

International

Trump, Biden spar over Ukraine after whistleblower complaint

Biden accuses US president of 'overwhelming abuse of power'

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden has accused Donald Trump of "an overwhelming abuse of power" and called for an investigation into accusations the US leader pressured his Ukrainian counterpart to investigate the presidential candidate's son. Biden's allegations prompted a swift rebuke from Trump, who himself accuses the Democratic frontrunner of wrongdoing in Ukraine during his time as vice president under former president Barack Obama.

The back-and-forth recriminations stem from a Washington Post report stating a whistleblower complaint had been filed over Trump's communications with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and a "promise" allegedly made by the US leader. Trump allegedly pressured Zelensky to investigate possible corruption involving Biden and his son Hunter, who had worked with a Ukrainian natural gas company while his father was vice president.

Trump has urged media to "look into" Biden's comments in early 2016 when the then US vice president said the Obama administration would freeze \$1 billion in US loan guarantees unless Kiev fire its top prosecutor, who was looking into the gas company. "This appears to be an overwhelming abuse of power,"

to get on the phone with a foreign leader who is looking for help from the United States and ask about me," Biden told reporters on the campaign trail in the state of Iowa.

"I know what I'm up against, a serial abuser. That's what this guy is," Biden continued. "If he sees any threat to his staying in power, he'll do whatever he has to do. But this crosses the line." Biden had on Friday demanded Trump immediately release the transcript of a July 25 call with Zelensky while saying reports that the president sought to coerce his Ukrainian counterpart, if true, amounted to "clear-cut corruption."

Trump slammed the allegations as "ridiculous," and on Saturday accused Biden on Twitter of having demanded, during his time as vice president, "that the Ukrainian Government fire a prosecutor who was investigating his son." He also accused news outlets of fabricating "a story about me and a perfectly fine and routine conversation I had with the new President of the Ukraine. Nothing was said that was in any way wrong, but Biden's demand, on the other hand, was a complete and total disaster."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Vadym Prystaiko denied that there was any pressure

from Trump in an interview on television station Hromadske. "I know what they were talking about and I think there was no pressure," he said. "It was a long and friendly discussion, and it dealt with many questions that in many cases needed serious answers," he said.

'Abuse of power'

On Saturday, Trump posted a video montage of media reports, which included a clip of Biden saying he'd asked that the prosecutor be dismissed. Biden has said the call had nothing to do with his son. "I've never spoken to my son about his overseas business dealings," Biden said. "Everybody looked at it and said there's nothing there."

"Trump is doing this because he knows I'll beat him like a drum and using abuse of power and every element of the presidency to try to do something to smear me," Biden, who is leading Trump in most polls, said. Trump also excoriated media outlets whose reporting brought the alleged events to light. "The Fake News Media nowadays not only doesn't check for the accuracy of the facts, they knowingly make up the facts. They even make up sources in order to protect their partners, the Democrats," he posted on Twitter. — AFP



DES MOINES: Former Vice President and presidential candidate Joe Biden clutches his fist as he arrives during the Democratic Polk County Steak Fry in Des Moines, Iowa. — AFP

Trump to boast to UN about US success, but troubles mounting

UNITED NATIONS: US President Donald Trump will stand before the United Nations tomorrow to declare his country top of the world. But with diplomatic troubles building, his annual boast may ring hollow. Trump's political brand is as well known inside the United Nations as his businessman version is to the rest of New York: brash, unabashedly self-promoting, and all about claiming the win. At this year's UN General Assembly, the former real estate tycoon won't disappoint. "We'll say the United States is the greatest country in the world. It's never been stronger and it's never been better," he said in a mini-review of his speech.

Oh - and that Americans "certainly have one of the great presidents in our history," Trump's declaration last year that he had "accomplished more than almost any administration in the history of our country" triggered laughter in the cavernous UN hall. Headlines like "The Whole World Laughed at Trump" followed, to which Trump insisted that diplomats were chuckling with, not at him. A year later, with Trump beset by setbacks from North Korea to Iran and Venezuela to China, will his Big Apple braggadocio get a better reception?

Going it alone

A senior administration official told reporters ahead of the assembly that Trump would work to "affirm America's leadership role in the rules-based international system." But the US president prefers to go it alone, preferring bilateral deals to coalitions, negotiating with enemies and clashing with friends. Today, he'll skip a big climate change summit organized by the UN secretary general. Trump, who promotes fossil fuels and derides the need for renewable energy, also missed climate change talks at the recent G7 summit in France.

While at the UN, he'll meet separately with around a dozen leaders. But of them, the only European representative currently on the list is Boris Johnson, the prime minister running the chaotic Brexit process of trying to pull Britain out of the EU. There will be intense scrutiny of a meeting on Wednesday with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky. Trump is alleged to have attempted to persuade the Ukrainian to investigate one of his 2020 presidential challengers, Joe Biden.

Personality test

A larger-than-life figure, Trump believes that his personality enables him to succeed where conventional diplomacy fails. He has tested this most spectacularly in North Korea, holding an unprecedented three summits with dictator Kim Jong Un to try and persuade him to abandon his flourishing nuclear weapons program. However, Kim shows no signs of budging on the central demand, leaving Trump open to criticism that he has been played. On the explosive standoff with Iran, Trump has taken the opposite route by piling pressure on the crumbling economy and seeking to wreck an international deal meant to defuse tension over the country's nuclear industry. Speculation is rife over whether he will order military strikes on Iran to respond against the bombing of Saudi oil facilities last weekend. Trump has left everyone guessing, announcing still more US sanctions on Friday - but so far resisting war.

Leaving a vacuum

In Afghanistan, Trump hoped for a big, dramatic win. His diplomats spent months in painstaking negotiations over getting nearly all the last US troops out of the country after two decades of war. But earlier this month, Trump tried to bring Taliban leaders over to the United States for face-to-face talks, only to cancel the whole thing at the last minute.

On the economic front, Trump's all-or-nothing battle with China has the whole world holding its breath. As usual Trump has sought to develop close relations with his counterpart, President Xi Jinping, but neither that friendship nor his aggressive use of tariffs has produced decisive results so far. At the United Nations, the US president might want to consider the risks of his instincts to tear up the old rules books, said diplomacy expert Jeffrey Feltman at the Brookings Institution. Because "if the US leaves a vacuum in the leadership of the UN, others will fill it." — AFP

'Don't open the door': US activists organize to thwart ICE

LANGLEY PARK: Though she speaks little English, Yoana was calm when two officers from the US federal agency tasked with deporting undocumented people such as herself appeared outside her apartment. Reading from a card that said, "This is to advise any law enforcement officer that I cannot answer any questions," she parried their demands until the agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) left.

"I didn't have fear. I knew what my rights were," said Yoana, 36, a native of Mexico who works on the apple farms of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and spoke to AFP on condition that her full name not be published. That she knew what to do when approached by ICE was due to the efforts of activists across the United States, who are finding novel ways to thwart President Donald Trump's crackdown on migrants — ranging from educating undocumented people like Yoana about their rights under US law to filming immigration agents in public.

Trump has pushed wide-ranging immigration law reforms, while tasking ICE with carrying out mass deportations of people in the US illegally. Rights groups, in turn, have criticized the agency for making indiscriminate arrests and terrorizing immigrants. "The immediate and extreme impact an immigration enforcement action has on an individual and their family is not lost on our officers," ICE wrote in an open letter released in September. "Our officers do their jobs professionally, humanely, and treat those they encounter with dignity and respect."

'Know Your Rights'

Amid the crackdown, immigrant rights groups have set up hotlines for people to call if they think ICE may be in



LANGLEY PARK: Nick Katz, Senior Manager of the Legal program for CASA, poses for a photo at the office of the Immigrants rights group CASA in Langley Park, Maryland. — AFP

their neighborhoods, while dispatching lawyers and camera-wielding activists to record the activities of agents in public. After Trump threatened in June to deport "millions" of illegal immigrants, the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights formed "ICE Chasers," a group that looks for ICE in immigrant neighborhoods early in the morning - when agents often target people as they head to work.

"In case we encounter any ICE official doing an arrest, we want to document and observe the proper usage of the civil rights," the group's executive director Adelina Nicholls said in an interview. Rights groups across the country are also encouraging immigrants like Yoana to attend training on law dubbed "Know Your Rights."

At a recent session held by Washington-area group CASA in Langley Park, Maryland, an instructor told a dozen immigrants what they could and couldn't do when encountering law enforcement. Chief among them: "Don't open the door," in case it's ICE agents who are outside. In the neighborhood where she lives with her two undocumented siblings, Lidamar Escorcia described an atmosphere of dread. "There's just constant fear and anxiety

when there's knocks on the door," said the 32-year-old Nicaraguan, who is in the US legally.

Armed with cameras

Elsewhere, advocacy groups have disseminated on social media photos of suspected ICE agents staking out neighborhoods or courthouses, while setting up hotlines for people to call for help if federal agents come to their door. "Law enforcement acts differently when it knows it's being witnessed and watched," said Laura Williamson, an organizer with Washington-area group Sanctuary DMV, whose volunteers go out and film arrests.

ICE's acting press secretary Bryan Cox told AFP that people film officers "routinely" and said the agency "fully respects the rights of all people to peacefully voice their opinion without interference." Immigrant advocates say they don't encourage people to obstruct officers or resist violently. "If ICE really wants to go after someone, the chances are, they'll get them," said Nick Katz, senior manager of legal services for CASA.

Standoff

When agents tried to arrest a father and son in their car in a suburb of Nashville, Tennessee in July, a crowd of neighbors gathered, giving the pair food and putting gas in their idling car so they could run the air conditioning in the summer heat. After several hours, ICE, lacking a warrant to force them out of the car, withdrew, and the family fled to safety. "They made an environment where the family was able to outlast the ICE agents," said Lisa Sherman-Nikolaus, policy director for the Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition.

That episode took place days after the Trump administration announced it would launch large-scale immigration raids aimed at 2,000 undocumented migrants in 10 cities. There was little evidence of those roundups happening, but weeks later, 680 undocumented migrants were arrested in mass raids in the southeastern US. "The administration is trying to scare the community in whichever way they can," Katz said. "Our Know Your Rights training is how you fight." — AFP

No-deal Brexit: How EU members are preparing

PARIS: With the spectre of a no-deal Brexit looming on October 31, EU members are taking measures to cushion their economies, safeguard trade with Britain and protect citizens' rights. The prospect of trade barriers being re-erected on November 1 between Britain and its EU neighbors has led to fears of nightmarish tailbacks at borders, with potentially huge losses for exporters. An end to freedom of movement could also spell anguish for some of the 3.5 million EU citizens living in Britain and the around 1.2 million Britons living in other EU countries. Following is a summary of the preparations taken by various EU members:

Britain: Fears of public disorder

Britain says it will scrap tariffs on most imports, while keeping a reduced rate for some agricultural products to protect farmers. The EU, for its part, says it will treat Britain as a "third country", imposing tariffs that are generally low but could run to 10 percent on cars, for example. A leaked government report on the potential impact of a no-deal Brexit set alarm bells ringing in August. It warned that that tailbacks at Channel ports could lead to drug shortages and food price hikes which could in turn trigger "public disorder". Britain, meanwhile, has already received applications from over a million Europeans for "settled status", around a third of whom have been turned down for permanent residency.

Ireland: On the Brexit frontline

Ireland is expected to be worst affected by a disorderly departure from the EU of its largest trading partner in the bloc. More than half of all Irish beef exports go to

Britain, and in the event of a no-deal Brexit, could be priced out of the market by steep tariffs. With Ireland importing most of its food from or through Britain, retailers have also warned of potential shortages of fresh produce. Meanwhile, Britain and the EU are still at odds over how to avoid border checks or infrastructure between Ireland and British-controlled Northern Ireland, seen as key to upholding a 1998 peace deal that ended three decades of sectarian conflict.

Germany: 'Ready for anything'

The German government says it is ready for "all imaginable exit possibilities" and has passed around 50 laws and regulations aimed at limiting the impact of a no-deal scenario. Berlin says its biggest priority is protecting the interests of citizens on either side of the Channel "who took advantage of the free movement and made life decisions based on its existence". British citizens living in Germany will have nine months after Brexit to apply for residence permits. Trade-wise, Germany has hired an extra 900 customs officials to help smooth trade with its fifth-biggest export market.

France: Fears of Channel logjams

France has insisted it is ready for no-deal and will this week carry out a dress rehearsal in the Channel port of Calais - a major hub for trade between Britain and the Continent - to showcase new technology aimed at avoiding long tailbacks. Paris has hired hundreds of extra customs officials and devised a barcode system for trucks crossing the Channel to help customs detect their contents and determine whether or not they need to be checked on arrival. Britons in France, home to the second-biggest British expatriate community in the EU (at least 150,000 people) will have a year after Brexit to apply for residency status.

Spain: Between Rock and hard place

The country with the largest number of British residents in the EU has tasked 875 civil servants with working out issues such as customs and border controls and residency rights after Brexit. But many ques-



MALAGA: People and British nationals wave European Union and Spanish flags as they take part in a protest against Brexit in Malaga yesterday. — AFP

tions remain, including how Spain will cooperate with the tiny British territory of Gibraltar, situated on its southern coast. Spain has pledged freedom of movement with the territory known as "The Rock" after Brexit and said it will grant residency to 400,000 Britons.

Italy: Prosecco sales could lose fizz

Italy has said that Britons who have spent at least six months a year over the five years leading up to Brexit will be eligible for permanent residency. Among those most worried about a no-deal Brexit are prosecco producers, whose British clients knock back a staggering 120 million bottles a year. "The uncertainty worries us but we are confident that the British will not ditch their guilty pleasure," Innocente Nardi, president of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene prosecco producers consortium, said.

Poland: Roadblocks ahead

Poland has a big stake in keeping trade between the EU and Britain flowing after Brexit: Around 25 percent of the goods shipped between Britain and its EU neighbors are transported by some 2,500 Polish hauliers. Poles also make up the biggest foreign-born community in Britain. The Polish ambassador to Britain has written to the around 1 million Poles in Britain advis-

ing them to apply for Britain's settlement scheme. Vaunting the rude health of the Polish economy he also asked Poles to consider returning home.

Netherlands: Big send-off party

The Dutch government has spent two years preparing for a no-deal Brexit, announcing plans to recruit 900 extra customs officers and add hundreds of extra parking spots for trucks backed up in the busy port of Rotterdam. But the Dutch have also been hoping to benefit from the uncertainty caused by Britain's exit from the EU. The Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency (NFA) said in August that nearly 100 international companies have decided to establish a base in the Netherlands to guarantee their access to the European market.

Greece - fears for tourism

With Britain supplying the second-biggest number of tourists to Greece last year (3 million), the government in Athens is worried about the impact of post-Brexit border controls on the country's tourist sector. Athens is also desperate to avoid any disruption in the operation of its influential merchant shipping sector. Greek shipowners have had a presence in Britain since the 19th century. — AFP