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Spain says deadly migrant rush 'attack' on its territory

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AUSTIN: An abortion rights demonstrator holding a pan chants slogans as they march near the State Capitol in Austin, Texas. Abortion rights defenders fanned out across America on June 25 for a second day of protest against the Supreme Court's thunderbolt ruling. — AFP

New US abortion reality takes shape

'It's not a personal choice to have an abortion, it involves two people'

WASHINGTON: Abortion rights defenders fanned out across America Saturday for a second day of protest against the Supreme Court's thunderbolt ruling, as state after conservative state moved swiftly to ban the procedure. The deeply polarized country grappled with a new level of division: between states that will now or soon deny the right to abortion, enshrined since 1973, and those that still allow it.

A few thousand people thronged the streets Saturday outside the fenced-off Supreme Court in Washington, in hot summer weather, carrying signs that read "War on women, who's next?" and "No uterus. No opinion." "What happened yesterday is indescribable and disgusting," said Mia Stagner, 19, a political science major in college. "Being forced to be a mother is not something any woman should have to do." Demonstrations also took place in Los Angeles, with dozens of smaller rallies from coast to coast. At least eight right-leaning states imposed immediate bans on abortion—with a similar number to follow suit in coming weeks—after the Supreme Court eliminated 50-year-old constitutional protections for the procedure, drawing criticism from some of America's closest allies around the world.

Fueling the mobilization, many now fear that the Supreme Court, with a clear conservative majority made possible by Donald Trump, might next set its sights on rights like same-sex marriage and contraception.

President Joe Biden—who has likewise voiced concerns the court might not stop at abortion—spoke out again Saturday against the "shocking decision." "I know



Painful and devastating decision

how painful and devastating the decision is for so many Americans," said the president, who has urged Congress to restore abortion protections as federal law, and vowed the issue would be on the ballot in November's midterm elections. Women in states that severely restrict abortion or outlaw it altogether will either have to continue with their pregnancy, undergo a clandestine abortion, obtain abortion pills, or travel to another state where it remains legal.

But "most women don't have the time of day or the financial resources to travel across state lines to get an abortion," Mikayla Marcum, a 23-year-old originally from Texas, told AFP at the Supreme Court on Saturday. "We are going to see some nightmare scenarios, sadly,"

Biden's spokeswoman Karine Jean Pierre told reporters on Air Force One, as the president headed to Europe for Group of Seven and NATO summits. "That is not hypothetical," she said.

Republican-led states enact bans

Friday's demonstrations mostly passed off without incident—although police fired tear gas on protesters in Phoenix, Arizona and a pickup truck drove through a group of protesters in the Iowa city of Cedar Rapids, running over a woman's foot. In Washington on Saturday the scene was once again mostly peaceful—barring the odd shouting match between abortion rights advocates and opponents. Carolyn Keller, 57, who traveled all the way from New Jersey, said she was enraged by the ruling, warning: "They came after women. They will come after other community and contraception."

But counter-protesters like Savannah Craven stood firm. "It's not a personal choice to have an abortion, it involves two people and unfortunately that choice ends in the ending of someone's life," she told AFP. As protesters like Craven made clear, while Friday's ruling represents a victory in the religious right's struggle against abortion, the movement's ultimate goal is a nationwide ban. That goal is now within sight in about two dozen states which are now expected to severely restrict or outright ban and criminalize abortions.

Missouri was first to ban the procedure on Friday, making no exception for rape or incest, joined as of Saturday morning by at least seven other states—Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Utah. In Wisconsin, where an 1849 law banning abortion except when saving the life of the mother may go into effect, Governor Tony Evers, a Democrat, vowed to offer clemency to any doctors who face prosecution, according to local media.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court tossed out the argument in Roe v. Wade that women had the right to abortion based on the constitutional right to privacy with regard to their own bodies.

Several Democratic-ruled states, anticipating an influx of patients, have already taken steps to facilitate abortion, and three of them—California, Oregon and Washington—issued a joint pledge to defend access in the wake of the court's decision. Abortion providers said they had seen a surge in donations since the ruling, as they braced for the long hard road ahead. "In the 24 hours following the court's devastating decision, Planned Parenthood ...saw a 40-fold total increase in donations compared to a typical day—more than half of whom are new donors," Kelley Robinson, vice president of advocacy at the largest abortion provider in the United States, said in a statement to AFP. "This is just the beginning, and we won't back down," she said. — AFP

Do signs point to an Zionist-Saudi normalisation deal?

RIYADH: The United States has hinted that more Arab nations could take steps to improve ties with Zionist entity, ahead of President Joe Biden's trip to the Middle East. All eyes are on Saudi Arabia, which Biden will visit in mid-July after he once vowed to treat the kingdom as a "pariah" state over the 2018 murder and dismemberment of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

However, despite the recent signs of a US-Saudi rapprochement, analysts say it is improbable Riyadh will agree to diplomatic ties with Zionist entity—not during Biden's visit or while King Salman, 86, still reigns. The king's official policy is that there should be no peace with Zionist entity until it withdraws from occupied territories and accepts Palestinian statehood.

Biden's visit will likely focus on convincing the world's biggest crude exporter to boost its oil output. Here are some questions and answers about the possibility of a normalisation deal between Saudi Arabia and Zionist Entity:

What are the signs?

Saudi's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has said Zionist entity was a "potential ally, with many interests that we can pursue together", state media reported in March, attributing the statement to an interview with The Atlantic.

Additionally, the kingdom never showed any opposition when its regional ally, the United Arab Emirates, established diplomatic ties with Zionist entity in 2020, followed by Bahrain and Morocco under the US-brokered Abraham Accords. In January 2021, Sudan's transitional government also agreed to do so but the northeast African country has yet to finalise the deal. Saudi Arabia also at the time allowed direct flights from the Emirates to Zionist entity to travel through its airspace, in another implicit sign of approval. Biden, who will also visit Zionist entity, is to travel directly from the Jewish state to Saudi Arabia, becoming the first US president to fly from there to an Arab nation that does not recognise Zionist entity. In 2017 his predecessor, Donald Trump, made the journey in reverse.

In recent months, Saudis have taken to social media—which is tightly controlled in the kingdom—to express their support for normalisation, which would be a shift from the kingdom's long-standing pan-Arab policy to isolate Zionist entity until the conflict with the Palestinians is resolved.

Esawi Frej, Zionist's minister of regional cooperation, told Saudi newspaper Arab News earlier in June

that Riyadh would be "central" to any solution to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. The Axios news website reported, also this month, that the United States was working on a "road map" for normalisation between Zionist entity and Saudi Arabia, while The Wall Street Journal said the region's two most influential nations were engaging in secret economic and security talks.

In both countries' interests?

Yasmine Farouk of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said a relationship with Zionist Entity will contribute to greater acceptance of Saudi Arabia. "It will open doors for the crown prince, with Western people and parliaments accepting the kingdom, and granting Saudi Arabia a greater role," she said.

"It will make a change, whether just in regards to the image of Saudi Arabia... especially since (Prince Mohammed) sees it as a global power, not just an Arab and Islamic one." She said that Zionist entity would want normalisation "because not only will it open the door to Saudi Arabia, but to other (Arab and Muslim) countries that may already engage in secret discussions with Zionist entity but don't dare normalise yet."

The two countries share a common enemy in Iran, said a Riyadh-based diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity. "They are looking at it in the sense of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'," he said. Two Saudi officials contacted by AFP refused to comment due to the "sensitivity" of the issue. — AFP

20 people die in S African pub

EAST LONDON: At least 20 young people have died at a township pub in South Africa's southern city of East London, but the cause of the deaths is still unclear. Senior officials from the provincial government rushed to the scene, where at least six mortuary vehicles were lined up in the residential street waiting to collect the bodies, according to an AFP correspondent.

Drinking is permitted in South African township pubs, commonly known as taverns or shebeens which are sometimes located in family homes, where safety regulations are rarely enforced. "The number has increased to 20, three have died in hospital. But there are still two who are very critical," the head of the provincial government safety department Zeziwe Tikana-Gxothwe said on local TV. A visibly shocked head of the Eastern Cape Province Oscar Mabuyane spoke from outside the scene, a building surrounded by houses in an area called Scenery Park. "It's absolutely unbelievable, we can't understand it, losing 20 young lives just like that," he told reporters, condemning "this unfortunate consumption, unlimited consumption of liquor".

"You can't just trade in the middle of society like this and think that young people are not going to experiment," he said. Empty bottles of alcohol, wigs and even a pastel purple "Happy Birthday" sash lay strewn on the dusty street outside the double-storey Enyobeni Tavern, according to Unathi Binqose, a safety government official who arrived at the scene at dawn.

'No obvious signs of injury'

Provincial police spokesman brigadier Thembinkosi Kinana told AFP that police were investigating the circumstances surrounding the incident. He said the victims at Enyobeni Tavern were aged between 18 and 20 years, but provincial community and safety department official Binqose said some could be as young as 15.

Ruling out a stampede as the cause of death, Binqose told AFP "there are no visible open wounds to those dead". "Forensic (investigators) will take samples and test to see if there was any poisoning of any sort," he said. "One thing for sure, the place had a lot more people than it normally takes," he added. A local newspaper website, DispatchLive, reported that "bodies are lying strewn across tables, chairs and on the floor; with no obvious signs of injury". — AFP

Norway pays tribute to victims of Oslo shooting

OSLO, Norway: Norway paid tribute on Sunday to the victims of a deadly shooting near the capital that shocked the normally peaceful country and led to the cancellation of a Pride march. The altar of Oslo cathedral was draped in a rainbow cloth for a service to remember the victims of the attack, attended by Crown Princess Mette-Marit. Investigators are probing the motives of the suspected gunman, who opened fire in the early hours of Saturday, killing two and wounding 21. "Oslo is in mourning. The whole country has been shaken by this attack," the Norwegian Protestant Church said. It came 11 years

after right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people in a shooting spree that shook the nation to its core.

"Bullets cannot kill love," said the head of the Church, Olav Fykse Tveit. Noting that the Church had for years opposed equal rights for same-sex couples, he said: "We see that we can learn, sometimes in spite of ourselves, that diversity is a present, a richness, and that many have a capacity for love that we are incapable of."

"The shooting ... put an end to the Pride march," said a somber Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store. "But it has not put an end to the fight to end discrimination, prejudice and hate." The shooting occurred at around 1:00 am on Saturday (2300 GMT on Friday) near the London Pub club in Oslo's packed nightlife district, where Pride parties were in full swing. Two men in their 50s and 60s died. Twenty-one other people were wounded. Police quickly arrested the suspect, whom they described as a 42-year-old Norwegian man of Iranian descent known to the nation's security services. Norwegian media named him as Zaniar Matapur. — AFP



OSLO, Norway: Norwegian Minister of Justice Emilie Enger Mehl arrives to attend a mourning service in Oslo Cathedral in Oslo on June 26. — AFP