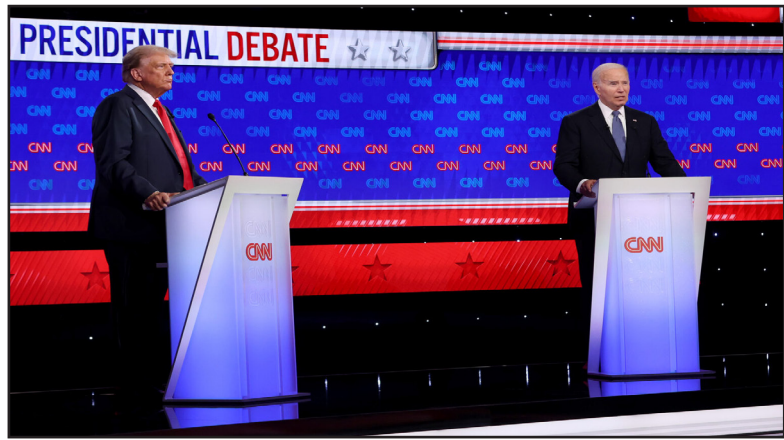


Biden, Trump Trade Insults, Accusations of Lying in Presidential Debate



U.S. President Joe Biden, right, and Republican presidential candidate, former U.S. president Donald Trump, participate in the CNN Presidential Debate at the CNN Studios on June 27, 2024 in Atlanta, Georgia.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) — U.S. President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump have engaged in a heated exchange of insults during their first debate ahead of the upcoming presidential election.

The presidential debate on Thursday night turned intensely personal as Biden and Trump exchanged sharp barbs. The two candidates clashed on their records, with the economy, abortion, and immigration taking center stage, but it was the personal insults that dominated the headlines.

The debate, a rare face-off between a sitting and former president, unfolded at CNN headquarters in Atlanta, without a live audience.

The candidates did not shake hands,

and their microphones were muted while the other spoke.

President Joe Biden's allies scrambled to contain the damage from his feeble debate performance with Republican rival Donald Trump, as some Democrats considered whether they could replace him as their candidate for the 2024 U.S. election.

Biden's verbal stumbles and occasionally meandering responses in the debate heightened voter concerns that the 81-year-old incumbent might be not be fit to serve another four-year term.

Biden, the oldest U.S. president to ever hold office, faced only token opposition during the party's months-long nominating contest, and he has secured enough support to guarantee

his spot as the Democratic nominee for the Nov. 5 election.

Former president Trump, 78, likewise overcame his intra-party challengers early in the year, setting the stage for a long and bitter general election fight.

The Trump campaign released a video on Friday highlighting Biden's stumbles. One adviser, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the debate would help them compete in Democratic-leaning states like Virginia and Minnesota.

Questions about Trump's fitness for office have arisen also over his conviction last month in New York for covering up hush money payments to a porn star, his efforts to overturn the 2020 election and his chaotic term in office.

But despite a litany of falsehoods and deflections from Trump during the debate, the focus afterwards was squarely on Biden.

The 90-minute debate at CNN headquarters in Atlanta took place far earlier in the campaign than any modern presidential debate, more than four months before the election.

That could mitigate the damage for Biden, as the memory of his performance fades and news events generate fresh headlines.

Trump, for instance, is scheduled to be sentenced in New York on July 11, just days before his party convenes to formally nominate him. He still faces three other criminal indictments, though none appears likely to reach trial before November.

Russia to Respond to U.S. Drone Operations Over Black Sea



A U.S. MQ-9 drone is on display during an air show at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) — Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov has directed the general staff of the Russian armed forces to propose a plan responding to U.S. drone operations over the Black Sea, the Russian Ministry of Defense said Friday on social media.

The ministry highlighted an increase in the frequency of U.S. strategic drone flights over the Black Sea, which are conducting reconnaissance and targeting for high-precision weaponry supplied to Ukrainian forces by Western countries.

These drone flights heighten the risk of incidents involving Russian Aerospace Forces' aircraft, thereby increasing the likelihood of direct confrontation between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia, said the ministry.

"This indicates a growing involvement of the United States and NATO countries in the Ukraine conflict on the side of the Kiev regime," it said, adding that "NATO countries will bear responsibility for these actions."

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that changes may be made to the Russian nuclear doctrine in light of the Ukrainian conflict.

Ryabkov said "further clarifications" would probably be made to the doctrine to reflect the experience from the Ukrainian conflict "when the classic old interpretation of nuclear deterrence did not work properly," RIA Novosti reported.

Russia is ready to do everything to ensure its security, and "Western provocateurs" must understand this, Ryabkov said.

Thousands of Doctors Go on Strike in England Ahead of Elections



Junior doctors on the picket line outside St Thomas' Hospital, London, during their continuing dispute over pay, Thursday June 27, 2024.

LONDON (AP) — Thousands of doctors in England are staging their 11th walkout on Thursday in a long-running dispute with the government over pay and working conditions, disrupting hospital services just days before the UK general election.

The five-day strike by junior doctors — those in the early years of their careers — shines a spotlight on the troubles besetting the chronically underfunded National Health Service, Britain's state-run public health system, a topic that is a top concern for voters going to the polls on July 4.

Junior doctors, who make up about half of the total medical workforce and form the backbone of hospital and clinic care, have

been locked in the pay dispute with the government since late 2022. They went on strike for six days in January — the longest in NHS history — and hospitals had to cancel tens of thousands of appointments and operations.

The latest strike began Thursday and ends on Tuesday, just two days before voters cast their ballots for a new House of Commons.

The British Medical Association, the doctors' union, says their pay has dropped by a quarter over the last 15 years and has called for a 35% pay raise. The union says newly qualified doctors earn about 15 pounds (\$19) an hour — the UK minimum wage is just over 10 pounds an hour — though salaries rise rapidly after the first year.

Dr. Sumi Manirajan, deputy chair of the junior doctors committee in the union, said years of underinvestment has resulted in young doctors leaving in droves to countries such as Australia that offer better pay, with those left behind seriously overworked and underpaid.

Manirajan, who recently graduated and works in obstetrics and gynecology, said she sees many women waiting for more than a year for routine procedures.

Dr. Shivam Sharma, who was among colleagues chanting on the picket line outside St. Thomas' Hospital in central London on Thursday, said the state of Britain's health service is "terrifying."

The Conservative government says it gave the doctors pay raises of between 8.1% and 10.3% last year and that it was a generous settlement. It maintained that authorities can't make a pay offer during the preelection period but the union refused to call off the strikes.

Manirajan said it was unfortunate that the government chose to call an election while knowing that the dispute was unresolved.

The doctors' union said it was ready to talk, and it has already had some discussions with the opposition Labour Party, which has a considerable lead in polls. Labour leader Keir Starmer told reporters Thursday that he would open discussions with junior doctors on "day one" if he is elected.

Bolivian Police Arrest Coup Leader; President Appreciates Public Support



Rebel military leader General Juan Jose Zuniga is arrested after a coup attempt in La Paz, Bolivia, on June 26, 2024.

LA PAZ (Reuters) — Bolivian authorities have arrested General Juan Jose Zuniga hours after troops stormed into the presidential palace amid a military coup attempt.

The troops of Juan Jose Zuniga, who was fired earlier this week as commander of the Bolivian Army, raided the presidential palace in the capital La Paz on Wednesday afternoon and took up positions in the square outside, where key government buildings are located. Media reports said a tank slammed the palace doors.

However, Zuniga urged the soldiers within hours to withdraw, after leaders from around the world blasted the army's actions as illegal.

The soldiers' retreat was followed by the apprehension of Zuniga after the attorney general opened an investigation.

President Luis Arce asserting his authority over the country's military and thanking the public for keeping up their support for the government.

Bolivia's Government Minister Eduardo del Castillo said that in addition to Zuniga, former navy Vice Adm. Juan Arnez Salvador was also taken into custody.

"What was this group's goal? The goal was to overturn the democratically elected authority," del Castillo told journalists while announcing the arrests.

The rebel military leader had claimed he wanted to "restructure democracy" and that while he respected the Bolivian president for now, there would be a change of government.

Arce condemned the coup attempt and called on the public to "organize and mobilize... in favor of democracy."

"We cannot allow once again coup attempts to take Bolivian lives," he said in a televised message to the country from inside the presidential palace.

"I am your captain, and I order you to

withdraw your soldiers, and I will not allow this insubordination," Arce said.

The president hailed the withdrawal as a victory for Bolivia's democracy and addressed the country's citizens in the aftermath, some of whom had taken to the streets in protest at the coup attempt, waving Bolivian flags, singing the national anthem and cheering.

"Many thanks to the Bolivian people," said Arce. "Long live democracy."

Late Wednesday, Defense Minister Edmund Novillo said that "everything is now under control." Surrounded by the new military chiefs appointed by Arce, Novillo said that Bolivia lived a "failed coup."

Justice Minister Ivan Lima denied Zuniga's claims of establishing democracy, saying the rebel leader was lying and trying to justify his actions for which he said he would face justice.

Prosecutors will seek the maximum sentence of 15 to 20 years in prison for Zuniga, Lima said via the social media platform X, "for having attacked democracy and the Constitution."

Former President Evo Morales also denounced the military's actions, calling for criminal prosecution against Zuniga and his "accomplices."

"We will not allow the armed forces to violate democracy and intimidate people," he added.

Bolivia has had a long history of political unrest since it gained independence in 1825.

The incumbent president has led an embattled government since taking office in 2020, fending off pressure from both the left and the right.

Bolivia has seen intensifying protests in recent months over the economy's precipitous decline from one of the continent's fastest-growing two decades ago to one of its most crisis-stricken.

News in Brief

PARIS (AFP) - An opinion poll published in newspaper Les Echos on Friday said French far-right party National Rally (NR) further rose in its forecast and may reach as much as 37 percent of the popular vote, two days before the first voting round in parliamentary elections. NR was up by 2 percent from the last publication of the poll compiled by OpinionWay a week ago, while Macron's centrist bloc Together France was seen reaching 20 percent, down by 2 percent from the last publication. The New Popular Front leftwing alliance was seen reaching 28 percent of the vote, a level unchanged versus a week ago. OpinionWay made no seat projections for France's next National Assembly which, due to the two-round majority voting system, could differ significantly from the measured popular vote.

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korea has successfully have conducted an important test aimed at developing missiles carrying multiple warheads, state media agency KCNA said. North Korea said the test was carried out using the first-stage, solid-fuel engine of an intermediate-range ballistic missile. The dispatch came a day after South Korea's military said North Korea had launched what appeared to be a hypersonic missile off its east coast that exploded in midair. KCNA said the missile succeeded in separating warheads, which were accurately guided to three preset targets, in a test that was aimed at developing multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) technology.

NAIROBI (Reuters) - Protests have continued in Kenya, albeit on a smaller scale, despite President William Ruto's decision to drop tax hike proposals and his promise to institute austerity measures. Hundreds of people took to the streets of various towns across Kenya on Thursday, though their numbers were notably fewer than earlier in the week. They defied pleas from Ruto and his deputy, Rigathi Gachagua, who on Wednesday had urged them to call off the protests and engage in dialogue with the government. The demonstrators said they were protesting in memory of their colleagues who had died or been injured in previous rallies.

CAIRO (Reuters) - There is a realistic chance of famine in 14 areas across Sudan if the war that began in April last year escalates, a global monitor said on Thursday, in a sharply worsening hunger crisis that the World Food Programme called the world's largest. The areas listed by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) as at risk of famine are those that have seen the heaviest fighting: the capital Khartoum, the regions of Darfur and Kordofan, and El Gezira state. It said the findings marked a "stark and rapid deterioration of the food-security situation" in Sudan since December, and the worst levels of hunger observed in the country since the IPC was formed 20 years ago.

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - European Union leaders agreed to nominate Ursula von der Leyen of Germany for a second five-year term as president of the European Commission, the EU's powerful executive body. At a summit in Brussels, the bloc's 27 national leaders also picked former Portuguese premier Antonio Costa as the future chair of their European Council meetings and selected Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas as the next EU foreign policy chief. "Mission accomplished! The European Council has delivered," the body's current chair, Charles Michel, told reporters early on Friday morning.

China Urges U.S. to Stop Supporting Philippines 'Provocations'

BEIJING (Reuters) - China urged the United States on Friday to stop tolerating and supporting "provocations" by the Philippines, after Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell expressed concern about Beijing's "destabilizing actions in the South China Sea."

China and the Philippines have recently traded accusations over "dangerous and illegal maneuvers" affecting their respective vessels in the area around the Second Thomas Shoal, a disputed atoll in the busy waterway.

"The United States should stop condoning and supporting the Philippines' provocations and nuisance and take practical actions to safeguard peace and stability in the South Chi-

na Sea," said Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning.

The Philippines has sent missions to resupply soldiers living aboard a rusty, aging warship deliberately grounded by Manila in 1999 at the atoll to reinforce its sovereignty claims.

At a regular briefing, Mao added that the Philippines had turned its back on a consensus with China, challenging its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and insisting on delivering construction materials to the warship.

On June 17, a Philippine sailor was injured after what the Southeast Asian nation's military called "intentional-high speed ramming" by the Chinese Coast Guard, an assertion

China has disputed, saying the actions were lawful.

Campbell made the remarks to China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu during a telephone call on Thursday, the U.S. State Department said.

The day before, U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan and his Philippine counterpart, Eduardo Ano, discussed shared concerns over China's "dangerous and escalatory actions."

The United States reaffirmed its commitment to the Philippines' security, the White House said.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, including portions claimed by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam.