



Immigrants in US both hopeful and wary of Biden

## Fifth body found in Norway mudslide, five still missing

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This combination of file pictures shows a group of Republican senators led by veteran lawmaker Ted Cruz, who said they will not vote to certify Joe Biden's election win. —AFP

# Dozen senators oppose Biden certification

## Pence encouraging lawmakers to debate voting irregularities

WASHINGTON: A group of Republican senators led by veteran lawmaker Ted Cruz said Saturday they will challenge Joe Biden's election win - the latest last-ditch move to support Donald Trump's efforts to undermine the vote. The initiative, which appears certain to fail, flies in the face of rulings in dozens of courts and the findings by officials in several key states that there were no widespread voting problems.

The Republicans' statement, signed by Cruz and six other current senators along with four senators-elect, asserts that "allegations of fraud and irregularities in the 2020 election exceed any in our lifetimes". The group said that when Congress convenes in a joint session on Wednesday - for what normally would be a pro-forma certification of Biden's victory - they will demand the creation of a special commission to conduct an "emergency 10-day audit" of the election results.

The statement says individual states could then convene special legislative sessions and potentially revise their vote totals. "An attempt to steal a landslide win. Can't let it happen!" Trump tweeted Saturday. Posting a list of the 11 senators, Trump added: "And after they see the facts, plenty more to come... Our Country will love them for it!"

They join Senator Josh Hawley of Missouri, who said earlier that he planned to raise objections on Wednesday. A Republican member of the House of Representatives, Louie Gohmert, has also announced his plan to oppose certification, and more than 100 House Republicans reportedly will back his challenge.

Gohmert sought to further raise the stakes with a lawsuit that would have given Vice President Mike Pence - traditionally in a ceremonial role in Wednesday's session - the power to overturn the election result. Pence opposed that effort, and a federal judge in Texas on Friday rejected the suit. On Saturday, a federal appeals court upheld that dismissal. The Hawley and Gohmert challenges will ensure that Congress must meet to hear the complaints.

### 'The Electoral College has spoken'

The Congress sessions, sure to be contentious, will play out against a backdrop of pro-Trump rallies in Washington next week. As with Trump's other attempts to reverse his election defeat, the latest political maneuvering appears doomed. Democrats control the House, and many Republicans are expected to vote Wednesday for certifica-

tion. The 11 senators conceded that most Democrats and "more than a few Republicans" would likely oppose their initiative.

Among them is Republican Senator Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, a battleground state that helped Biden to victory. Its result is expected to be among those contested on Wednesday. "A fundamental, defining feature of a democratic republic is the right of the people to elect their own leaders," Toomey tweeted. "The effort by Sens Hawley, Cruz, and others to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election in swing states like Pennsylvania directly undermines this right."

He added: "I voted for President Trump and endorsed him for re-election. But, on Wednesday, I intend to vigorously defend our form of government by opposing this effort to disenfranchise millions of voters in my state and others." Responding to Toomey late Saturday night Hawley criticized the "shameless personal attacks" and urged senators to avoid "making unfounded claims about the intentions of our fellow senators".

"I never claim to speak for another senator, but I do speak for my constituents when they raise legitimate con-

cerns about issues as important as the fairness of our elections," he said in a message to the Senate GOP conference, first reported by Politico.

Earlier, Utah Senator Mitt Romney, a vocal Trump opponent, dismissed his colleagues' rationale as "nonsense". "The egregious ploy to reject electors may enhance the political ambition of some, but dangerously threatens our Democratic Republic," Romney said. "Members of Congress who would substitute their own partisan judgment for that of the courts do not enhance public trust, they imperil it," he added. "Has ambition so eclipsed principle?"

Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell also urged fellow Republicans to vote to certify and avoid a divisive political brawl. Pence, however, is reportedly encouraging lawmakers to debate the baseless accusations of voting irregularities. "Vice President Pence shares the concerns of millions of Americans about voter fraud and irregularities in the last election," his chief of staff Marc Short said in a statement to US news outlets. Biden won in the all-important Electoral College by a vote of 306 to 232. Cruz is considered a likely 2024 presidential candidate. Hawley is also said to be positioning himself for a 2024 run - and so is Pence. —AFP

## Medics warn of 'catastrophe' in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Lebanon's hospitals are being overwhelmed by coronavirus cases, medics warned Saturday, as infection rates surge in the wake of end of year holidays. The national COVID-19 task force met Saturday and recommended a three-week lockdown, its head Petra Khoury said, a decision supported by the parliamentary health committee. Lebanon, with a population of around six million, has recorded 183,888 coronavirus cases, including 1,466 deaths, since February. On Thursday, it hit a daily record of more than 3,500 new cases.

In what he termed a "catastrophic" situation, Sleiman Haroun, head of the Syndicate of Private Hospitals, said "the 50 private hospitals in the country receiving patients with COVID-19 are now almost full". They have a total of 850 beds, including 300 in intensive care units, Haroun said. "Patients are now waiting in line... waiting for a bed to be free," he told AFP.

After imposing tight restrictions in November to combat the spread of the pandemic, the government relaxed rules. Ahead of the December holidays, the government pushed back a nighttime curfew to 3:00 am and allowed nightclubs and bars to reopen. This prompted criticism from health professionals who warned bed occupancy in intensive care units was running critically low. "The problem is that once a patient is admitted to intensive care, they stay there for three weeks," said Khoury.

The "gatherings and private parties" of the



BEIRUT: People celebrate the New Year at a pub on Jan 1, 2021. —AFP

December holiday season have fed a dramatic rise in cases, Khoury said. "Over the past three weeks, the occupancy rate of intensive care units has increased by 10 percent," pushing the occupancy of hospital beds in Beirut to over 90 percent of capacity.

Lebanon has been grappling with its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war. The Lebanese pound has lost more than two thirds of its value against the dollar on the black market, leading prices to skyrocket. More than half of the population is trapped in poverty,

according to the United Nations. Beirut was also hit by an Aug 4 explosion at its port that killed more than 200 people and devastated swathes of the capital.

"We have been asked by several hospitals not to transfer patients to them," Lebanese Red Cross president Georges Kettaneh told AFP. Instead, the Red Cross was taking patients to the Bekaa in the east or Nabatiyah in the south. Lebanon is expecting to receive its first shipment of coronavirus vaccines in February from Pfizer-BioNTech. —AFP

## Gunmen kill 11 Hazara miners in southwest Pak

QUETTA: Gunmen in southwestern Pakistan have killed at least 11 workers at a remote coalmine, officials said yesterday. The victims of the attack in Baluchistan province were from the minority Shiite Hazara community. "Dead bodies of the 11 miners have been taken to a local hospital," Khalid Durrani, a government official in the area, told AFP.

Ethnic Hazara make up most of the Shiite population in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan - the country's largest and poorest region, rife with ethnic, sectarian and separatist insurgencies. They are often targeted by Sunni militants, who consider them heretics, though it was unclear why the attackers targeted the coal mine specifically.

The attack, before dawn on Sunday, took place in the far-flung and mountainous Machh area - 60 km southeast of Quetta - while the

miners slept, Durrani said. A security official told AFP the attackers first separated the miners, tied their hands and feet, took them out into the hills and later killed them. Both Durrani and the security official said the victims belonged to the Hazara community.

Durrani said the mine was deep in the mountains. Abid Salim, a top government official in the area, told AFP "they tied their hands and feet and brutally slaughtered them with some sharp instrument". Some of the victims were beheaded, he added. The assailants fled after the attack. Both officials said police and members of the local paramilitary force were on the scene, where a search operation had been launched to trace the attackers.

Dozens of local people and family members briefly blocked a main road in the area, demanding protec-



Members of the Shiite Hazara community stand around the dead bodies after gunmen killed 11 workers of the community in the mountainous Machh area in Baluchistan province yesterday. —AFP

tion. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack. In a tweet, Prime Minister Imran Khan condemned "the killing of 11 innocent coal miners in Machh" as a "cowardly inhumane act of terrorism". Liaqat Shahwani, a spokesman

for the provincial government, confirmed the incident and told private TV channel Geo that it was an act of terrorism. Though Pakistan's mines are notorious for poor safety standards, such attacks against miners are rare. —AFP

## Five women killed, kids hurt in Yemen wedding hall blast

HODEIDA, Yemen: Five women were killed and children were among the wounded when a projectile exploded at a New Year's Day wedding party in Yemen's Red Sea city of Hodeida, the latest atrocity in the war-torn nation. The Saudi-backed government and Houthi rebels blamed each other for the suspected artillery shell attack Friday night near Hodeida's airport, a frontline between their forces on the edge of the key Houthi-held port.

It came just two days after at least 26 people were killed in blasts that rocked the airport of the southern city of Aden as government ministers got off a plane there. In Hodeida, "the explosion struck at the entrance to a complex of several wedding halls," a witness told AFP, as a party was being held for a newly-married rebel supporter. Local officials said five women were killed, and children were among the seven others wounded, when the shell hit the wedding venue.

General Sadek Douid, the government representative in a UN-sponsored joint commission overseeing a truce, condemned it as "an odious crime committed by the Houthis against civilians". Hodeida's Houthi-appointed governor, Mohammed Ayache, said on Al-Masirah television, which is run by the Shiite rebels, that "the forces of aggression never hesitate to blame others for their crimes". The Houthis called for an international investigation into the explosion, their news agency said.

### Humanitarian catastrophe

Tens of thousands, mostly civilians, have been killed and millions displaced in Yemen's grinding six-year war, which has triggered what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian disaster. The rebels, based in northern Yemen, have controlled the capital Sanaa since 2014. Government forces launched an offensive in June 2018 to retake Hodeida, the main entry point for humanitarian aid to the Arab world's poorest country.

A ceasefire has been partially observed in Hodeida since December of 2018, but there have been new attacks in recent weeks. On December 4 at least eight people were killed in bomb attacks on an industrial complex in Hodeida, a few days after the bombardment of residential areas killed five children and three women.

Houthi military camps were targeted in air raids by the Saudi-led coalition backing the government, in retaliation for an attack on a Saudi oil tanker that was blamed on the rebels. In the face of the highly volatile situation, Yemen's new power-sharing government vowed Thursday to restore stability, a day after the deadly blasts on the airport tarmac in Aden, the south's main city. —AFP



HODEIDA, Yemen: A damaged van is pictured following an explosion at a nearby wedding hall during the night in this Yemeni Red Sea city on Saturday. —AFP