

TRUMP'S MEXICO TRIP HAUNTS PRESIDENT

CHANGE IN CABINET PROVES TRIP WAS A DISASTER

MEXICO CITY: Donald Trump may have visited Mexico for only a few hours, but President Enrique Pena Nieto is still feeling political pain from last week's ridiculed meeting with the White House hopeful. Public anger over the trip continues to flare even after felling Pena Nieto's close confidant, Luis Videgaray, who stepped down Wednesday as finance minister following reports he orchestrated the sit-down with the Republican candidate who referred to Mexican migrants as "rapists."

Adding insult to injury, Trump later bragged during a televised forum that Videgaray's resignation proved his lightning visit on August 31 was a success. "I let them know where the United States stands," said Trump, who has angered Mexicans by demanding that the government pay for a border wall. "And if you look what happened, the aftermath today, people that arranged the trip in Mexico have been forced out of government. That's how well we did," he said, before tweeting on Thursday that Videgaray was a "brilliant finance minister."

'Vomited in your house'

"The cabinet change was a recognition that the visit was a disaster," political analyst Jose Antonio Crespo said. "Otherwise they wouldn't have changed President Pena Nieto's right-hand man." The controversial meeting is dogging a president whose approval ratings have plummeted, with the economy underperforming, drug violence claiming more lives every day and a report last month that he had plagiarized parts of his law school thesis. The government "commits mistake after mistake



US President Barack Obama tours Midway Atoll in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Pacific Ocean on Thursday. —AFP

after mistake and doesn't consult people who know about these things, so they invite someone (Trump) at a completely inadequate time," said Jesus Velasco, a specialist on US-Mexico relations at Tarleton State University in Texas. Pena Nieto came under fire for not being hard on Trump during a joint news conference and failing to challenge him when the New York billionaire said they had not discussed the wall during their meeting. It was only later that Pena Nieto said he had privately told Trump that he would not pay for the barrier. Carlos Marin, editorial director general of the Grupo Milenio media outlet, put it this way when he interviewed Pena Nieto this week: "This miser-

able man vomited in your house." Pena Nieto defended the get-together saying it was important to open a dialogue with someone who could be the next US president instead of confronting Trump with "insults" that "would make me very popular here in Mexico." That decision has clearly not helped his popularity, with a survey by pollsters Mitofsky showing that 88 percent of Mexicans were not pleased with the meeting.

Cooler US-Mexico ties?

Acknowledging the "very heated rhetoric" that often occurs in US elections, US Ambassador Roberta Jacobson said "there

may be rough times ahead for each country" but "in the end we get back to business." "So I tend to not 'catastrophize' even some of the things that are happening in this election," she said at a forum in Mexico City. But analysts said Trump's visit could hurt Mexico's relations with the next US president, whether Trump or Democratic rival Hillary Clinton, who declined Pena Nieto's invitation to visit Mexico.

Pena Nieto gave Trump a platform to look presidential just as Clinton was seeking to paint him as unfit for office. "Whoever wins (the US election), the relationship, at least with Pena Nieto until there's a new (Mexican) president, will already be cooler than it should have been before Trump's visit," Crespo said. But Christopher Wilson of the Mexico Institute at the Wilson Center think-tank said the meeting could end up useful if Trump wins-despite their discord over what they said at their meeting.

"They got to know each other and it opened lines of communication and that's probably a good thing," he said. "If Hillary Clinton wins, maybe this is a bit of stain on what she would hope to be a strong relationship from the get-go," he added. "But at the same time, you'd be dealing with Hillary Clinton, who is someone who understands the importance of a strong relationship with Mexico." Although the scandal is hurting Pena Nieto, Wilson said, ultimately, what matters to Mexicans is "kitchen table" issues such as the economy, public security and fighting corruption. "His record on those, both for good and for bad, will be the most important part of his legacy." — AFP

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