

## International

# Ivory Coast court clears president's third-term bid as fresh violence erupts

## Only four cleared of the 44 candidates for October 31 presidential election

**ABIDJAN:** Ivory Coast's top court on Monday cleared the path for President Alassane Ouattara to seek a contentious third term, as protests turned violent in several cities and fears grew of a repeat of the conflict that claimed 3,000 lives in the West African country a decade ago.

The constitutional council also barred former president Laurent Gbagbo and former rebel leader turned prime minister Guillaume Soro from standing in next month's presidential election.

It cleared only four of the 44 candidates for the October 31 presidential election. The other candidates cleared were former president Henri Konan Bedie from the historically dominant PDCI party, Gbagbo's former prime minister Pascal Affi N'Guessan, and Kouadio Konan Bertin, a dissident from Bedie's party.

In the economic capital Abidjan, protesters torched a bus in the working-class district of Yopougon, an AFP photographer said, after scuffles broke out earlier in the day between security forces and youths. The district is thought to be a fiefdom of exiled former president Gbagbo, whose supporters had filed an application for him to run in the vote.

It was Gbagbo's refusal to concede defeat to Ouattara after the 2010 election that sparked the bloody conflict in the former French colony, for-

merly a beacon of stability and prosperity in the region. In the centre-west city of Bangolo, demonstrators set fire to a mining truck and other vehicles on Monday, according to a resident who requested anonymity, who added that gendarmes dispersed them with tear gas. Witnesses said security forces took down barricades set up by protesters on several roads in the west of the former French colony. Around 15 people have died in violence since Ouattara, 78, announced last month that he would run for a third term.

Although the constitution limits presidents to two terms, Ouattara and his supporters argue that a 2016 constitutional tweak reset the clock.

The president had previously committed to not running again, but he changed his mind after the sudden death of his anointed successor, prime minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly, from a heart attack in July. The electoral commission has said that anyone convicted of a crime will be disqualified from running for the top office and barred Soro from running as he was sentenced in April to 20 years in prison for "concealment of embezzlement of public funds".

Gbagbo has been sentenced in absentia to a 20-year term over the looting of the local branch of the Central Bank of West African States during the 2010-11 crisis. Former president Bedie is expected



**ABIDJAN:** In this file photo taken on August 22, 2020 Ivory Coast's president Alassane Ouattara speaks at the Felix Houphouet-Boigny stadium in Abidjan during his investiture as presidential candidate. The Ivory Coast's constitutional court cleared the path for President Alassane Ouattara to seek a contentious third term. —AFP

to be the opposition's mean flagbearer, after his PDCI party nominated the 86-year-old as its candidate on Saturday. At a rally attended by tens of thousands of supporters in the capital Yamoussoukro, Bedie pledged if elected to work for "the

unconditional return of all exiles, as well as the release of all political, civilian and military prisoners from the post-election crisis". Bedie is seeking to return to the presidency after he was ousted in the country's first coup in 1999. —AFP

## US 'spy' to be charged with terrorism: Venezuela

**CARACAS:** An "American spy" arrested near Venezuelan oil installations last week will be charged with "terrorism," Attorney General Tarek William Saab announced Monday. Venezuela announced the arrest on Friday, saying a US citizen he identified as Matthew John Heath had been spying on two oil refineries when he was captured with cash and weapons.

Seven Venezuelan citizens were arrested in follow-

up raids over the weekend, Saab said. One of them was a serving member of the Venezuelan Armed Forces. "All the Venezuelan citizens are going to be charged with the crimes of treason, terrorism, illicit traffic of weapons and association (to commit crimes), while the US citizen is going to be charged with terrorism, illicit traffic of weapons and association," Saab told state television.

Saab said the arrest of the American had made it possible to "neutralize" what he described as an attempt to destabilize the oil industry and the national electrical system. A grenade-launcher, a submachine gun and an amount of explosive material were found in Heath's vehicle, the attorney general said.

He said Heath had served a series of three-month missions in Iraq from 2005 to 2016, working "as a communications officer in the CIA's secret base."

Announcing the arrest on Friday, President Nicolas

Maduro said the US citizen had been "spying in Falcon state on the Anmay and Cardon refineries" when he was detained the previous day.

Maduro said the arrest occurred after authorities on Wednesday "discovered and dismantled" a "plan to cause an explosion" at El Palito refinery — the closest to Caracas — located in Carabobo state.

Last month two former US soldiers, Luke Alexander Denman, 34, and Airan Berry, 41, were sentenced to 20 years in prison in Venezuela on charges including terrorism, after a failed bid to invade the Caribbean country last May.

Just hours before Friday's announcement, the Venezuelan government said it was establishing an "emergency plan" intended to regulate "fuel distribution" in light of severe gasoline shortages in the country, where people wait in lines stretching miles to fuel up their vehicles. — AFP

## US court sides with Trump on deporting immigrants

**LOS ANGELES:** A US court of appeals on Monday gave the green light for the Trump administration to expel hundreds of thousands of nationals from four countries who had been granted protected status for humanitarian reasons.

In a 2-1 ruling, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals said a federal court in San Francisco had erred when it issued an injunction protecting more than 300,000 immigrants from El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua and Sudan from being deported from the US.

President Donald Trump's administration has sought to end the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) granted to these people — who have several hundred thousand American children — on the grounds that their countries which were previously wracked by unrest were now safe.

Monday's ruling will not result in the immediate deportation of TPS holders, the American Civil Liberties Union said, as the challengers have vowed to file an appeal.

Writing for the majority, Judge Consuelo Callahan disagreed with arguments that a bid to terminate TPS was influenced by Trump's alleged anti-immigrant bias shown through his controversial remarks, including a 2018 comment in which he referred to "shithole countries."

"Plaintiffs fail to present even 'serious questions' on the merits of their claim that the Secretaries' TPS terminations were improperly influenced by the President's 'animus against non-white, non-European immigrants,'" Callahan wrote, referring to US-citizen children of TPS holders who are behind the case brought before the court.

The court's majority added that while it did not "condone the offensive and disparaging nature" of Trump's remarks, there was no proof his "alleged racial animus was a motivating factor in the TPS decisions."

A statement by the American Civil Liberties Union said Monday's ruling will lead to families who have lived lawfully in the US to be torn apart and vowed to fight the decision.

"The president's vile statements about TPS holders made perfectly clear that his administration acted out of racial animus," Ahilan Arulanandham, senior counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Southern California, said in a statement. "The Constitution does not permit policy to be driven by racism." Yael Schacher, an immigration historian and senior advocate at Refugees International, also denounced the ruling.

"Many of those with TPS have lived in the United States for more than two decades and are serving as essential workers on the front lines of the pandemic response," she said.

"The pain and fear caused by this decision will be felt deeply in communities across the United States, as long-time residents living with TPS are now left in limbo and face the risk of being separated from their American-born children."

The ACLU noted that TPS holders from the countries concerned will be permitted to maintain their status until at least February, and those from El Salvador until at least November. — AFP

## Mexico's invisible heroes battle virus in shadows

**MEXICO CITY:** Disinfecting emergency rooms, collecting hazardous waste and washing contaminated laundry, Mexican hospital cleaners risk their lives every day during the pandemic, often with little recognition.

Rights campaigners say these unsung heroes are particularly vulnerable to infection by the coronavirus in Mexico, whose Covid-19 death toll of more than 70,000 is one of the world's highest.

Rodolfo Diaz and his colleagues disinfect and wash thousands of sheets and gowns from hospitals in the Mexican capital every day.

Previously, they received few items considered infectious, but since the pandemic began, the workload has increased significantly.

"We try to protect ourselves every day as a team to do our job," said the 53-year-old, who wears a mask, goggles, gloves and other personal protective equipment. "Yes it's worrying, but I think we're prepared for it because we like our work."

Diaz is aware that his contribution to fighting the pandemic is often overlooked, but for him the most important thing is to ensure hospitals can keep caring for the sick. "As public servants and health workers, we're on the front line and we have to help people," Diaz said.

Erika Ramirez helps to oversee the cleaning of an intensive care unit at a military hospital in the south of Mexico City that treats Covid-19 patients.

The 23-year-old soldier's work includes dealing with infectious waste such as syringes or gauze, and sanitizing other parts of the facility, so she wears a



**MEXICO CITY:** Workers handle dirty laundry from the COVID-19 zone, in the laundry room of the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS), in Mexico City. Cleaning workers also risk their lives in Mexico's pandemic hospitals, knowing that their efforts often go unnoticed. — AFP

protective suit.

"If we do the cleaning well and disinfect and sanitize the areas, then all this can run smoothly," she said. Despite the risk of contagion, she said she goes about her work with no fear, although she has faced a lot of uncertainty since the start of the crisis.

Ramirez said that due to long work days of up to 24 hours, she has missed her daughters' birthdays, but she believes it is part of serving her country.

"It's worth not having a family gathering because we're doing an important job," she said.

Amnesty International said in a report this month that hospital cleaners in Mexico were "especially vulnerable to infection," noting that outsourcing means such workers have less protection.

According to the London-based rights group, Mexico has the world's highest coronavirus toll

organ that would have jeopardized their life immediately," Villanueva told KNX Newsradio, adding that both officers faced a long road to recovery.

He said investigators were working around the clock "to identify and arrest these cowards," referring to the gunman and a suspected getaway driver. Surveillance video of the incident shows the suspect — described as an African American aged between 28 and 30 — approach the patrol car from behind and fire through the passenger side window.

The female officer was struck in the jaw and arms. Her partner was hit in the forehead, arms and hand.

The unexplained shooting, in a neighborhood with a high crime rate and a history of tension between the police and black community, drew media and political attention toward the dangers police face on the job and away from the national Black Lives Matter campaign focused on police shootings of African Americans. "These are real people doing a tough job, and

among health workers — 1,320 dead and almost 100,000 infected at the end of August in the country of 128 million.

Worldwide at least 7,000 health workers have died after being infected with the virus, it said.

"Throughout the pandemic governments have hailed health workers as heroes, but this rings hollow when so many workers are dying from a lack of basic protection," said Steve Cockburn, Amnesty's head of economic and social justice.

Since the health crisis began almost six months ago, Idalia Diaz has seen the amount of garbage that she has to deal with grow relentlessly. "There are more disposables, more masks, more gowns," the 40-year-old cleaner said. But she gets on with her work without complaining. "I get paid to do this job, and I do the best I can." — AFP

it just shows the dangers of the job, in the blink of an eye," Villanueva said after the shooting. President Donald Trump, who has campaigned on his support for police and rejection of Black Lives Matters concerns, retweeted the stark video of the shooting and wrote: "Animals that must be hit hard!"

"If they die," Trump wrote of the police officers, "fast trial death penalty for the killer. Only way to stop this!" "This cold-blooded shooting is unconscionable and the perpetrator must be brought to justice," Trump's Democratic election rival Joe Biden said in a Twitter statement.

"Violence of any kind is wrong; those who commit it should be caught and punished," Villanueva lashed out on Monday at protesters who showed up Saturday night at the hospital where the two officers are being treated, with some reportedly shouting "death to the police" as they tried to force their way into the emergency room. — AFP

## LA set \$100,000 reward for shooter of 2 police officers

**LOS ANGELES:** Detectives offered a \$100,000 reward Monday for information leading to the capture of a fugitive who brazenly shot two US sheriff's deputies at close range as they sat in their car.

The officers targeted Saturday in the Compton neighborhood of Los Angeles — a 24-year-old man and 31-year-old woman — were in a critical condition, but LA County Sheriff Alex Villanueva said he was hopeful they would pull through.

"Fortunately, they were spared any injury to a vital