



RYAN SEACREST FLAUNTS TIME'S UP BRACELET AT GOLDEN GLOBES A YEAR AFTER HE WAS ACCUSED OF MISCONDUCT



KEVIN SPACEY CHARGED WITH GROPING BUSBOY IN 2006, ENTERS NOT GUILTY PLEA; NEXT HEARING ON MARCH 4

Thailand won't deport Saudi asylum-seeker

18-Year-Old Says Bangkok Won't Give Her Asylum; She Is Now Under Care Of UN Agency

Naomi Canton

London: An 18-year-old Saudi woman, who was stopped in Bangkok as she was trying to travel to Australia for asylum to escape alleged abuse by her family, has been allowed to temporarily enter Thailand under the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Her passport, which had been confiscated, was also returned to her.

Rahaf Mohammed al-Qununi told TOI on Monday that she would be killed if she returned to her family. The 18-year-old said that she had renounced Islam and is fearful of her father's retaliation.

Thai immigration police released photos of Rahaf after she left the room at a Bangkok airport hotel where she had been held up. Rahaf had stayed in the room while sending out desperate pleas for help over social media. She began posting on Twitter late Saturday



Rahaf Mohammed al-Qununi is escorted out of Bangkok airport by a Thai immigration officer and UNHCR officials on Monday

after her passport was taken away when she arrived in Bangkok on a flight from Kuwait.

The agreement allowing her to leave the airport came after officials from UNHCR met with Thai immigration police chief Major General Surachate Hakparn, and then with Rahaf.

A spokeswoman for the UNHCR told TOI: "The Thai authorities have granted

UNHCR access to Saudi national Rahaf Mohammed al-Qununi at Bangkok airport to assess her need for international refugee protection. In addition, we can confirm that she has left the airport to a safe place in the city. UNHCR staff will continue their interview with her once she has had some rest. UNHCR consistently advocates that refugees and asylum seekers—having been confirmed or claimed to be in need of international protection—cannot be returned to their countries of origin according to the principle of non-refoulement."

Rahaf, who was petrified and exhausted, having not slept on Sunday night, had a brief WhatsApp exchange with TOI on Monday in which she said: "I only trust the UN. I am scared because I am still in Thailand."

When asked where she planned to claim asylum, Rahaf said, "It is not my choice. Thailand won't give me asylum so I have to get it in another country."

Rahaf had been on a family holiday in Mahboulia in Kuwait when she escaped in the middle of the night. She bought herself a ticket to Australia where she had intended to claim asylum. However, on her arrival at the Bangkok airport, officials from Kuwait Airways seized her passport and put her in the hotel room with four guards outside. Rahaf started a Twitter account and live-twe-

eted her plight and soon had the whole world glued to the drama as she revealed she was going to be forcibly deported back to Kuwait on a flight at 11.15am (local time) on Monday.

On Twitter, some online users from Saudi Arabia called for her to be hanged in a public square and one cousin of hers tweeted at her in Arabic that her blood would be on the cabin of the flight. In the space of three days, the student at Ha'il University has gained 60,000 Twitter followers. At 4pm (local time), Rahaf tweeted a video showing herself barricaded in her hotel room using a mattress, a bed, table and chair, and repeatedly saying to someone through the door: "I want asylum".

By 9pm (local time), her wealthy and influential father, Mohammed bin Mottalq al-Qununi, governor of the governorate of al-Sulaimi, had arrived at the Bangkok airport. Rahaf tweeted: "My father just arrived which worried and scared

me a lot. I want to go to another country that I seek asylum in."

Phil Robertson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch Asia, said: "It is critically important that UNHCR protects her and makes sure she is not returned to Kuwait or Saudi Arabia." Rahaf has told Human Rights Watch that she was fleeing beatings and death threats from her male relatives who forced her to remain in her room for six months for cutting her hair.

The case has drawn new global attention to Saudi Arabia's strict social rules, including a requirement that women have the permission of a male "guardian" to travel, which rights groups say can trap women and girls as prisoners of abusive families. It comes at a time when Riyadh is facing unusually intense scrutiny from its Western allies over the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at its consulate in Istanbul in October.

With inputs from agencies

Photos: Twitter

Hasina sworn in as Bangladesh PM for record fourth term

Dhaka: Sheikh Hasina was sworn in as Bangladesh's prime minister for a record fourth term on Monday after her Awami League's landslide victory in the recent elections that was marred by deadly violence and allegations of vote rigging.

President Md Abdul Hamid administered the oath of office to 71-year-old Hasina at the Bangabhaban for a record third consecutive term. Hasina was first elected prime minister in 1996 and then again in 2008 and 2014.

The president then administered the oaths for the new ministers, ministers of state and deputy ministers who will form the Cabinet. Hasina will lead a Cabinet of 24 ministers, 19 ministers of state and three state ministers. Her cabinet is mostly made up of new faces. Thirty-one members of the new cabinet are first-timers.

Several veterans were dropped from the council of ministers amid speculation about the inductions as major portfolios like defence were retained by Hasina herself.

Hasina, who had included representatives from the Awami League's allied parties in the previous cabinets, has not picked any of them in her new cabinet. In-



Sheikh Hasina's crushing election victory has been marred by deadly violence and claims of widespread rigging

stead, the new cabinet exclusively consists of members of the Awami League.

The Jatiya Party, a key partner in the Awami League-led Grand Alliance of Hasina, has decided to occupy the opposition benches in Parliament after the main opposition BNP led by ex-premier Khaleda Zia rejected the results of the general election.

Hasina, the president of the Awami League, won the 11th parliamentary elections with a landslide victory even as the Opposition rejected the "farfetched" polls marred by violence that claimed 17 lives, making it one of the deadliest polls in the country's history. Her ruling Grand Alliance won 96% of the seats contested in the election. Hasina and her alliance have dismissed the accusations of vote rigging. PTI

Wiki lists 140 things reporters can't say about Julian Assange

London: WikiLeaks on Sunday advised journalists not to report 140 different "false and defamatory" statements about its founder Julian Assange, who has been holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London since June 2012.

"There is a pervasive climate of inaccurate claims about WikiLeaks and Julian Assange, including purposeful fabrications planted in large and otherwise 'reputable' media outlets," Wikileaks said in an email sent to media organisations and marked "Confidential legal communication. Not for publication. It was not immediately clear what prompted the advice to media organisations.

The 5,000-word email included 140 statements that WikiLeaks said were false and defamatory, such as the assertion that Assange had ever been an "agent or officer of any intelligence service". WikiLeaks also said it was false and defamatory to suggest that Assange, 47, had ever been employed by the Russian government or that he is, or has ever been, close to the Russian state, the Kremlin or Putin. Other items listed as false and defamatory included more personal claims including that Assange bleaches his hair; that he is a hacker; that he has ever neglected an animal or that he has poor hygiene. REUTERS

AND THE 'PHOTOBOMBING GLOBE' GOES TO...

When it came to stealing the show at the Golden Globes, it was all about a mysterious woman in blue whom you may never have heard of but she is now known across the internet as 'Fiji Water Girl'. She photobombed almost every red carpet shot—appearing behind just about everyone from Nicole Kidman and Jamie Lee Curtis to Idris Elba and Richard Madden. She also stole the spotlight from the likes of Jim Carrey, Dakota Fanning and Camilla Belle. She made a point of staring into the camera and grabbing the global limelight. She has now been identified as LA-based model, Kelleth Cuthbert



In surprise move, World Bank prez to quit by Feb

Washington: Jim Yong Kim, the president of the World Bank who was at odds with the Trump administration's policy on climate change, announced Monday he is resigning at the end of January.

Kim's unexpected departure three years before his term was set to expire is likely to set off a fierce battle between the Trump administration and other countries who have complained about the influence the US exerts over the World Bank.

Kim's departure will give US President Trump the chance to nominate his own choice to fill the post. Since the creation of the 189-nation bank at the end of WW II, its leaders have all been Americans. Its sister lending agency, the International Monetary Fund, has always been led by a European. Other countries, including China and other Asian nations, have complained about the pattern.

The World Bank said Kim will be succeeded on an interim basis by Kristalina Georgieva, its CEO and the bank's executive board would immediately start the process for selecting a permanent successor to Kim. The US is the largest shareholder in the bank, which is headquartered in Washington. AP

Myanmar army to crush Rakhine rebels: Govt

Yangon: Myanmar government leader Aung San Suu Kyi discussed insurgent attacks on Myanmar police on Monday in a rare meeting with the military chief, and her administration called for the armed forces to "crush" the rebels, a government spokesman said. Fighting between government forces and the rebel Arakan Army in the western state of Rakhine has displaced thousands of people since early December, according to the United Nations.

The Arakan Army wants greater autonomy for Rakhine, where the mainly Buddhist Rakhine ethnic group makes up the majority of the population. Rakhine State saw a military-led crackdown in 2017, following attacks by Rohingya Muslim insurgents that prompted hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh.

Myanmar government spokesman Zaw Htay said Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and

other cabinet members met military leaders, including army chief Min Aung Hlaing, to discuss "foreign affairs and national security".

"The president's office has instructed the military to launch an operation to crush the terrorists," Zaw Htay told a news conference in the capital, Naypyitaw.

While Suu Kyi is barred from being president by a military-drafted constitution, Win Myint is a loyalist and

she is seen as de facto leader of the civilian government, while the military remains in charge of security.

The insurgents killed 13 policemen and wounded nine in attacks on four police posts on Friday, as Myanmar celebrated Independence Day, state media reported. An Arakan Army spokesman outside Myanmar said last week the group attacked the security forces in response to a broad military offensive in Rakhine state that also targeted civilians. REUTERS

Several Oz beaches shut after 3k stung by jellyfish

Sydney: Highly venomous jellyfish have stung more than three thousand people on Australia's northeastern shores in just a few days, authorities said Monday, forcing the closure of several beaches.

The massive influx of Portuguese man o' war jellyfish, whose stings are notoriously painful, has been described as an "invasion" by local media in the state of Queensland. Coastguard association Surf Life Saving said a "whopping" 3,595 people had suffered painful burns after encounters with the creatures, also known as bluebottles, for their transparent bluish appearance.

At least four major beaches remained closed as the organisation warned that even more jellyfish were on their way. "A



Bluebottles, also known as Portuguese man o' war jellyfish, are known for painful stings

wall of bluebottles is approaching #Rainbow beach. Life-savers are closing the beach. Please stay out of the water," read one of several warnings from Surf Life Saving.

Bluebottle stings are a frequent occurrence. But the sheer number of people stung in the last few days has surprised authorities. AFP

Court nixes plea to check Lanka prez's sanity

Colombo: A top Sri Lankan court on Monday dismissed a petition seeking mental health assessment of President Maithripala Sirisena for his sacking of Ranil Wickremesinghe as PM, a controversial decision which plunged the country into an unprecedented political crisis.

On October 26, President Sirisena, 67, sacked Wickremesinghe as PM and replaced him with ex-strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa, triggering a political and constitutional impasse that lasted for over two months.

The court dismissed the petition by a woman, saying it had no authority to hear the case. She sought an order directing the police chief to go into Sirisena's state of mind. The plea called for a medical report on the president's mental status. PTI

Tycoon's 'free cash' post gets most retweets ever

Tokyo: Billionaire Japanese tycoon and future space tourist Yusaku Maezawa said on Monday that his tweet promising a cash giveaway of nearly \$10,000 was the most retweeted ever. The 43-year-old Maezawa

posted a tweet on Saturday promising one million yen (\$9,250) in cash each to 100 randomly selected followers who had retweeted it by Monday.

The tweet—now retweeted more than 4.3 million times—is the most shared in history, according to the entrepreneur. "Hit the new world record. Surpassed Twitter's world record number of retweets (it was 3.55 million RTs before) and more people are still retweeting," wrote the

high-profile Maezawa.

The previous record-holder was an American teenager in 2017 trying to win a year's supply of chicken nuggets from fast food chain Wendy's, according to media.

Maezawa is chief executive of Japan's largest online fashion store and is the 18th richest person in Japan, with an estimated fortune of \$2 billion, according to business magazine Forbes. In October, Maezawa said he paid an undisclosed sum for a ticket on Elon Musk's SpaceX rocket around the moon as early as 2023. Known as a passionate art collector, he also plans to take around half a dozen artists with him on the trip. AFP



Yusaku Maezawa

Sounds that stalked diplomats in Cuba? Lovelorn crickets

Carl Zimmer

In 2016, US diplomats in Cuba complained of persistent, high-pitched sounds followed by a range of symptoms, including headaches, nausea and hearing loss. Exams of nearly two dozen of them eventually revealed signs of concussions or other brain injuries, and speculation about the cause turned to weapons that blast sound or microwaves. Amid an international uproar, a recording of the sinister droning was widely circulated in the news media.

On Friday, two scientists presented evidence that those sounds were not so mysterious after all. They were made by crickets, the researchers concluded. That's not to say that the diplomats weren't attacked, the scientists added—only that the recording is not of a sonic weapon, as had been suggested.

Alexander Stubbs of the University of California, Berkeley, and Fernando Montelegre-Z of the University of Lincoln in England studied a recording of the sounds made by diplomats and published by



Scientists, who analysed the 'sonic attack' recording that is widely being circulated, said the identification of the sound source does not mean that the attacks didn't happen, but it casts doubt over the sound being reason for diplomats' health problem

the Associated Press. "There's plenty of debate in the medical community over what, if any, physical damage there is to these individuals," said Stubbs in a phone interview. "All I can say fairly definitively is that the AP-released recording is of a cricket, and we think we know what species it is."

When Stubbs first heard the recording, he was reminded of insects he came across while doing field work in the Caribbean. When he and Montelegre-Z downloaded the sound file, they found that its acoustic patterns—such as the ra-

te of pulses and the strongest frequencies—were very similar to the songs of certain kinds of insects. Male singing insects produce regular patterns during courtship. Females are attracted to certain males based on their songs, which has led to the evolution of different songs in different species.

Experts on cricket songs said the analysis was well done. "It all seems to make sense," said Gerald Pollack, who studies acoustic communication among insects. "It's a pretty well supported hypothesis." NYT NEWS SERVICE

AROUND THE WORLD



PUTIN FIRES CANNON TO MARK RUSSIAN CHRISTMAS: For Christmas, Vladimir Putin got to do something that many children dream of: fire a really big gun. Under the Russian Orthodox liturgical calendar, Christmas is observed on January 7. During a visit to St. Petersburg on Monday, the Russian president visited the Petropavlovsky Fortress on the banks of the Neva River and pulled the lever on the howitzer that fires a daily noontime salute. The midday shot has been a tradition since 1865

IKEA accidentally plays porn on big screen at HK store

An IKEA store has hit the headlines this week after they accidentally played a pornographic film on a big screen for several minutes. The video shocked customers at the furniture store in Causeway Bay Hong Kong on Tuesday. According to reports, the graphic video showed a man masturbating. A shopper said he spent three minutes watching the footage before going inside to alert staff members of the situation. A female IKEA worker is said to have attempted to cover up the giant screen using a piece of drawing paper. However it was too small to

cover the entire thing. It is currently unclear how the video came to be played outside the store front, but it's thought a prankster may have hacked the system as some sort of joke.

Not for pick-up: Spilled chicken cause traffic jam

These chicken tenders aren't for pick-up. An Alabama sheriff's office is warning people against eating chicken that tumbled on to a rural highway after a truck wreck. An 18-wheeler crashed on Alabama 35 on Sunday, spilling boxes of chicken tenders in Cherokee County near the Georgia line. Motorists began stopping to pick up the food, which authorities say created a traffic hazard. The Cherokee County Emergency Management Agency posted a notice on its Facebook page

asking people to quit picking up the chicken. The notice says the food isn't safe to eat after hours on the ground. The post also says the situation was creating a traffic hazard and it's a crime to block traffic. Violators could face charges.

Man who stole guitars has one thing to say: 'Go Eagles'

A Pennsylvania man accused of breaking into a music store and stealing guitars tells reporters he has one thing to say: "Go Eagles." WNEP-TV reports Dale Sourbeck was charged on Thursday with burglary. Police say Sourbeck used a hammer to break into the store in Pittston around 3am. He was captured on surveillance taking two guitars. Police say Sourbeck returned to the store and grabbed three more guitars.