

## International

# Pentagon issues new limits on transgender troops, surgery

## Pentagon denies US wants 'cost + 50%' from allies for bases

**WASHINGTON:** The Pentagon yesterday announced a new policy that will bar enlistment of new recruits who have undergone a gender transition or intend to do so, and require most individuals to serve in their birth sex. Under President Donald Trump's new rules, set to go into effect on April 12 after the Supreme Court allowed them to go forward, only transgender troops serving in their birth gender will be able to stay in the military after that date, and they will be barred from taking hormones or getting transition surgery.

The move was a reversal from a policy enacted under Trump's Democratic predecessor Barack Obama, who allowed military recruits to serve in their preferred sex rather than just the one they were assigned at birth. The latest action was swiftly condemned by Democrats and civil rights advocates. "The Trump administration is determined to bring back 'don't ask, don't tell,' a policy that forced service members to choose between serving their country and telling the truth about who they were," said Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center, an independent research institute.

Trump had announced the new ban by tweet in July 2017, pointing to the "tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail." After a flurry of legal battles, the Pentagon's policy is not a complete ban. Transgender troops have until next month's deadline to receive hormonal treatment or surgery, and service members who have already joined the military in their preferred gender

will be able to continue to serve in that gender.

After April 12, however, no one who has transitioned to another gender or been diagnosed with "gender dysphoria" will be able to enlist - and currently enlisted troops will thereafter have to serve in their birth gender and renounce transition treatment. Around 9,000 people who self-identify as transgender individuals currently serve in the armed forces, out of 1.3 million in the active duty troops population, a Pentagon official said on condition of anonymity. Around 1,000 say they have transitioned to another gender or would like to do so. "Persons with a history of gender dysphoria - a serious medical condition - and who have undergone certain medical treatment for gender dysphoria, such as cross-sex hormone therapy or sex reassignment surgery, or are unwilling or unable to meet the standards associated with their biological sex, could adversely impact unit readiness and combat effectiveness," a Pentagon statement read. "For this reason, such persons are presumptively disqualified for service without a waiver."

### 'Cost-plus-50 percent'

In another development, Acting Pentagon chief Patrick Shanahan denied yesterday reports that the United States has a "cost-plus-50 percent" formula for allies to pay for the US military presence on their soil. Earlier this week, Bloomberg reported that President Donald Trump is pushing the formula as a basis for Germany, Japan and other



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump meets with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar in the Oval Office of the White House yesterday. —AFP

allies to compensate Washington for US troops based in their countries. But Shanahan told the Senate Armed Services Committee that such reports were "erroneous." "We won't do cost-plus-50 percent," he said in a hearing. He said US partners should pay their "fair share" when they can, but there was no such business-like formula. "We're not going to run a business and we're not

going to run a charity," Shanahan said.

"Payment comes in lots of different forms. At the end of the day, people need to carry their fair share," he said. "Not everyone can contribute. It is not about cost-plus-50 percent." Shanahan did not say whether Trump, who built a multibillion-dollar fortune in the real estate business, himself has advocated the formula. —Agencies

## Love, corruption and car: What you need to know about Slovakia

**BRATISLAVA:** Slovakia, which kicks off a two-round presidential election tomorrow, spent decades behind the Iron Curtain before joining the European Union, the euro-zone and NATO. Last year's murder of a journalist probing high-level corruption led to the largest anti-government protests since communist times. Here are five things to know about the central European country of 5.4 million people.

### Car-driven economy

With the world's highest per capita auto production, Slovakia is home to Volkswagen, Kia Motors, PSA Peugeot Citroen, and Jaguar Land Rover car plants. Last year, more than a million cars rolled off its assembly lines, while exports totaled 3.7 billion euros (\$4.3 billion). Overall, the car-making sector has a 44 percent share of Slovakia's total industrial production. The economy is expected to grow 4.5 percent this year, from 4.2 percent in 2018. The parliament also approved a balanced state budget for 2019 — a first in the country's modern history.

### Tourist paradise

Though geographically one of the smaller EU members, Slovakia boasts nine national parks, more than 6,000 caves and 180 castles, among other treasures. It also has nearly 60 well-preserved wooden churches - built without a single nail - many of them UNESCO world heritage sites. The oldest is the 15th-century Church of St Francis of Assisi in the eastern village of Hervartov. Slovakia's mountains are a favorite ski location in the region.

### Murdered journalist

Investigative reporter Jan Kuciak and his fiancée were gunned

down in February 2018 as he was about to publish a story on alleged ties between Slovak politicians and the Italian mafia. His murder and explosive report, published posthumously, plunged the country into crisis, raising concerns about media freedom and corruption and sparking protests that forced the government to resign. To date, four people have been charged in the double murder. Last year, Slovakia earned its worst corruption score since 2013. It placed 57th - down three spots from 2017 - on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks 180 nations for public-sector corruption.

### 'Epicentre of Love'

According to the World Record Academy, Slovakia boasts the longest love poem. The 2,900-line "Marina", written in 1844, recounts the doomed love between poet Andrej Sladkovic and his muse Maria Pischlova. They were star-crossed lovers but unlike Romeo and Juliet their tragic romance is a true story. Marina's parents shunned the poor poet and forced her to marry a wealthy gingerbread maker. The house where Marina lived in the medieval silver mining town of Banska Stiavnica is today called the "Epicentre of Love". The exhibition includes a "love-o-meter" that measures the strength of a couple's affection.

### Peaceful split

The Slovak Republic was part of Czechoslovakia, which declared independence from the dying Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 and was home to Czechs and Slovaks. It remained a stable democracy until dismemberment in 1938. Under Nazi occupation Slovakia became a puppet state under the regime of Father Jozef Tiso, who agreed to send tens of thousands of Jews to World War II death camps.

Czechoslovakia was liberated and a republic restored in 1945. Three years later, following a Communist coup, the country fell under Soviet domination. The Velvet Revolution toppled totalitarian rule in 1989, and in 1993 Czechoslovakia split peacefully into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Michal Kovac became Slovakia's first head of state. Presidential elections have since been held in 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014. —AFP

## 8 killed in Brazil school shooting; 2 suspects dead

**SAO PAULO:** Two former pupils shot dead eight people, most of them students and staff, at a high school near Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Wednesday before turning their weapons on themselves, authorities said. The two assailants burst into the school grounds in the early morning, armed with a .38 caliber revolver and a "medieval weapon that looked like a bow and arrows," military police Colonel Marcelo Sales said.

After shooting at students in the yard, the killers headed to the language center where several pupils were hiding and "committed suicide in a corridor," he said. Brazil is one of the most violent countries in the world, and the victims in this case were five students aged 15 to 17, two school officials aged 38 and 59, and a 51-year-old carwash owner who was shot by the attackers before they arrived at the school, said Sao Paulo's Public Security Secretary Joao Pires de Campos.

Eleven other people were wounded in the shooting at the Raul Brasil public school in Suzano, on the outskirts of Sao Paulo in southeast Brazil. "It's the saddest thing I've ever seen," said Sao Paulo State Governor Joao Doria. Tearful residents later held a street mass near the school, where flowers and candles commemorated the dead. President Jair Bolsonaro expressed his sympathies on Twitter to "the families of this inhumane attack," describing it as "a monstrosity and enormous cowardice." The two assailants, who wore hoods, were identified as former pupils aged 17 and 25. —AFP