

NO 'WHITE KNIGHT' TO RESCUE BRAZIL FROM CRISIS

RIO DE JANEIRO: Some are charged with bribe-taking, others electoral crimes and one with forming a gang: Meet the men overseeing the impeachment of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff. The first woman to lead Latin America's biggest country could be ejected one year into her second term on charges that her government illegally managed the federal budget. But many of the politicians directly responsible for Rousseff's fate do not have clean hands.

Of the 65 congressional deputies elected in controversial circumstances Tuesday to a committee scrutinizing the impeachment case, about 30 percent face criminal probes, according to a detailed count by specialist website Congresso em Foco. The architect of the impeachment drive himself, house speaker Eduardo Cunha, has been charged with taking as much as \$40 million in bribes. He allegedly stashed the loot - part of a vast corruption network centered on state oil giant Petrobras - in secret Swiss accounts.

Dozens of other senators and deputies also face

Petrobras-related charges. Throw in scenes of deputies brawling on television this week, or reports that the agriculture minister, Katia Abreu, threw a glass of wine in the face of a senator at a dinner late Wednesday, and the idea that exchanging Rousseff for another leader would clean up Brazil's politics looks ever less likely. "There's no white knight," says University of Brasilia politics expert David Fleischer. "There's no national savior riding from the horizon."

'Depressing Spectacle'

Tuesday's election of the impeachment commission encapsulated the mix of bad tempers and questionable legality plaguing the capital Brasilia. Pro-Rousseff and opposition deputies pushed and screamed during voting to form the commission, which will recommend whether or not Congress should impeach the president. The Supreme Court intervened hours later to suspend the commission for a week, citing irregularities. The O Estado de Sao Paulo newspaper called the

scenes "a scandalous and depressing spectacle."

"The chamber was turned into a circus. We are living in a degrading and humiliating situation," said Julio Delgado, from the Brazilian Socialist Party. On Thursday, another group of deputies punched and shoved each other on national television. This time they were members of the house ethics committee, which has repeatedly tried and failed to decide whether it should open a probe into the powerful Cunha. Fleischer estimated that about 20 percent of Congress members as a whole face criminal investigations, many of them linked to Petrobras.

These include senior figures like key Rousseff ally Senator Delcidio do Amaral and even a former president, Fernando Collor de Mello. Collor resigned from the presidency in 1992 during his own impeachment trial, before making a comeback as a senator. For Fleischer, the fighting in the chamber was a new low point. "Because it's an ethics committee, you wouldn't really expect that."—AFP

MACRI SWORN IN PRESIDENT

BUENOS AIRES: Mauricio Macri took office as Argentina's first non-Peronist president in more than a decade on Thursday, promising to end policies of leftist populism and revive the South American country's ailing economy. Macri began his 4-year term in a ceremony snubbed by his predecessor, Cristina Fernandez, following a rancorous argument over where the handover of power should take place. The 56-year-old Macri, his wife and daughter were escorted by horse-riding guards through streets packed with cheering supporters waving the national flag and yellow balloons, the color of Macri's "Let's Change" alliance.

In his first speech as president, the former center-right mayor of Buenos Aires vowed to make the economy grow, lift all Argentines out of poverty and tackle endemic graft. "Multiplying job opportunities is the only way to achieve prosperity where, today, there is an unacceptable level of poverty," Macri told lawmakers moments after taking his oath in the National Assembly.

His victory delivered a hammer-blow to the Peronist movement that has dominated Argentine politics for much of the past 70 years and which will be ready to pounce on him if his planned reforms to the fragile economy unleash a new crisis. Peronism is a now a fragmented force but many Argentines who in the same breath voice support and disdain for it have tended to turn to it in times of political and economic turmoil.

Reading from a script, Macri did not provide any fresh details on how he would unwind capital controls and import restrictions, tame double-digit inflation or narrow Argentina's yawning fiscal deficit. They are tasks that will be complicated by a central bank running low on US dollars and a festering debt dispute with creditors that isolated Argentina from global debt markets and plunged it back into default last year.

Tens of thousands of Macri supporters swarmed toward the Pink House presidential palace, where Macri later received the presidential baton and sash from the Senate leader in Fernandez's absence. In the streets, firecrackers rang out in celebration as he delighted the crowd with his dad-style dancing on a palace balcony. Macri's argument with Fernandez stemmed from his wish that he receive the presidential sash and ceremonial baton at the palace, while Fernandez insisted on holding the full ceremony in Congress, where her party has the most seats.—Reuters



BUENOS AIRES: Argentinian President Mauricio Macri sits in his office at the government palace after his inauguration ceremony on Thursday. — AFP



TORONTO: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (left) greets Georgina Zires, Madeleine Jamkossian and her father Kevork Jamkossian, refugees fleeing from Syria, as they arrive at Pearson International airport yesterday. —AP

CANADA WELCOMES FIRST SYRIA REFUGEES

TRUDEAU AT AIRPORT TO GREET ARRIVALS

OTTAWA: Canada welcomed 163 Syrian refugees late Thursday, taking in the first of a planned 25,000 in a matter of months and promising them a better life as they flee their country's horrific war. The refugees arrived just weeks after Canada's newly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said his country would pull its fighter jets from a US-led coalition targeting Islamic State fighters in Iraq and Syria. Trudeau and several members of his Liberal government were on hand to greet the Syrians as they arrived on a troop transport plane in Toronto.

Dozens of volunteers, interpreters and immigration officials helped the Syrians through the formalities of admission and gave them blankets, snow boots and other welcome gifts. Over the course of the day, good Samaritans came to the airport to donate winter clothes and try to greet the Syrians who had set out from Beirut. But in the end the tired travelers were admitted through a terminal that was closed to the public.

"Tonight they step off the plane as refugees. But they walk out of this terminal as permanent residents of Canada with social insurance numbers, with health cards and with an opportunity to become full Canadians," Trudeau said.

'Memorable' Day

The government hopes to bring in 10,000 Syrian refugees and another 15,000 by the end of February. "We will all remember this day," Trudeau said shortly before greeting the refugees, many of them women and children. Syria's grinding four-year civil

war has killed more than 250,000 people and displaced four million others. The new Liberal government, elected in October, had campaigned on a pledge to resettle 25,000 Syrians this year.

But it backpedaled last month, citing logistical issues and following criticism that Ottawa had been moving too fast despite security concerns heightened by the terror attacks in Paris last month. Broadcaster CBC reported in November that Canada will accept only whole families, lone women or children from Syria, while unaccompanied men - considered a security risk - will be turned away.

Since the start of 2014, Canada has welcomed 3,500 Syrian refugees. Another plane carrying around 160 Syrians is due to arrive in Montreal today, and the pace of arrivals is scheduled to increase to as many as two planes per day. The ones who arrived Thursday night were to stay in hotels before joining relatives or Canadian families who have offered to open up their homes to them.

The generosity being shown by Canadians stands in contrast to the colder approach of the United States toward the refugees. President Barack Obama has pledged to take in 10,000 Syrians over the course of the next year, and many American states - apparently fearing Islamist extremists will be hiding amid the refugee flow - have said they do not want them. Canada last year deployed 69 military trainers to northern Iraq to train Kurdish militia, as well as six CF-18 fighter jets to conduct sorties in Iraq and Syria. — AFP