

International

Students fear deportation over Trump's visa threat

Trump threatens to revoke foreign students' visas

NEW YORK: Pakistani student Taimoor Ahmed is one of hundreds of thousands of foreigners enrolled in American universities now fearing for their future after Donald Trump's administration threatened to revoke their visas. The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced this week that foreign students whose entire courses have moved online because of the coronavirus pandemic must return to their home country. "I might be affected if they don't offer any sort of in-person class," said Taimoor Ahmed, an information technology student at Cal State University in Los Angeles. "I'm concerned. This can potentially change my future and plans," the 25-year-old told AFP.

Harvard and MIT launched a lawsuit Wednesday, asking the court to revoke the order that Harvard President Lawrence Bacow said had thrown higher education in the US "into chaos." But the action has done little to alleviate the worries of foreign students, of which there were more than one million in the United States in 2019, a doubling in 20 years, according to the Institute of International Education (IIE). "I'm kind of scared actually," said an Indian graduate student at a major Texas university, who asked not to be named.

He planned to continue with online classes in the fall but is now obliged to return to the cam-

pus - in a state where COVID-19 cases are soaring - or face deportation. "I'm talking to a lot of people that are really scared, (they are) alone in a different country. "I don't have anyone to take care of me if I get ill. The cost of the medical treatment in the US is far, far more than the country which I come from," the 25-year-old added. The students see themselves as collateral damage in Trump's aggressive push to force universities and schools to reopen fully in September amid his reelection campaign.

An Indian graduate studying electrical engineering at one of the top universities in Arizona, where the virus is also surging, fears having to risk her health to continue her research and tutoring of younger students. "The rule is really, really cruel," she told AFP. More than 4,000 foreign students attend California's public universities, and another nearly 5,000 at Harvard in Massachusetts, establishments that plan to offer online-only education this fall. Some 84 percent of universities are planning to offer a hybrid system of in-person and online classes, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education website, which would save students from deportation.

'Unfair'

Many students fear a resurgence of the pandemic later this year, though, which could see all



LOS ANGELES: This photo illustration shows a visa stamp on a foreign passport in Los Angeles on June 6, 2020. The United States said July 6 it would not allow foreign students to remain in the country if all of their classes are moved online in the fall over the coronavirus crisis. — AFP

classes moved online, forcing them to leave the country. "I think it's really hard to control the spread of the virus in such a densely populated campus," said the Arizona student, who asked not to be named.

"It just seems really unfair to me that the virus getting bad would be something that international students, who didn't necessarily have any part to play in spreading the virus, would have to suffer from," she added. She says she will

live in a "permanent state of anxiety" until her work and thesis defense ends in November. "If my visa gets invalidated, I have invested three years of my life of hard work to earn this degree, so it would be so bad." Students are not the only ones concerned: the universities themselves are worried that Trump's immigration policies are making their institutions less attractive. They fear losing foreign students to cheaper colleges in Europe. — AFP

Trump 'bullying' blamed as key impeachment witness quits army

WASHINGTON: Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman, who provided damning impeachment evidence against President Donald Trump, retired from the US Army on Wednesday after being subjected to a campaign of "bullying, intimidation and retaliation," his attorney said. Vindman, 45, was fired from his position on the National Security Council at the White House in February, two days after Trump was acquitted by the Republican-majority Senate. He was up for promotion to full colonel, but his attorney, David Pressman, said in a statement that would clearly not be forthcoming. Vindman is "retiring today after it has been made clear that his future within the institution he has dutifully served will forever be limited," Pressman said.

"LTC Vindman's patriotism has cost him his career," he said. "Through a campaign of bullying, intimidation, and retaliation, the president of the United States attempted to force LTC Vindman to choose: Between adhering to the law or pleasing a President. Between honoring his oath or protecting his career. "These are choices that no one in the United States should confront, especially one who has dedicated his life to serving it," Pressman said. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, tweeted her support for Vindman. "The President's vindictiveness can't erase the truth: history will remember Lt. Col. Vindman as an American patriot, who proved his heroism both on the battlefield when he earned a Purple Heart & in the House impeachment trial when he spoke truth to power," she wrote. — AFP

Can Trump keep his finances secret? Court to rule on cases

WASHINGTON: Can Donald Trump refuse to hand over his financial records to Congress and New York prosecutors simply because he is president of the United States? The Supreme Court will rule Thursday on two related cases to answer this, with potentially widespread political implications. The decision by the nine justices could lift the veil on Trump's finances ahead of the November 3 election. Unlike all of his predecessors since Richard Nixon in the 1970s, New York real estate mogul Trump refused to release his tax returns, despite promising to do so during his 2016 White House campaign.

Trump made his fortune a key component of that campaign, and his lack of transparency raises questions about his true worth and possible conflicts of interest. Congressional investigations have raised questions about whether Trump has sensitive financial exposure to Russia, and also whether he has used questionable accounting loopholes to avoid paying taxes in the 1990s and 2000s. Attorneys for Trump claim the president enjoys total immunity during his time in office, and that this is necessary so he can concentrate on his work without being "harassed" by prosecutors or lawmakers.

During the proceedings, one of the attorneys even argued that the president could shoot someone on 5th Avenue in New York and not be prosecuted until he left office — echo-

ing a Trump 2016 campaign boast claiming that he would not lose any voters if he committed such a crime. The cases could have long-term implications for the ability of lawmakers to scrutinize presidents, as well as test the claim by Trump's attorneys that a president is immune from criminal investigation while in office.

Stormy problems

One of the cases before the Supreme Court relates to an investigation opened by the state of New York, and poses the specific question of the president's immunity from prosecution. In April 2019, New York District Attorney Cyrus Vance, a Democrat, asked accounting firm Mazars - Trump's long-time accounting firm - to provide him with eight years of the president's financial records (2011 to 2018) in order to shed light on an alleged "hush money" payment made to porn actress and former Playboy model Stormy Daniels. Such an unreported payment, made to obtain the silence of Daniels over an alleged affair with the billionaire Republican, would be a violation of state laws covering campaign finances.

Separately, two committees from the House of Representatives - under Democratic control - are seeking access to an array of financial documents from the same period in injunctions sent to Mazars as well as to Deutsche Bank and Capital One bank. This second case raises issues over the balance between the executive and legislative branches of government. Claiming to be the victim of a "witch hunt," Trump has opposed all of these requests but has lost each case at first instance and on appeal. Now the Supreme Court, which has a majority of conservative justices including two appointed by Trump, will have the last word. At the hearing, which took place in May via telephone because of the novel coronavirus pandemic, the justices looked at each case differently. — AFP