



**Incoming leader of Tamil Nadu jailed**

## THAIS IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE AS V-DAY FEVER SWEEPS THE NATION

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**MAKASSAR:** A condom rack is left empty at a convenience store in Makassar, South Sulawesi province yesterday. Indonesian authorities raided convenience stores and seized condoms in a major city to stop teenagers having casual sex on Valentine's Day, an official said yesterday, the latest crackdown on the holiday in the Muslim-majority nation. — AFP

# INDONESIA LAUNCHES ANTI-VALENTINE CONDOM RAIDS

## FORBIDDEN LOVE: VALENTINE'S DAY BAN IN INDONESIA

**JAKARTA:** Indonesian authorities in parts of the Muslim-majority nation have confiscated condoms and banned students from celebrating Valentine's Day, saying the romantic tradition encourages casual sex and runs counter to cultural norms. In the city of Makassar on Sulawesi island, police raided minimarts and seized condoms that were readily available in most parts of Indonesia, a secular country whose state ideology enshrines religious diversity.

"These raids were done after we received reports from residents that the minimarts were selling condoms in an unregulated way, especially on Valentine's Day," Makassar police official Jufri was quoted as saying in a media report. He added employees of the minimarts were told not to sell contraceptives to teenagers, the report said. Indonesia's highest Islamic clerical council declared Valentine's Day forbidden by Islamic law

in 2012, saying it was contradictory to Muslim culture and teachings. But the vast majority of Indonesia's more than 220 million Muslims follow a moderate form of Islam in a country with sizeable Christian and Hindu minorities.

In Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, and other parts of the country, Valentine's Day has grown in popularity with companies looking to cash in by offering special discounts and promotions. For example, national flag carrier Garuda Indonesia is offering a 15 percent discount on air fares this week and motor bike delivery services are promoting week-long discounts to send flowers and chocolates to loved ones.

Rights groups have expressed concerns over the growing influence of Islamist groups, who have targeted how people lead their lives. A hard-line group went around malls in East Java late last year to check whether outlets had ordered

Muslim staff to wear Christmas apparel such as Santa hats. In Indonesia's second largest city, Surabaya, government officials ordered schools to ban students from celebrating Valentine's Day "in or outside of school" because it ran counter to "cultural and social norms", according to a copy of the letter on the city's official website.

A similar letter was also sent to public education agencies and schools in West Java province, according to a statement on the provincial government's website. West Java is the country's most populous province. West Java and other provinces, such as Aceh, which is the only province in Indonesia to follow sharia law, have issued similar bans on celebrating Valentine's Day in previous years. Under Indonesia's decentralized system of government, regional authorities are allowed to issue bylaws without approval from the central government. — Reuters

## 7 SAUDI SOLDIERS KILLED

**RIYADH:** At least seven Saudi soldiers have died on the southern border since late last week, according to an unusual series of official reports released as the country fights Yemeni rebels. In separate dispatches since last Thursday, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) has carried photographs of funerals for the "martyrs" it said had died "defending the southern borders."

The most recent report, published late on Monday, named Mohammed Al-Manjahi as the latest soldier to have been killed. The report quoted Manjahi's father as saying he was proud of his son.

A Saudi-led coalition began air strikes over Yemen in March 2015 to support the internationally recognized government of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi against Iran-backed Houthi rebels. The Houthis are allied with former members of the security forces loyal to ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh and have carried out retaliatory rocket strikes and engaged in firefights along the border. They have also fired ballistic missiles further into the kingdom. An earlier AFP tally of reports by the Saudi interior ministry and civil defense department found that at least 115 civilians and soldiers had been killed on the southern border since coalition operations began. That total

has now reached at least 122. The coalition's spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment on the tally. The Saudi Interior Ministry regularly gives details of casualties among its border guard troops but other military services normally do not. Official media have previously reported on funerals for dead troops but the series of dispatches since last week is unusual. SPA said the director of the border guards, Awad Al-Balwi, last Wednesday paid tribute to two of his men killed in the Jazan region on the border. "They were among the best," SPA said he told the dead men's families while conveying condolences in their villages.

On Sunday and Monday, SPA reported that funeral prayers and condolences were held for five other soldiers, including a major, killed on duty in the south. There were no details of how they died. The latest losses came after Yemeni government forces claimed full control of the Red Sea coastal town of Mokha on Friday and prepared a push further north into rebel-held territory. In Yemen, the war has left thousands dead and millions struggling to feed themselves, a toll which UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in Riyadh on Sunday left him heartbroken. — AFP

## TRUMP TOP AIDE FLYNN RESIGNS

**WASHINGTON:** Donald Trump's national security advisor Michael Flynn resigned after it was revealed he misled top officials over his contacts with Russia, an unprecedented departure so early into a US president's administration. The White House late Monday said Trump had accepted Flynn's resignation amid allegations the retired three star general discussed US sanctions strategy with Russia's ambassador Sergey Kislyak before taking office. Flynn—who once headed US military intelligence—insisted he was honored to have served the American people in such a "distinguished" manner, despite the Trump presidency being less than a month old.

Flynn admitted that he "inadvertently briefed" the now Vice President Mike Pence with "incomplete information" about his calls with Kislyak. Pence had publicly defended Flynn, saying he did not discuss sanctions, putting his own credibility into question. "Regarding my phone calls with the Russian Ambassador, I have sincerely apologized to the President and the Vice President, and they have accepted my apology," read Flynn's letter, a copy of which was released by the White House. Flynn's resignation came after details of the telephone calls were made public—increasing pressure on Trump to take action.

Several US media outlets reported Monday that top Trump advisors were warned about Flynn's contacts with the Russians early this year, reopening questions about who knew about the calls and why Trump did not move earlier to replace Flynn. The resignation will also fuel calls for an independent investigation into Russia's influence during the 2016 US presidential election and throws into doubt the fledgling effort from Trump to establish ties with President Vladimir Putin. The Kremlin on Tuesday said Flynn's resignation was "not our business". "This is the internal business of the Americans, it is the internal business of President Trump's administration," spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists in Moscow.

On Monday, White House spokesman Sean Spicer insisted Trump was not consulted about Flynn, a for-



**US National Security Advisor Michael Flynn**

mer head of defense intelligence, discussing sanctions, nor did he task the retired general to do so. The Justice Department had warned the White House that Flynn had misled senior administration officials about the contents of his talks with Kislyak, and that it could make him vulnerable to Russian blackmail, US media reported. The message was delivered in the last days of Barack Obama's administration by then-acting attorney general Sally Yates—who Trump sacked after she instructed government lawyers not to defend the new president's controversial travel ban.

CNN said then director of national intelligence James Clapper and then CIA chief John Brennan agreed the White House should be told about the concerns. Until quitting, Flynn had been instrumental in Trump's inner circle.

He was an early supporter of Trump's improbable bid for the presidency and had encouraged tougher policies on Iran and a softer policy on Russia. That was a sharp break from the Obama administration, which introduced sanctions over Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea, support for separatists in eastern Ukraine, and what US intelligence says were its attempts to sway last year's election in Trump's favor.

Washington and Moscow had also clashed over alleged war crimes in Syria, where Russia is accused of aiding the bombing of hospitals and other civilian targets. Despite this, Flynn had argued for rapprochement. Several Republicans had joined their Democratic foes in urging Flynn to resign over a situation that had become an embarrassment for the ruling party. Flynn's resignation came just days before Trump's first official talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, discussions in which the president's national security advisor would normally have a key role.

### Successor talk

The Justice Department and Congress are both investigating possible links between Trump campaign advisors and Moscow. US intelligence has concluded that Putin personally directed an operation to interfere in the election. On December 29, the Obama administration sanctioned four Russian individuals and five entities, and expelled 35 Russian diplomats in retaliation. Although the Russian foreign ministry prepared a response, Putin ruled it out. After Flynn quit, the White House said Trump had named retired lieutenant general Joseph Kellogg, a decorated Vietnam war veteran who was serving as a director on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to be interim national security advisor.

The Washington Post, citing unnamed White House sources, reported that Vice Admiral Robert Harward, a former deputy commander of the US Central Command - in charge of US-led wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan - and a friend of Defense Secretary James Mattis, is the frontrunner to replace Flynn. — AFP

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