



**MONEY LAUNDERING TRIAL**

### Ex-president of Maldives detained

AFP, Malé

Maldives authorities yesterday detained former strongman president Abdulla Yameen after he was accused of trying to bribe witnesses in his money laundering trial, officials said.

The arrest came after the Criminal Court began a hearing into allegations that Yameen received nearly \$1.5 million in illicit payments just before he lost an election in September and was forced out of power.

"Prosecutors said that Yameen had allegedly attempted to bribe witnesses," a court official said, adding that the former president would be held at the Dhoonidhoo prison island near the capital.

If convicted, the 59-year-old could face up to 15 years in jail and be fined three times the amount of the fraud involved.

Yameen, who came to power in 2013 and jailed many of his opponents or forced them into exile, was summoned to the Criminal Court Sunday to formally receive his indictment. He sent his lawyers in his place.

The court then scheduled a rushed hearing after prosecutors told judge Ahmed Hailam that Yameen was attempting to interfere with witnesses.

Since Yameen's shock election defeat, all dissidents have returned to the Indian Ocean archipelago and most have had their convictions overturned.

During his five-year tenure, Yameen relied heavily on China for political and financial support as he came under international criticism over his dismal human rights record.



**A house in which militants are suspected to have sheltered is in flames after a gunfight happened between rebels and Indian security forces that killed 4 soldiers, in South Kashmir's Pulwama district, some 10 km away from the spot of recent suicide bombing, yesterday. Inset, an Indian soldier carries a rocket launcher near the site of the gun battle.**

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

**ROW OVER BREXIT, ANTI-SEMITISM**

## Seven MPs quit UK Labour Party

AFP, London

A group of MPs from Britain's opposition Labour Party broke away yesterday in protest at leader Jeremy Corbyn's support for Brexit and his failure to stamp out anti-Semitism.

The seven MPs included Chuka Umunna, who has led a campaign for a second referendum that could stop Brexit and was once seen as a potential leader of the centre-left party.

Umunna called for a centrist "alternative" in British politics as the rebel MPs complained about the far-left turn the party had taken under veteran socialist Corbyn.

"The bottom line is this -- politics is broken, it doesn't have to be this way, let's change it," Umunna said at a hastily-arranged press conference in London.

The seven MPs will form a breakaway independent group in parliament, undermining Corbyn as he attempts to steer the party through the highly divisive issue of Brexit.

Many Labour voters, particularly in northern England, chose to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum -- but a majority of Labour MPs and members supported staying in.

The referendum cut across party political allegiances also in the ruling Conservative Party, which is now deeply divided between pro-EU moderates and Brexit hardliners.

The Labour rebellion is unlikely to make a major difference in crucial upcoming votes on Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal but the move was welcomed by pro-EU forces.

Corbyn said he was "disappointed" by his MPs' decision. "Now more than ever is the time to bring people together to build a better future for us all," he said, pointing to the party's strong result in the last general election in 2017.

## Saudi vows to ease tensions

### Crown Prince Salman holds series of meetings with Pakistan leadership before flying on to India today

AGENCIES

Saudi Arabia vowed to "de-escalate" rising tensions between Pakistan and India during a high-profile summit in Islamabad yesterday as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman prepares to travel from Islamabad to New Delhi.

The kingdom's foreign minister spoke at a press conference in Islamabad as Pakistan recalled its envoy from Delhi for "consultations", the latest development in a fresh diplomatic crisis between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

Delhi has vowed to retaliate after a suicide blast which killed 40 Indian paramilitaries in Kashmir on Thursday, the deadliest attack in the disputed Himalayan region in decades.

The attack has sparked widespread calls in India for action against Pakistan.

"Our objective is to try to de-escalate tensions between the two countries, neighbouring countries, and to see if there is a path forward to resolving those differences peacefully," said Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir.

Following the pledge, the crown prince -- widely known as MBS -- held a series of meetings yesterday afternoon with

the Pakistani leadership before flying on to India.

After his arrival late Sunday, MBS signed \$20 billion in investment deals with cash-strapped Islamabad and vowed to free thousands of Pakistani prisoners in Saudi custody, reported AFP.

He also received the country's highest civilian award yesterday, the Nishan-e-Pakistan (Order of Pakistan), before heading to India to meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi today.

After India, he is expected to finish with two days in China on Thursday and Friday.

Meanwhile, India asked the World Court yesterday to order the release of an Indian national sentenced to death by Pakistan, saying Islamabad had failed to allow him diplomatic assistance before his conviction, as required by an international treaty, reported Reuters.

The hearings at the UN court, formally known as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), revolve around the case of Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav, a former Indian navy commander who was arrested in Pakistan in March 2016 and convicted of spying.

**INDO-PAK CONFLICT**

India urges UN court to free death row 'spy' in Pakistan

Crown prince receives Pakistan's highest civilian award



## FB broke rules, should be regulated: UK lawmakers

REUTERS, London

Facebook intentionally breached data privacy and competition law and should, along with other big tech companies, be subject to a new regulator to protect democracy and citizens' rights, British lawmakers said yesterday.

In a damning report that singled out Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg for what it said was a failure of leadership and personal responsibility, the British parliament's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee said tech firms had proved ineffective in stopping harmful content on their platforms.

This included disinformation, attempts by foreign countries to influence elections, and risks to personal data.

"We need a radical shift in the balance of power between the platforms and the people," committee chairman Damian Collins said.

Collins said the age of inadequate self-regulation must end, following an 18-month investigation that concluded

Facebook had "intentionally and knowingly violated both data privacy and anti-competition laws."

"The rights of the citizen need to be established in statute, by requiring the tech companies to adhere to a code of conduct written into law by Parliament, and overseen by an independent regulator," he said.

Facebook rejected the suggestion it had breached data protection and competition laws, and said it shared the committee's concerns about false news and election integrity.

"We are open to meaningful regulation and support the committee's recommendation for electoral law reform," Facebook's UK public policy manager Karim Palant said.

"We also support effective privacy legislation that holds companies to high standards in their use of data and transparency for users."

Lawmakers in Europe and the United States are scrambling to get to grips with the risks posed by big tech companies regulating the platforms used by billions of people.

**DATA PRIVACY SCANDAL**

Facebook knowingly and intentionally violated privacy laws

Social media giant says it is open to meaningful regulation

## 'State actor' hacked political parties, parliament

### Says Aussie PM weeks before closely fought election

AFP, Sydney

Australia yesterday said a "sophisticated state actor" had hacked the country's main political parties and parliament, just weeks before a closely fought election.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison told lawmakers that investigators looking into a hack of parliament computer systems revealed two weeks ago "also became aware that the networks of some political parties" had been breached.

"Our cyber experts believe that a sophisticated state actor is responsible for this malicious activity," he said.

Australian security agencies said they did not know who was behind the attack or their motives.

It is not yet clear what, if any, material was stolen during the hacks, how long the perpetrators went undetected, or whether it could make

some political figures vulnerable to blackmail. Earlier this month, Australia reported a "security incident on the parliamentary computing network".

That forced users -- including the prime minister and the cabinet -- to change passwords and take other security measures.

Experts warn that attribution is time-consuming and difficult.

"I think it's definitely too early to say," said Fergus Hanson, a cybersecurity expert at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

He added, however, that there were only "one or two actors" capable of carrying out such an attack.

Hanson said he would put China "at the top" of the list of possible suspects, but "wouldn't rule out" Russia's involvement.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said such speculation about Beijing was "irresponsible" and an attempt to "smear" the country.



**Migrants from Honduras try to cross the Rio Bravo towards the United States, as seen from Piedras Negras, Mexico, on Sunday. Last week Trump invoked a "national emergency" to justify tapping military and other funds for barrier construction, after Congress approved less than a fourth the \$5.7 billion he had sought for border security.**

PHOTO: REUTERS

## NEWSIN brief

### Senator vows to probe talk on ousting Trump

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A key ally of Donald Trump has denied alleged efforts by senior officials to depose the president and pledged to hold a congressional investigation. Republican senator Lindsey Graham said it was "stunning" the former acting director of the FBI, Andrew McCabe, had admitted in a TV interview he had discussed invoking the 25th Amendment with the deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein.

### Iran arrests three over suicide bomb attack

AFP, Tehran

Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards said yesterday it has arrested three "terrorists" involved in last week's deadly suicide bomb attack on security forces in a region bordering Pakistan. "Safe houses in (the cities of) Saravan and Khash were identified and eliminated, and the terrorists based in them were arrested," the force said.

### Yemen sides agree deal on pullback: UN

AFP, United Nations

Yemen's government and Huthi rebels have agreed on the first phase of a pullback of forces from the key city of Hodeida, in a deal the UN described Sunday as important progress. The fragile truce deal marks the first step toward ending a devastating war that has pushed Yemen to the brink of famine.

### BITS OF HISTORY (FEBRUARY 18)

**1930:** Clyde William Tombaugh discovered the planet Pluto, working with photographic plates at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona.

**1994:** South Africa's ANC President Nelson Mandela and Palestinian PLO leader Yasser Arafat meet in the Hague.

## IS defends dying 'caliphate'

### Hundreds of Syrian civilians trapped as jihadists fight in last bastion; Britain rejects Trump's repatriation call

AFP, Omar Oil Field

Jihadists defending their last dreg of territory in Syria have no choice but to surrender, a Kurdish-led force said yesterday, ahead of a victory declaration expected within days.

The warning by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) comes as EU foreign ministers were scheduled to meet yesterday to discuss the repatriation of European nationals in Syria, which Germany said would be "extremely difficult" to do.

Diehard Islamic State group fighters are now trapped in their last patch of territory of less than half a square kilometre in the village of Baghouz near the Iraqi border.

The SDF are moving cautiously on the jihadist holdout, saying IS is increasingly using civilians as "human shields" to block the advance.

"The clashes are sporadic and very limited," SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali told AFP yesterday.

"So far there have been no significant changes on the ground," he said, adding that coalition warplanes have reduced air strikes on IS positions over the past two days.

The SDF "are still working on trying to get civilians out", the spokesman said.



captured in Syria and try them at home.

Trump tweeted on Sunday that Washington was "asking Britain, France, Germany and other European allies to take back over 800 ISIS fighters that we captured in Syria and put them on trial".

Prime Minister Theresa May's spokesman said the fighters should be put on trial in places where they committed their crimes.

## 5th Death Anniversary

Today, 19<sup>th</sup> February, is the fifth death anniversary of Mohammad Abul Khayer, former member of the National Assembly. He was elected from Muksudpur-Kashiani constituency of Gopalganj in 1970 general election that spurred the Independence movement.

Mr. Khayer was a freedom fighter, industrialist and a trusted close associate of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He received the Swadhinata Padak posthumously in 2014 for his contribution to the 1971 War of Independence. Mr. Khayer was the founder Chairman of Jamuna Bank Limited.

We pray for the eternal peace of his soul in heaven.