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Christine Blasey Ford's testimony: Women need to run for office because powerful men will fight to maintain privilege

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On 27 September, many American women watched Christine Blasey Ford recount her vivid memories of her alleged sexual assault by Brett Kavanaugh to the white, male-dominated, Republican-controlled judiciary committee in the US Senate. Later that afternoon, Kavanaugh asserted his innocence, through outbursts of anger, tears of rageful indignity, and vituperative attacks on Democratic members. The circus taught American women of all demographics an important lesson: Our bodies, our lives, and our dignity will not stand in the way of the aspirations of the powerful men who harm us or the men who protect them.

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Brett Kavanaugh's accuser Christine Blasey Ford during her testimony at the US Senate. AP content/uploads/2018/09/ford30.jpg

For Indian women, in the midst of their own struggle against sexual harassment by powerful men, the lessons may be important. The outcome was a foregone conclusion. Republican men signaled before, during and after Ford's testimony, that the truth was irrelevant. Republican Orin Hatch (a senator from Utah) opined that even if the allegations of a foiled rape attempt were true "I think it would be hard for senators to not

consider who the judge is today." He then asked and answered a rhetorical question: "Is this judge a really good man? And he is. And by any measure he is."

Mitch McConnell, the Republican majority leader in the Senate, whose anti-democratic efforts to stack the US judiciary with partisan apparatchiks is now legendary, repeatedly said Kavanaugh will be confirmed no matter what.

As the November 2018 mid-term elections near, Republicans wanted to avoid the image of white men attacking a victim of assault. They outsourced their constitutional duty in the hearing by hiring Rachel Mitchell, a female prosecutor specialising in sex crimes from Maricopa County, Arizona to question Ford in effort to poke holes in her story. The optics of a special prosecutor of sexual predators interrogating Ford was jolting. They abandoned using Mitchell to question Kavanaugh and opted instead to make indignant speeches about the horrors besetting Kavanaugh and his family.

The charade taught us that a man's word will always trump those of a woman no matter how credible we are, and how credible our accounts are. Ford, after all cleared a polygraph exam and called for an FBI investigation. Kavanaugh repeatedly refused to be similarly accommodating, which is odd if he were innocent as he alleged.

Before, during and after her testimony, the chorus of rape-shamers began heaping their opprobrium upon Ford and attributing her coming forward as evidence of a deep, Left-

wing conspiracy to undermine the judge. (I wish half of those conspiracies were true

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Democratic Party.) Many questioned her delay in reporting the attack, even though she reported it to her health-care provider in 2012. To other women out there hiding their attacks in shame, this was yet another lesson: You come forward and name your assailant at your own peril. You—not your attacker—will be blamed for myriad, maddening reasons.

But for me, the most rage-making aspect of this spectacle was the constant reassertion of the privilege of elite masculinity. Kavanaugh made frequent references to his tenure at Yale when questioned. (former president Bill Clinton also went to Yale and is notorious for exploiting his positions of power to extract sex from subordinate women.) Kavanaugh referred to the elite circle of preparatory school students in which he socialised. We learned of his excessive, under-age drinking and country-club escapades. We also saw him cry, stammer, engage in fits of rage when questioned. Men can behave in any way they want without consequence, even when seeking to be a justice on the United States Supreme Court. While women must discipline our bodies and our voice, no such requirements are placed upon men.

What became terribly clear was that the Republican Party had thrown its weight behind a man who dissembled repeatedly, refused to answer simple questions, and became combative when questioned. His noxious behaviour rendered him ill-suited to be a reality television judge. Surely the Republicans could have found another judge who would advance their agenda of stacking the court to roll back the rights of women, minorities and LGBTQI while expanding the voice of big business in American politics who is not accused of being a serial sexual assailant? (since Ford came forward, two other women made similar claims about Kavanaugh.)

I suspect that the reason for the intransigence of Republican men defending this indefensible man is simple: What was on trial was not the veracity of Ford's claims; rather the inherent male privileges that women like Ford and others in the #MeToo movement are fighting to destabilise. And for that these men in power will fight until the end.

For women, the path forward is clear. White men are only 30 percent of the United States and yet they dominate federal and local offices. We need to stop voting for men thinking that they will serve our interests. They will not. Progressive women need to run for office.

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They are fighting for their privileges they did nothing to earn. We are fighting for our lives. And to paraphrase Midy Aponte, if they won't give us a seat at the table, then we are going to bring our own chair.

C Christine Fair is the author of Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War (OUP, 2014) and In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (forthcoming 2018).

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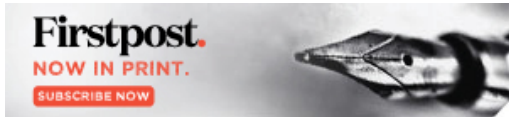
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By Gabriella Borter

(Reuters) - A pair of tornadoes killed at least 23 people on Sunday in Alabama, causing infrastructure damage with at least 150 miles per hour (241 kph) winds in the deadliest twister to hit the United States in almost six years.

The following is a list of some of the deadliest single tornadoes and tornado outbreaks in the United States over the last quarter century:

- A so-called Super Outbreak of 362 tornadoes hit the southeastern United States over three days in April 2011, killing an estimated 321 people, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Three of the tornadoes were rated EF-5, the top of the five-step Enhanced Fujita scale that meteorologists use to measure tornado strength. The system struck Alabama the hardest, wrecking Tuscaloosa and Birmingham and causing

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- The deadliest tornado to hit the United States in the last several decades struck Joplin, Missouri on May 22, 2011 and killed at least 158 people, NOAA said. Damage from the storm exceeded \$3 billion, the most of any single tornado in U.S. history.
- The so-called Super Tuesday Outbreak of 87 tornadoes in the southeastern United States on Feb. 5, 2008, killed 57 people, according to NOAA. It had the longest footprint of any tornado in U.S. history, according to private forecaster Accuweather, touching down continuously for 122 miles (196 km) through Arkansas.
- A tornado outbreak in the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, metropolitan area on May 3, 1999, spawned 61 tornadoes and killed 55 people, with one single tornado responsible for 36 deaths, according to the Weather Channel.
- An outbreak of seven tornadoes in central Florida in February 1998 killed 42 people and injured 260 others in the state's deadliest tornado outbreak since 1962, the National Weather Service reported.
- In April 2014, an outbreak of dozens of tornadoes stirred up by a powerful storm system hit the Southeast and Midwest over a three-day period and killed 32 people in Iowa, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee, according to NOAA.
- A tornado killed 24 people on May 20, 2013 in Moore, Oklahoma. The tornado had winds over 200 miles per hour (322 kph), giving it the most severe rating of EF-5. It lasted about 40 minutes, and caused billions of dollars worth of damage, according to NOAA.

(Compiled by Gabriella Borter in New York; Editing by Scott Malone and Grant McCool)

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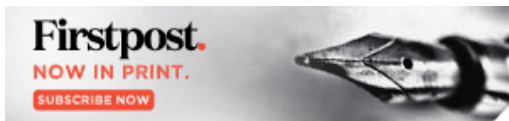
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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Three U.S. House committees sent a letter to the White House and State Department on Monday asking for details on President Donald Trump's communications with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The House Intelligence, Foreign Affairs and Government Oversight committees said in a statement they wrote to acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo seeking documents and interviews on Trump's communications with Putin.

(Reporting by David Alexander; Editing by Lisa Lambert)

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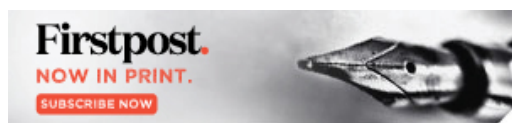
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By Deisy Buitrago, Angus Berwick and Carlos Jasso

CARACAS, Venezuela (Reuters) - Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido returned to his country on Monday after flouting a court-imposed travel ban by touring Latin American countries to boost support for his campaign to tighten regional pressure on President Nicolas Maduro.

A crowd of cheering supporters greeted Guaido and his wife as they stepped into the Maiquetia airport's arrivals hall, and then sped to an opposition rally in eastern Caracas where thousands had gathered to welcome him.

The return of Guaido, recognised by most Western nations as Venezuela's legitimate head of state, signals that Maduro's adversaries have at least temporarily avoided the arrest of a leader who has united the traditionally fractured opposition.

But it will also lift pressure on Maduro to act against Guaido as his authority continues to wane and the country's economic meltdown fuels malnutrition and hunger.

"Horn has been horn and it will not die - things are going well," Guaido told the crowd at a Mercedes district. "We are going to celebrate this small victory today."

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He announced plans to meet on Tuesday with public employees, who have been historically pressured by the ruling Socialist Party to join pro-government rallies, as well as for a major march on Saturday.

Guaido secretly left Venezuela for Colombia, in violation of a Supreme Court order, to coordinate efforts there on Feb. 23 to send humanitarian aid into Venezuela to alleviate widespread shortages of food and medicine.

But troops blocked convoys of aid trucks sent from Colombia and Brazil, leading to clashes that killed at least six people along the Brazilian border, rights groups say.

From Colombia, he travelled to Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Paraguay to shore up Latin American support for a transition government that would precede free and fair elections.

On Sunday, he departed by plane from the Ecuadorean coastal town of Salinas but had not appeared publicly since. Venezuelan media outlets reported that he flew from Panama City to Caracas.

He had kept details of his trip under wraps and he arrived without prior notice, meeting ambassadors for European countries at the airport.

Guaido calls Maduro a usurper and says his presidency is illegitimate after he secured re-election last year in a vote widely considered a sham. Maduro retains control of state institutions and the apparent loyalty of senior figures in the armed forces.

Asked by a reporter how he was received at the airport by immigration authorities, who could have prevented his entry for violating the travel ban, Guaido said they addressed him as president - a swipe at Maduro, who calls him a U.S. puppet.

"Here's my passport, safe and sound," Guaido said, showing it to the crowd.

The Information Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"FACE JUSTICE"

Maduro, who denies there is a humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, has said Guaido's arrest depends on the justice system.

"He can't just come and go. He will have to face justice, and justice prohibited him from leaving the country," he told ABC News last week.

Protesters in Caracas on Monday, wearing dressed in white and chanting "Freedom," said arresting Guaido would spark new demonstrations.

"If the regime has even a little bit of conscience, they should not arrest Guaido because people truly would not put up with it," said Franklin Lopez, a 60-year-old administrator.

The United States has warned Maduro of the consequences of arresting Guaido and the U.S. Treasury imposed new sanctions on Friday targeting Venezuelan military officials.

After the military blocked the aid convoys, Guaido proposed that "all options be kept open" to topple Maduro, but foreign military intervention is seen as unlikely and his international backers are instead using a mix of sanctions and diplomacy.

"President Guaido safely returned to Venezuela today," U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton said on Twitter. "The United States fully supports Guaido and the National Assembly. His safety must be guaranteed. The world is watching."

The government has jailed dozens of opposition leaders and activists for seeking to overthrow Maduro through violent street demonstrations in 2014 and 2017, including Guaido's mentor, Leopoldo Lopez, who remains under house arrest.

Turning away from previous hopes of a swift end to Maduro's government, Guaido said on Sunday it would be a "long and difficult process."

He has offered future amnesties to state officials and soldiers who recognise Guaido, though the military has largely remained loyal to Maduro despite Colombia's migration agency reporting several hundred desertions since Feb. 23.

(Additional reporting by Vivian Sequera, Fabian Cambero, and Shaylim Valderrama in Caracas, Marco Bello in Bogota, and Efrain Otero in Maiquetia; Writing by Angus Berwick and Brian Ellsworth; Editing by Clarence Fernandez, Susan Thomas and James Dalgleish)

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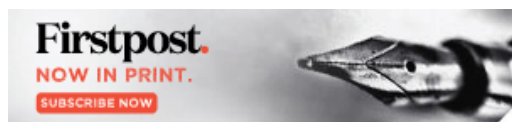
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(Reuters) - A CommutAir plane, a 50-seat Embraer ERJ145 jet, flying from Newark to Presque Isle landed on the grass adjacent to a runway at the Northern Maine Regional Airport, injuring one pilot as well as three passengers, the Federal Aviation Administration and the company said on Monday.

The Ohio-based regional carrier, in which No.3 U.S. airline operator United Continental Holdings Inc owns a minority interest, said the injuries of the crew and the passengers were minor and they were being attended to by emergency personnel.

There were 28 passengers and three crew members on board the aircraft, which landed at

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The FAA said it would investigate the incident.

(Reporting by Ankit Ajmera in Bengaluru; Editing by Maju Samuel)

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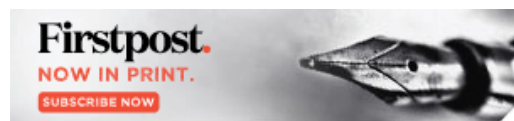
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