



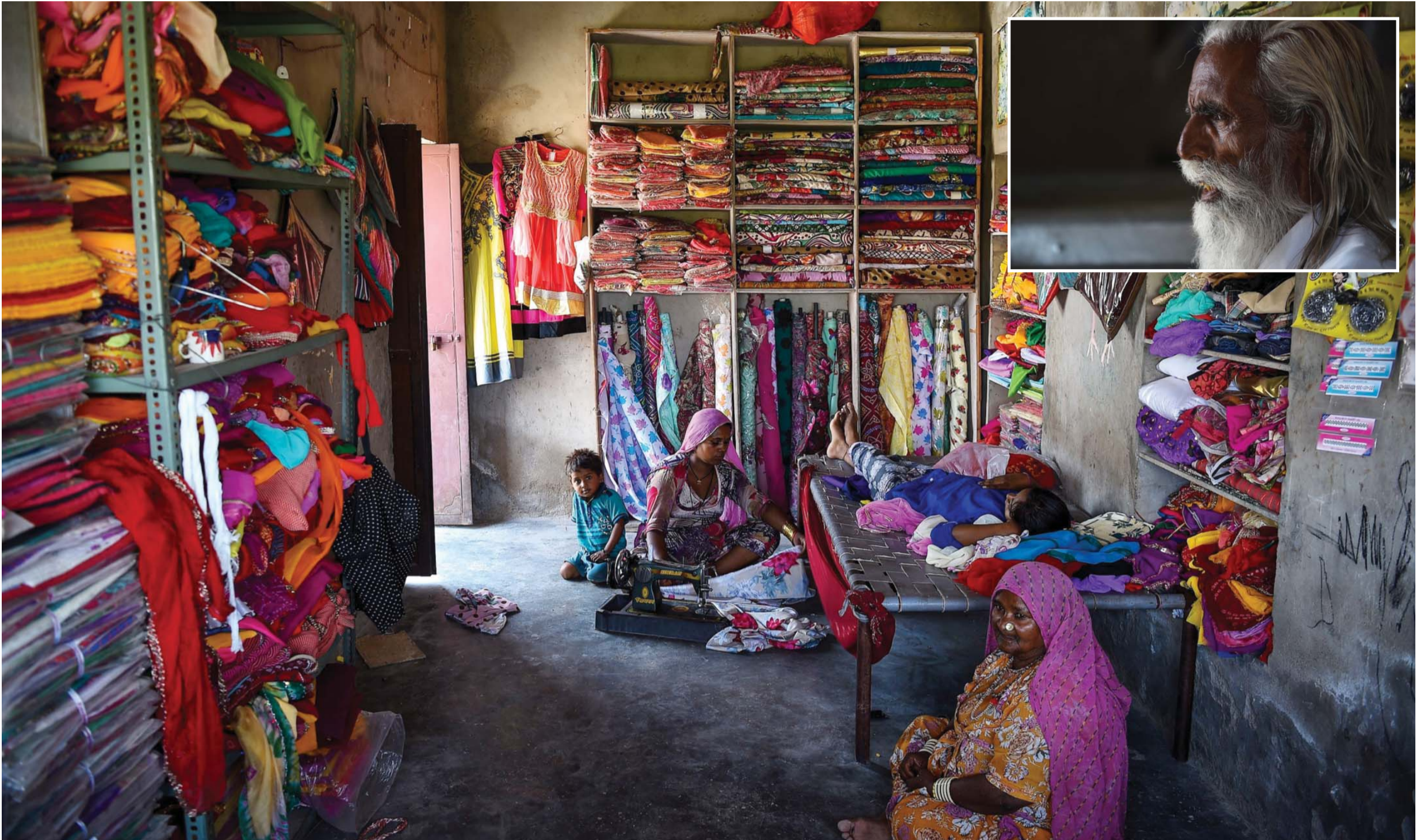
Venezuela braces for new protests after deadly vote

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AFGHAN CHILDREN BEING SMUGGLED TO PAKISTAN MADRASSAS

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JODHPUR, Rajasthan: This photo taken on June 16, 2017 shows Dhanki (C), 32, who has been living in India for 16 years, at an artisan shop in an unauthorized settlement for Pakistani Hindus in Jodhpur in India's western state of Rajasthan. (Inset) This photo shows Pakistani national Jogdas, 81, in an unauthorized settlement for Pakistani Hindus in Jodhpur. — AFP photos

PAKISTANI HINDUS FIND LITTLE REFUGE IN INDIA

FOR MANY, THE PARTITION IS NOT OVER

JODHPUR: For decades, Jogdas dreamed of moving to India to escape the persecution he suffered as a Hindu in Muslim Pakistan. But the reality of life over the border is a far cry from those dreams. Seventy years after partition unleashed the largest mass migration in human history, Hindus are still moving from Pakistan to India, where tens of thousands languish in makeshift camps near the border with no legal right to work.

Many have no choice but to toil illegally in the stone quarries near where they live because their movements are strictly controlled by the authorities, suspicious of anyone from across the border. It is not the welcome most of them expected in Hindu-majority India. "No job, no house, no money, no food. There, we were working in the fields, we were farmers. But here people like us are forced to break rocks to earn a living," said 81-year-old Jogdas, who goes by just one name.

"For us the partition is still not over.

Hindus are still trying to come back to their country. And when they come here, they have nothing," he told AFP from the camp on the outskirts of the western city of Jodhpur where he lives. More than 15 million people were uprooted following India's independence from Britain in 1947, which triggered months of violence in which at least a million people were killed for their faith.

Amid the bloody chaos, Hindus and Sikhs fled the newly formed Pakistan, as Muslims moved in the opposite direction. Despite the exodus, Hindus remain one of Pakistan's largest religious minorities. Estimates vary, but they are believed to account for around 1.6 percent of the population of roughly 200 million. Many say they face discrimination and even risk abduction, rape and forced marriage. "Soon after partition, the harassment started," said Jogdas, whose family had only moved to what is now Pakistan a few months before partition to escape a devastating drought. "There was not even a single

day when we could live in peace. I wanted to come back to live with my Hindu brothers."

'We are alone'

Most of the migrants to India come from Pakistan's Sindh province, taking a four-hour train journey through the Thar desert to Jodhpur in the arid western state of Rajasthan. That they share the culture, food and language of Rajasthan should make it easy for them to assimilate in their adopted homeland. In reality, they live in isolated camps, far from local communities and are treated with suspicion by authorities.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government has said it wants to make it easier for persecuted adherents of the faith to find refuge in India. Last year it changed the rules to allow immigrants to apply for citizenship in the state where they live, rather than having to go through the central government.

Hindus from Pakistan qualify for a fast

track to citizenship after seven years in the country. But bureaucratic delays have meant the process of getting it can take longer to complete. Khanaramji, 64, became an Indian citizen in 2005 after fleeing Pakistan in 1997. He said many others had given up and returned to Pakistan, disillusioned by life in India. "There is no assistance from the government. We are just like cattle with no owners. We are just surviving on our own," he said.

'Life becomes hell'

Worse even than the poverty is the suspicion from authorities. "Those who do not have citizenship are harassed by (intelligence) agencies. They are always treated like suspects and agents of Pakistan," said Khanaramji, who goes by only one name. "They spend most of what they earn on going to police stations and agency offices."

Hindu Singh Sodha, who runs a charity in Jodhpur for Pakistani Hindus seeking to set-

tle in India, said they had high hopes of Modi when he came to office in 2014, but had been disappointed. The migrants still come under increased scrutiny whenever tensions flare between India and Pakistan—a frequent occurrence under the Modi government. "Their life becomes hell," he said. "Because everything is affected. Their shelter, health-care, access to education, their livelihood." But some feel even that is worth tolerating.

Horoji fled to India with his two adult sons two years ago after receiving death threats from the family's Muslim neighbors in Pakistan. "To save our lives, we had to run to India," said 65-year-old Horoji, whose grandparents were originally from present-day India but found themselves on the wrong side of the border at partition. "My grandfather had gone to the other side for work. But he had told us to move to India when the right time comes as he had sensed times would not be safe for Hindus in future." —AFP

AUSTRALIAN PLANE PLOT MAY HAVE INVOLVED BOMB OR GAS: REPORTS

SYDNEY: Four men accused of plotting to bring down a plane planned to use poisonous gas or a crude bomb disguised as a meat mincer, reports said yesterday, with Australian officials calling preparations "advanced". The men—reportedly two Lebanese-Australian fathers and their sons — were arrested in raids across Sydney on Saturday evening.

The Sydney Daily Telegraph said they allegedly planned to carry the device on board a commercial flight from Sydney to a Middle East destination as hand luggage. It said the idea was to use wood scrapings and explosive material inside a piece of kitchen equipment such as a mincing machine. The Sydney Morning Herald also reported that a mincer was being examined, while The Australian newspaper cited multiple sources as saying it was a "non-traditional" device that could have emitted a toxic sulphur-based gas.

This, it said, would have killed or immobilized everyone on the aircraft. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said the plans were "advanced" but refused to comment on the conflicting claims over the method of attack. "I have to respect the integrity of the investigations," he said. "But I can say that certainly the police will allege they had the intent and were developing the capability. "There will obviously be more to say over com-

ing days. It will be alleged that this was an Islamist, extremist terrorist motivation." Australian Federal Police Commissioner Andrew Colvin on Sunday said the aviation industry was potentially a target and that an improvised explosive device was involved.

Seamless cooperation

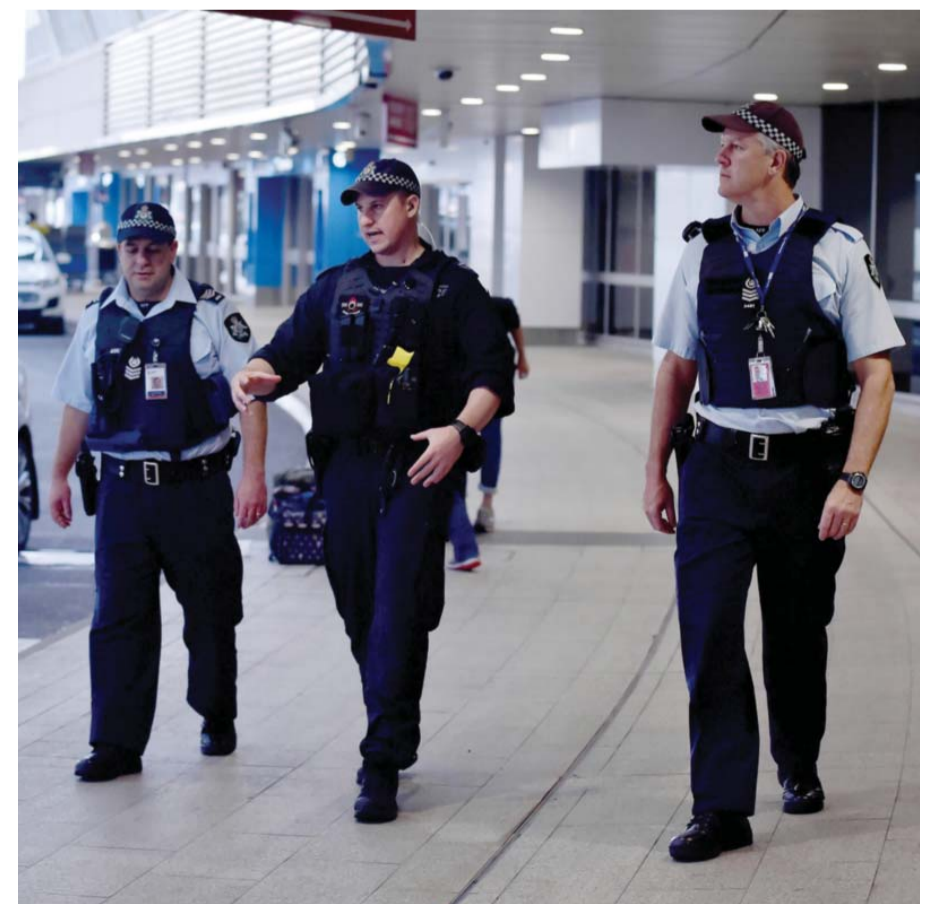
Justice Minister Michael Keenan on Monday called the plans "quite sophisticated". "It was a plot to bring down an aircraft with the idea of smuggling a device on to it to enable them to do that," he said. A magistrate late Sunday gave police an additional seven days to detain the men, who have not been officially named, without charge. Police continued to gather evidence Monday at the five homes raided, warning the investigation would be "very long and protracted".

TV footage on Saturday showed riot police moving on a terrace house in the inner-city suburb of Surry Hills, with a man with a bandage on his head being led away by authorities, draped in a blanket. A woman at the address denied they had any link to terrorism. Police reportedly acted after receiving information from an overseas intelligence agency, suggesting the men may have been directed by someone else.

Turnbull would not confirm this, but said "nowhere is far away from anywhere else these days". "In an age of the internet and the age of social media and the age of instant messaging applications, Syria is not a long way away from Sydney," he said. "And so that's the criticality of it—seamless cooperation."

Security has been strengthened at major domestic and international airports across Australia since the raids, with passengers asked to arrive early and to limit their baggage. This prompted long queues at Sydney's domestic terminal on Monday morning, with officials saying extra checks were likely to continue for some time. Australia's national terror alert level was raised on September 2014 amid concerns over attacks by individuals inspired by organizations such as the Islamic State group.

Canberra has become so worried that it announced the creation of a super ministry this month combining its security agencies including the domestic spy service, border force and national police to better tackle terrorism. A total of 12 attacks, before the latest one, have been prevented in the past few years, while 70 people have been charged. Several terror attacks have taken place in Australia in recent years, including a Sydney cafe siege in 2014 that saw two hostages killed. — AFP



SYDNEY: Police walk outside the international terminal as they patrol Sydney Airport yesterday. — AFP