



Japan emperor proclaims his status to the world

Vatican out of money? Heavens no, says Pope's ally



TOKYO: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (center) holds a cane while speaking to his daughter, Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio (left) while Senator Bong Go listens before the entronement ceremony of Japanese Emperor Naruhito, at a hotel in Tokyo. —AFP

Duterte suffers 'unbearable pain'

Philippine President cuts short Japan trip

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, suffering from "unbearable pain" in his spine after a motorcycle accident, is cutting short a trip to Japan, his spokesman said yesterday. The 74-year-old hurt his hip in the crash last week, with his health already the subject of intense speculation following his disclosure earlier this month that he is suffering from a disease that causes one of his eyelids to droop.

A statement from the leader's spokesman Salvador Panelo said Duterte would leave Japan sooner than planned, having attended the entronement ceremony of Emperor Naruhito with the aid of a cane. "The palace announces that the president will cut short his trip to Japan due to unbearable pain in his spinal column near the pelvic bone," Panelo said. Duterte later described his predicament in a short video clip posted on Facebook by Senator Christopher Go, a former chief aide who accompanied him on the trip.

"If you ride motorbikes you will experience a crash once or twice in your life. All those who are

into motorbikes, they crash like I did," he said, grimacing and moaning while sat in the back of a car beside Go. "I can't bear it, it's around my belt area (waistline), about three inches. It's really painful," added the president, who Go said was on his way back to the Philippines. Panelo said the pain was "a consequence" of the motorcycle accident that the presidency said Duterte had suffered on the palace grounds.

The leader fell off his vehicle just 10 days after he publicly revealed that he has myasthenia gravis, which causes muscle weakness and can result in drooping of eyelids, blurred vision as well as weakness in a person's extremities. Questions over his health have swirled since he took office in 2016, with Duterte at times skipping events and meetings or discussing his various ailments in long and rambling speeches. He has previously said he used to take fentanyl, a potent opioid painkiller, because of a spinal injury caused by other motorcycle accidents when he was younger.

According to Duterte, his doctor made him stop using fentanyl on learning he was "abusing the drug" by using more than the prescribed patches. Duterte has also said he suffers from migraines and other illnesses including Buerger's disease, which is characterized by inflammation of blood vessels, usually due to smoking. Duterte will see his neurologist Wednesday after flying back to Manila late yesterday, while his daughter Sara Duterte Carpio will represent him at the emperor's banquet yesterday, Panelo said.

The Filipino leader attended Naruhito's entronement ceremony earlier yesterday using a cane to help him walk, he added. Senator Go also released a photo of the president sitting down with his forehead propped up by a cane. The Philippine constitution requires the handover of power to the vice president if the leader dies or is incapacitated. However Panelo said yesterday "the public can rest assured that there is nothing to worry about as regards the physical health and condition of the president".—AFP

UK lifts flight ban to Sharm El-Sheikh

CAIRO: Britain said yesterday it was ending a nearly four-year suspension of flights to Egypt's Sharm El-Sheikh that followed the bombing of a Russian airliner claimed by the Islamic State group. The move comes after multiple airport inspections and visits by aviation security experts in response to the 2015 attack that killed all 224 people on board the plane carrying holidaymakers from the Red Sea resort.

"The UK has been clear that flights to Sharm El-Sheikh should resume when the security situation allows," British minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Andrew Murrison, said in a statement released by the embassy. "I am pleased that today we can announce the lifting of the current restrictions." The bombing had dealt a devastating blow to Egypt's crucial tourism industry. The British ambassador to Egypt, Geoffrey Adams, said the decision followed cooperation between security experts in both countries.

"We will work closely with airlines who wish to resume flights," he added. Egyptian authorities welcomed the move. "This step is a testament to the continuous efforts exerted by the Egyptian government to ensure the safety and security of every visitor in all of Egypt's destinations, and in South Sinai in particular," the tourism ministry said in a statement. Egypt has gone to great lengths to lure tourists back, touting archaeological finds and boosting security at airports and around ancient sites.

The British embassy said the number of British tourists remained high despite the ban on flights to flights to Sharm El-Sheikh, reaching 415,000 visitors in 2018. Russia, another major source of tourists to Egypt, initially suspended all direct flights to Egypt following the attack. It resumed direct flights to Cairo last year but has yet to restart them to popular Red Sea resorts. Egypt's tourism industry has started to rebound in recent years with arrivals reaching 8.2 million in 2017 and 11.3 million in 2018. —AFP

Baha'i community fears deportations

WASHINGTON: The Baha'i community voiced fear yesterday that a court under Yemen's Houthi rebels could order the mass expulsion of members of the faith. The community said that an appeals court in Yemen's capital Sanaa, which is controlled by the insurgents, is expected to rule Tuesday on a death sentence handed down on religious grounds to Hamed bin Haydara, a Baha'i detained since 2013.

Citing statements by the prosecutor, the Baha'i International Community said it feared the judge would not only uphold the execution but order the deportation of Baha'is from Yemen. "By such a ruling, he would target and threaten an entire religious community in Yemen - which wishes for nothing more than to contribute to its nation's progress," Diane Ala'i, a representative of the community to the United Nations, said in a statement. She warned Baha'is could face "statelessness and expulsion, confiscation of assets and threat of extermination in the country."

Sam Brownback, the US ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, voiced concern about reports that the Houthis were looking to deport the Baha'is or seize their assets. "We urge them to release arbitrarily detained Baha'is like Hamed bin Haydara and respect religious freedom," he tweeted earlier this month. Several thousand Baha'is - members of the 19th century faith founded by the Iranian-born Baha'u'llah that calls for unity among religions and equality between men and women - are estimated to live in Yemen.

The Houthis are allied with Iran's Shiite clerical



SANAA: Shoppers walk at a market in the capital Sanaa's old quarter. The Baha'i community voiced fear that a court under Yemen's Houthi rebels could order the mass expulsion of members of the faith. —AFP

regime, which restricts the rights of Baha'is despite allowing freedom of religion for Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. Baha'is consider the Baha'u'llah to be a prophet, a sharp contrast from the orthodox Islamic view that Mohammed was God's final messenger. Houthis control much of Yemen despite a US-backed military campaign led by Saudi Arabia, which has contributed to what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. —AFP

Trump claims impeachment is a 'lynching'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump yesterday likened the impeachment investigation against him to a "lynching," a racially charged word from the darkest days of America's slavery legacy. There was an immediate backlash to Trump's tweet in which he claimed that impeachment was unfair and stripping him of his legal rights.

"All Republicans must remember what they are witnessing here—a lynching. But we will WIN!," Trump tweeted. Kristen Clarke, president of the National Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, said she was "sickened to see Trump's gross misappropriation of this term today." Clarke said that 4,743 people were lynched in the United States between 1882 and 1968, of which 3,446 were African Americans.

"Lynchings were crimes against humanity and an ugly part of our nation's history of racial violence," she said. "It's beyond shameful to use the word 'lynching' to describe being held accountable for your actions," said Democratic presidential candidate Julian Castro. Trump is being investigated for possible impeachment in the Democratic-led House of Representatives over his alleged abuse of office. He is counting on the Republican-dominated Senate to acquit him if the House does vote to impeach. —AFP