

International

In ancient throne ritual, Japan's emperor vows to fulfill his duty

New Japanese emperor proclaims his status to the world

TOKYO: Japanese Emperor Naruhito formally proclaimed his ascendancy to the throne yesterday in a centuries-old ceremony attended by dignitaries from more than 180 countries, pledging to fulfill his duty as a symbol of the state. Naruhito became emperor and his wife Masako became empress on May 1 in a brief ceremony, but yesterday's "Sokui no Rei" was a more elaborate ritual at the royal palace in which he officially announced his change in status to the world.

"I swear that I will act according to the constitution and fulfill my responsibility as the symbol of the state and of the unity of the people," the 59-year-old emperor declared, his voice slightly hoarse, in front of about 2,000 guests including Britain's Prince Charles. "I sincerely hope that Japan will develop further and contribute to the friendship and peace of the international community, and to the welfare and prosperity of human beings through the people's wisdom and ceaseless efforts." Naruhito is the first Japanese emperor born after World War Two. He acceded to the throne when his father, Akihito, became the first Japanese monarch to abdicate in two centuries, worried that advancing age might make it hard to perform official duties. The long-planned celebrations, for which Japan declared a national holiday, were tempered following Typhoon Hagibis, which killed at least 82 people when it tore through Japan 10 days ago, and pouring rain yesterday.

A public parade was postponed until next month to allow the government to devote attention to the typhoon clean-up, while yesterday's weather forced the palace to scale back the number of courtiers in ancient robes taking part in the courtyard ceremony. But just before the ceremony began, the skies cleared and a rainbow appeared over Tokyo. "Storm-like rain and winds came to a stop right before the ceremony, and the sun came out. I, along with people around me, were moved," tweeted lawmaker Kentaro Sonoura, who attended the ceremony.

'Banrai' cheers, 21-gun salute

At the sound of a gong in the Matsu-no-Ma, or Hall of

Pine, the most prestigious room in the palace, two courtiers bowed deeply and drew back purple curtains on the "Takamikura" - a 6.5-metre high pavilion that weighs about 8 tons. Naruhito was revealed standing in front of a simple throne, dressed in burnt-orange robes and a black headdress, with an ancient sword and a boxed jewel, two of the so-called Three Sacred Treasures, placed beside him. Fifty-five-year-old Harvard-educated Empress Masako, wearing heavy 12-layered robes and with hair flowing down her back, stood in front of a smaller throne to the side. Such traditional robes can weigh around 15 kilograms.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivered a congratulatory speech before assembled dignitaries including Crown Prince Akishino, the emperor's younger brother, and his family, all adorned in brightly colored robes. Other guests included US Transport Secretary Elaine Chao and Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Abe led a trio of cheers of "banrai", or "long life", for the emperor, before a 21-gun salute. Guests from overseas were not required to join in shouting the phrase, which for some raises memories of the wartime emperor worship.

Naruhito had entered the palace to cheers from admirers before reporting his enthronement to his imperial ancestors at three shrines on the palace grounds, dressed in pure white robes. "As he is young and energetic with outstanding leadership, I hope he'll support the people of Japan, which has faced continuous disasters and typhoons," said Tomoko Shirakawa, 51, who was among the crowds of umbrella-clutching citizens packing the area in front of the palace. A court banquet was held yesterday evening, before Naruhito and Masako host a tea party for foreign royalty on Wednesday afternoon. The government pardoned about half a million people convicted of petty crimes, such as traffic violations, to mark the day. Although the public parade was postponed until Nov. 10, NHK public TV said there were 26,000 police providing security.

Imperial family future

Naruhito is unusual among recent Japanese emperors



TOKYO: Japan's Emperor Naruhito (2nd right) and Empress Masako (right) welcome Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck (center) and Queen Jetsun Pema (2nd left) prior to a court banquet at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. — AFP

since his only child, 17-year-old Aiko, is female and cannot inherit the throne under current law. Unless the law is revised, the future of the imperial family for coming generations rests instead on the shoulders of his nephew, 13-year-old Hisahito, who is second in line for the throne after

his father, Crown Prince Akishino. Naruhito's grandfather, Hirohito, in whose name Japanese troops fought World War Two, was treated as a god but renounced his divine status after Japan's defeat in 1945. Emperors now have no political authority. — Reuters

Guru's 'best friend': Gold and diamonds

NEW DELHI: Indian investigators seized more than \$14 million in cash, gold and diamonds after raiding 40 properties belonging to a spiritual guru with a worldwide following, investigators said yesterday. Vijayakumar Naidu, known as Kalki Bhagavan, a former insurance agent who says he is the reincarnation of a Hindu god, is one of several Indian "godmen" to have fallen foul of the law in recent years for crimes from rape to murder to fraud.

The raids on properties belonging to Bhagavan-whose group is accused of tax evasion and amassing unaccounted wealth up to six billion rupees (\$75 million) - involved 300 investigators and took place over five days in three southern states. "\$2.5 million in cash and gold weighing 90 kilograms (200 pounds) and diamonds were seized.

Cash receipts and investment and business documents worth 400 crore (four billion rupees) were also recovered," a tax official told AFP on condition of anonymity. The official said the group had been suppressing financial information for years and channelling money through shell



AHMEDABAD: A saleswoman helps a customer try a necklace at a jewelry shop in Ahmedabad on the occasion of Guru Pushya Nakshatra (auspicious venture day). — AFP

companies into real estate and to foreign countries. The 70-year-old guru and his wife Amma, who claim to have millions of followers across the world, promote the concept of "oneness philosophy" and receive millions of dollars in donations every year. Bollywood actor Shilpa Shetty and fashion designer Donna Karen are said to have

stayed at his ashrams a decade ago, and he also claims other celebrities and politicians among his followers. The couple issued a video statement Monday denying media reports claiming they had fled India.

"We will not leave you, we will not abandon you.. Things will continue as usual, things are continuing as usual," an apparently unfazed Naidu said, wearing his trademark white dress and with a gold-bordered cloth draped over his shoulder. His son runs several real estate companies and the Oneness University-spread over 400 acres and which teaches courses in spirituality-attracting students from across the globe. Media reports said a glimpse of the couple in a crowded room costs \$60 while a one-on-one meeting with the guru sets followers back by \$700.

Gurus offer spiritual enlightenment and help huge numbers of devotees in India with their financial, physical and mental problems but are often accused of preying on the poor and vulnerable for power, fame and money. In 2017 Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh was convicted of raping two of his disciples, prompting riots by tens of thousands of people in several Indian states that left 40 people dead. In January he was sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering a journalist who exposed rampant sexual abuses at his luxurious sect headquarters in Punjab. — AFP

Clean getaway: Meat waste joins biofuels at luxury jet show

LAS VEGAS: At the world's biggest industry show in Las Vegas luxury jets are luring buyers with their sleek silhouettes, plush cabins - and increasingly, their use of alternative fuels. Fuel producers and jetmakers are keen to showcase novel forms of aviation fuel deemed less harmful to the climate, from used cooking oil to the distinctly less glamorous meat waste. Business jet operators, like airlines, have bowed to environmental pressure on aviation and committed to halving carbon emissions by 2050 compared with 2005.

Their hope is that adopting renewable fuel to curb emissions could make business jets more attractive to environmentally conscious buyers - especially corporations facing questions over sustainability from shareholders or green campaign groups. The availability of less polluting private jets could also spare the rich and famous the negative publicity experienced by Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan over a recent private jet trip to southern France. Five Gulfstream jets on display in Las Vegas are using California-produced fuel from inedible beef tallow.

The latest waste-based fuels include "fats, grease and oils that are byproducts of the food industry," said Bryan Sherbacow, chief commercial officer of Boston-based biofuel producer World Energy, which produces fuel from meat waste used by Gulfstream. "All of our product is inedible." Some of the other 79 aircraft on display are expected to be powered by 150,000 gallons of other renewable fuel blends expected to be pumped at the show.

Flight shaming

Private jets account for less than 0.1% of total annual carbon emissions globally, but can emit, on average, up to 20 times more carbon emissions per passenger mile than jettliners, according to the London-based private charter firm Fly Victor. Prince Harry has defended his occasional use of private jets to ensure his family's safety, and has said that on the rare occasions he does not fly commercially he offsets his emissions. But planemakers say incidents such as the furor over his itinerary have added fresh challenges for an industry already striving to justify its contribution to cutting corporate costs. "Incidents of flight shaming involving the use of private jets are unfortunate when you consider that our industry has delivered fuel efficiency improvements of 40% over the past 40 years," said Bombardier Aviation President David Coleal.

Bombardier believes increased sustainable fuel use will help the industry make inroads with corporations and wealthy buyers. According to industry data, billionaires only have a 19% business jet ownership rate. But even an image makeover - with jets sporting stickers like "this aircraft flies on renewable fuels" and organizers adding alternative fuel pumps for visiting planes - is unlikely to satisfy all critics at the Oct 22-24 luxury jet event. Environmentalists and some analysts remain skeptical that biojetfuels, usually mixed 50-50 with kerosene, will make a significant impact on public perceptions about luxury travel. "No amount of Jatropa or Brazil-nut fuel can make business jets look eco-friendly," said aviation analyst Richard Aboulafia. Demand from business jet operators for renewable fuels now far exceeds supply and their interest could drive future production, Sherbacow said. World Energy, which produces 40 million gallons of biofuel at its California plant, could expand production up to 150 million gallons by 2022.

Corporate charter companies and consultants are also seeing more interest from customers who want to buy carbon credits to offset emissions from their flights. Brian Proctor, CEO of Mente Group, a US consultancy, said emissions played a role in a corporate jet utilization study his company recently completed for a Fortune 500 company. — Reuters

Bangladesh court jails key opposition lawmaker for graft

DHAKA: A Bangladeshi court sentenced a senior opposition figure to five years in jail yesterday for evading taxes on the sale of a car he imported when his party was last in office. The opposition in the South Asian country has long complained that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's ruling Awami League party - which tightened its grip on power following elections last year - is seeking to muzzle dissent.

Harunur Rashid, who has emerged as a prominent voice in parliament, was found guilty of evading taxes on Monday after he sold a car he had bought duty-free in 2005 when his Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was in government. He was sentenced to five years in jail and fined five million taka (\$59,000) by a court in Dhaka "for selling the duty-free car illegally, depriving taxes to the government", court inspector Ashikur Rahman said.

The owner of a private television channel who bought the car was also sentenced to two years in jail. There was no immediate comment from the BNP, the largest opposition party, whose leader and two-time former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was last year jailed for 10 years on graft charges. Rashid, also a joint secretary of the BNP, earlier this month met with the deputy leader of the Awami League in an attempt to secure bail for Zia, saying she needed medical treatment abroad.

His own conviction comes weeks after Hafizuddin Ahmed, another senior BNP figure, was arrested under contentious digital security laws on charges of spreading anti-state propaganda. He was later granted bail. The BNP said the arrest was carried out to "muzzle" Ahmed as he was planning to speak out against a water-sharing accord Bangladesh recently signed with India. A former army colonel, who was reportedly a member of Zia's security team, was also arrested on the same charges. In recent years tens of thousands of opposition activists have been arrested for various acts.

At a general election in December which was marred by allegations of widespread fraud and ballot stuffing, the Awami League tightened its grip on power, with the BNP managing to win only seven seats. Hasina last month launched a sweeping anti-graft crackdown, arresting prominent members of her own party and sacking the influential heads of its student and youth wings. Hasina said the drive was necessary to prevent a repeat of the January 2007 coup by the powerful military, which said tackling corruption was one of its key goals. — AFP



MONTREAL: Liberal Leader and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appears on stage to deliver his victory speech at his election night headquarters in Montreal, Canada. — AFP

Trudeau: Liberal star shines less brightly

OTTAWA: Justin Trudeau's golden-boy image was blotted by ethics lapses and scandals going into Monday's Canadian elections, but he managed to secure a second term to build on his past achievements - albeit with a weakened minority government. The first-born son of late prime minister Pierre Trudeau had swept to power in a landslide in 2015 with a mop of dark curly hair and confident swagger, jumping into crowds to take selfies with adoring young fans. Four years later, at 47, he faced a barrage of criticism on the campaign trail, and even threats - forcing him to appear at a rally in a bulletproof vest.

As a self-declared feminist, his cabinet was equally split with 15 men and 15 women in his first term, during which he resettled tens of thousands of Syrian migrants. He also legalized cannabis, held a public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women, and passed legislation permitting medically assisted suicide. "Trudeau's great strength is his positive message," University of Montreal researcher Jocelyn Coulon told AFP. "It's all about openness, tolerance and respect for diversity, at a time when public discourse has become bigoted and xenophobic."

Trudeau dynasty

The world watched with interest, even admiration, as

Trudeau proclaimed in 2015: "Canada is back!" "Why can't he be our president?" shouted a Rolling Stone magazine cover featuring Trudeau. This election, former US president Barack Obama endorsed him, calling him an "effective leader who takes on big issues like climate change." "The world needs his progressive leadership now," Obama tweeted.

The Trudeaus, with their political talent and film-star good looks, have often been compared to the Kennedys in the United States. Pierre Trudeau, who was prime minister from 1968 to 1979 and 1980 to 1984, established the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and preserved national unity against Quebec separatists. He also decriminalized homosexuality and pushed for the bilingualism and multiculturalism that have become integral parts of Canadian identity. Justin's birth on December 25, 1971, made front-page news across Canada. His mother Margaret's partying with the Rolling Stones and her 1984 divorce from Pierre - a rare sensational scandal in Canada - was also fodder for the tabloids. Coming late to politics after working as a snowboard instructor, bartender, bouncer and teacher, Justin Trudeau was first elected in 2008 to the House of Commons to represent a gritty, working-class Montreal neighborhood.

Trudeau's admission that he had smoked cannabis after becoming an MP raised eyebrows, and his detractors accuse him of being an intellectual lightweight. Nevertheless, in his first term, his Liberal Party ratified free trade agreements with Europe and Pacific nations, and negotiated a new continental trade pact with the United States and Mexico. — AFP