

## B'DESH BANK CHIEF QUILTS OVER \$81M CYBER HEIST

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He described the heist as an "earthquake" and said the bank had promptly informed intelligence agencies in Bangladesh and abroad and also brought in international experts to investigate. FireEye Inc's Mandiant forensics division is helping investigate the cyber heist. The bank has also been in touch with the Fed and other US authorities, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Department of Justice.

Bangladesh Bank is also working with anti-money laundering authorities in the Philippines, where it suspects the stolen \$81 million arrived in four tranches. The Philippines' Rizal Commercial Banking Corp (RCBC) said last week it was investigating deposits amounting to just that sum, which were made at one of its branches. Teofisto Guingona, head of the Philippines Senate's anti-corruption committee, told Reuters the transfers into RCBC were subsequently consolidated into one account and some of the money was converted to pesos.

CCTV cameras at the branch were not functioning when the money was withdrawn, RCBC's anti-money laundering head, Laurinda Rogero, told the Senate hearing. The president of a foreign exchange broker called Philrem Service Corp, Salud Bautista, told the Senate that her firm was instructed by the bank branch to transfer the funds to a man

named Weikang Xu and two casinos. She said that \$30 million went to Xu in cash. Guingona has said Xu was ethnic Chinese and a foreigner, but he was not sure if he was a Chinese national.

A tranche of \$29 million ended up in an account of Solaire, a casino resort owned and operated by Bloomberry Resorts Corp. Bloomberry is controlled by Enrique Razon, the Philippines' fifth-richest man in 2015, according to Forbes. Silverio Benny Tan, corporate secretary of Bloomberry Resorts, told the hearing that the \$29 million was transferred into a casino account under Xu's name in exchange for 'dead chips' that can only be cashed in from winnings.

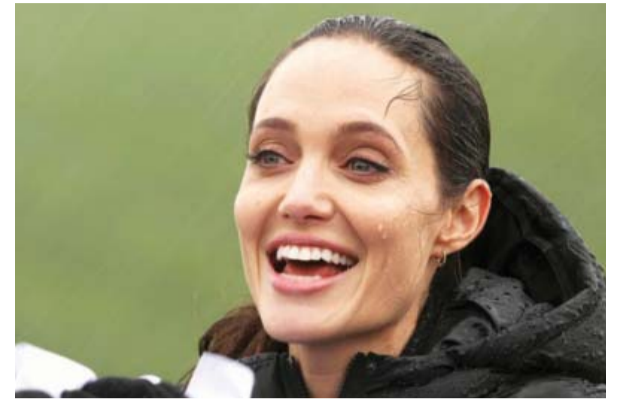
Bautista said a further \$21 million went to an account of Eastern Hawaii Leisure Co, a gaming firm in northern Philippines. Reuters tried several phone numbers to seek comment from Eastern Hawaii officials but was unable to reach any. "Our money trail ended up at the casinos," Julia Bacay Abad, executive director of the Anti-Money Laundering Council, told the open hearing. She said her agency had frozen 44 accounts connected to the case and had requested assistance from the FBI. Senator Guingona said that because casinos are not covered by the country's anti-money laundering laws it was not clear if the stolen funds could ever be recovered. "The paper trail ends there. That is the problem," he said. "Right now we are at a dead end." — Agencies

## JOLIE VISITS LEBANON, SAYS WORLD HAS FAILED REFUGEES

**BEIRUT:** Angelina Jolie, the Hollywood actress and special envoy for the UN's refugee agency, said yesterday that the international community must address the root causes of the global refugee crisis. "We cannot manage the world through aid relief in the place of diplomacy and political solutions," she said under the pouring rain at a press conference in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have sought refuge in the Bekaa. Lebanon hosts well over a million Syrian refugees, who now account for nearly a fifth of its population.

Jolie said she had hoped to be in Syria helping victims return to their homes on the fifth anniversary of the uprising against President Bashar Al-Assad. She said it's "tragic and shameful that we seem to be so far from that point." There are now more people displaced through conflict around the globe than during World War II, according to the UN. The war in Syria between Assad's government, rebels and foreign jihadis has drawn in world powers and generated what the UN says is the largest humanitarian catastrophe in a generation.

Half of Syria's prewar population of some 23 million has been displaced, with around 5 million having fled their homeland, mainly to neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. The international relief organization OXFAM warned yesterday that Lebanese municipalities are running out of space to bury deceased refugees. "We should never forget that for all the focus on the refugee situation in Europe at this time, the greatest pressure is still being felt



Angelina Jolie

in the Middle East and North Africa, as it has for each of the last five years," Jolie said.

After a tidal wave of refugees poured into Europe last year, some countries began erecting political and physical barriers to migration, which have left tens of thousands of refugees stuck in squalid conditions in the Balkans this spring. Jolie called on such countries to adhere to their international obligations to aid refugees. "The reason we have laws and binding international agreements is precisely because of the temptation to deviate from them in times of pressure," she said. — AP

## SUBAIH GRILLING DELAYED, DASHTI IMMUNITY...

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Dashti was stripped of his immunity in the state security case 10/2016 related to addressing abusive remarks against Saudi Arabia. Up to 41 MPs approved the request and five declined, out of the 46 MPs present in the session. The parliamentary legislative panel unanimously recommended in its meeting on March 13 the prosecution's request, denying that the case had any personal ill intentions.

The committee had clarified that the public prosecutor received a letter from the foreign ministry notifying him about an official memo addressed by the Saudi Embassy in Kuwait stating that the Dashti had uttered harmful remarks against the kingdom during an interview with Syrian television channel Al-Ekhabria on Feb 24. He was also accused of inciting against the kingdom. The MP had made similar remarks in previous TV interviews.

### Elderly people's rights

Meanwhile, lawmakers endorsed a draft law to preserve the rights of the elderly for optimum care. The draft law identifies any Kuwaiti citizen above the age of 65 to be an elderly person, however it differentiates between an elderly person capable of independent living and one who does not have the wherewithal to do so, or is physically or mentally incapacitated.

The draft law provides numerous advantages enabling the elderly to secure their needs with ease and dignity, including the requirement that senior citizen cards be issued to them with which they could obtain government or public services without any hassle.

The elderly, in accordance with this law, would get some government services without charge, such as free bus passes, or special care at government clinics and hospitals. This draft law urges the private sector and civil society organizations to dabble into establishing and running elderly care facilities and to create means of supporting families that have elderly folks amongst them. Following voting on the draft law, Subaih touted the law but pointed out that it was an improvement on an existing law from the 1970s. She promised that she would implement the law when it is officially sanctioned by the government.

### Illegal residents

In the meantime, the Assembly gave the thumbs up to several recommendations pertinent to the conditions of illegal residents (bedoons). The recommendations included the naturalization of worthy illegal residents, mainly the children of martyrs, Kuwaitis' relatives and military personnel.

They also called for handing out 'security cards' to illegal residents who are not included in naturalization lists so that they could gain access to basic humanitarian and social rights, recruiting them at military and government agencies and bodies as well as the private sector, and for reconsidering existing security restrictions on illegal residents' families. Furthermore, illegal residents should be given access to birth and death certificates, marriage and divorce contracts, driving licenses

and public schools. Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah had warned that the government would abstain from voting unless such recommendations were reformulated. But, he had assured that the issue of illegal residents was given top priority by the government.

### Government contracts

Also yesterday, the Assembly approved a recommendation for excluding government contracts for companies with a record of flaws and in and shortcomings in past deals' execution. The parliament approved the recommendation against such companies, with a record of breaches and irregularities recorded by the Audit Bureau, to avert recurrence of such shortcomings. Moreover, the parliamentary commission for protecting public funds will present to the parliament, at the upcoming session, a report about a company with an identical record.

Also in the same session, Minister of Commerce and Industry Yousef Al-Ali pledged to hold a presentation on terms' compatibility, due to be addressed to the central tenders committee regarding an infrastructural project, pending the funds protection panel's cross-examination of the company.

### Sovereign rating

Furthermore, the parliament approved an address from the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anas Al-Saleh to the financial affairs committee regarding prospected downgrading of Kuwait's sovereign rating internationally. The MPs blessed a request by MP Faisal Al-Kandari urging the Assembly to tackle conditions in the oil sector and another one addressed to the finance minister re-examine irregular acts and performance reported by the Audit Bureau.

In response to the motion, presented by Kandari, the minister said that the examination and hazards committee at Kuwait Petroleum Corporation had tasked him with following up on remarks of the Audit Bureau. As to "purported targeting of special allocations" for the oil personnel, the minister affirmed the government serious care for the sector and the workers, explaining that the government is actually seeking to "rationalize some of the allotments granted to leaders" in the public and oil sectors.

### Universities' bill

Separately, Minister of Education and Higher Education Bader Al-Essa affirmed significance of the public universities' bill, allowing establishment of branches for Kuwait University and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training in the country's six governorates.

During the session, the minister said the said bill had been referred to the parliamentary committee for educational affairs, pending voting in the parliament. On press reports about non-accredited certificates, he said 200 persons who work in the private sector and suspected of involvement in the case have been referred to the public prosecution. — KUNA

## 1503 SHIPWRECK FOUND OFF OMAN

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"That was an amazing discovery," Mearns said. "It was like a thing you read about in a Hollywood story." The archaeologists announced their findings in an article published yesterday by The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology. Ayoub Al-Busaidi, the supervisor of marine

archaeology at the Oman Ministry of Heritage and Culture, said this marked the first underwater excavation carried out by his country. He said it inspired officials to continue to explore the waters around the sultanate for other finds. "Oman is now looking at outside archives to read about the relationships and trade between Oman and the outside" world, Busaidi said. — AP

## RUSSIA JETS RETURN FROM SYRIA

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Syrian Observatory for Human Rights director Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP that "Russian helicopters and warplanes, that are likely Russian" had struck IS targets around the ancient city of Palmyra. There was no official confirmation from Moscow.

Meanwhile, one Al-Qaeda linked group branded the withdrawal a "defeat" and vowed to launch a new offensive in Syria. Putin said Monday that Moscow's military goal had been "on the whole" completed some five-and-a-half months and 9,000 combat sorties after the Kremlin launched its bombing campaign in support of Assad. State media broadcast live footage of flag-waving crowds and priests greeting returning pilots at a military base in southwest Russia as a brass band played.

The West reacted cautiously to the announcement, since Moscow is yet to specify a timeframe for completing the withdrawal, and a Kremlin official said Russia will keep advanced air defence systems in Syria. Some governments expressed hope the Russian move could push Assad to negotiate, but in Geneva both sides remained locked in a bitter dispute over his fate. The talks opened after a temporary ceasefire between Assad's forces and opponents went into force on Feb 27 and has largely held, although it does not cover IS jihadists and Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate the Al-Nusra Front.

De Mistura was yesterday to hold his first official meeting with the opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC), which has repeatedly said Assad cannot be part of Syria's political future. Damascus sparked Western anger by staking out an uncompromising stance before the talks, insisting that discussions on Assad's removal were a "red line" they would not cross. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied that the Kremlin was angered by Assad's perceived inflexibility.

But in February, Russia was unusually critical of Assad after he vowed in an interview with AFP to retake the whole country, saying his stance was "not in accord" with Moscow's diplomatic efforts. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter

Steinmeier said a Russian withdrawal "increases the pressure" on Assad to negotiate, while France's foreign ministry said "anything that helps towards a de-escalation in Syria should be encouraged".

Moscow has pledged to ratchet up its own diplomatic efforts to find a political solution to a conflict that has killed more than 270,000 people and displaced millions since March 2011. The White House said President Barack Obama had spoken to Putin following Russia's announcement, and discussed the "next steps required to fully implement the cessation of hostilities". But US officials offered a cautious initial assessment. "At this point, we are going to see how things play out over the next few days," a senior administration official told AFP.

The foreign minister of Iran - which controls thousands of troops supporting Assad on the ground in Syria - said Russia's withdrawal showed Moscow did not "see an imminent need (to) resort to force in maintaining the ceasefire". Russia began air strikes in Syria in September, in a move that helped shore up the regime's crumbling forces and allowed them to go on the offensive. Moscow sent some 50 warplanes to carry out thousands of strikes across Syria, saying it was targeting "terrorist" groups including IS jihadists. The intervention was slammed by the West and its regional allies, which accused Moscow of mainly bombing more moderate rebels.

Meanwhile, a jihadist commander told AFP that Al-Nusra was preparing to launch a new offensive "within the next 48 hours", saying the regime was unable to hold onto territory it had seized with the help of the Russians. Syria's main opposition welcomed the Kremlin announcement, but said it would wait to see what happens on the ground. "We must verify the nature of this decision and its meaning," HNC spokesman Salem Al-Meslet told reporters in Geneva. After his first official meeting with the regime on Monday, de Mistura told reporters that "strong statements (and) rhetoric" were part of every tough negotiation and that his initial discussions with government representative Bashar Al-Jaafari were "useful". — AFP

## KNPC CLOSE TO \$3BN LOAN TO PART-FUND...

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Under the project, the capacity of the Mina Ahmadi refinery will drop to 347,000 barrels per day (bpd) from 466,000, while Mina Abdullah refinery's capacity

will rise to 454,000 bpd from 270,000. The reduction in the capacity of the Ahmadi refinery, after shutting one of its crude distillation units, will be compensated for by adding new units to produce higher-value products. — Reuters

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