

International

Trump speaks with Libya warlord, in sign of Washington's support

Libyans accuse France of backing Tripoli assault

UNITED NATIONS: The White House has revealed that President Donald Trump reached out personally to Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar, as a push at the United Nations to broker a ceasefire hit trouble. Observers see Trump's words of praise for the strongman, at the expense of internationally-recognized leader Fayez Al-Sarraj, as evidence of US support that explains Haftar's determination to pursue his offensive to seize Tripoli.

Trump and Haftar spoke on Monday "to discuss ongoing counterterrorism efforts and the need to achieve peace and stability in Libya," according to the White House. A statement said that Trump "recognized Field Marshal Haftar's significant role in fighting terrorism and securing Libya's oil resources," adding that "the two discussed a shared vision for Libya's transition to a stable, democratic political system." The White House did not say why it delayed giving news of the phone call.

Fighting till the end

Haftar, seen by his allies Egypt and the United Arab Emirates as a bulwark against Islamists, has declared he wants to seize the capital, now controlled by a UN-recognized government and an array of militias. The military commander backs a rival administration based in eastern Libya that is refusing to recognize the Tripoli government's authority. On Thursday, Russia and the United States opposed a British bid backed by France and Germany at the UN Security Council to demand a ceasefire in Libya. Russia insisted on having no criticism of Haftar in the proposed resolution, while the United States said it wanted more time to consider the situation.

Diplomats say the signaling from Washington goes a long way toward explaining Haftar's aggressive strategy in the face of strong condemnation by the European powers and the UN. "Haftar believes he has to fight until the end," said one diplomat at the UN speaking on the condition of

anonymity. Despite some military setbacks, Haftar maintains that he "can prevail," according to several others. News of Trump's phone call "clarifies" the US position, noted another diplomat, after Britain fought in vain for five days to try to pass a resolution calling for a ceasefire and unconditional humanitarian access to the combat zones.

UN authority undercut

In terms of international backing, Haftar enjoys the support of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and now, clearly, the United States. Sarraj, whose control over his country remains extremely tenuous, is backed by Qatar and Turkey. Haftar would not have unleashed his offensive without a green light from his backers, and getting him to back down from the "impasse" will depend on their will, the diplomats said.

France of backing assault

Meanwhile, Hundreds of "yellow vest" protesters demonstrated in Tripoli against an offensive by military strongman Khalifa Haftar on the Libyan capital and accused France of backing him. Wearing the trademark yellow vests of French anti-government demonstrators, they were among thousands of Libyans who flooded a central Tripoli square to rally in support of the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA). "We are surprised by France's conduct in the face of the Tripoli attack," read a sign held up by the demonstrators.

Portraits of French President Emmanuel Macron and the leaders of Egypt and Saudi Arabia were also carried by demonstrators or placed on the ground for people to trample them. Haftar is seen by his allies - Egypt and the United Arab Emirates - as a bulwark against Islamists who have gained a foothold in Libya after the 2011 uprising that ousted and killed dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

"Other countries must stop interfering in Libyan



TRIPOLI: Libyan women wave national flags and chant slogans during a demonstration against strongman Khalifa Haftar in the capital Tripoli's Martyrs Square. — AFP

affairs," Haifa Ferjani, a 23-year-old protester said. "France says it is a friend but secretly backs those attacking our city and our homes," added the young woman. The French embassy in Libya on Friday tweeted - in Arabic - that Paris was "opposed to the attack" on Tripoli and urged all par-

ties to abide by a ceasefire and engage in peace negotiations. Khalifa Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA), based in the country's east, launched an offensive on April 4 to take Tripoli, the western seat of the UN-recognized GNA. — Agencies

What is the New IRA?

LONDON: Northern Ireland police suspect a "violent dissident republican" of fatally shooting journalist Lyra McKee in Londonderry, with fingers being pointed at a group calling itself the New IRA. Here are some facts about the organization.

Formation

The New IRA came into being in 2012 following the merger between two groups - the Real IRA and Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD). The Real IRA was formed in 1997 by dissident members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) unhappy about the group's ceasefire that year, preferring to "realize their vision through violence rather than democracy and politics", according to Gemma Clark, history lecturer at the University of Exeter. RAAD was a republican vigilante group, focused mainly in Londonderry - also known as Derry - that targeted suspected drug dealers with "punishment shootings" and pipe bomb attacks.

Make up of group

Irish authorities believe the group comprises around 200 members. They include "old-school republicans... people who've got training and knowledge in building bombs" and "newer recruits who are young, maybe who might not even have been born when the paramilitary ceasefires happened," said Clark. The younger recruits "are coming from these very deprived areas like Creggan, where the journalist tragically got shot yesterday", she added, saying they had become "radicalized by memories of the past."

The aims

The group ultimately wants to bring about a united Ireland, putting them in conflict with Protestants of British descent who want the province of Northern Ireland to remain under British control.

Activities

The group has been behind a number of gun and bomb attacks on British forces, gangland figures, prison officers and police, and has ramped up its activity in recent months. It sent letter bombs to British Army offices in England in 2014, the first republican action in Britain since 2001. It sent incendiary devices to transport hubs in London in March and is suspected of being behind a car bomb at a Londonderry court in January. It was also blamed for provoking unrest between republicans and police in the city last year.

Republican schism

The group's members are disillusioned by the republican movement's leaders, including Gerry Adams, former leader of political party Sinn Fein, who believe that a united Ireland is best realised through politics and demographic change within Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein's leadership immediately condemned McKee's murder. "These so-called dissident groups who took her life offer nothing, only hardship and suffering," party president Mary Lou McDonald said. "They do not represent the community."

Political turmoil

Tensions have been fuelled by the twin political shocks of Brexit and the collapse of the power-sharing assembly in Belfast, established following the Good Friday Agreement, said Clark. "There is something of a power vacuum at the moment, I don't think you can underestimate the damage it is doing," she said of the strife in Belfast, which raises the possibility of Britain taking direct rule of the province once again, something bitterly opposed by republicans. Brexit has also conjured the spectre of a hard border being erected on the Irish border as Ireland, unlike Britain, will stay in the European Union. "It's a very serious, scary prospect," said Clark. "The border was the focal point of so much violence during the Troubles. It's a symbol of what they (republicans) hate, the partition of the Ireland." — AFP

'House of Horrors' parents jailed for torture and abuse

RIVERSIDE: A California couple were handed life sentences Friday after admitting to imprisoning and torturing 12 of their 13 children in a grisly "House of Horrors" case that shocked the world. David Allen Turpin, 57, and his wife Louise Anna Turpin, 50, had pleaded guilty to 14 felony counts - including cruelty, false imprisonment, child abuse and torture of their children aged three to 30 - and will serve at least 25 years before they are eligible for parole.

In an emotionally wrenching hearing, several of the children professed continued love for their parents, who lived in the city of Perris, 70 miles (112 kilometers) southeast of Los Angeles. "I never intended for any harm to come to my children. I'm sorry if I've done anything to cause them harm," David Turpin told the court in the nearby city of Riverside, via a statement read out by his attorney. The case came to light last year when one of the children, aged 17, escaped through a window from the couple's home and called the emergency services.

Both Turpins fought back tears throughout the hearing, with Louise visibly trembling as two of her own children came into court. "My parents took my whole life from me, but now I'm taking my life back," one of the couple's daughters said, while a son said he still loved his parents and had forgiven them. According to excerpts of the initial emergency call released during court proceedings, the escaped girl told the dispatcher two of her siblings were chained to beds so tightly that their skin was bruised.

Peru's Garcia denies claims in a suicide note

LIMA: A suicide note in which Peru's Alan Garcia denied corruption charges against him set the backdrop Friday for the ex-president's funeral, two days after he put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger as police arrived to arrest him on bribery charges linked to the Odebrecht graft scandal. The sweeping affair, which has tainted politicians across Latin America, swept up another Peruvian ex-president when a judge ordered 80-year-old Pedro Pablo Kuczynski jailed for up to three years on Odebrecht-related money laundering charges.

"I've seen others paraded in handcuffs and living a miserable existence, but Alan Garcia will not suffer such an injustice or circus," the late ex-president, 69, wrote in a note to his six children. It was read out at his funeral by his sobbing daughter Luciana. Garcia (1985-90, 2006-11) and Kuczynski (2016-2018) are two of four former Peru presidents embroiled in various corruption scandals. He had a long and controversial political career in which he seemed obsessed with his legacy.

"I leave to my children the dignity of my decisions, to my colleagues a signal of pride and my body as a sign of my contempt for my opponents because I already fulfilled the mission given to me," wrote Garcia. He accused authorities of using corruption investigations as a tool for "humiliation, harassment and not to find truths," then wrote dramatically: "Others sell themselves, but not me." In his suicide note, Garcia "victimizes himself, blames opponents for his sit-



LIMA: People carry the coffin with the remains of late Peruvian ex-president Alan Garcia during his funeral procession in Lima. — AFP

uation, then sacrifices himself for the sake of his party," historian Juan Luis Orrego opined on RPP radio.

Ex-president Kuczynski to jail

Kuczynski, currently being treated for hypertension and heart issues at a private hospital, was sentenced to 36 months of pre-trial detention as he is being investigated for money laundering, the Peruvian court handling corruption cases said on Twitter. Kuczynski's attorney Cesar Nakazaki said he will appeal the decision because he considers it "unjust against a person who is of ill health." Kuczynski, a successful Wall Street banker and former economy minister before becoming president, had already been under pre-trial detention and was banned from leaving the country.

Prosecutors said that if Kuczynski remains free, he may attempt to obstruct the investigation. Kuczynski allegedly received Odebrecht kickbacks for granting them a contract to build a highway from Lima through Brazil to the Atlantic Ocean, and another to build

a major hydroelectric project in northern Peru, according to prosecutors. Other alleged dirty money include \$300,000 in unreported Odebrecht cash to support Kuczynski's 2016 presidential election. Thousands of people gathered at the headquarters of Garcia's social democratic APRA party in Lima to bid their leader a final farewell. "Alan Garcia performed an act of dignity and did not allow that persecution disguised as a legal inquiry to mock him - that is the main gift he gave to the party," said Congressman Mauricio Mulder, one of his closest collaborators. Loyalists wept openly and sang party songs as close aides carried Garcia's casket to a hearse. The ex-president's remains were then cremated in a private ceremony. Early Wednesday, police arrived at Garcia's home in the upmarket Miraflores neighborhood of Lima with an arrest warrant to take him into custody for a preliminary period of 10 days, which would have given authorities time to gather evidence and prevent him from fleeing. — AFP

ment and beat them with paddles. Since their rescue, the children have been in the care of child and adult protective services. The Turpins moved from Texas to California in 2010. Investigators have said it is unclear what prompted the abuse.

Turpin professed his love for the youngsters before the sentence was pronounced, while his wife read her own statement, apologizing to her children and adding: "I only want the best for them. Their happiness is very important to me." Superior Court Judge Bernard Schwartz told the Turpins their children's lives had been permanently altered, by their "selfish, cruel and inhumane" actions. They were given credit for an early admission of guilt that spared their children the pain of testifying against them at trial.

'Scared to death'

Turpin, an aerospace engineer, had registered as the principal of their purported home school program set up through the California Department of Education. But prosecutors said the enterprise was bogus, and accused Turpin of lying on forms filed with the state. Sheriff's Deputy Manuel Campos testified in a preliminary hearing about his interview with the initial escapee, recalling how the girl's hair was filthy and her skin was caked with dirt. He said the girl admitted "being scared to death" about fleeing but felt desperate to get out and leapt from an open window.

Campos said the teenager had been planning an escape for two years and was ultimately able to procure a mobile phone discarded by her older brother. She used it to snap pictures of her younger sisters - all of whom were severely malnourished - chained to beds. The girl's only exercise was pacing back and forth in the room she shared with her two younger sisters, according to the deputy. District Attorney Mike Hestrin said the victims were allowed to shower only once a year. — AFP

In S Sudan, illness is as deadly as war

UDIER: By the time he was brought into the remote clinic in northeastern South Sudan, two-year-old Nyachoat was already convulsing from the malaria attacking his brain. After being given medication he lies fast asleep, naked and feverish, attached to a drip, his anxious mother sitting on the bed next to him. Nyachoat could be saved, but others are not so lucky. In South Sudan mind-bending horrors abound of war, ethnic violence, rape, hunger and displacement.

But for civilians living in the shadow of conflict, the greatest danger is often being cut off from health services, whether due to violence or lack of development in the vast, remote areas that make up much of the country. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which supports the tiny clinic where Nyachoat is recovering in Udiar village, 70 percent of all illness deaths are due to easily treatable malaria, acute watery diarrhoea and respiratory infections. In case of more serious illness there is "no place" to go, said Nyachoat's 22-year-old mother Buk Gader.

A study by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) last year showed almost 400,000 people had died as a result of South Sudan's nearly six-year war. Half of these were due to violent deaths, and half because of the increased risk of disease and reduced access to healthcare as a result of the conflict. ICRC health field officer Irene Oyenya said the Upper Nile region was particularly affected. "There were (aid) organizations which were supplying primary healthcare, but then during the war, most of the organizations got evacuated" and pulled out of the country, she said.

Udiar is a village with a dirt airstrip whose sun-baked sand, which when not used by twice weekly ICRC flights bringing medicine and supplies, serves as a football pitch for youths. It is also a pedestrian highway for those who come from far flung huts and cattle camps to market. In the tiny market, there is little fresh food available. Villagers can buy red onions or sit for a strong Sudanese coffee, infused with ginger, while in the dry season nomadic Falata herdswomen in flowing dresses sell milk from their cattle.

A brick building next to the airstrip, its roof long blown off in a storm, is the village school, but for several days in a row no teacher shows up. In the surrounding villages, women are hard at work mudding their huts and re-thatching the roof in anticipation of the rains to come within weeks. — AFP