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Zimbabweans mourn Mugabe

HARARE: Zimbabweans yesterday mourned the death of their founding father Robert Mugabe, but there was confusion over when his body would be returned from abroad for burial, two years after he was toppled in a coup. Mugabe died on Friday aged 95 in Singapore, where he had long received medical treatment.

He was one of the most polarizing figures in African history, a giant of national liberation movements whose 37-year rule ended in ignominy when he was overthrown by his own army in November 2017. President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who worked closely with Mugabe for decades before helping oust him, granted him the status of national hero on Friday, while tributes poured in from leaders across the continent.

Mugabe's body was initially expected to arrive in South Africa early yesterday before flying on to Zimbabwe. But there was still no word yesterday afternoon that the body had left Singapore. There were no major public events to mark Mugabe's passing in the capital Harare. Residents expressed a mix of sadness at the former president's death and frustration that their daily hardships had not relented since he left power.

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'Electronic armies' threaten activists and media in Iraq

BAGHDAD: Iraqi journalists, activists and researchers are facing a wave of accusations and threats by shadowy online groups they suspect are linked to powerful pro-Iran factions. Parties, armed groups and even officials in Iraq benefit from legions of supporters dubbed "electronic armies," which take to social media to anonymously sing their praises or mock their detractors.

These online rivalries now appear to have been fanned by months of rising tensions pitting Iran against the US and Israel. This summer, suspicious explosions hit five camps and arms depots run by Iraq's Hashed Al-Shaabi, a network of mostly Shiite armed factions linked to Iran. The Hashed was quick to blame Israel and the United States, but also said it suspected "agents" of the two countries contributed to the attacks.

That accusation was followed by an online campaign accusing a broad range of Iraqi nationals of "collaborating" with Israel and the US. One graphic shared by an Arabic-language page named "Don't Tread on Us" accused 14 Iraqis of de facto supporting a policy of "normalization with Israel." Shared on social media, it named figures such as journalist Joumana Mumtaz and blogger Ali Wajih.

'A broader plot?'

In response, Wajih penned a rare open letter to Iraq's prime minister Adel Abdel Mahdi, Hashed chief Faleh Fayyadh and his powerful deputy Abu Mehdi Al-Muhandis. "For years, a group of us journalists and bloggers has faced incitements to murder by people and pages that may be close to the Hashed, or directly linked to it," he wrote. Allegations they were "agents" or seeking normalization with Israel, Wajih said, were "empty and silly."

Iraqis have long been opposed to Israel because of its occupation of Palestinian land.

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TEHRAN: Iran seized a boat and arrested 12 Filipinos as it busted a "fuel-smuggling ring" in the Strait of Hormuz yesterday, the semi-official news agency ISNA reported. "A foreign tugboat was confiscated as well as 283,900 liters (75,000 gallons) of petrol worth 233.71 billion rials (about \$2 million)," ISNA said, citing the coast guard chief in the southern province of Hormozgan.

"Twelve Philippine nationals were arrested and the relevant judiciary officials are currently taking the required legal measures," Major Hossein Dehaki was quoted as saying. Dehaki said the group was suspected of operating a fuel-smuggling ring and the confiscated shipment had been intercepted close to Sirik county in the Strait of Hormuz. The seizure comes amid tensions in the Gulf after the United States unilaterally withdrew from a nuclear deal putting curbs on Iran's nuclear program in return for relief from sanctions.

The escalation has seen ships mysteriously attacked, drones downed and oil tankers seized in the Strait of Hormuz - a chokepoint for a third of world's seaborne oil. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps detained a "foreign tanker" in Gulf waters on July 14 for allegedly smuggling contraband fuel. "With a capacity of two million liters and 12 foreign crew on board, the vessel was en route to deliver contraband fuel received from Iranian boats to foreign ships," the Guards said at the time.

Maritime tracking service TankerTrackers reported



BANDAR ABBAS, Iran: An image grab taken from a broadcast by Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) shows what they say is the boat of a fuel-smuggling ring in the Strait of Hormuz that Iran seized and arrested the Filipino crew on board. — AFP

the Panamanian-flagged MT Riah, used in the strait for fuelling other vessels, had crossed into Iranian waters, and at that point its automatic identification system stopped sending signals. In the most high-profile

seizure, the Guards impounded the British-flagged Stena Impero tanker in the Strait of Hormuz on July 19 for breaking "international maritime rules".

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India loses contact with Moon lander

BANGALORE: India's space program suffered a huge setback yesterday after losing contact with an unmanned spacecraft moments before it was due to make a historic soft landing on the Moon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to comfort glum scientists and a stunned nation from mission control in Bangalore, saying India was still "proud" and clasp the visibly emotional space agency head in a lengthy hug.

Blasting off in July, the emerging Asian

giant had hoped to become just the fourth country after the United States, Russia and regional rival China to make a successful Moon landing, and the first on the lunar South Pole. But in the early hours of yesterday, as Modi looked on and millions watched nationwide with bated breath, the Vikram lander-named after the father of India's space program-went silent just 2.1 kilometers above the lunar surface.

Its descent had been going "as planned and normal performance was observed", Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) chairman Kailasavidoo Sivan said. "Subsequently the communication from the lander to the ground station was lost," he said after initial applause turned to bewilderment at the operations room. "The data is being analyzed."

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BANGALORE: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (centre right) speaks with Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) scientists at the ISRO headquarters in Bangalore. — AFP

Like meat, but not meat - the latest tech

SAN FRANCISCO: Meaty mushrooms, printed 'steaks' and NASA discoveries - the latest array of meat alternatives has been showcased at the Good Food Conference in San Francisco. At various stages of production, here are a few of the ideas gaining attention as producers and investors focus on the booming vegetarian sector.

The Ecovative company was founded in New York in 2007 to develop bio-degradable packaging made from mycelium, the root structure of mushrooms. That project

was to find alternatives to plastic packaging - but the company then applied the same technique to make a leather substitute, and is now moving onto a meat alternative.

"You can grow a mushroom into a unique form" by changing its growing environment, says co-founder Gavin McIntyre. Once mature, the mushroom "has the structure and texture to simulate whole cut meat" - not just burgers and sausages - and can be a "blank canvas" for other ingredients to add taste and nutrients. The company is seeking partners to develop its product.

Italian technology entrepreneur Giuseppe Scionti was a university specialist in tissue engineering, who worked on creating human tissue using a three-dimensional printer.

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SAN FRANCISCO: Amadeus Driando Ahnan, cofounder of the start up company Better Nature, displays some of his products on his stand at the Good Food Institute's conference promoting plant-based and cell-based meat. — AFP

Facebook rolls out dating service

WASHINGTON: Is love the answer on Facebook? The huge social network rolled out its online dating service for the United States - a move to take on rivals such as smartphone app Tinder, while focusing on connecting people in "real" long-term relationships. The free "Facebook Dating" site which was announced last year and already available in 19 other countries will allow users to link their Facebook and Instagram posts to a separate dating profile.

It will seek to facilitate romantic connec-

tions among the more than two billion users of the social network worldwide. "Facebook Dating allows you to match with friends of friends and/or people not in your friend circle," said a blog post from Nathan Sharp, head of the project. One of the features, "Secret Crush," allows people who are friends to connect if they both secretly express interest in each other.

"Facebook Dating won't match you with friends, unless you choose to use Secret Crush and you both add each other to your list," Sharp said. "Finding a romantic partner is deeply personal, which is why we built Dating to be safe, inclusive and opt-in. Safety, security and privacy are at the forefront of this product."

Sharp said users will have the ability to report and block anyone.

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The Facebook sign and logo is seen in Menlo Park, California. — FP