

International

US abortion rights advocates, opponents brace for court decision

Final ruling on the highly contested issue is expected by June 30

WASHINGTON: Odile Schalit is preparing for "the worst." Schalit is the executive director of The Brigid Alliance, an organization that helps women in the United States who are forced to travel long distances to obtain an abortion.

And with the Supreme Court poised to potentially restrict abortion access, her group's services may soon be more essential than ever. A draft opinion leaked in May would have the conservative majority on the nine-member court overturn Roe v. Wade, the 1973 landmark decision allowing nationwide access to abortion.

The final ruling on the highly contested issue is expected by June 30. In the meantime, both defenders and opponents of abortion are engaged in preparations for what is being called the "post-Roe world." "I've stopped assuming that the worst won't happen," Schalit told AFP. The Brigid Alliance organizes and finances trips for women seeking abortions after the first trimester. That often involves travel from states with strict abortion laws to other states.

"We're adding more staff. We're doing outreach," Schalit said. "We're reaching out and trying to grow our donor base. We're really doubling down on all of those efforts." The Brigid Alliance currently employs 10 people full-time and assists some 125 women a month. It hopes to boost that number to 200 a month by adding six more employees. Even then, Schalit said, and despite an increase in donations, "we will not be able to meet the need of every single person needing our services."

'Trigger' laws

Twenty-two of the 50 US states, mostly in the conservative South of the country, are prepared to ban abortion if the Supreme Court goes ahead and overturns Roe v. Wade. According to the Guttmacher Institute, nine states, including Arizona and Michigan, have pre-1973 laws banning abortion on the books that they could immediately revive.

Others have so-called "trigger" laws that would go into force virtually automatically if the Supreme Court goes ahead and restricts abortion rights. Iowa, Georgia, Ohio and South Carolina are among the states that have passed laws restricting abor-



WASHINGTON: A flag reading "Don't Tread On My Uterus" is displayed outside the US Supreme Court in Washington, DC. —AFP

tion after six weeks, before many women even know they are pregnant.

While currently blocked by the courts, those laws could take effect if the Supreme Court changes the legal landscape. Democratic-ruled states, where abortion would remain legal, are preparing, meanwhile, for an influx of women seeking abortions.

Connecticut and Delaware, for example, have expanded the categories of professionals who are authorized to carry out abortions to include nurses and midwives. Lawmakers in California have allocated \$152 million to assist access to abortion and the governor of New York has pledged \$35 million.

Planned Parenthood, which performs more than one-third of the 850,000 annual abortions in the United States, is reinforcing its network in places such as Colorado and Illinois, which border states where the procedure may be banned.

Ordinary citizens are also mobilizing—and have been for a while. Since May 2019, the online discussion platform Reddit has hosted a group called the "Aunties" which offers assistance and anonymity to

women seeking an abortion. Since last month, the number of users has exploded from just 45 to more than 75,000. A retired woman in her 60s in Tennessee was among those offering to help on Reddit, saying she could drive abortion-seekers to neighboring states.

"It's amazing," Schalit said. "More hands is phenomenal." At the same time, she said she would prefer that volunteers "consider instead connecting with pre-existing organizations like ours, to build out what already exists." Abortion opponents have opened their own "crisis pregnancy centers" during the past few years where they seek to persuade women seeking abortions not to go through with the procedure. Abortion pills, which account for about half of the abortions in the United States, are another battleground.

Easily available through the internet from sites abroad, the pills can be used without significant risk up until 10 weeks of pregnancy. Several conservative US states, including Kentucky and South Dakota, have sought to cut off access to the pills by banning their delivery through the mail. —AFP

Frequent mass shootings

The president had pushed for more substantive reforms, including a ban on assault rifles - which were used in both the Texas and New York shootings - or at least an increase in the age at which they can be purchased. He had also urged lawmakers to ban high-capacity magazines, mandate safe storage of firearms, and allow gun manufacturers to be held liable for crimes committed with their products.

The Democrat-controlled House of Representatives passed a broad package of proposals that included raising the purchasing age for most semi-automatic rifles from 18 to 21. But the party does not have the requisite 60 votes to advance it in the Senate, leaving the bipartisan deal as the only hope for federal measures to address firearms violence.

Frequent mass shootings have led to widespread outrage in the United States, where a majority of people support tighter gun laws, but opposition from many Republican lawmakers and voters has long been a hurdle to major changes. A strong supporter of gun rights is the National Rifle Association, which has been weakened by scandals and was hit by a lawsuit from New York State's attorney general, but it still wields considerable influence.

"The media, leftist politicians, and gun-hating activists are bullying NRA members and gun owners because they want us to give up. We won't bend a knee," the lobby tweeted on Saturday. That day, thousands of people took to the streets in the United States to push for action on gun violence, protesting in Washington, New York and locations across the country. —AFP

Selim called for an investigation into the incident. Last month, a massive fire broke out in the cargo area of Suakin port, lasting hours and causing heavy damage. It was not clear what caused the blaze. An investigation has been launched to determine the cause of the fire, but has yet to release its findings.

The historic port town of Suakin is no longer Sudan's main foreign trade hub, a role which has been taken by Port Sudan, some 60 km away along the Red Sea coast. There have been moves to redevelop Suakin port, but a 2017 deal with Turkey to restore historic buildings and expand the docks was suspended after the ouster of longtime president Omar Al-Bashir.

Sudan remains gripped by a chronic economic crisis, which has deepened following last year's military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan. The military takeover triggered punitive measures, including aid cuts by Western governments, who demanded the restoration of the transitional administration installed after Bashir was toppled. —AFP

lion to the effort through the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center, the official Saudi Press Agency reported Sunday.

"The Kingdom calls on the United Nations to quickly take the necessary measures to ensure the prevention of oil leakage... and also calls on the international community to contribute urgently to support this initiative and prevent a serious environmental disaster," the agency said. Saudi Arabia's current defense spending is \$36.8 billion per year, according to the Military Balance+ database prepared by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. —AFP

Senators announce limited deal on gun violence measures

WASHINGTON: A bipartisan group of US senators on Sunday proposed steps to curb gun violence following devastating mass shootings in Texas and New York, but the limited measures fall far short of the president's calls for change. The shootings in May - one at a Texas elementary school that killed 19 young children and two teachers, and another at a New York supermarket that left 10 Black people dead - have piled pressure on politicians to take action.

But Republicans lawmakers, who have repeatedly blocked tougher measures, are still resisting major changes to gun regulations, instead pointing to mental health issues as the root of the problem. The new proposals include tougher background checks for gun buyers under 21, increasing resources for states to keep weapons out of the hands of people deemed a risk, and cracking down on illegal gun purchases.

"Today, we are announcing a commonsense, bipartisan proposal to protect America's children, keep our schools safe, and reduce the threat of violence across our country," the group of 20 Democratic and Republican lawmakers said in a statement. "Our plan increases needed mental health resources, improves school safety and support for students, and helps



WASHINGTON: A gun control advocate participates in the "March for Our Lives" to protest against gun violence during a rally near the Washington Monument on the National Mall on June 11, 2022. — AFP

ensure dangerous criminals and those who are adjudicated as mentally ill can't purchase weapons."

The senators also called for increased investment in mental health services and school safety resources, as well as including domestic violence convictions and restraining orders in the national background check database. President Joe Biden praised the announcement and urged lawmakers to pass it quickly, while making clear that the proposals do not go far enough.

"Obviously, it does not do everything that I think is needed, but it reflects important steps in the right direction, and would be the most significant gun safety legislation to pass Congress in decades," he said in a statement. "With bipartisan support, there are no excuses for delay, and no reason why it should not quickly move through the Senate and the House."

Kuwait seeks UN help to deport 450...

Continued from Page 1

They said this is a humanitarian issue and they cannot be forced out, especially since many of them are elderly. The sources said after embassies of these patients did not act, their numbers, the hospitals they are in, the time they have spent there and their health conditions have been tallied, adding the ministry will not ask for treatment fees in exchange for their departure. The sources said the files of these patients will soon be sent to the foreign ministry to find another way to resolve the issue, which is to contact the United Nations office in Kuwait to deal directly with embassies, or for the UN to transfer these patients to their countries in cooperation with Kuwaiti authorities.

Panel approves KD 3,000 grant law...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, the head of the Assembly's environment committee MP Hamad Al-Matar said a number of experts and oil executives told the panel during a meeting on Sunday that there is no relation between the recent strong earthquake that hit Kuwait and oil operations. The lawmaker said earthquakes normally happen deeper than five kilometers, while oil drillings and operations normally take place at under two kilometers.

Thousands of sheep drown as...

Continued from Page 1

"The sunken ship will affect the port's operation," the official said. "It will also likely have an environmental impact due to the death of the large number of animals carried by the ship."

Omar Al-Khalifa, the head of the national exporters' association, said the ship took several hours to sink at the pier - a window that meant it "could have been rescued". The total value of the lost livestock "is around 14 million Saudi riyals, the equivalent of four million dollars," said Saleh Selim, the head of the association's livestock division. He said livestock owners recovered only around 700 sheep "but they were found very ill and we don't expect them to live long."

Saudi offers \$10m to prevent oil spill...

Continued from Page 1

The UN has said an oil spill could destroy ecosystems, shut down the fishing industry and close the lifeline Hodeida port for six months. It has said the operation needs to be completed by the end of September to avoid "turbulent winds" that pick up later in the year. Riyadh will donate \$10 mil-

News in brief

Italy helicopter crash

ROME: Seven bodies were found Saturday in the wreckage of a helicopter that disappeared in the mountains of northern Italy two days ago, with no survivors, emergency services said. Four Turkish citizens were on board the helicopter which went missing on Thursday, the Turkish foreign ministry said, while Lebanese President Michel Aoun said he mourned the death of two nationals on board. The pilot was Italian, originally from Venice, according to the ANSA news agency, which reported that the others had been on a business trip. "After the discovery on Mount Cusna of the remains of the aircraft that disappeared on June 9, the unfortunately lifeless bodies of the seven people on board were found in the wreckage," Italy's fire service announced. —AFP

Bomb attack kills 4

KABUL: A bomb blast on a minibus killed at least four people and injured several others in the Afghan capital on Saturday, police said. The explosion in an eastern district of Kabul was the latest in a series of deadly attacks that have rocked Afghanistan in recent months, a little under a year since the Taliban takeover. A team of Taliban security personnel had been deployed to the area to investigate the bombing, police spokesman Khalid Zadran told AFP. No group has so far claimed responsibility for the bombing that occurred in a district mainly inhabited by members of the Sunni Pashtun community. While the number of bombings has fallen across the country since the Taliban seized power in August, attacks have ticked up recently. Dozens of civilians were killed in Kabul and other cities in primarily sectarian attacks during the holy month of Ramadan, which ended on April 30 in Afghanistan, with some claimed by the Islamic State group. — AFP

Attack on poultry farm

CHILPANCINGO, Mexico: Six people were killed and two others wounded Saturday in a gun attack on workers at a chicken farm in Mexico's troubled southeastern state of Guerrero, the regional prosecutor's office said. Authorities are investigating "the events that occurred in Petaquillas (Guerrero) where two people were injured with firearms and five men and one woman were killed," the Guerrero prosecutor's office tweeted, without giving further details. Local media reported that the "woman" was actually a 14-year-old girl. The gunman opened fire on the employees of the chicken production and sales farm, located on the side of the Mexico-Acapulco federal highway in the town of Petaquillas, near a military checkpoint. Police and National Guard forces cordoned off the area. —AFP

Sinn Fein leader alleges Tory 'games' over N Ireland

LONDON: The leader of Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein on Sunday accused UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson of sacrificing Northern Ireland to shore up his own enfeebled position. Johnson's government will on Monday introduce legislation to rewrite its post-Brexit commitments on Northern Ireland, but denied that it was breaking its treaty obligations to the European Union.

Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis insisted the bill was "lawful" and necessary to fix problems in the EU protocol, so as to restore a power-sharing government in the troubled territory. But Sinn Fein's all-Ireland president Mary Lou McDonald said the bill would unilaterally break the UK's EU withdrawal treaty, and pointed to Johnson's narrow escape in a Conservative leadership vote last Monday.

"It is disgraceful to use the north of Ireland, to use Ireland, as a bargaining chip," she told Sky News, accusing the Conservatives of "games and gamesmanship". The government's proposals were rather "designed to boost the ego, the leadership ambitions of either Boris Johnson or one of his would-be successors", McDonald added. "It's dishonourable stuff, by any measure extraordinary stuff." Lewis, also speaking in a Sky interview, said the Northern Ireland Protocol was disrupting trade and lacked support from the territory's pro-UK unionist parties.

"So it's right that we repair that," he said, adding that the need to protect a 1998 peace agreement in Northern Ireland had "primacy" over the protocol. McDonald countered that public opinion and most lawmakers in Northern Ireland backed the protocol.

"Brandon Lewis is talking through his hat, and not for the first time," she said, accusing the government of "undermining, attacking and damaging the (1998) Good Friday Agreement". In a historic first, Sinn Fein emerged as the biggest party in Northern Ireland elections last month. —AFP



Brandon Lewis