

# Tens of Thousands March for Scotland's Independence



Scotland's police estimated that 35,000 supporters turned out for the march.

GLASGOW: (AFP) -- **Tens of thousands of people, many waving the Saltire flag and beating drums, marched through the streets of Glasgow in support of Scottish independence.**

Police estimated around 35,000 people turned out for the five kilometer march from Kelvingrove Park to Glasgow Green, while organizers "All Under One Banner" put the attendance around 60,000. The annual march has been growing in size since Scotland voted against independence by

55% in 2014, from a few thousand to around 20,000 last year. Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's nationalist First Minister, has threatened to hold a second independence referendum if Scotland's powers are curtailed after Brexit. Keith Brown, one of Sturgeon's most senior allies who is standing to be deputy leader of the Scottish National Party in June, attended Saturday's march. "I've been on these kind of marches for the best part of 35 years and I've never seen a

crowd like this," he told AFP. Brown suggested a second independence referendum could be held as early as 2019. "We have to wait and see what Brexit brings and we will know that very soon - perhaps in October," he said. "At that point, we need to make sure that we are working non-stop for whenever the referendum happens. "I have said it could happen in a year's time or two years time. The crucial point is that we are ready for it when it comes." Veteran nationalist Bobby Watt, 73, brought his 13-year-old granddaughter Holly Noble to march. "I joined the SNP in 1966 and now we're coming to a head," he said. "You could see on the march that it's the youngsters that are here so it looks good for the future." Clutching a Scottish piper teddy bear, Elaine Thomson, 53, told AFP: "I'm not here campaigning for myself, because I don't think I'll benefit, but my grandchildren possibly could and I am out doing this for them."

## India Faces Fresh Pressure After Rape, Murder



In this picture taken May 5, 2018, Aam Admi Party (AAP) supporters burn an effigy of Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das during a protest rally following the rape and murder of 16-year-old girl on April 3 in the Indian city of Ranchi.

NEW DELHI (AFP) -- **Indian police said Sunday they have arrested the main suspect in the gang rape and gruesome murder of a teenage girl, in the latest of several high-profile sexual assault cases in the country.** The local village chief has also been detained while the 16-year-old victim's family have been given special police protection. Dhanu Bhuiyan was found at a relative's house where he was hiding after he and accomplices allegedly burned the girl alive Friday in a

remote district of the eastern state of Jharkhand. Police said Bhuiyan became enraged after the local village council ordered him to do 100 sit-ups and pay a 50,000 rupee (\$750) fine for the victim's gang rape. Bhuiyan and his accomplices allegedly attacked the girl's parents before setting their house on fire with the girl inside. Village councils of local elders often settle disputes in rural India, bypassing a lengthy and expensive judicial system. Although they carry no legal weight, they exert massive

influence over village communities. So far 15 people have been arrested in the case, Thakur said, adding that the accused and the victim seemed to know each other. Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das has called for stringent punishment and announced compensation of 100,000 rupees (\$1,500) for the victim's family. He has condemned the killing as "barbaric". Indian authorities have faced renewed pressure to act in the wake of several horrific sexual assault cases, including the recent gang rape and murder of an eight-year-old Muslim girl by a group of Hindus. Amid mounting outrage, the government has changed the law to allow execution for child rapists. India previously tightened the law following the 2012 rape and murder of a student on a bus in New Delhi, a crime that triggered mass protests. Some 40,000 rape cases were reported in 2016, with many more believed to go unreported because of stigma attached to sex crimes in deeply patriarchal India.

## Coal Mine Explosion Kills 23 People in Pakistan

QUETTA, Pakistan (AFP) -- **Twenty-three people were killed and 11 wounded after gas explosions tore through two neighboring coal mines in south-western Pakistan, officials said Sunday.** Shortly before midday on Saturday, a build-up of methane caused an explosion and tunnel collapse at a mine in Marwaarh, east of Quetta, the capital of the fossil fuel-rich Balochistan province bordering Iran and Afghanistan. Jawaid Shahwani, the top government official in Quetta, said 16 of the 25 people inside the mine at the time were killed, with the remaining miners rescued and taken to hospital for treatment. Around three hours later, a mine 25km to the west at Spin Carez collapsed in similar circumstances, killing seven of the nine miners inside.

Provincial mines minister Saleh Baloch told AFP that all miners in both accidents had been accounted for and rescue operations had ended. Pakistani mines are notorious for poor safety standards and bad ventilation. A total of 43 workers died in 2011 when gas explosions triggered a collapse in another Balochistan colliery, also owned by the Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation. Balochistan is the largest of Pakistan's four provinces by area but its roughly seven million people have long argued they do not get a fair share of its vast gas and mineral wealth. The beleaguered province has also battled against separatist insurgents and Islamist militants for more than a decade.

## Accuses Beijing of 'Orwellian Nonsense': U.S. Ups Ante in War of Words With China



Beijing says overseas companies must follow Chinese law and "respect the national feelings of the Chinese people".

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- **The White House has sharply criticized China's efforts to force foreign airlines to change how they refer to Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, labeling China's latest effort to police language describing the politically sensitive territories as "Orwellian nonsense."** Amid an escalating fight over China's trade surplus with the United States, the White House said China's Civil Aviation Administration sent a letter to 36 foreign air carriers, including a number of U.S. carriers, demanding changes. The carriers were told to remove references on their websites or in other material that suggests Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau are part of countries independent from China, U.S. and airline officials said. The White House said in a statement that President Donald Trump "will stand up for Americans resisting efforts by the Chinese Communist Party to impose Chinese political correctness on American companies and citizens." "This is Orwellian nonsense and part of a growing trend by the Chinese Communist Party to impose its political views on American citizens and private companies. ... We call on China to stop threatening and coercing American carriers and citizens." Taiwan is China's most sensitive territorial issue. Beijing considers the self-ruled island a wayward province. Hong Kong and Macau are former European colonies that are now part of China

but run largely autonomously. On Sunday, China's foreign ministry responded to the White House comments, saying that overseas companies operating in China should respect its sovereignty and territorial integrity, follow Chinese law and "respect the national feelings of the Chinese people." "No matter what the United States says, it cannot change the objective fact that there is only one China in the world and that Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan are indivisible parts of Chinese territory," spokesman Geng Shuang said in a statement on the ministry website. The harsh exchanges follow contentious trade talks between senior U.S. and Chinese officials last week. The Trump administration demanded a \$200 billion cut in China's trade surplus with the United States by 2020, sharply lower tariffs and a halt to subsidies for advanced technology, people familiar with the talks said. Trump earlier this week praised his relationship with Xi but there were no signs of significant progress at the talks on Thursday and Friday, raising fears of a trade war between the world's two largest economies. Trump has already proposed tariffs on \$50 billion of Chinese goods which could go into effect next month. China has said its own retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods, including soybeans and aircraft, will go into effect if the U.S. duties are imposed.

## Catalans Vow to Try Again to Elect Puigdemont



Catalonia's ousted leader Carles Puigdemont attends a meeting with members of the Catalan political platform "Junts per Catalunya" on April 18, 2018 in Berlin.

BERLIN (AFP) -- **Catalan separatists, meeting in Berlin, vowed to attempt once again to get their leader-in-exile Carles Puigdemont reinstated as president of the Spanish region while adding that they don't want to hold fresh elections.** "We don't want new elections," said Eduard Pujol, spokesman for Puigdemont's Together for Catalonia grouping. However an attempt will be made to install the former Catalan president by May 14 at the latest, he added after talks with Puigdemont after talks in Berlin. Puigdemont was sacked by Madrid after Catalonia made a declaration of independence last year following a regional referendum not sanctioned by the Spanish government. The Catalan independence leader then left for Belgium where he lives in self-imposed exile. An earlier attempt to get him reinstated was blocked by a Spanish court. Puigdemont was detained in Germany in March after Spain issued a European arrest warrant against him. He was later released on bail. On Friday the pro-independence Catalan parliament backed a law allowing him his investiture while abroad, something the Spanish government has ruled out. Ines Arrimadas, leader in Catalonia of

the anti-independence Ciudadanos party, has rejected this "Puigdemont law", describing it as "tailor-made for a fugitive". Since he fled Spain Puigdemont has been a divisive figure among the separatists. On Saturday the influential grassroots independence group ANC announced the results of an opinion poll, saying that most of its members support the return of the "legitimate president". However, if this proves impossible, ANC supporters want a new government formed without a return to the ballot boxes. The regional parliament must elect a new president by May 22 or organize fresh elections. If Puigdemont is not reinstated, his supporters will propose that ANC leader Jordi Sanchez, currently imprisoned in Madrid over the failed independence bid, be given the job. But last month Spain's Supreme Court rejected a request by Sanchez to be let out of jail and sworn in as regional head. If that option proves impossible "we will open the door to another alternative," Pujol told reporters in Berlin, adding only that "none of the names you have speculated about are on the table". The Spanish press has mentioned economist Elsa Artadi, who is an ally of Puigdemont.

## News in Brief

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- **Senator John McCain, 81 and battling brain cancer, has made clear he does not want President Donald Trump to attend his funeral, U.S. media reported Saturday.** McCain, a Vietnam war vet and respected senator from Arizona who has had a turbulent relationship with Trump, instead wants Vice President Mike Pence to represent the White House, The New York Times and NBC News said, quoting people close to McCain. McCain is also using a new book and documentary to express regret about not having selected former Senator Joseph Lieberman as his running mate in 2008 against Barack Obama and instead going with populist Sarah Palin, the Times said. McCain has been fighting an aggressive form of brain cancer for more than a year. He is currently back in Arizona, recovering from surgery for an intestinal infection. McCain and Trump have had a rough relationship, particularly during the 2016 presidential primary, when Trump said McCain -- a POW for years in Vietnam -- was not really a war hero because he was captured.

JARAK, Serbia (AP) -- **Serbian police have prevented a Serbian far-right leader convicted of war crimes from returning to an ethnically-mixed northern village where he spurred ethnic hatred during the 1990s Balkan war.** Dozens of policemen sealed off Hrtkovci on Sunday, blocking Serbian Radical Party leader Vojislav Seselj and his supporters from reaching the village and rallying there. The Radicals briefly gathered by the police cordons before dispersing. A scuffle was reported with some liberal protesters who came to denounce Seselj. The UN war crimes court for the former Yugoslavia last month sentenced Seselj to ten years in prison over his 1992 speech in Hrtkovci that resulted in the deportations of dozens of ethnic Croats from the village. Seselj remains free because he served his sentence while in custody during the trial.

KUNDUZ, Afghanistan (AFP) -- **Six Indian engineers working on a power plant project in northern Afghanistan were kidnapped along with their Afghan driver Sunday, Afghan officials said.** Gunmen snatched the seven from a vehicle on the outskirts of Baghlan provincial capital Pule-Khumri, police spokesman Zabi Shuja told AFP. Provincial council chairman Mohammad Safdar Mohseni said the group had been travelling in a largely Taliban-controlled area when they were abducted after ignoring warnings to take a police escort. Indian external affairs spokesman Raveesh Kumar confirmed the abduction of Indian nationals, but did not say how many were taken or what they were doing in Baghlan. Baghlan governor Abdul Hai Nemati told Tolo TV that the Taliban had kidnapped the group. But there was no immediate claim of responsibility. Kidnapping of Afghans and foreigners is common in Afghanistan where swathes of the country are infested with militant groups or criminal gangs.

BERLIN (Reuters) -- **Support for Germany's Social Democrats (SPD), the country's oldest party, has slumped to half that of Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives just two weeks after the left-leaning party elected a new leader, a poll showed on Sunday.** The SPD suffered its worst showing in last September's national election since Germany became a republic in 1949, and only reluctantly agreed to go into coalition with Merkel again in March after a divisive internal debate. Two weeks ago, the SPD elected Andrea Nahles as their first female leader, hoping she could reinvigorate the party. Nahles has her work cut out. The survey by pollster Emnid for the Bild am Sonntag weekly showed support for the SPD dropping one percentage point to 17%. Support for Merkel's conservative bloc - her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and their Bavarian allies, the Christian Social Union (CSU) - rose by two points to 34%.

CAIRO (AFP) -- **Egypt's antiquities ministry said Sunday that tests had debunked a theory that there are hidden chambers next to the tomb of Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings.** Experts used ground penetrating radar (GPR) which provided "conclusive evidence of the non-existence of hidden chambers adjacent to or inside Tutankhamun's tomb," the ministry said in a statement. More details will be announced in a speech later in the day by the head of an Italian scientific team, Francesco Porcelli, of the Polytechnic University in Turin, the statement said. It said Porcelli had submitted a report that "concluded, with a very high degree of confidence... the hypothesis concerning the existence of hidden chambers or corridors adjacent to Tutankhamun's tomb is not supported by GPR data." Previous scans had suggested the possibility of hidden chambers, although experts disagreed on the results.

MOSCOW (AP) -- **Alexei Navalny, the leader of protests against President Vladimir Putin that resulted in the arrests of more than 1,500 demonstrators across Russia, says he has been released from detention but faces two charges.** Navalny said Sunday on Twitter that he had been released after being arrested on Moscow's Pushkin Square on Saturday. He said he faces charges of organizing an unauthorized meeting and of resisting police. Each of those charges can carry a jail sentence of 15 days. OND-Info, an organization that monitors Russian political arrests, said at least 1,575 people were arrested in demonstrations in 26 cities across Russia protesting Putin's upcoming inauguration Monday for a new term. It was not clear Sunday how many remained in custody. Amnesty International called the arrests and beatings of some Russian protesters "outrageous."