

## AFGHAN VP FACES PROBE OVER CLAIMS OF SEX ASSAULT, TORTURE

**KABUL:** Afghanistan has launched an investigation into allegations that the country's vice president sexually assaulted a rival, in the face of mounting criticism from Western allies and activists over a pervasive culture of impunity.

Abdul Rashid Dostum, a former warlord who has a catalogue of war crimes attached to his name, is accused of abducting Ahmad Ishchi last month during a traditional game of Buzkashi, or polo with an animal carcass, in northern

Jowzjan province. Dostum allegedly kept Ishchi hostage in his private compound for five days, where he was said to be tortured and sodomized. "The attorney general's office has begun its impartial and transparent investigation regarding the incident," Afghanistan's top prosecutor said in a statement late Saturday.

"The investigation will be carried out neutrally and independently."

Officials are scrambling to gather evi-

dence after the United States, European Union, Australia and Canada on Tuesday joined the chorus of calls for a thorough probe. Ishchi has undergone a medical examination since his release earlier this month at the American air base in Bagram, north of Kabul, local media reported.

Dostum has denied the allegations, but his office said he would cooperate with any investigation. It added, however, that it prefers to "resolve" the matter

by the traditional mediation of tribal elders rather than through conventional courts. Observers are skeptical the government will sack or bring charges against Dostum, who has survived all previous allegations of abuse. "He is too powerful to be sacked or tried in court," said Kabul-based analyst Ahmad Saeedi told AFP. "The president is under pressure to take action, but he (Dostum) has a lot of support and influence, which the government cannot take lightly." Despite

his human rights record, Dostum was invited to join the National Unity Government in 2014 in a bid by President Ashraf Ghani to attract the support of his mostly ethnic Uzbek constituency.

The latest controversy has once again drawn attention to how Afghan warlords and strongmen operate with impunity, hobbling Western-backed efforts to restore peace and rebuild the nation after decades of conflict. —AFP



**MOBILE, ALABAMA:** US President-elect Donald Trump greets members of the Azalea Trail Maids as he arrives in Mobile, Alabama, for a 'Thank You Tour 2016' rally on December 17, 2016. —AFP

## HOW TRUMP HAS UPENDED WASHINGTON POLITICS AS USUAL

### SHREDDING THE RULES OF AMERICAN POLITICS

**WASHINGTON:** During his unorthodox White House campaign, Donald Trump thoroughly shredded the rules of American politics, from his often coarse language to his intermittent disdain for basic concepts like freedom of the press.

Since defeating Democrat Hillary Clinton on November 8 to become the US president-elect, his title until he succeeds Barack Obama on January 20, he has made a mockery of those who said he would eventually fall in line.

While he admittedly followed protocol during his post-election visit to the White House, treating Obama with deference in the Oval Office, the Republican billionaire has otherwise blazed a new path in presidential transitions.

His style seems to indicate that the Manhattan property mogul will be a president like no other.

#### Victory tour

Candidate Trump thrived on the campaign trail at his large arena rallies. President-elect Trump has tried to recreate that atmosphere with his "thank you" tour through the swing states that propelled him to victory, wrapping up Saturday in Mobile, Alabama.

Hats with slogans, anti-Clinton chants and plenty of colorful signs? They're back. "They are saying, as president he shouldn't be doing rallies but I think we should, right?" Trump told the cheering crowd in Mobile. "We've done everything else the opposite. This is the way you get an honest word out because you can't give it to them because they are so dishonest," he added, slipping in one of his customary jabs at the media.

For Peter Kastor, a history professor at

Washington University in St. Louis, "the 'thank you' tour is unusual for presidents, but it is completely consistent with his campaign style." "Every president has in some way constructed the trip to the national capital as a symbolic move, and Donald Trump is doing so in a way that is unlike all of his predecessors," he said.

#### Press conferences? No, thanks

Eight years ago, at this stage of the transition, Obama had held nearly a dozen press conferences, in the midst of an economic crisis. Trump has held... none.

The 70-year-old president-elect has given a handful of interviews, including three lengthy ones to CBS, The New York Times and Fox News. When Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama wanted to make key cabinet nominations, they introduced their chosen ones to the press.

Trump sends statements, many of them either at 6:00 am or late at night, or simply posts news on Twitter. And his incoming chief of staff Reince Priebus created a stir in the White House press corps by suggesting major changes could lie in store for the traditional daily media briefings.

#### Reality show cabinet hunt

The recruitment of his cabinet so far has more or less unfolded in the public eye, with most candidates forced to run the media gauntlet through the lobby of Trump Tower or at his resort properties in New Jersey or Florida.

Former Trump critic-turned-admirer Mitt Romney made the pilgrimage twice, only to be dumped as secretary of state-designate in favor of ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson... who Trump only met for the first time on December 6.

#### Politics take back seat

Usually, state governors and US senators are the most likely choices for cabinet posts. Not this time. Trump has chosen an inner circle in his own image—mainly white, mainly male industry titans and investors, many of them millionaires and a handful of them billionaires.

Obama's team included a Nobel physics laureate. Trump has chosen three former generals.

#### Gender equality?

Keeping the male-female divide even in politics has always been a challenge in the United States. There were only six women given cabinet or cabinet-rank positions in Obama's first administration, but one of them was secretary of state Hillary Clinton. Trump has so far chosen four women, all for second-tier posts. The first 11 people in the order of presidential succession will be men. And so far, he has named only one African-American—Ben Carson—and no Latinos.

#### Melania in New York

Incoming first lady Melania Trump and the couple's 10-year-old son Barron will not move into the White House on January 20 as is customary, instead remaining in New York at least until the school year ends.

For Kastor, this is a first. "These are big cultural moments about the presidency—the transition is often the story about how this family is going to move," he told AFP. "There are all these stories about how they are packing up, and about what does it mean to move from a simple, private residence into this big, public one," Kastor added. "So this is completely unusual." —AFP

## SUSPECT IN PARIS MURDER OF KURD REBELS DIES

**PARIS:** A Turkish national charged with murdering three female Kurdish rebels in Paris died Saturday, a French judicial source said, before his case came to trial.

Omer Guney died at a hospital in the French capital following a battle with a serious brain illness, the source said. He was the only suspect sent for trial, scheduled to start next month, on charges of "murder in relation to a terrorist enterprise" over the killings of the three women, including Sakine Cansiz.

Cansiz—one of the founders of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was murdered along with Fidan Dogan, 28, and 24-year-old Leyla Soylemez. The women's bodies were found in the early hours of January 10, 2013 at a Kurdish information centre. They had been shot in the head and neck. Guney denied involvement in the killings, though investigators said they had surveillance footage of him entering the crime scene and one of the victim's DNA was allegedly found on his coat.

Lawyers for the victims' families spoke of their anger at being "denied a public trial

which they had been waiting for almost four years." They expressed their "consternation at seeing France, one again, incapable of judging a political crime committed on French territory by foreign secret services".

Guney had been described by relatives as a Turkish ultranationalist who infiltrated the PKK in order to spy on it, with one source saying he was tasked with "eliminating PKK cadres".

In January 2014 the Turkish intelligence services officially denied any role in the killings. French investigators had concluded that members of the Turkish national intelligence agency MIT were "implicated" in the triple murder, according to an informed source. However, the investigators had been unable to establish whether the service sponsored the hit or whether agents were acting on their own initiative.

The PKK launched its insurgency against the Turkish state in 1984, initially fighting for Kurdish independence although it now focuses on greater autonomy and rights for the country's largest ethnic minority. —AFP

## INDIA APPOINTS NEW ARMY, AIR FORCE AND INTELLIGENCE CHIEFS

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian government has appointed new heads of its army and air force among a series of senior military and intelligence appointments, officials said, two weeks before its two most senior defence force chiefs are due to retire.

Vice Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Bipin Rawat was named as the new chief of the army to succeed General Dalbir Singh Suhaag. Air Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa, a fighter pilot, was chosen as the new chief of India's air force to replace Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha. The appointments were announced on Twitter by a defence ministry spokesman late on Saturday.

The appointment of Rawat, a counter-insurgency specialist, raised eyebrows among opposition parties because he was given the job ahead of two more senior candidates. "Why has seniority not been respected in appointment of Army Chief," Manish Tewari, a former government minister and leader of the opposition Congress party, said on Twitter.

The appointment was also questioned

by Communist Party of India leader D. Raja, but a spokesman for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said it was not a matter for political debate. "The government appoints people to the office based on what it considers to be the most appropriate choice," BJP spokesman G.V.L. Narasimha Rao said.

Indian media reported that it was the first time since 1983 that the most senior candidate had not been chosen to replace an outgoing army chief. Rawat also has experience working along the Line of Control, the de facto border between areas controlled by India and Pakistan in the disputed Kashmir region.

The Indian government also announced senior appointments to its two main intelligence agencies. Rajiv Jain was named as the new chief of the domestic Intelligence Bureau and Anil Dhasmana as the head of India's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Both will serve for the next two years. —Reuters

## 13 PEOPLE KILLED IN MILITARY PLANE CRASH IN INDONESIA

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Twelve Air Force personnel and a radar technician were killed in a Hercules plane crash yesterday in Jayawijaya, Papua, Indonesian authorities said.

The Hercules C-130 with flight number A-1334 Navex 32 en route from Timika to Wamena was piloted by Maj. Marlon, with 12 crew. The plane was undertaking navigation training while transporting cement and sacks of rice to people in the Tengah

Mountains, the National Search and Rescue Agency's Operation Director Evan Ahmad Rizki Titoss said in press statements.

The 13 fatalities were confirmed after a joint team from the Air Force and a search and rescue group arrived at the crash site, he added.

The plane was heavily damaged and seemed to have been razed by fire, he said, adding that all 13 people inside the plane were killed. —KUNA



**NEW YORK:** In this Saturday, Nov 12, 2016 file photo, UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage smiles as he arrives at Trump Tower. —AFP

## UK GOVERNMENT REJECTS FARAGE'S AMBITION TO BE LINK TO TRUMP

### ARGUES HE WOULD BE IDEAL

**LONDON:** The British government says it doesn't need maverick anti-European politician Nigel Farage to be its go-between with the incoming Trump administration.

Senior figures in Prime Minister Theresa May's government rejected the idea yesterday after Farage, former leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party, argued he would be ideal given his bond formed on the US presidential campaign trail with Trump. Farage told BBC radio: "I

can help to be a bridge between the government ... and not just Donald Trump, but his team and his administration. I would like to do that." International Trade Secretary Liam Fox retorted Sunday that Britain has "a perfectly good ambassador in Washington."

The US president-elect met Farage last month at Trump Tower and tweeted that Farage would make an excellent ambassador to the United States. —AP

## CROATIA: 42 MIGRANTS HOSPITALIZED AFTER FOUND PACKED IN VAN

**ZAGREB, Croatia:** Forty-two migrants were hospitalized after police in Croatia found a van crammed with 67 people, including children, traveling through the country, authorities said yesterday.

The occupants were suffering from carbon-monoxide poisoning and some were unconscious, doctors said. They were treated in local hospitals and are now out of danger, the country's health minister said. "It is a serious medical condition and it is good that they were found," minister Milan Kujundzic said in comments carried by the Hina news agency. "Most will be released but three or four will remain hospitalized for observation."

Kujundzic said two children aged 10 and 12 were among the migrants found in the van. The migrants were cold and hungry, with some saying they hadn't eaten for five days, he said. Police said they stopped the van with British plates on Saturday evening, near the town of Novska, by the border with Bosnia. Some of the migrants were packed in the van's cargo compartment, police said.

Two Bulgarian citizens are under criminal investigation for smuggling the migrants, the police statement said. It said the van was headed west, toward the capital Zagreb and on toward western Europe.

Thousands of migrants are stranded in neighboring Serbia looking for ways to reach EU countries Croatia or Hungary. Many turn to people smugglers to take them illegally across the borders. EU nations have sought to curb the influx after more than 1 million came to Europe in 2015. —AP



**ROME:** Former Italian Premier Matteo Renzi delivers his speech at the Democratic Party's national assembly yesterday. —AP

## RENZI VOWS TO REVAMP ITALIAN PARTY, MAKE IT MORE HUMBLE

**ROME:** Recently drubbed by voters, Italian ex-Premier Matteo Renzi says his Democratic Party must be more united, humble and in synch with citizens as he eyes elections expected in 2017.

Renzi resigned after voters rejected a reforms referendum on Dec. 4. As leader of the Democrats, Parliament's largest party, Renzi gave delegates a pep talk in Rome on Sunday. He says Democrats "efficiency outstripped our empathy" toward citizens.

The No. 2 party in Parliament is the opposition, populist 5-Star Movement. Founder Beppe Grillo is scrambling to do damage control as scandals engulf some top aides to Rome's 5-Star mayor, Virginia Raggi. A 5-Star leader, Alessandro Di Battista, says sometimes "honesty and ingenueness go hand-in-hand."

The scandals are embarrassing as the party aims for national power for the first time in elections. —AP