



Inter-American court hears first abortion case

Rahul Gandhi found guilty of defamation



BRUSSELS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (R) talks with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen (C) and Cyprus' President of the Republic Nikos Anastasiades as they attend a EU Summit, at the EU headquarters in Brussels, on March 23, 2023. — AFP

Existing France-Germany tensions overshadow EU leaders' summit

While no agreement has yet been reached, Dutch PM hopes issue will be resolved

BRUSSELS: A burgeoning row between France and Germany fired by differences over nuclear energy and combustion engines threatened to spill over into a gathering of the 27 European Union leaders Thursday. Existing strains between the European Union's two biggest players after Berlin upset some of its partners by blocking—at the last minute—a landmark deal to prohibit new sales of fossil fuel cars from 2035. The ban is key to Brussels' ambitious plan to become a "climate neutral" economy by 2050, with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. In an unprecedented action this month, Germany intervened after the car ban had already been approved under the EU legislative process. It demanded that Brussels provide assurances the law would allow the sales of new cars with combustion engines that run on synthetic fuels.

While the last-minute block frustrated many EU capitals, Paris had in turn already irked Berlin by insisting on giving nuclear energy a starring role in European plans to produce more green technology in Europe. Paris and Berlin have traditionally worked together to push forward the EU agenda. But the split hangs over the summit as the leaders meet to discuss EU support for Ukraine and how to boost

economic competitiveness in the face of threats from US and Chinese subsidies.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, has been holding talks with Germany's transport ministry to resolve the dispute over cars. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told reporters before the summit that Germany's talks with the commission were "on the right track". "It is now really only a matter of finding the right way to implement this promise," Scholz said.

Domestic affair reaches EU

While no agreement has yet been reached, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said he hoped the issue would be resolved "over the coming days". Some leaders criticised Germany's 11th-hour move to slam the brakes on a proposal that had already cleared all the hurdles in the traditional EU legislative process.

"The entire architecture of decision-making would fall apart if we all did that," Latvian Prime Minister Arturs Krisjanis Karis said. Germany, which boasts one of the world's biggest car manufacturing industries, blocked the deal signed last year in a move viewed as a product of domestic politics.

Scholz heads a coalition made up of his social democrats and rival Greens and liberals. "It is above all a German affair and an internal debate in German politics that has reached Europe," a senior EU diplomat complained. The synthetic fuels Germany wants an exemption for are still under development, produced using low-carbon electricity. The technology is unproven, but German manufacturers hope it will lead to the extended use of combustion engines.

While Germany led the revolt against the combustion engine ban, it is not alone. It has formed a small alliance with countries including Italy, another major car manufacturer, and eastern European states such as Poland and Hungary. France has not held back from singling out Germany for criticism. Earlier this month, French Transport Minister Clement Beaune accused his German counterpart of leading "a revolt" against the ban on new petrol- or diesel-engine cars.

'Scam' nuclear

Against this tense backdrop, French President Emmanuel Macron will meet Scholz one-on-one on Friday. Another bone of contention they will have to thrash out is France's push for EU recognition that

nuclear power has a role to play in Europe's green future. Nuclear divides the EU, with countries like Austria and Luxembourg strongly against while its supporters include the Czech Republic and Poland. "It's not safe, it's not fast, it's not cheap and it's not climate-friendly. With European flags on it, it would be a scam," Luxembourg's Prime Minister Xavier Bettel said, as he arrived.

On March 16, the European Commission launched new plans to boost clean technology production by ensuring permits are given out faster and projects given better access to funding. Nuclear-powered France wanted atomic energy to be included in the list but failed to achieve that goal.

Nuclear did, however, feature in the proposals announced—but it applies only to fourth-generation reactors that do not yet exist, meaning atomic energy would obtain little of the advantages on offer.

Macron will "focus on the role of nuclear in decarbonisation" during the leaders' meeting, a French government source said. Another senior EU diplomat was less optimistic about what the summit would achieve, given the distance between the capitals. "We don't expect a spectacular breakthrough on any specific issue," the diplomat said. — AFP



DRUZHKIVKA: Ivan Synchina, 48, (right) and his daughter Marta Synchina, 25, pose for a picture in Druzhkivka, eastern Ukraine. — AFP

'Together for now': Ukrainian families serving on the front

DRUZHKIVKA: When Marta Synchina was first sent to Ukraine's war-ravaged east as a military nurse, she and her father -- deployed in the same brigade -- decided not to tell her mother. "Mum didn't know I was here for a long time," the young woman told AFP, seated next to her father, Ivan Synchina, on a bench in Druzhkivka, where she treats wounded fighters. "We didn't say anything at first so she wouldn't cry." But, she said, her mother was calmer knowing the pair were near each other, even after Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February last year. The war sparked a mass rallying of Ukrainian forces, often including two generations of the same family.

Marta joined the military seven months before Moscow sent in its troops. The country's east was already gripped by conflict, but at the time she saw only a few wounded per month. Now, she treats countless more. She had followed her father into the military after initially taking her mother's lead into medicine, training as a midwife.

"Before, my work was about the start of life, and now it is about saving life," she said, tucking her hands into her camouflage jacket against the cold. While Ivan and his wife were proud of their daughter, he said he did not think she would accept having their nearly 18-year-old son also join the armed forces. "There are already too many of us in the military,"

said the 48-year-old, who has served more than seven years and whose brother also volunteered to fight after the February invasion.

'They died together'

Marta had not seen her mother or brother for nearly a year since the war started, but sporadic visits with her father keep both their spirits up. Each time, Ivan said, he is grateful that "we're together, for now". Marta said she knew of several relatives serving: A father and son at the front, a mother and two sons working as drivers, and another nurse whose father and brother are in the infantry battalion of their brigade.

The list is emblematic of how the war has extended its deadly reach into the heart of Ukraine, leaving few untouched by loss as a mounting toll of coffins are sent home from the front. Oleg Khomyuk, 52, and his 25-year-old son Mykyta volunteered for the army together shortly after the invasion. Not long after its first anniversary on February 24, both were killed in a trench near the embattled city of Bakhmut.

Khomyuk covered his son with his body during an attack but a shell exploded nearby, killing them both, said Yuriy Samson, Oleg's brother, at their funeral in Kyiv. The Ukrainian defence ministry posted a photo on Twitter of the pair side by side in fatigues, cradling rifles. "They died together," the ministry wrote.

It's a fate Volodymyr Chaikovsky, 54, tries not to dwell on. He serves in the same brigade as his 25-year-old son, also named Volodymyr. "Of course I worry about my son," he said, seated next to the younger man at the dust-covered patio table of an abandoned home not far from the front lines near Lyman. — AFP

Trump jury fails to meet, indictment decision delayed

NEW YORK: The drama surrounding Donald Trump's possible indictment over hush money paid to a porn star took a new twist Wednesday, after a New York grand jury failed to convene as expected—pushing back a decision, potentially into next week. Speculation that a historic indictment of a former president may be imminent has been building ever since Trump himself announced he was expecting to be arrested. But Wednesday's grand jury session was called off, unnamed law enforcement officials told multiple US outlets, without giving a reason. The New York Times reported that such interruptions are not unusual.

With barricades outside Trump Tower and police on high alert, New York has been holding its breath over an expected indictment for days—with tension peaking on Tuesday, the day Trump said he would be arrested. He wasn't. The jury panel usually meets on Thursdays too but Insider, which broke the news of the canceled meeting, quoted one source as saying it may not gather again this week, meaning the earliest a decision might come is Monday. The 76-year-old Republican would become the first former or sitting president to ever be charged with a crime if the panel eventually votes to indict. The unprecedented move would send shockwaves through the 2024 election campaign, in which Trump is running to regain office.

It would also raise the prospect of a former leader of the free world being arrested, booked, fingerprinted and possibly handcuffed. The Times has reported that Trump favors the idea of being paraded in front of cameras by law enforcement, in what is known as a perp walk. Prosecutor Alvin Bragg likely wants to avoid any spectacle that could rile up Trump's base.

Bragg formed the grand jury—a citizens' panel tasked with deciding whether there is a case to answer—in January following his investigation into \$130,000 paid to Stormy Daniels in 2016. Grand juries operate behind closed doors to prevent perjury or witness tampering before trials, making it virtually impossible to follow their proceedings.

A spokesperson for Bragg told AFP that she couldn't comment "on grand jury matters." Even once the panel takes a decision, it is unclear when Bragg would announce any charges. Legal experts have suggested it could take some time before Trump, currently at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Flor-



NEW YORK: Anti-Trump demonstrators protest outside the Manhattan District Attorney's office in New York City. Former US President Donald Trump is expected to be indicted over hush money paid to a porn actress, with Trump calling for mass demonstrations if he is charged. — AFP

ida, is arraigned before a Manhattan Criminal Court judge. The payment to Daniels was made weeks before the 2016 election, allegedly to stop her from going public about a liaison she says she had with Trump years earlier. Trump denies the affair and has called the inquiry a "witch hunt."

Trump calls for protests

Trump's ex-lawyer-turned-adversary Michael Cohen, who has testified before the grand jury, says he made the payment on his boss's behalf and was later reimbursed. If not properly accounted for, the payment could result in a misdemeanor charge for falsifying business records, experts say.

That might be raised to a felony if the false accounting was intended to cover up a second crime, such as a campaign finance violation, which is punishable by up to four years behind bars. Analysts say that argument is untested and would be difficult to prove in court. Any jail time is far from certain.

An indictment would begin a lengthy process that could last several months, if not more. The case would face a mountain of legal issues as it moves toward jury selection and pose a security headache for Secret Service agents who protect Trump. Trump has called for demonstrations if he is charged, fueling fears of unrest similar to the January 6, 2021 riot at the US Capitol, but so far protests have been small and muted. New York police have erected barricades outside the courthouse and Trump Tower. — AFP