

World News Roundup

Crime

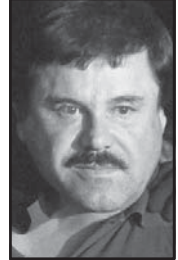
No remorse

El Chapo sentenced to life imprisonment

NEW YORK, July 18, (AP): Mexican drug kingpin and escape artist Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman was sentenced Wednesday to life behind bars in a US prison, expressing no remorse over his conviction for a massive drug conspiracy that spread murder and mayhem for more than two decades.

Instead, a defiant Guzman took a parting shot at a judge in federal court in Brooklyn by accusing him of making a mockery of the US justice system in refusing to order a new trial based on unsubstantiated allegations of juror misconduct.

"My case was stained and you denied me a fair trial when the whole world was watching," Guzman said through an interpreter.



El Chapo

Experts say he will likely wind up at the federal government's Supermax prison in Florence, Colorado, where inmates are held alone for 23 hours a day and have little human interaction.

"Since the government will send me to a jail where my name will not ever be heard again, I take this opportunity to say there was no justice here."

The 62-year-old drug lord – sporting his trademark moustache after being clean-shaven during his trial – also used what could be his last chance to speak in public by complaining about being kept in solitary confinement since he was brought to the US to stand trial after twice breaking out of Mexican prisons.

Before handing down the sentence, US District Judge Brian Cogan said Guzman's complaints were minor given the "mountain range of evidence" against him detailing conduct he described as "evil."

Alleged

On Wednesday, the judge heard from one of Guzman's alleged victims, Andrea Velez Fernandez, who once worked for him until she made his enemy list. She claimed he put out a \$1 million bounty to have her killed.

"Fortunately, I found out and escaped with the help of the FBI," she said.

Guzman had no visible reaction at hearing his sentence. As he stood to be led out of the courtroom, he put his hand on his heart and waved to family members.

Outside court, US Attorney Richard Donoghue told reporters: "Never again will Guzman pour poison over our borders."

The term – life plus 30 years – was a foregone conclusion. The guilty verdict on drug-trafficking charges in February triggered a mandatory sentence of life without parole. Cogan also ordered Guzman to pay \$12.6 billion in ill-gotten proceeds – money his drug-trafficking organization made distributing cocaine and other drugs around the United States.

The evidence at an 11-week trial showed that his Sinaloa cartel was responsible for smuggling mountains of cocaine and other drugs into the United States during his 25-year reign, prosecutors said in recent court papers. They also said his "army of sicarios" was under orders to kidnap, torture and murder anyone who got in his way.

The defense argued he was framed by other traffickers who became government witnesses so they could get breaks in their own cases. They also claimed his trial was tainted by jurors improperly viewing media coverage of the highly publicized case.

Trial

"A fair outcome was a fair trial – that's all we wanted," defense attorney Jeffrey Lichtman told reporters Wednesday outside the federal courthouse. "It was not justice. We can't have a situation where the jurors are running around lying to a judge about what they were doing."

Guzman has been largely cut off from the outside world since his extradition in 2017. US authorities have kept him in an ultra-secure unit at a Manhattan jail and under close guard at his appearances at the Brooklyn courthouse where his case unfolded.

While the trial was dominated by Guzman's persona as a near-mythical outlaw who carried a diamond-encrusted handgun and stayed one step ahead of the law, the jury never heard from Guzman himself, except when he told the judge he wouldn't testify.

But evidence at Guzman's trial suggested his decision to stay quiet at the defense table was against his nature: Cooperating witnesses told jurors he was a fan of his own rags-to-riches narco story, always eager to find an author or screenwriter to tell it. He famously gave an interview to American actor Sean Penn while he was a fugitive, hiding in the mountains after accomplices built a long tunnel to help him escape from a Mexican prison.

At the trial, Guzman's lawyers argued he was the fall guy for other kingpins who were better at paying off top Mexican politicians and law enforcement officials to protect them while the US government looked the other way.

Prosecutors describe an empire that paid for private planes, beachfront villas and a private zoo were a fallacy, his lawyers say. And they say the US government has no chance at collecting the multibillion-dollar forfeiture.

The figure is "fiction," Lichtman said. "We all know that. It's part of the show."

In Culiacan, the capital in Mexico's northwestern state of Sinaloa, locals lamented that Mexicans were deprived of the chance to see the notorious capo tried, convicted and punished on his native soil.

"He doesn't stop being Mexican... He should be paying for his sins here in Mexico," said Victor Estrada, who was at a public plaza in Culiacan.

After an 11-week trial, a US jury in February found Guzman guilty of trafficking tons of cocaine, heroin and marijuana and engaging in murder conspiracies as a leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, one of Mexico's most treacherous drug trafficking groups.

US District Judge Brian Cogan has ordered Guzman to forfeit \$12.6 billion. He also said Guzman deserved the harshest sentence possible because any potentially redeeming qualities were overshadowed by "overwhelming evil."



US President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at Williams Arena in Greenville, NC, on July 17.

Britain

Knife crime soars: Knife crime rose 8% to a record in England and Wales last year, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said on Thursday, as major cities like London try to tackle a surge in stabbings.

However, the number of homicides where a knife or sharp instrument was involved dropped, reflecting an overall fall in the number of homicides, the first annual fall since March 2014.

The number of offences involving knives and sharp instruments rose to 43,516 in the year to March 2019, the ONS said, the highest level since records began in 2011.

Last month, four people were murdered in a 28-hour period in London, including a heavily pregnant woman who was stabbed to death.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who has been criticised by US President Donald Trump for his record on knife crime, said the government needed to reverse police cuts and invest to tackle poverty.

"We're doing everything we can with the powers we have in London, but as these figures show, this is a national problem that requires national solutions," Khan said, noting that the increase in knife crime in London was slowing, with fewer homicides than the year before.

London had the highest knife-crime rate in the year to March 2019, ONS statistics showed, with 168 offences per 100,000 of population, up 1% on the previous year. (RTRS)

Bid to hamper no-deal:

British lawmakers on Thursday backed proposals to make it harder for the next prime minister to force through a no-deal Brexit by suspending parliament, showing again their determination to stop a divorce from the EU without agreement.

Boris Johnson, the frontrunner to succeed Prime Minister Theresa May next week, has said Britain must leave the European Union on Oct 31 with or without a deal.

He has refused to rule out suspending, or proroguing, parliament to prevent lawmakers from passing legislation to block his exit plan if he tries to exit without a deal.

Lawmakers backed a proposal by 315 to 274 that would require parliament to be sitting to consider Northern Irish affairs for several days in September and October even if it was suspended.

They also backed a requirement for ministers to make fortnightly reports on progress towards re-establishing Northern Ireland's collapsed executive, to give lawmakers an opportunity to debate and approve those reports

and if parliament has been suspended, to recall it in order to do so.

The measures do not amount to an outright block on suspending parliament

but could make it much more difficult to bypass parliament.

A junior culture minister was among those who rebelled against the Conservative government to vote for the measure while media reported some senior government figures, including finance minister Philip Hammond who are likely to be sacked if Johnson wins the top job, abstained.

The three-year Brexit crisis is deepening as Johnson's plan to leave the EU "do or die" on Oct 31 sets Britain on a collision course with the bloc's 27 other leaders and many lawmakers in the British parliament. (RTRS)

Trump slams 4 Democrat congresswomen

GREENVILLE, NC, July 18, (AP): Going after four Democratic congresswomen one by one, a combative President Donald Trump turned his campaign rally into an extended dissection of the liberal views of the women of color, deriding them for what he painted as extreme positions and suggesting they just get out.

"Tonight I have a suggestion for the hate-filled extremists who are constantly trying to tear our country down," Trump told the crowd in North Carolina, a swing state he won in 2016 and wants to claim again in 2020. "They never have anything good to say. That's why I say, 'Hey if you don't like it, let 'em leave, let 'em leave.'"

Eager to rile up his base with the some of the same kind of rhetoric he targeted at minorities and women in 2016, Trump declared Wednesday night, "I think in some cases they hate our country."

Trump's jabs were aimed at the self-described "squad" of four freshmen Democrats who have garnered attention since their ar-

rival in January for their outspoken liberal views and distaste for Trump: Reps Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan. All were born in the US except for Omar, who came to the US as a child after fleeing Somalia with her family.

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