFP