

## NEWSIN brief

### 51pc of Pakistanis back PM Khan: poll

DAWN ONLINE

More than half of Pakistan has a favourable opinion of Prime Minister Imran Khan's overall performance after his first five months in power, a new poll conducted by Gallup & Gilani Pakistan suggests. According to the survey's findings, 38 per cent of Pakistanis rated the premier's performance as "good", whereas another 13pc had a "very good" opinion of whatever he's been up to.

### Germany should phase out coal mining by 2038

AFP, Berlin

Germany should end all coal mining for electricity production by 2038, a government-appointed commission said yesterday, laying out a roadmap to phase out the polluting fuel. The transition is expected to cost up to 80 billion euros (\$91 billion) over 20 years. Coal accounted for more than 30 percent of Germany's energy mix in 2018, putting it neck-and-neck with renewables like solar and wind energy.

### Palestinian shot dead in West Bank

AFP, Ramallah

Israeli troops on Friday fatally shot a 17-year-old Palestinian and wounded another as they threw stones at Israeli motorists in the occupied West Bank, the army said. The army said that the alleged stone throwing was aimed at traffic on highway 60, the main north-south road through the West Bank which runs close to Silwad and is heavily used by Israeli settlers.

### BITS OF HISTORY (JANUARY 26)

**1926:** John Logie Baird demonstrates first working TV system.  
**1939:** In the Spanish Civil War, the Nationalist forces of General Francisco Franco captured Barcelona.  
**2001:** A 7.7 earthquake struck the western Indian state of Gujarat, killing 18,000 people.



Rescue crew work after a dam collapsed in Brumadinho, Brazil on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# 300 feared dead or missing

AFP, Brumadinho

Rescuers worked overnight into yesterday searching for around 300 people missing after a dam collapse at a mine in southeast Brazil killed at least nine, but the local governor said "odds are minimal" that they would be found alive.

Seven bodies were recovered Friday hours after the disaster, which saw a torrent of mud break through the disused dam at the iron-ore mine close to the city of Belo Horizonte, in the state of Minas Gerais, around 1:00 pm.

By early Saturday the official death toll had risen to nine, with "nearly 300 people missing," the local firefighters said, doubling the number of people presumed missing from the previous toll.

Up to 150 of those missing worked in the company's administrative offices which were closest to the dam break, the firefighters said.

The mine is owned by Vale, a Brazilian mining giant that was involved in a previous 2015 mine collapse in the same state that claimed 19 lives and is regarded as the country's worst-ever environmental disaster.

Vale shares plummeted on the new accident, losing eight percent in New York trading.

Romeu Zema, the governor of Minas Gerais, told reporters that, while all was being done to find survivors, "from now, the odds are minimal and it is most likely we will

recover only bodies."

His regional administration said 427 people had been working at the Vale mine at the time of the dam collapse, and 279 were recovered alive. The others were listed as missing.

The massive, muddy flow from the collapse barreled towards the nearby town of Brumadinho, population 39,000, but did not hit it directly.

Instead, it carved its way across roads, vegetation and farmland, taking down a bridge, and damaging or destroying homes.

Television images showed people being pulled out of waist-high mud into rescue helicopters, dozens of which were in use by late Friday because of the cut-off land access.

The disaster recalled trauma from the 2015 dam break near Mariana, in Minas Gerais. That accident released millions of tons of toxic iron waste along hundreds of kilometers (miles). Vale was joint operator of that dam, along with the Anglo-

Australian group BHP.

The Brazil office of Greenpeace, the environmental activist group, said Friday's dam break was "a sad consequence of the lessons not learned by the Brazilian government and the mining companies."

It said the incidents "are not accidents but environmental crimes that must be investigated, punished and repaired."

### BRAZIL DAM DISASTER



# Malaysia scraps multi-billion dollar China-backed project

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A multi-billion dollar China-backed rail project in Malaysia has been scrapped, government officials said yesterday, adding that the cost of building it was too high.

Malaysia has in recent months suspended several major projects signed under the country's previous scandal-plagued regime, in a bid to cut the country's massive one trillion ringgit (\$251 billion) debt.

Economics minister Azmin Ali said Malaysia made the decision two days ago on the 81 billion ringgit (\$19.6 billion) east coast rail link (ECRL) that would have connected the eastern and western coasts of the peninsula.

"The cost of the ECRL development is too big, so we have no financial ability at this time," he told reporters.

He said that if the project was not terminated, Malaysia would have to pay an annual 500 million ringgit interest payment.

Malaysia's previous government under Prime Minister Najib Razak had warm ties with China and signed up to a string of

Beijing-funded projects.

But critics say many of these deals lacked transparency, fuelling speculation they were made in exchange for help in paying off debts from a massive financial scandal involving state fund 1MDB.

The scandal was a major factor in Najib's shock electoral defeat in May last year that saw his former boss Mahathir Mohamad return to power.

Mahathir then ordered a review of mega-projects signed by Najib during his nine-year rule, adding he would discuss "unfair" terms supposedly set in these deals and high interest rates levied on Chinese loans used to finance the projects.

Azmin did not say how much compensation Malaysia would have to pay for cancelling the project, adding it would be determined by the finance ministry.

Najib and his cronies were accused of plundering billions of dollars from 1MDB, with the former leader charged with corruption over the scandal.

He will stand trial over these charges in February, and has denied any wrongdoing.



Indian army K9 Vajra-T tanks (foreground) take part in the Republic Day parade in New Delhi, yesterday. India celebrated its 70th Republic Day.

PHOTO: AFP

# Hold election in 8 days

EU nations issue ultimatum to Maduro as US, Russia spar at UN

AFP, Madrid

Spain, France and Germany put embattled Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro on notice ahead of an UN Security Council meeting yesterday, saying they would recognise opposition leader Juan Guaido as president unless he calls elections within eight days.

The ultimatum comes as international pressure mounts on the Maduro regime to agree to a new vote, after the United States, Canada and major South American players recognised Guaido, who proclaimed himself acting president of Venezuela during massive street rallies this week.

After four years of economic pain that has left Venezuelans short of food and medicine and driven more than two million to flee, Guaido is trying to oust Maduro following controversial elections that saw the socialist leader sworn in for a second term.

"If within eight days there are no fair, free and transparent elections called in Venezuela, Spain will recognise Juan

Guaido as Venezuelan president" so that he himself can call such polls, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said in a televised announcement.

French President Emmanuel Macron followed suit in a tweet, saying "the Venezuelan people must be able to freely decide on their future," as did German



government spokeswoman Martina Fietz.

The coordinated announcements are the most explicit yet from EU countries as the 28-member bloc struggles to draft a joint statement with regards to its position on the crisis in Venezuela.

For his part, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo yesterday urged UN

Security Council members to recognise Guaido as interim president.

But countries like Austria, Greece and Portugal are much more reluctant. Greece's ruling party Syriza has publicly backed Maduro, with party secretary Panos Skourletis voicing "full support and solidarity" to what he called "the legal president".

Maduro also has the support of Russia, whose foreign minister Sergei Lavrov denounced US policy on Venezuela as "destructive".

At the UNSC meet, Russia attempted to block the US move, accusing it of plotting a coup against Maduro.

Maduro's reelection last year was contested by the opposition and rejected by the US, EU and UN as a sham -- but he has until now retained the loyalty of the powerful military.

Guaido has rejected an offer of talks with Maduro, saying he won't attend a "fake dialogue" on a crisis that has left 26 dead in clashes this week between anti-Maduro activists and security forces.

# 'Invasion Day' or national day?

AFP, Melbourne

Thousands of Australians attended "Invasion Day" rallies across the country yesterday calling for a rethink of national day celebrations they say are disrespectful to indigenous people.

The annual January 26 Australia Day holiday commemorates the arrival of the first British settlers in 1788, but for many Australians it marks the beginning of colonial oppression of Aboriginal people.

Several thousand joined the annual march in Melbourne yesterday chanting "Always was, always will be Aboriginal land", and holding placards stating "Australia is a crime scene".

Thousands more joined similar demonstrations in major cities around the country, calling for a change of date, or for the day to be abolished altogether.

"Why would you want to celebrate this concept called Australia? It is founded on lies, founded on genocide, founded on murder," Melbourne protestor Dominic

Guerrera told AFP. "There's nothing to celebrate in that."

Divisions have deepened in recent years with increasing calls to change the date.

Amid the heightened sensitivities this week Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced government funding of a voyage to mark the 250th anniversary of explorer Captain James Cook's first journey to Australia.

Canberra pledged about \$6.5 million to a circumnavigation of Australia in a replica of Cook's ship, the Endeavour, which in 1770 brought the British into contact with eastern Australia and foreshadowed the colonisation of the continent.

The story of Cook's voyage and his "discovery" of territory declared New South Wales on the east coast has stirred debate in Australia, with Aboriginal people inhabiting the land for more than 60,000 years before the first European explorers arrived.

Aboriginal people remain the most disadvantaged Australians, with higher rates of poverty, ill-health and imprisonment than any other community.



# 'Brexit date could be pushed back'

AFP, London

The date Britain leaves the EU could be pushed back by a couple of weeks to give time for legislation to be approved by lawmakers, the leader of Britain's lower house of parliament said, the most senior figure to make such a suggestion.

Britain, the world's fifth largest economy, is due to leave the European Union on March 29 but Prime Minister Theresa May's negotiated exit deal was rejected by lawmakers, leaving open the possibility of a disorderly Brexit.

Parliament will now vote on a series of amendments on Tuesday with the United Kingdom facing its deepest political crisis in half a century as it grapples with how, or even whether, to exit the European project it joined in 1973.

"We can get the legislation through and I think we do in spite of everything, have a very strong relationship with our EU friends and neighbours and I am absolutely certain that if we needed a couple of extra weeks or something then that would be feasible," Andrea Leadsom told the BBC.

Responding to the idea that this would mean extending the two-year Article 50 negotiation period, Leadsom, who is the organiser of government business in the lower house of parliament, told the BBC:

"It doesn't necessarily mean that. I think we would want to think carefully about it. But as things stand I do feel that we can get, with the support of both Houses - the House of Commons and the House of Lords - with goodwill and a determination we can still get the legislation through in good time."

A spokeswoman at May's No. 10 Downing Street office said the government's position had not changed.

"We are not considering an extension to article 50 and are committed to doing whatever it takes to have the statute books ready for when we leave the EU on March 29th this year."

# EU adds S Arabia to draft 'terrorism financing' list

REUTERS, Brussels/friyadh

The European Commission has added Saudi Arabia to an EU draft list of countries that pose a threat to the bloc because of lax controls against terrorism financing and money laundering, two sources told Reuters on Friday.

The move comes amid heightened international pressure on Saudi Arabia after the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate on Oct 2.

The EU's list currently consists of 16 countries, including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and North Korea, and is mostly based on criteria used by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a global body composed by wealthy nations meant to combat money laundering and terrorism financing.

But the list has been updated this week, using new criteria developed by the EU Commission since 2017. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries added to the updated

list which is still confidential, one EU source and one Saudi source told Reuters.

Saudi authorities did not immediately respond to request for comment.

The move is a setback for Riyadh at a time when it is striving to bolster its international reputation in order to encourage foreign investors to participate in a huge transformation plan and improve financial ties for its banks.

Khashoggi, a columnist for the Washington Post and a critic of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was killed and dismembered by Saudi agents at its Istanbul consulate on Oct 2, provoking widespread revulsion and

damaging the kingdom's image.

Apart from reputational damages, the inclusion in the list complicates financial relations with the EU. The bloc's banks will have to carry out additional checks on payments involving entities from listed jurisdictions. The provisional decision needs to be endorsed by the 28 EU states before being formally adopted next week.



### MINDANAO VOTE

## 85pc say 'yes' to self-rule

REUTERS, Manila

A predominantly Muslim area of the southern Philippines has returned a resounding "Yes" in this week's referendum on greater autonomy, boosting hopes for peace in one of Asia's most conflict-torn regions.

The plan to create a self-administered area for the Muslim-dominated parts of Mindanao was backed by 85 percent of voters, the election commission said late on Friday, paving the way for a three-year transition towards elections for a legislature that will choose an executive.

Monday's referendum was the culmination of a tumultuous peace process between separatists and successive governments that aimed to settle decades of conflict, which have hampered development and kept these parts of Mindanao among Asia's poorest regions.

The instability and high rates of unemployed, unschooled youth made the areas fertile recruitment ground for bandits and Islamist extremists, who exploited grievances about neglect and stoked narratives of government duplicity in the peace process.

The endorsement by some 1.74 million voters comes as no surprise, and the new region to be called Bangsamoro (nation of Moros) will have greater powers to generate and invest more money in infrastructure, schools, healthcare and social welfare for its estimated 5 million inhabitants.

A ballot will now be held on Feb 6 to ask several other areas if they want to join.

The central government will oversee defence, security, and foreign and monetary policy, and soon appoint a transition authority nominated by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).