

ANTI-CORRUPTION DRIVE

# Malaysia unveils five-year plan

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia yesterday unveiled an ambitious five-year plan to clamp down on corruption in government, months after a multi-billion-dollar graft scandal brought down the previous administration.

The plan, launched by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, would involve sweeping changes to the appointment process for key posts, require lawmakers and ministers to publicly declare their assets, and introduce new laws to regulate political funding and lobbying.

Voters rejected Mahathir's predecessor Najib Razak in an election in May last year, amid widespread public disgust over allegations that about \$4.5 billion was stolen from 1MDB Development Berhad (1MDB), a state fund set up by Najib.

The former premier, his wife, and several high-ranking officials of his former administration have since been hit with dozens of criminal charges related to losses at 1MDB and other government entities. All of them have pled not guilty.

Mahathir said Malaysia needs "all kinds of strategies, laws and restrictions" to curb corruption.

"This plan is a strong statement from the current government that we will track down and prosecute past offenders,

The plan focuses on procurement, contracts and requires politicians to publicly declare their assets



while current and future offenders will be facing harsher action," Mahathir said in a speech to launch the new approach to fighting graft.

The plan's measures would target the government's procurement process, law enforcement, judiciary, politics and business, he said.

New rules on political funding could affect opposition parties, particularly the United Malays National Organisation, the party once led by Mahathir and subsequently led by Najib for close to a decade before his fall last year.

Having led every multi-ethnic coalition since independence six decades ago until its defeat in 2018, UMNO had established a system of patronage to bind Malay support for the party.

UMNO and PAS, an Malay Islamist party also in opposition, had reportedly received funds from 1MDB.

Malaysia was ranked 62 out of 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International last year.

Malaysian and US authorities allege that Jho Low, a financier with ties to Najib's family, diverted funds from 1MDB and that about \$1 billion of it made their way into Najib's personal bank accounts.

Both Najib and Low, whose whereabouts are unknown, have consistently denied wrongdoing.

Officials studied the 1MDB case closely to design the new anti-corruption plan, said Abu Kassim Mohamed, the director-general of the Governance, Integrity and Anti-Corruption Centre, which drafted the anti-graft measures.

"When you have a top leader of the country allegedly involved in misconduct on such a mega scale, that has an impact on the public," Abu Kassim told Reuters on Monday.

The plan addresses high-risk practices such as the selling of government contracts to third parties, and the appointment of political operatives to the board of state-linked companies, he said.



Migrants stand in line as French police evacuate hundreds of migrants living in a makeshift camp set up under the Porte de la Chapelle ring bridge in Paris, France yesterday. Inset, a migrant baby is seen in a tent during the evacuation. Europe has faced a migrant crisis since 2015 following wars in Libya and Syria, and more than 1 million people from Africa and the Middle East have tried to reach the continent via Turkey or by sea.

PHOTO: REUTERS



## BJP will always protect interests of Assam: PM

### Ten northeast political parties oppose bill

AGENCIES

As the BJP faces heat over the Citizenship Bill in the northeast, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday that his party will always protect the interests of Assam.

The prime minister thanked the people of Assam in a tweet for supporting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in elections to three tribal autonomous councils.

"Gratitude to my sisters and brothers of Assam for the strong support to @BJP4Assam in polls to three Tribal Autonomous Councils in the state. The @BJP4India is fully committed towards the development and prosperity of Assam," he said.

The BJP has won several seats in the autonomous council polls. PM Modi said the government will "always protect the interests of the state."

"Several initiatives of the central and Assam government have contributed

towards transforming lives of the citizens of Assam," he wrote.

Meanwhile, ten political parties of the northeastern region, including BJP allies and the JD(U), yesterday unanimously decided to oppose the citizenship amendment bill, Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma said.

A decision to this effect was taken at a meeting of the political parties convened by Sangma and AGP President Atul Bora here, reported PTI.

"The meeting was a natural process, considering the opposition of the northeast states to the bill and it is not politically motivated," Sangma told reporters here.

"Most political parties in the region were protesting against the bill in their own states and so we decided to come together and discuss measures to protect our people and the region," he added.

AGP President Atul Bora said that the meeting was "historic".

#### CITIZENSHIP BILL ROW



An anti-Brexit activist holds a placard reading "Brexit: Not Going Well Is it!" as he demonstrates opposite the Houses of Parliament in London yesterday. British PM Theresa May heads into her latest Brexit battle weakened but still determined to get her legacy-defining deal through parliament, as MPs wrestle to take control of the process.

## iPhone bug lets callers eavesdrop

AFP, San Francisco

A newly discovered FaceTime bug lets people hear and even see those they are reaching out to on iPhones even if the other person hasn't answered their phone.

When a phone number is dialed on FaceTime -- the iPhone's internet-based voice and video calling feature -- the caller can swipe up from the bottom of the screen and tap an option to add a person, according to video demonstrations.

If the caller then enters their own number as that of the added caller, a group call begins even though the person being called hasn't even answered.

The caller can then eavesdrop on the person being called, and in some demonstrations even watch them through the camera app. Declining a call breaks the connection.

The bug, initially outlined by Apple product and review website 9to5Mac.com, was reported by several media outlets.

A video posted at Twitter account @BmManski showing how simple it is to take advantage of the flaw and listen in on an iPhone being called using FaceTime, logged nearly two million views and was shared 14,000 times by late evening in California.

Some Twitter users offered advice to disable the FaceTime application until a fix was in place.

## Corruption seen rising in Trump's US: watchdog

AFP, Frankfurt Am Main

The United States last year slid down the rankings of a global corruption index as America's system of checks and balances faced growing threats on Donald Trump's watch, Transparency International said yesterday.

The US lost four points to score 71 out of 100 on the watchdog's 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index, sending the country tumbling out of the top 20 for the first time since 2011.

"The low score comes at a time when the US is experiencing threats to its system of checks and balances as well as an erosion of ethical norms at the highest levels of power," TI said in its annual report.

The second year of Trump's presidency was a turbulent one, ranging from damaging revelations in an investigation probing links between Trump's 2016 campaign team and Russia, to his controversial backing for a Supreme Court nominee accused of sexual assault.

The US leader, who frequently rails against the media for writing "fake news", was also dogged by accusations of nepotism and conflicts of interest.

Last month, Trump agreed to close his personal charity after the New York attorney general said it had acted "as little more than a checkbook to serve Mr. Trump's business and political interests".

Transparency International's closely-watched index ranks 180 nations according to their perceived level of public sector corruption, where a score of zero means very corrupt and 100 signifies very clean.

"The Trump presidency has illuminated the cracks in the US system for ensuring a government that is accountable to the public interest," TI's Zoe Reiter, acting representative to the US, told AFP.

"But President Trump is a symptom rather than a cause; the issues were there before he took office. For example, the Office of Government Ethics simply doesn't have the teeth to control for conflicts of interest at the highest levels," she said.



## Palestinian PM, govt resign

REUTERS, Ramallah

Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Al-Hamdallah has tendered his resignation and that of his unity government to President Mahmoud Abbas, he said yesterday, dealing a blow to faltering reconciliation efforts with Gaza's Islamist Hamas rulers.

The government will continue to carry out its duties until a new one is formed, it said in a statement issued after a weekly cabinet meeting.

There was no immediate comment from Abbas, but his Fatah faction, at a meeting he chaired two days ago, recommended that the government be replaced. A Hamas official condemned the move as an attempt to marginalise and exclude the group from Palestinian politics.

Hamdallah, a little-known academic, headed the national unity government formed in 2014 and led the West Bank-based Fatah's reconciliation efforts with Hamas, which seized power in Gaza in 2007.

The two groups signed a reconciliation deal two years ago which set in motion a plan for Abbas's Palestinian Authority to resume governing in Gaza and take up control of the coastal enclave's crossing points into Egypt and Israel.

But disputes over power-sharing and disagreements over policy towards Israel have hampered the deal's implementation.

The Islamist movement Hamas, which runs the Gaza Strip, is not part of the PLO.

## Myanmar Suu Kyi's party clashes with military

REUTERS, Naypyitaw

Myanmar's ruling party yesterday clashed with military lawmakers as it proposed steps towards changing the constitution, its biggest challenge in nearly three years to the army's power over politics as enshrined in the charter.

Military members of parliament, clad in green uniforms, rose to their feet and stood in silence as parliament voted to approve the first stage of a proposal to form a committee on amending the constitution.

The proposal could foment tension between the army and Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), who have been at loggerheads over the charter since the party's historic landslide election win in 2015.

The surprise bid to reform the constitu-

tion comes as both civilian and military leaders face growing international pressure over an army crackdown on Rohingya Muslims in 2017 that sent about 730,000 people fleeing to neighbouring Bangladesh.

NLD lawmaker Aung Kyi Nyunt, submitting an "emergency proposal" to discuss a committee that could propose amendments, said the constitution was "not in line with the democratic system" and the "desires of the people" should not be ignored.

After the speaker agreed to put the proposal to a vote, green-clad military lawmakers rose to their feet and stood for several minutes in silence.

"This is me, as speaker, telling you to sit down," the speaker, T Khun Myat, said.

Brigadier-General Maung Maung, a senior military official, said the NLD had not acted "in line with the law".

NLD proposes first step to charter reform

Military says the bid is not in line with system

#### KHASHOGGI MURDER PROBE

## UN expert to present report before June

AFP, Istanbul

A UN judicial expert tasked with investigating the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi said yesterday she would present her report by the end of May.

Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions, carried out an inspection outside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Khashoggi, a regime critic, was killed on October 2 at the consulate by a Saudi hit squad which Ankara says was sent from Riyadh for the murder.

Speaking to journalists outside the mission, Callamard said her report would be made public in time for the June session of the UN human rights council.

"The report will be made public a few weeks before I present it to the human rights council in Geneva, so end of May possibly," she said.

Callamard, an independent expert appointed by the United Nations, on Monday met Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul in Ankara before travelling to Istanbul.

She was set to meet later yesterday with Istanbul chief prosecutor Irfan Fidan.

Riyadh, after denying the killing for two weeks, finally described it as a "rogue" operation and arrested a number of senior Saudi officials.

#### VENEZUELA CRISIS

## US sanctions state oil firm to hit Maduro

Russia denounces move

REUTERS, Washington

The Trump administration on Monday imposed sweeping sanctions on Venezuelan state-owned oil firm PDVSA, aimed at severely curbing the OPEC member's crude exports to the United States and at pressuring socialist President Nicolas Maduro to step down.

Russia, a close ally of Venezuela, denounced the move as illegal interference in Venezuela's affairs and said the curbs meant Venezuela would probably have problems servicing its \$3.15 billion sovereign debt to Moscow.

Minutes before the sanctions announcement, Juan Guaido, the opposition



leader who proclaimed himself interim president last week with US backing, said congress would name new boards of directors to the company and its US subsidiary, Citgo.

He also said Maduro stole his re-election and must resign to allow new, fair polls.

"My duty is to call for free elections because there is an abuse of power and we live in a dictatorship," he told BBC.

Maduro, in a live national broadcast on Monday, accused the US of trying to steal US refining arm Citgo Petroleum, the OPEC member's most important foreign asset. He said Venezuela would take legal actions in response.

In the first sign of serious retaliation, three sources with knowledge of the decision said PDVSA had ordered customers with tankers waiting to load Venezuelan crude bound for the United States to prepay for the cargoes or they will be authorised to fill the vessels or leave the ports.

## NEWSIN brief

### Yemen truce timelines pushed back: UN

AFP, Sanaa

The United Nations envoy for Yemen said Monday the expected timeline for a truce in the flashpoint city of Hodeida and a prisoner swap between warring parties has been pushed back. Martin Griffiths hosted hard-won peace talks between the Saudi-backed Yemeni government and rival Iran-aligned Huthi rebels in Sweden last month. The agreement stipulates a full ceasefire, followed by the withdrawal of rival forces from the city.

### 30,000 Nigerians flee Boko Haram violence

AFP, Kano

More than 30,000 people have fled the northeast Nigerian town of Rann and across the border to Cameroon in recent days because of fears of renewed Boko Haram attacks, the UN, civilian militia and residents said yesterday. The latest mass movement comes as the world body voiced renewed concern about the effect of the bloody conflict on civilians and launched a longer-term plan to help those made homeless by the fighting.

#### BITS OF HISTORY (JANUARY 29)

**1996** - Venice's opera house, fatefully named La Fenice or "The Phoenix", was destroyed by fire for the second time in its history.

**2002** - US President George W. Bush describes "axis of evil" in State of the Union address.

**2017** - World record set in Argentina for most people floating while holding hands.