



Brexit in chaos: Court rules PM's suspension of parliament unlawful

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TEHRAN: President Hassan Rouhani (center) chairs a cabinet meeting in the capital Tehran, with a banner behind him reading in Arabic 'O martyr Abu Al-Abbas Al-Hussein', hung up during the Ashura mourning period and referring to the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) grandson Imam Hussein ibn Ali. — AFP

# Three Australians detained in Iran

## Latest in a series of Westerners seized by authorities in Tehran

**SYDNEY:** Australia yesterday revealed that three of its citizens had been detained in Iran, the latest in a series of Westerners to be seized by authorities in Tehran. News of the trio's detention comes at a sensitive geopolitical juncture, and after Australia announced that it would join a US-led mission to protect shipping through the Strait of Hormuz with tensions high in the Gulf region.

"The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is providing consular assistance to the families of three Australians detained in Iran," a spokesperson told AFP, declining to comment further citing privacy obligations. Canberra is battling to keep efforts to free the trio under wraps, and it is not clear if the three have been charged.

Confirmation of their detention comes after the Times of London reported that two British-Australian women were being held in Tehran's Evin prison, and Australian

broadcaster ABC said that the Australian boyfriend of one of the women was also detained.

One of the women was reported to be an academic who has been in detention for months, while the couple were said to have been detained while camping near a military facility on a journey across Asia. Earlier this week, the Australian government updated its travel advice for Iran to "reconsider your need to travel" and "do not travel" to areas near the border with Iraq and Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison last month announced a "modest" contribution to the US-led Gulf mission including a frigate, a P8 maritime surveillance aircraft and support staff—which will also involve British forces. Already difficult relations between Iran and the United States—and American allies—have threatened to boil over since President Donald Trump abandoned a deal to limit

Tehran's nuclear program in 2018. Iran has responded by resuming some proscribed nuclear activities.

### Collateral damage?

Meanwhile, a rising number of dual nationals have been detained in Iran in what many see as a ruthless diplomatic strategy. They include Meimanat Hosseini-Chavoshi, an Iranian-Australian population expert who was detained late last year while visiting Iran on a study tour. Analysts see the arrests as either a tactical ploy to gain diplomatic leverage or as part of the murky politics in Iran—with hardliners in the judiciary and the security apparatus scuttling the more conciliatory approach of moderates.

The detention of two dual British-Australian citizens, if confirmed, would deepen tensions between London and Tehran and pose a further challenge to

embattled Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The two countries have clashed over Britain's detention of an Iranian tanker, which was released recently on the condition that it did not provide oil to Syria. "It is now clear that Iran has breached these assurances and that the oil has been transferred to Syria and (President Bashar al-Assad's) murderous regime," the British Foreign Office said Tuesday.

Johnson had previously come in for withering criticism for jeopardized the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British-Iranian woman held in Tehran for sedition, by mischaracterizing her job. "Iran once again ups the stakes" with the latest arrests, said Tulip Siddiq, Zaghari-Ratcliffe's member of parliament. "This is a wake up call for our Prime Minister, Government and Ministers that they must act urgently to bring our innocent citizens home." — AFP

## Mugabe's body arrives home; burial place still a mystery

**HARARE:** The body of Zimbabwe's founder Robert Mugabe arrived at the country's main airport yesterday, but his final resting place remained a source of mystery amid a dispute between some family members and the government. Mugabe, one of the last "Big Men" of African politics who ruled the southern African nation for 37 years until he was ousted by his own army in November 2017, died in a Singapore hospital five days ago.

He is proving as polarizing in death as he was in life, as the fight over where he will be buried threatens to embarrass his successor, President Emmerson Mnangagwa, and deepens divisions in the ruling ZANU-PF party. The former president's body arrived at Harare's Robert Gabriel Mugabe International Airport shortly after 1330 GMT, a Reuters witness said. Crowds had gathered at the airport well before the scheduled arrival time, with some people wearing T-shirts bearing Mugabe's face and others with Mnangagwa's image, while music blared from loudspeakers.

A convoy of 4x4 vehicles with number plates bearing the letters "RG Mugabe" and the former leader's signature were also on the runway. Mugabe's wife Grace and Zimbabwean Vice President Kembo Mohadi were among those accompanying the body of the former leader on the plane. Leo Mugabe, a nephew and family spokesman, said. Mnangagwa, top officials and other Mugabe family members



HARARE: Zimbabwean soldiers perform during a ceremony as the casket of late Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe arrives at Harare airport yesterday. — AFP

were at the airport to receive the body.

Leo Mugabe declined to say where Mugabe would be buried, saying only that on arrival his body would be taken to his palatial home in the capital, known as Blue Roof. Today, ordinary Zimbabweans and supporters are expected to pay their last respects to Mugabe at a Harare soccer stadium, where the body will lie in state before being taken to his rural home in Kutama, 85 km from the capital, he added. Mnangagwa and his party want Mugabe buried at a national monument to heroes of the liberation war against the white minority Rhodesian regime.

But some of Mugabe's relatives have pushed back against that plan. They share Mugabe's bitterness at the way former allies including Mnangagwa conspired to topple

him and want him buried in his home village. A government minister said on Tuesday the burial was still planned for Sunday, a day after a state funeral. But the minister said Mugabe's burial site would only be known once the body had arrived and government officials had consulted with the family.

Mugabe left behind an economy wrecked by hyperinflation and deeply entrenched corruption, and a raging political rivalry between ZANU-PF and the opposition MDC. The MDC said in a statement yesterday that it had postponed its 20th anniversary rally because of Mugabe's funeral. It said: "Notwithstanding our legendary differences with Mr. Mugabe, we have no reason to exhibit barbarity by hosting a national festivity during his funeral." — Reuters

## Mugabe a 'broken soul' in final years

**HARARE:** Once feared for the all-encompassing power he wielded in Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe died a "broken soul," bereft at his downfall, his allies and relatives say. Mugabe died in Singapore on Friday at the age of 95, nearly two months before the anniversary of the coup that forced him from power. He had ruled the southern African country uninterrupted for 37 years and seven months. During these long decades, Mugabe was Zimbabwe, and Zimbabwe was Mugabe.

But in his twilight years, he became vulnerable and helpless, according to relatives, allies and analysts. Mugabe bowed to pressure and resigned on November 21, 2017 in a military-backed coup, ending an increasingly tyrannical rule that saw millions leave Zimbabwe to escape repression and economic ruin. People close to him said the coup hit Mugabe very hard. He never recovered from the shock that lieutenants whom he had groomed and trusted for years could betray him, they said.

"It was sudden," his nephew Leo said. "He could not believe that those he trusted most turned against him." The coup was his "lowest moment - that period from November 2017 up to his last day... sometimes he would just sit there," said Mugabe. "A person who was used to waking up at 4 o'clock every morning, exercises, baths, goes to work and he has the whole country to look at, and sud-

denly that is abruptly brought to a halt - that is bound to affect." Mugabe's health deteriorated incredibly quickly, he said.

### 'Blind to reality'

The coup had been in the making for months but Mugabe was blind "to reality at that time," said Ibbo Mandaza, one of the intellectuals who served in Mugabe's government after independence. "Mugabe's last years were years of extreme vulnerability," said Mandaza, now head of a thinktank, the Southern Africa Political Economy Series (SAPES) Trust. Shortly after tanks rolled into the streets of Harare in a show of force, one of Mugabe's allies who sought shelter at the leader's house, was former education and information minister Jonathan Moyo. Moyo, who spent time with Mugabe in the post-coup turbulence, said the once-feared autocrat dramatically changed.

"He became unusually introverted," Moyo said. "He just became instantly withdrawn and non-engaging. He was deep in thought and palpably at a loss." He became a "broken soul, an obliterated soul and someone whose world collapsed in front of him and left him helpless." Moyo said in a phone interview from Kenya where he fled after the coup. Generals seized power days after Mugabe fired his vice president and there were mass street protests over concern Mugabe was positioning his wife Grace to succeed him. After days of talks mediated by a Jesuit priest Fidelis Mukonori, Mugabe resigned. Close to Mugabe for decades, Mukonori mediated most conflicts of Zimbabwean politics, starting in the 1970s with talks between guerrillas and colonial ruler Britain that led to independence in 1980. — AFP