



# Macron's worries continue

● **Announces more concessions to pacify 'yellow vest'**

● **Mulls cutting tax for high earners**

● **Protest began on Nov 17 against fuel taxes**

AFP | Paris, France

The French government signalled yesterday that it was prepared to make further concessions to "yellow vest" protesters, even raising a possible rollback on a controversial move to cut taxes for high earners last year.

President Emmanuel Macron faces a crucial few days as he seeks an end to more than two weeks of protests which degenerated on Saturday into some of the worst violence in central Paris in decades.

The former investment banker was heckled by a crowd as he visited a burned out government building in Puy-en-Velay in central France on Tuesday night, just hours after a new opinion poll showed his approval rating at just 23 percent.

The so-called "yellow vest" protests began on November 17 in opposition to rising fuel taxes, but they have since ballooned into a broad challenge to Macron's pro-business agenda.

One of the frequent demands from the protesters, who are mostly from rural or small-town France, is a repeal of Macron's move last year to cut the ISF "fortune tax" which was previously levied on high-earners. "If something isn't working, we're not dumb, we'll change it," government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux said on RTL radio on Wednesday morning, saying the wealth tax would be evaluated between now and late next year.

Macron, 40, made the issue one of his key campaign pledges ahead of his election in May 2017, arguing that punitive taxes on the wealthy discouraged job creation and led many entrepreneurs to leave France.

Griveaux stressed that re-instating the

ISF "is not on the table for now," but Equality Minister Marlene Schiappa said she would argue to bring it back unless the tax cut could be shown to be effective.

"The government has been too technocratic and took too long to respond" to the protests, she told France 3 television Tuesday in a withering assessment of the management of the current political crisis.

## U-turn on taxes

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced the first major U-turn of Macron's presidency when he suspended for six months a rise in fuel taxes scheduled for January 1.

Griveaux stressed that the tax hikes could be scrapped permanently if no agreement was reached during consultations over the next six months.

"We're not in politics to be right. We're in politics so that things work out," he said.

A source in the prime minister's office also told AFP that "the government has not necessarily played all of its cards", with further concessions such as a further cut in residence taxes possible.

Many "yellow vest" protesters, named after the high-visibility jackets they wear, have said that Philippe's rollback on fuel taxes is not enough and have called for new protests in the capital on Saturday.

Two truck driver unions have also called an indefinite sympathy strike to begin Sunday night, and the protests have spread to dozens of schools nationwide as students denounce tougher university entrance requirements.

# US soldier gets 25 years in prison for backing ISIS

Los Angeles, United States

A US soldier based in Hawaii was sentenced on Tuesday to 25 years in prison for attempting to provide support to the Islamic State group also known as ISIS.

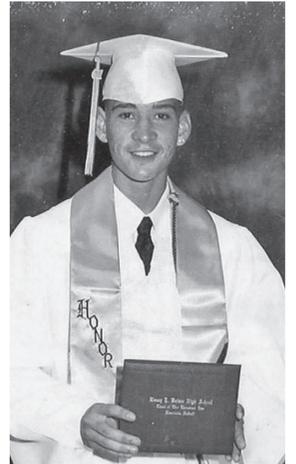
Ikaika Erik Kang, 35, whose sentence was part of a plea agreement, will also be under at least 20 years of supervised release after he completes his prison term.

"Kang swore to defend the United States as a member of our military, but betrayed his country by swearing allegiance to ISIS and attempting to provide it material support," John Demers, assistant attorney general for national security, said in a statement.

According to authorities, Kang, a sergeant in the US Army, became sympathetic to ISIS by at least early 2016 and regularly watched propaganda videos published online by the terror group while expressing a desire to become a member.

Prosecutors said he spoke in detail about committing specific acts of violence including launching attacks at public gatherings such as the Honolulu Christmas Parade and planning a suicide bombing at his army barracks.

In June and July of last year, he met with undercover FBI agents posing as people with connections to ISIS and



Ikaika Erik Kang, 34, continued to serve in the Army for years after expressing support for ISIS (Courtesy of Daily Mail)

provided them with sensitive material.

He also supplied the agents with a small aerial drone and military-style clothing and gear.

On another occasion, he provided two undercover FBI employees -- one pretending to be a high-ranking ISIS leader and another an ISIS fighter -- with a two-hour combat training session to hone their fighting and marksmanship skills.

Kang was arrested after he swore allegiance to ISIS during a ceremony conducted by the purported ISIS leader.

# Einstein letter doubting God auctioned for \$2.89 million

New York, United States

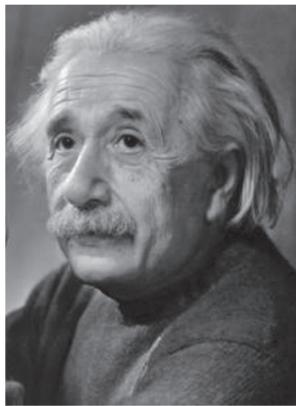
A handwritten letter by Albert Einstein in which the physicist doubts the existence of God was auctioned Tuesday for \$2.89 million.

It was a record for an Einstein letter and far surpassed its estimated value of \$1.0-1.5 million,

Christie's said. A 1939 letter in which Einstein warned then president Franklin D. Roosevelt about Germany's atom bomb preparations was auctioned for \$2.1m in 2002. In the letter sold on Tuesday, dated 1954 and written in German to philosopher Eric Gutkind, Einstein said he did not believe in God.

"The word God is for me nothing but the expression and product of human weaknesses," Einstein wrote.

"The Bible, a collection of venerable but still rather primitive legends." The letter was last sold in 2008 to a private collector for \$404,000, Christie's said.



# Bulgaria says will not join UN migration pact

Sofia, Bulgaria

Bulgaria's government confirmed on Wednesday that it would not join the United Nations pact for better regulating worldwide migration, set to be adopted later this month.

"The government decided that Bulgaria will abstain from joining the Global Compact

for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration," said a government statement.

Bulgaria would not send representatives to the December 10-11 conference in Marrakesh, Morocco, at which the pact is set to be formally adopted, the statement added. And it would abstain at the UN general assembly vote to affirm the pact.

# In a first, baby born via uterus transplanted from dead donor

AFP | Paris, France

In a medical first, a mother who received a uterus transplant from a dead donor gave birth to a healthy baby, researchers reported yesterday.

The breakthrough operation, performed in September 2016 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, shows that such transplants are feasible and could help thousands of women unable to have children due to uterine problems, according to a study published in The Lancet.

The baby girl was born in December 2017, the medical journal added.

Until recently, the only options available to women with so-called uterine infertility were adoption or the services of a surrogate mother.



This baby girl, shown shortly after birth with her doctors in Brazil, is a medical first. Her mom is the first woman to give birth with the help of a uterus transplanted from a deceased donor. (Courtesy of sciencenews)



The breakthrough operation, performed in September 2016 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, shows that such transplants are feasible and could help thousands of women

The first successful childbirth following uterine transplant from a living donor took place in 2014 in Sweden, and there have been 10 others since then.

But there are far more women in need of transplants than there are potential live donors, so doctors wanted to find out if the procedure could work using the uterus of a woman who had died.

Ten attempts were made -- in the United States, the Czech Republic, and Turkey -- before the success reported yesterday.

Infertility affects 10 to 15 percent of couples. Of this, one in 500 women have problems with their uterus that prevent them from becoming pregnant and carrying a child to term.

"Our results provide a proof-

of-concept for a new option for women with uterine infertility," said Dani Ejzenberg, a doctor at the teaching hospital of the University of Sao Paulo.

He described the procedure as a "medical milestone".

The 32-year-old recipient was born without a uterus as a result of a rare syndrome.

Four months before the transplant, she had in-vitro fertilisation resulting in eight fertilised eggs, which were preserved through freezing.

The donor was a 45-year-old woman who died from a stroke. Her uterus was removed and transplanted in surgery that lasted more than ten hours.

Mother and baby left the hospital three days later.