

MH370 PROBE
Pilot named as 'chief suspect'
INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Malaysia's criminal investigation into the disappearance of flight MH370 has identified the plane's pilot as its prime suspect, it has been reported.

While the official results of the inquiry are yet to be published, details have been passed on to foreign governments and crash investigators, according to the Sunday Times.

They revealed that after detectives carried out 170 interviews and profiled all of the 239 people on board the Boeing 777 when it vanished on 8 March, Captain Zaharie Shah was left as the most likely perpetrator if deliberate human action is to blame.

Investigators have previously refused to "clear" the captain's flight simulator of suspicious activity, and it now appears they found evidence of routes programmed to take a plane far out into the Indian Ocean and practising landing using a short runway on an island.

The data from the simulated flights had been deleted, the Times reported, but computer experts were able to retrieve them.

The police probe has also revealed that the 53-year-old captain was unique among those on board the flight for having no recorded commitments, either socially or for work, to take place after the date of the MH370 journey.

This was not in keeping with Zaharie's usually outgoing and open nature, police said, and in contrast to the activities of his co-pilot, Fariq Hamid, and the rest of the crew.

The reported findings of the criminal investigation rely only on circumstantial evidence, and make mention of rumours of trouble in the pilot's marriage and home life that have been denied by his family.



Indian activists from the opposition Congress Party burn an effigy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as they shout anti-government slogans during a protest against the hike in rail fares, in Amritsar, yesterday. Angry demonstrators blocked railway tracks to protest a steep hike in train fares, seen as the government's first tough step towards reforming a sluggish economy.

PHOTO: AFP

Lankan media criticises cops over deadly riots

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan police announced yesterday they were tightening security in the capital after local media, in a rare show of unity, condemned them for failing to control Buddhist extremists behind deadly anti-Muslim riots.

Police spokesman Ajith Rohana said security would be stepped up in Colombo today following reports that a Muslim group was planning a demonstration to denounce an alleged arson attack at a Muslim-owned shop over the weekend.

He dismissed the barrage of media criticism yesterday that police should take the blame for anti-Muslim riots carried out by hardline Buddhists a week ago which left four people dead, 80 wounded, and hundreds of homes and shops destroyed.

"It is unfair to blame one individual, there are so many factors involved," Rohana said, referring to a call for Inspector General of Police (IGP) N. K. Illangakoon to step down.

The privately-run The Nation weekly took the unusual step yesterday of leading its front page with an editorial with the blunt headline: "The IGP must resign".

Other media joined in blasting officials for failing to rein in a hardline Buddhist group known as the Bodu Bala Sena, blamed for much of the unrest.

"Arrest him," the Sunday Leader newspaper demanded in a headline, referring to the head of the BBS, Galagodaatte Gnanasara, who has publicly denied causing trouble.

Sri Lanka's Sunday Times said the burning down of the Muslim-owned No-Limit clothing store outside Colombo on Saturday "is an indication that some people might want this violence to spread".

Police were investigating the cause of the blaze, which Justice Minister Rauf Hakeem, the most senior Muslim in President Mahinda Rajapakse's cabinet, described Saturday as an arson attack.

Israeli troops kill 2 more

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli troops shot dead two Palestinians in the West Bank early yesterday in separate clashes that erupted as they made more arrests in the hunt for three missing teenagers.

Their deaths raised the number to four Palestinians killed since the Israeli army began a massive search for three young students who disappeared on June 12 while hitchhiking in the southern West Bank.

Israel accuses Hamas militants of kidnapping them, and has said the objective of "Operation Brother's Keeper" is to bring them home safe while dealing a crushing blow to the West Bank infrastructure of its Islamist nemesis.

So far, the army has arrested more than 340 Palestinians, around two thirds of them Hamas members.

The teens' seizure has been condemned by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, who yesterday questioned why Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had not condemned the bloodshed triggered by the manhunt.

Abbas also said he has seen no concrete evidence of the Islamist group's involvement.

But Netanyahu insisted Israel had "unequivocal proof" that Hamas was behind the youths' disappearance.

He also referred to comments made by Abbas on Thursday in which the Palestinian leader pledged to hold those behind the kidnapping "accountable", and said there would be no new armed uprising against Israel.

Israel has seized on the opportunity presented by the operation to try to rupture a reconciliation agreement between Abbas and Hamas, which saw the two sides recently agree on an interim government of independents, infuriating Israel.

Netanyahu also appeared to address Abbas's remarks on Palestinian casualties: "This effort involves a certain amount of friction with the civilian population in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and we have no intention of harming anyone. But our forces are acting as necessary for self-defence, and from time to time, there are victims or casualties on the Palestinian side as a result."

HUNT FOR MISSING TEENS

Malaria kills 41 in Tripura

IANS, Agartala

The deaths in a malaria outbreak in Tripura have risen to 41, including 31 children, a minister said in Agartala yesterday.

"At least 41 people, including 31 children, have died and more than 22,000 others have fallen ill since the first week of this month. Of the 22,000 ill people, malaria germ was found in the blood of 3,215 of them," Tripura Health and Family Welfare Minister Badal Choudhury told reporters.

All the affected people have been admitted to various government hospitals in five districts, he said.

However, sources in the health department said the unofficial tally stands at more than 60 dead and 30,000 ill.

Accusations of election fraud gather pace in Afghanistan

Abdullah releases audio to 'prove' fraud claims

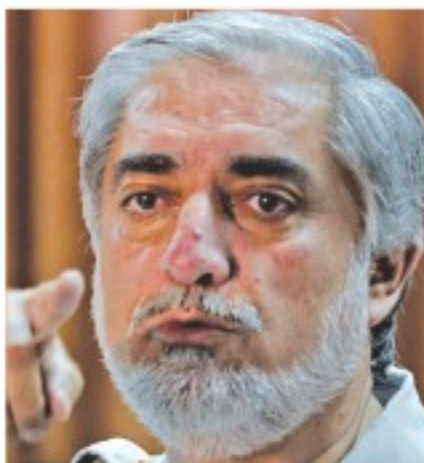
REUTERS, Kabul

The party of Afghan presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah yesterday released audio that it said showed mass fraud had been committed in an election that aims to transfer power democratically in the country for the first time.

The audio purports to show that Independent Election Commission (IEC) Secretariat head Zia-ul-Haq Amarkhil made phone calls to officials in several provinces ordering them to stuff ballot boxes using code words.

While Amarkhil denies the allegations and the Independent Election Complaints Commission is investigating, the broadcast could stoke further protests across the country supporting Abdullah's decision to withdraw from the vote.

The election comes at a delicate time as



Abdullah

most foreign troops will exit by the end of the year, leaving behind a still strong Taliban insurgency and deepening economic crisis.

Abdullah, former leader of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, last week recalled his observers monitoring the ongoing count and said the outcome of the runoff with former finance minister Ashraf Ghani on June 14 would be illegal.

The United Nations has warned of an escalation of ethnic tension and called on him to reengage with the election.

Abdullah is of mixed heritage but his support base is with the Tajik community, while ex-World Bank economist Ghani is an ethnic Pashtun.

The IEC deferred comment to the Independent Election Complaints Commission, which said it was looking into the allegations.

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