

## International

# New British passport to be made by Franco-Dutch firm

## De La Rue losses tender; shares fall 5%

**LONDON:** The new blue British passports that Prime Minister Theresa May called “an expression of our independence and sovereignty” after Brexit will be made by a Franco-Dutch firm, the boss of the British company which lost the contract said yesterday. May announced in December that Britain, which adopted burgundy passports in 1988, would switch back to the “iconic” blue ones that it had before joining the bloc. British passports are now made by De La Rue, which despite its French name is a British company that prints them in northern England. The company’s CEO said it lost the tender for the new version after being undercut on price.

Franco-Dutch company Gemalto won the contract, the Sun newspaper said. “I’m going to have to go and face those workers, look them in the whites of the eyes and try and explain to them why the British government thinks it’s a sensible decision to buy French passports not British passports,” De La Rue CEO Martin Sutherland told BBC radio. “I’d like to invite Theresa May or (interior minister) Amber Rudd to come to my factory and explain to my dedicated workforce why they think this is a sensible decision to offshore the

manufacture of a British icon.” “Sacre Bleu!” headlined the pro-Brexit Daily Mail tabloid.

When May announced the switch back to blue passports in December, she said on Twitter: “The UK passport is an expression of our independence and sovereignty - symbolizing our citizenship of a proud, great nation. That’s why we have announced that the iconic



‘An expression of independence and sovereignty’

#bluepassport will return after we leave the European Union in 2019.” The European Union does not require any particular color of passport but recommends member states adopt burgundy. Croatia, which joined the European Union in 2013, retained its blue passport with no plans to change its color scheme.

near the French border. Police had found a black hair partially dyed blond at the scene, then spotted Khavari by his hairstyle on security camera footage and linked him to the crime using his DNA. As the crime sparked public anger and revulsion, social media users posted sarcastic “thank you” messages to Chancellor Angela Merkel over her liberal policy that brought more than one million refugees and migrants to the country. During the trial, prosecutor Eckart Berger had reminded the two jurors sitting alongside three judges that “on trial is a criminal offender and not Germany’s refugee policy”.

### Jailed in Greece

Khavari arrived in Germany, without identity papers, in November 2015, near the peak of the refugee influx, as an unaccompanied minor claiming to be 16 or 17 years old and hailing from Afghanistan. A police officer told the court that Khavari’s cellphone and social media accounts suggested he had lived in Iran. Khavari was sent to live with a German host family in the picturesque town on the edge of the Black Forest, went to a local school, learnt German and received state benefits.

It emerged only after his arrest that he had already committed a violent crime in May 2013 in Greece, where he pushed a woman off a cliff on the island of Corfu, leaving her badly injured. He was sentenced there in February 2014 to 10 years jail for attempted murder but was granted a conditional release from Greece’s overcrowded jails in October 2015. He fled to Germany, where authorities knew nothing of his criminal past because Greece had only issued a nationwide warrant, and because no match was detected in an EU-wide fingerprint data base for asylum seekers. —AFP

De La Rue’s contract, which ends in July 2019, is worth 400 million pounds (\$566 million). Its shares fell 5 percent in early trading. Britain’s interior ministry defended the decision. “The preferred bidder has been selected following a rigorous, fair and open competition,” it said in a statement. “The chosen company demonstrated that they will be best able to meet the needs of our passport service with a high quality and secure product at the best value for money for our customers and the taxpayer.”

Gemalto has been awarded the passport deal worth 490 million pounds, The Sun reported. The company did not return requests for comment from Reuters. Britain’s biggest trade union Unite hit out at the government’s choice and said the French government would never have made such a move. “It wouldn’t happen in France because of national security and it shouldn’t happen in the UK,” said national officer Louisa Bull. “Ministers need to reverse this decision and start supporting British business and UK workers through public procurement and an industrial strategy which is more than just sound-bites.” —Reuters



**LONDON:** File photo shows the blue cover of a United Kingdom passport. Britain’s new, blue post-EU passports are set to be made by a Paris-based firm, reports said yesterday, in what leading Brexit supporters called a ‘national humiliation’. —AFP

## Asylum seeker jailed for life in Germany for rape, murder

**FREIBURG:** An asylum seeker claiming to be from Afghanistan was yesterday sentenced to life in jail in Germany for the rape and murder of a student that stoked a public backlash against a mass influx of migrants. Hussein Khavari, of uncertain age and origin, was found guilty of the deadly night-time attack on medical student Maria Ladenburger, 19, in October 2016 in the university town of Freiburg. Khavari pushed her off her bicycle as she was riding home alone from a party, then bit, choked and repeatedly raped her and left her on the bank of a river where she drowned. Presiding judge Kathrin Schenk condemned the extreme “lack of empathy” of Khavari, who was handcuffed and wearing a black hooded jumper, before reading out the verdict and sentence, which were greeted with applause in the courtroom. She handed down the maximum sentence of life in prison, which under German law means 15 years behind bars, with no chance of parole and the possibility of “security detention” afterwards if the convict is still deemed to pose a threat to society.

Schenk said she saw almost no chance of rehabilitation, telling Khavari that “you would have to become an entirely different human being”. Khavari had been arrested seven weeks after the murder, following a huge manhunt in the town

## Russia media outlets boycott parliament over sex scandal

**MOSCOW:** Top Russian media outlets launched a rare boycott of parliament yesterday after it dismissed claims from a number of journalists that a senior lawmaker had sexually harassed them. Influential media including popular radio station Echo of Moscow, RBC media group and Dozhd (Rain) independent television said they would no longer send journalists to cover the lower house of parliament, the State Duma. The joint action comes after several reporters for Western and Russian independent media accused Leonid Slutsky, head of the State Duma’s foreign affairs committee, of making lewd sexual comments and groping. But on Wednesday, the parliamentary ethics commission said it had found no violations in the behavior of the 50-year-old lawmaker from the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party.

The commission questioned the motives of BBC Russian Service journalist Farida Rustamova, deputy editor at the US-based RTVi Yekaterina Kotrikadze and Dozhd producer Darya Zhuk, saying their claims had appeared in the run-up to last Sunday’s presidential election. The journalists broke their silence on a subject that is still largely taboo in Russia as the “#MeToo” movement has swept across the globe. And the boycott is a rare campaign of solidarity in a country where all major television channels are state-controlled.

### ‘Dangerous to work’

“Echo of Moscow now considers the State Duma an unsafe workplace for journalists of both sexes,” its chief editor Alexei Venediktov wrote. The Vedomosti business daily said it would boycott Slutsky and the ethics commission’s members. Journalists have the constitutional right to safety and dignity, it wrote. “The State Duma should adopt all measures including legislative ones so that such things does not happen within its wall or outside them.” Dozhd quoted its chief editor Alexandra Perepolova as saying “it has become clear that it’s simply dangerous for women to work in the State Duma”. Some media organizations such as Kommersant business daily did not pull their parliamentary correspondents but said they would no longer be asking Slutsky for comments. The Kremlin-friendly online news portal Lenta said it would ignore Slutsky’s existence and would delete all its articles about him except those covering the sexual harassment claims.

### ‘Enemy media’

According to an audio recording of Wednesday’s closed-door hearing of the ethics committee that was leaked to the press, a lawmaker with the ruling United Russia party, Shamsail Saraliyev, called the women “enemy media”. “All the journalists who raised this subject today are journalists of Western media, I call them enemy media,” he was quoted as saying. President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on the boycott and the decision of the ethics commission. “This is not the issue for the presidential administration,” he told reporters. —AFP