



SANTA CLARA, Cuba: Airport workers receive the JetBlue flight 387 holding United States and Cuban national flags on the airport tarmac yesterday. — AP

ROUSSEFF STRIPPED OF PRESIDENCY

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"I will not associate my name with this infamy," read a sign held up by one senator. "Coup plotters!" others chanted.

Renan Calheiros, the Senate president, rejected Rousseff's claim of a coup, saying her impeachment might not have been perfect, but had "the DNA of democracy, the DNA of the constitution". Brazil's first female president, holed up in the presidential palace on the outskirts of the capital Brasilia with close aides, was expected to make a statement. Her vice president turned bitter political enemy, Michel Temer, was to be sworn in as her replacement, the Senate president announced. Temer, a veteran center-right politician, was then to leave for a G20 summit in China.

Rousseff, from the leftist Workers' Party, is accused of taking illegal state loans to patch budget holes in 2014, masking the country's problems as it slid into its deepest recession in decades. She told the Senate during a marathon 14-hour session on Monday that she is innocent and that abuse of the impeachment process put Brazil's democracy, restored in 1985 after a two-decades-long military dictatorship, at risk.

Recalling how she was tortured and imprisoned in the 1970s for belonging to a leftist guerrilla group, Rousseff urged senators to "vote against impeachment, vote for democracy... Do not accept a coup." However, huge anti-Rousseff street demonstrations over the last year have reflected nationwide anger at her management of a country suffering double-digit unemployment and inflation. The once mighty Workers' Party, meanwhile, has struggled to stage more than small rallies.

Temer, who was in an uncomfortable partnership with

Rousseff before finally splitting, will be president until the next scheduled elections in late 2018. The 75-year-old, known more as a backroom wheeler-dealer than street politician, took over in an interim role after Rousseff's initial suspension in May. He immediately named a new government with an agenda of shifting Brazil to the right after more than a decade of leftist rule that saw 29 million people lifted from poverty, but became bogged down in corruption and the economic slump. Temer has earned plaudits from investors. It remains uncertain whether he will have voters' support to push through the painful austerity reforms he promises.

About 50 leftist demonstrators gathered outside the presidential palace to show their support for Rousseff. "We are protesting against the coup and fighting for democracy," said 61-year-old farmer Orlando Ribeiro. In the center of the capital, extra security and the closing of avenues near the Senate caused massive traffic jams. Police said they were preparing for large protests later in the day.

On the Senate floor, emotions crackled in the run-up to the vote, then overflowed as senators made final speeches on what both sides of the debate agreed was history in the making. Senator Aecio Neves, Rousseff's narrowly defeated center-right opponent in her 2014 re-election, pronounced triumphantly: "The constitution won. Brazil won!" But Senator Vanessa Grazziotin was scathing in her summing up of an "illegal process that is called impeachment but is a coup". "Temer does not have legitimacy to govern this country," she warned. "This is a farce, a farce, a farce," shouted another pro-Rousseff senator, Lindbergh Farias. Shaking his fists at the majority backing impeachment, he cried: "They're going in the garbage can of history." — AFP

WEALTHY QATARIS TASTE AUSTERITY

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The austerity measures may be light compared with those felt by expatriate workers and poorer energy-producing countries, but they have nevertheless unnerved some locals for whom affluence and stellar economic growth have been the norm. A merger of several ministries early this year did not affect the salaries or benefits of Qataris - which are still viewed as sacrosanct - but did entail sharp cuts in "discretionary" spending, according to three government ministry officials.

"We stopped receiving a daily paper," said one of the officials, who said colleagues had been encouraged not to fly business class and to cut back on trips abroad for overseas conferences. "Journal subscriptions were cancelled. Some who had their own offices were moved into shared offices." The economy, finance and labor ministries did not respond to requests for comment.

Overseas Travel

Another official, from the labor ministry, said as a result of the merger hundreds of Qatari government employees had been left with no work since January as the government scrambled to find them new positions while continuing to pay their salaries. Staff in the labor ministry were told that travelling abroad for further education while working for the government - an appealing aspect of the job for many Qataris - was now limited to those pursuing technical or vocational degrees, the official said. He and the other officials declined to be named as they are not authorized to speak publicly.

Qatari authorities say the oil price slump provides an opportunity to curb the excesses of government agen-

cies that have been plagued by inefficiencies for years. An economic adviser to the government, who also asked to remain anonymous as he is not authorized to speak publicly, said there was a freeze on recruitment in some government departments and more scrutiny on spending. He said reducing inefficiencies, while painful, would benefit the state in the long run, even once oil prices rebounded.

Many Qataris are drawn to public-sector positions which typically involve more favorable working hours and better salaries and benefits than private companies. It is not yet clear how successful the efficiency drive has been, although in the 2016 budget "minor capital expenditure", an area of discretionary spending that traditionally includes smaller building projects such as refurbishments, fell by 70 percent year-on-year.

Salaries account for 50 billion riyals (\$13.7 billion) - about a quarter - of Qatar's expenditure. Previous austerity steps in Qatar, such as utility bill rises in late 2015 and a reduction in fuel subsidies earlier this year, have fallen hardest on poorly paid foreign construction workers - as will a 5 percent sales tax on consumer goods and services planned for 2018. This trend risks increasingly polarizing the country between wealthy Qataris at the top and Asian blue-collar workers at the bottom.

However Syed Bashar, a former economist with Qatar's central bank, said Qatari workers could increasingly feel the weight of austerity as the government targets state entities to narrow the deficit. "The government will not be able to provide the vast majority of Qatari jobs indefinitely," he added. "Nor can it guarantee that salaries keep rising as they did. This will be upsetting for some nationals." — Reuters

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