

International

Self-defense 'is not' illegal: Rittenhouse

Ruling sparks sporadic protests across the country

WASHINGTON: Kyle Rittenhouse, the US teen acquitted after fatally shooting two men during protests and riots against police brutality in Wisconsin last year, said self-defense is "not illegal" after being cleared, as the verdict reverberated across America. On Friday, a jury found the 18-year-old Rittenhouse not guilty of reckless and intentional homicide and other charges stemming from the August 2020 shootings in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

The ruling sparked sporadic protests across the country late Friday—from New York to Portland, Oregon—but also drew praise from Rittenhouse supporters at the courthouse and gun rights advocates, highlighting how divisive the case was. In comments broadcast by Fox News, the teen—seen smiling as he rides in a car after the verdict—said he was relieved that his "rough journey" had come to an end.

"The jury reached the correct verdict—self-defense is not illegal," Rittenhouse said, ahead of a full interview with Fox to be shown today evening and a subsequent documentary scheduled to air in December. "I'm glad that everything went well... We made it through the hard part." Rittenhouse's family later said via a spokesman that they had been moved to an undisclosed location. "They are doing well right now, they're in an undisclosed location, and they're a family and everybody's just ecstatic," spokesman David Hancock told CBS.

Rittenhouse's case drew national attention, in part because it arose from the Black Lives Matter demonstrations that swept the country last year and

featured a controversial mix of guns, racial tensions and vigilantism. The teen testified during the two-week trial that he shot dead two men and wounded another with his AR-15 semi-automatic rifle in self-defense after being attacked during a night of unrest in Kenosha.

Rittenhouse, who lived in neighboring Illinois, claimed he went to Kenosha to protect businesses from looters and act as a medic. Prosecutors countered by arguing the then 17-year-old Rittenhouse "provoked" the events on a chaotic night sparked when a white policeman shot a Black man, Jacob Blake, in the back several times during an arrest,

leaving him paralyzed. But the jury sided with Rittenhouse.

For John Huber, father of one of the men killed in Kenosha, the "shock" had not dissipated when he appeared on CNN Saturday morning. "We still can't believe it," Huber said. "He should have got about 40 years in prison. That was

our expectation." "That guy gets to run free and he's now a hero. And this is my son right here. This is Anthony," Huber said, holding up a small urn and a photo of his son. "There's no justice right now for our family and there's no closure."

Divisive case

The reaction to the verdict reflected the national divide over the right to bear firearms in America—and where the line should be drawn on that constitutionally protected right. President Joe Biden warned against violence following the verdict and appealed for calm. "While the verdict in Kenosha will leave many Americans feeling angry and con-



ATLANTA: Demonstrators gather to protest the acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse on November 20, 2021 in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

cerned, myself included, we must acknowledge that the jury has spoken," Biden said in a statement. "I urge everyone to express their views peacefully, consistent with the rule of law."

In an editorial, the Wisconsin State Journal called the verdict "disappointing" and said it was "sure to embolden militant people who seek to take the law into their own hands." "But further violence in response to the verdict won't help anyone," it added. Meanwhile, the Gun Owners of America cheered Rittenhouse as a "warrior for gun owners and self defense rights" and said it would be "awarding him" with an AR-15 like the one he used that night in Kenosha. Rittenhouse—who had

faced five charges in total—earned praise from some Republican lawmakers and former president Donald Trump.

The most serious charge—intentional homicide—carried a mandatory sentence of life in prison. The jury deliberated for a total of 26 hours over four days before delivering a unanimous verdict of not guilty on all counts. Shannon Watts, founder of gun control group Moms Demand Action, slammed the verdict. "That a teenager could travel across state lines to a protest he had nothing to do with; shoot three people, killing two; and face no criminal consequences is a miscarriage of justice and an indictment of our criminal justice system," Watts said. —AFP

US road rage shootings on the rise

CALIFORNIA: After a speeding driver cut her off abruptly on a Californian highway in May, Joanna Cloonan gestured rudely towards the car. A passenger grabbed a pistol and fired at her vehicle, killing her six-year-old son in the back seat. A woman in Texas was shot in the back last week while shielding her seven-year-old daughter from gunfire toward their vehicle, and another driver in Kentucky is recovering from gunshot wounds sustained after an argument involving a parking space.

Road rage incidents involving a gun have been responsible for record levels of injury and death in the United States since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a recent report from Everytown for Gun Safety, a nonprofit that advocates against gun violence. Data shows that traffic skirmishes involving firearms have been on the rise since 2018, and the report said that "if current trends continue, 2021 is on track to be the deadliest year on record." The pandemic, which introduced many new sources of stress to people's lives, has also seen record increases in gun sales and shootings, Everytown said.

'Entitlement' and 'narcissism'

Ryan Martin, an anger researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, told AFP that "just the existence of a life-threatening illness puts people on edge, when the frustrations that they encounter would have been kind of mild two years ago." In a country where the right to bear arms is fiercely guarded, the omnipresence of guns magnifies the problem, according to Martin, a psychology professor.

Firearms are "a driving factor in multiple ways because it gives you a lethal mechanism to act out that anger," he said. "Data also shows that having a gun in the car with you makes you more likely to become angry. It's called the weapons effect."

Individualistic American attitudes may also be partly to blame. "The individualism that we see in the US probably exacerbates a lot of anger response. There is a sense of entitlement that comes with the way in which Americans tend to think about freedom," Martin said.

Martin and emotional management specialist Pauline Wallin both suggest that deep political divides also contribute to the violence. Wallin, a psychologist based in Pennsylvania, said that because Americans are increasingly polarized, a person cutting you off in traffic is more likely seen as the "enemy" rather than an "inconvenience."

"We're more apt to blame other people for what happened," she said. "It's somebody else's fault... it's all about narcissism." Even pandemic safety measures like masks became framed as a political debate under former president Donald Trump, and divisive messaging did not disappear with his administration, Wallin said.

"Poor management of frustration" is at fault for most road rage incidents, according to the psychologist. "You have to take some deep breaths. You have to calm yourself down because you can't think logically when you're very upset," she said. "Ask yourself, will this matter tomorrow? In a week?" Martin said drivers have to realize that engaging in an aggressive, hostile way is "never going to be a positive outcome." "Let it go," he advised. —AFP

Hijacker's mid-air escape fascinates Americans, 50 years on

WASHINGTON: On the eve of Thanksgiving, 1971, a nondescript, 40-something man who called himself Dan Cooper approached the airport counter and bought a one-way ticket for the short flight from Portland to Seattle. Within hours, he had strapped a bag holding \$200,000 in ransom to himself—today worth about \$1.3 million—and parachuted off the plane, never to be found.

Fifty years after his leap into the unknown, the case of DB Cooper—an alias spawned by the media—remains the only unsolved plane hijacking in the history of the United States. The US Federal Bureau of Investigation called him "a quiet man who appeared to be in his mid-40s, wearing a business suit with a black tie and white shirt." He ordered a bourbon and soda while waiting for the plane to take off.

His plan was fairly simple. After the aircraft departed, Cooper handed the flight attendant a note. When she didn't immediately react, he reportedly leaned over and said: "Miss, you'd better look at that note. I have a bomb."

After getting a glimpse of the mass of wires in his briefcase, the badly shaken flight attendant wrote down his demands—four parachutes and \$200,000 — and brought them to the captain as instructed.

Egypt makes Gaza comeback with post-war reconstruction

GAZA: Posters of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi beam out over a site in the war-battered Gaza Strip where laborers and bulldozers are hard at work rebuilding. After years of retreat, Egypt is making its presence felt again in the neighboring Palestinian enclave, emerging as a key benefactor in the aftermath of the last bout of fighting between Hamas and Zionists in May. In the weeks following the deadly violence, a number of Egyptian workers crossed the border on a mission to lay down a coastal road in the Gaza's northern city of Beit Lahya.

"The president's instructions are to reconstruct the Gaza Strip. We are about 70 engineers, civil servants, lorry drivers, mechanics and workers," said a worker who preferred not to give his name. He added that he was

"happy to help Palestine". During the 11-day conflict that erupted between Zionists and armed Islamist factions in Gaza last May — the worst since 2014 — Egypt worked behind the scenes to mediate a ceasefire. Cairo also pledged a \$500 million package to reconstruct the enclave which borders Zionists and Egypt.

'Common interests'

Relations between Cairo and Hamas — an offshoot of Egypt's veteran Islamist opposition Muslim Brotherhood group — have been sour, particularly after the 2013 military ouster of late president Mohamed Morsi, also of the Brotherhood. The sight of Egyptian workers rebuilding Gaza as Egypt invests millions in the enclave was "unexpected, unimaginable", Palestinian economist Omar Shaban said. "Egypt and Hamas are not friends, but they have common interests," he explained in his office in Al-Rimal, a Gaza district that was heavily bombed by Zionists in May. "Egypt wants to maintain the ceasefire by engaging in the after-war reconstruction efforts."

Hamas is in desperate need of inter-

When the plane landed in Seattle, Cooper let the 36 passengers go in exchange for the money and parachutes, brought on board by the FBI. Keeping the crew as security, he demanded the plane take off anew, and fly low—this time on course for Mexico City. But somewhere between Seattle and Reno, Nevada, Cooper jumped out of the rear door of the Boeing 727 and into the bitterly cold winter night.

Manhunt

The FBI launched a far-reaching investigation, but after several weeks of searching in the thick, rugged forests of the American Northwest, investigators found nothing. More than five years and 800 suspect interviews later, there were still no signs of the hijacker or his parachute. Did he even survive the jump? Could his clothes and supplies last long in the freezing wilderness? These questions and more remain unanswered.

'James Bond'

"He's a guy who presented himself in a James Bond-esque sort of manner," said researcher Eric Ullis, whose own quest to resolve the Cooper mystery was the subject of a History Channel documentary. Ullis, a historian, has investigated and written about the case for nearly 14 years, and he organized CooperCon, a conference for other sky-jacking mystery enthusiasts. Mary Jean Fryar, a special agent for the FBI in the 2000s, worked on the investigation.

Cooper, she said, became "kind of a folklore hero" in the United States after his high-altitude heist. She describes the current flurry of interest around the case as like a "cult," fueled by the fact



This FBI file handout image obtained on March 27, 2008 shows the likenesses of D.B.Cooper. On the eve of Thanksgiving, 1971, a nondescript, 40-something man who called himself Dan Cooper approached the airport counter and bought a one-way ticket from Portland to Seattle. —AFP

that the hijacker has never been found. Theories, some far-fetched, have poured in over the years, and dozens of people have claimed, sometimes on their deathbed, to be DB Cooper.

FBI investigators examined many intriguing profiles, like that of Barbara Dayton, an amateur pilot and transgender woman who allegedly confessed to her friends; of Lynn Doyle Cooper, whose niece became convinced of his involvement after he showed up bloody and battered to Thanksgiving dinner that year; and of Sheridan Paterson, a World War II veteran interviewed by Fryar. —AFP



RAFAH: File photo shows Egyptian workers pose for a photo by construction equipment provided by Egypt arriving at the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Palestinian Gaza Strip enclave. — AFP

national aid for reconstruction, while positive relations with Egypt are an added benefit as it controls the Rafah border, often the only access point for much-needed construction material to the enclave. Egypt, meanwhile, "understands that it doesn't have a lot of options" in Gaza, where Hamas — nearly 15 years after seizing power from the Fatah movement and despite four wars with Zionists — still holds firm,

Shaban said.

Over recent years, Qatar has become the prime donor of aid for the impoverished territory, but in the aftermath of the May fighting, the flow of cash came to a halt. The energy-rich Gulf country — considered to be sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots — has dispensed tens of millions of dollars in aid to poor families in Gaza. —AFP

Seven Turks held in Libya for almost two years return

ISTANBUL: Seven Turkish citizens held in eastern Libya for almost two years were released and returned home after intense diplomacy, the Turkish

foreign ministry said yesterday. The Turks were released after joint efforts between Turkey and its regional ally Qatar, the ministry said in a statement. Turkish media said most of them worked in the restaurant business. The North African country has been mired in civil war and strife since the overthrow of dictator Muammar Gaddafi in a 2011 uprising. The bloodshed has drawn in competing Libyan factions and Islamist groups as well as foreign powers.

Turkey has sent troops as well as pro-Turkish

militia units from Syria to shore up the UN-recognized government in Tripoli, while Russia and other countries support eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar. In 2019, Turkish officials said the Turks were detained by eastern Libya forces loyal to Haftar. "The situation of our citizens were closely monitored during this process by our embassy in Tripoli and the National Intelligence Organization," the foreign ministry said. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also placed telephone calls to the citizens who returned home, it added. —AFP