

## New post-Brexit EU summit Feb 3 in Malta: source

AFP, Brussels

European Union leaders will meet in Malta in February to help prepare for a summit the following month in Rome aimed at revitalising a bloc without Britain, an EU source said yesterday.

"I can confirm that the Malta Summit at EU 27 will take place on the 3rd of February," an EU source who asked not to be named told AFP.

The 27 leaders met without British Prime Minister Theresa May earlier this month in Bratislava, promising to forge a new vision for a bloc rocked by Brexit, the worst migrant crisis since World War II, terrorist attacks and a stuttering economy.

Valletta will play host as it assumes the rotating six-month presidency of the EU in January after Slovakia.

The EU source said the agenda of the Malta meeting is still to be determined but it will be "basically a follow-up to Bratislava and preparation for the Rome Summit in March," which marks the 60th anniversary of the bloc's founding treaty signed in the Italian capital.

May has said Britain will not trigger Article 50, which sets the two-year Brexit talks in motion, before the end of this year.

Her EU peers have repeatedly called on her to move quickly so as to end the uncertainty over Britain's future relations with the bloc.

A regular EU summit is also scheduled for the end of October in Brussels, leading up to another in December.

## Russia jails space engineer for 7 yrs for treason

AFP, Moscow

Russia has sentenced an elderly decorated space engineer and university instructor to seven years in prison for state treason, an official said yesterday.

Vladimir Lapygin was sentenced to seven years on charges of state treason, a spokesman for Moscow City Court told AFP, without giving details.

## IS releases

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Khairul Islam Payel and Shafiqul Islam Uzzal -- stormed the Holy Artisan restaurant in Gulshan on July 1 and killed 20 hostages, 17 of them foreigners. They were later killed in an army operation.

In the video, in which they appear to have spoken before the attack, they are heard threatening that they would target anyone who they call the "enemies of Islam".

Contacted, Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said it wasn't possible to comment on the matter immediately.

## Six militants

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compete against each other. In August six gunmen of Assam's National Democratic Front of Bodoland opened fire on a busy market, killing 15 people and wounding several others.

## 'Dog professor'

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The hope is that Professor Tirebiter will help create a sense of community on campus, in addition to providing therapeutic companionship, said Paula Lee Swinford, director of the Office of Wellness and Health Promotion at USC.

"We wanted to do something that would change our culture," Swinford was quoted as saying.

Research suggests that positive interactions with dogs can create a sense of calm and well-being, said Olga Solomon, an assistant professor at USC.

Petting a therapy dog can increase serotonin, beta-endorphin and oxytocin -- chemicals and hormones that make people happy -- and decrease cortisol, a stress hormone, Solomon said.

For now, Professor Tirebiter is learning to get comfortable all over campus, in addition to some tricks, said Amanda Vanni, his handler, who is also a health promotion specialist at USC's student health centre.

"I'm teaching him how to do a 'Fight on' right now," she said, referring to the school's official fight song. "(W)e're working on a paw out in the air," she said.

# EU looks beyond Obama to clinch free trade deal

AFP, Bratislava

A last-gasp push to seal a landmark free trade deal between the European Union and the United States before the end of Barack Obama's presidency has failed, EU ministers agreed yesterday.

"It is not realistic to reach the final agreement by the end of the Obama administration," said Peter Ziga, the trade minister of Slovakia which currently holds the EU's six-month rotating presidency.

The decision puts the fate of the accord on the US side in the hands of Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump, who are both running their presidential campaigns on anti-trade deal platforms.

The highly ambitious Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (or TTIP) would create the world's biggest market of 850 million consumers stretching from Hawaii to Lithuania.

But with talks dragging on since 2013, opposition has grown, most dangerously in key member states France and Germany amid fears that TTIP will undermine European standards on health and the environment.

EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstroem, who leads the talks with the US, said it takes five or six months for a new American administration to be fully in place and that effectively puts the negotiations on hold.

"When we can restart, (that) is a bit too early to speculate until we know what the administration would look like," she said after EU trade ministers met in the Slovak capital.

The ministers met hoping to patch up deep differences after tens of thousands of demonstrators thronged European cities in recent days demanding the EU walk away from the deal.

"From our point of view, the (TTIP) talks are effectively suspended because meaningful negotiations are no longer taking place," said Reinhold Mitterlehner, the economy minister from Austria where opposition to the deal is fierce.

## Now in jail

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which sent him to jail in connection with the arms cases, reports a correspondent from Feni, quoting the OC.

Akash's uncle Abdul Quader claimed Akash had been implicated in the arms cases as part of a conspiracy.

After passing the SSC exams, Akash enrolled in MES College in Chittagong and later studied at Chittagong College. He also owned a shop "Akash Telecom" in Mahipal area of Feni, according to Quader.

Akash later travelled to Malaysia and opened a restaurant "Rasana Bilash" with another Bangladeshi, added his uncle.

Police said Akash got involved with Islami Chhatria Shibir, student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami, while studying at Shaheen Academy.

Though the 37-year-old businessman was deported on September 2, the incident came to light on Thursday after Malaysian daily The Star ran a report on his arrest along with three foreigners and a local man.

Referring to a statement of Inspector General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar, the newspaper said, "He was placed in Interpol's Red Notice and was deported on September 2."

Three others arrested in the special operation included a 38-year-old Nepalese businessman, a 26-year-old Moroccan man and a 34-year-old Malaysian man.

Quoting sources, the newspaper yesterday reported, "A Bangladeshi man, who was among the four arrested for terror links, had met the suspect involved in an attack in Dhaka, Bangladesh, two months ago."

Sources revealed that the 37-year-old businessman used his restaurant in Bukit Bintang to meet "terrorist" Andaleeb Ahmed, who was involved in the July 1 terror attack on Holy Artisan Café in Dhaka where 21 hostages were killed, it added.

On condition of anonymity, an investigator in the Gulshan café attack case said they were yet to find involvement of any man named Andaleeb Ahmed in the incident.

The Malaysian newspaper said, "Andaleeb was linked to Monash University here, having been in Malaysia from 2012 to 2015 and later in Istanbul."

Ashraf Uddain Ahmed Chunnu, father of Andaleeb Ahmed, refuted the claim that his son was involved in the Gulshan café attack or militancy.

"Over the last 10 months, my son has been helping me out with my business. He regularly goes to the office," Chunnu, a former star foot-

"It would be wise to put on mute something that is perceived so negatively," he added, confirming a position Austria shares with France.

Critics complain that the US side has failed to offer any serious proposals, especially on sensitive issues such as protecting geographical labelling for renowned farm products such as Champagne or Roquefort cheese.

"I am convinced that we must restart on totally new grounds," said French Trade Minister Matthias Fekl, one of TTIP's loudest critics, adding that more and more member states were coming round to his view.

In Germany, TTIP has split the ruling coalition, with Chancellor Angela Merkel still its biggest backer but her socialist partners, led by Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel, dead set against it.

Hopes were strong meanwhile for CETA, a similar deal with Canada that has already been negotiated but which had to overcome unexpected hurdles in Austria and Germany.

Fears of a failure of CETA have waned since Gabriel's socialists narrowly backed the deal at a party conference last week.

Last-minute opposition also flared up in Austria and Belgium but the ministers now expect to approve the agreement next month so that it can be signed with Canadian Premier Justin Trudeau at an EU-Canada summit on October 27.

CETA would then go on for ratification in national and regional parliaments across the EU, a tricky and time-consuming process, though most of the terms will be able to be implemented provisionally.

Opponents believe CETA is an attempt to set a dangerous precedent before completing the much bigger accord with the US.

More than 160,000 demonstrators thronged major cities across Germany on Saturday in opposition to both trade deals. Thousands more protested outside EU headquarters in Brussels on Tuesday.

## 3 more bodies

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Banaripara Police Station's Sub-inspector Mohammad Jasim told The Daily Star that police had put the death toll at 27 on basis of primary information. But later the list was updated with information from some victims' relatives.

There are eight men, 10 women and seven children among the dead, police said.

However, some people alleged that they were yet to receive the bodies of their relatives.

One Tipu Sultan alleged that his relative, Mainul, was still missing. "We have been searching for him in the river for the last two days," he said.

Around 11:45am on Wednesday, Oishi Plus sank in the river near Dasherhaat village with around 50 passengers on board. It was on its way to Uzirpur from Banaripara and was trying to anchor at Masjidbari point, which is not a designated stop, to pick up and drop off passengers.

As the launch was about to anchor, a large chunk of the bank collapsed on its front part and it turned upside down.

Rescuers managed to recover 14 bodies on the same day. The sunken vessel was pulled up around 8:30am on Thursday. Eight bodies were also found.

Barisal Port Officer Mustafizur Rahman said the launch was not registered as a passenger-carrying vessel and had no valid route permit. It used to ply different waterways in the area illegally.

The district administration started handing over Tk 10,000 to each family of the victims as burial cost.

## Gulen says will return to Turkey if US backs extradition

AFP, Berlin

US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen is ready to return to Turkey if Washington approves Ankara's request for his extradition over the failed July coup, he told German broadcaster ZDF yesterday.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has accused Gulen of ordering the failed putsch and Ankara wants Washington to arrest the Islamic cleric and deliver him to Turkish authorities.

"If the United States says yes, then I will go, it's not a problem. Then I will spend the rest of my days tormented (by the government) and so I will reach God as a pure man," Gulen said.

The preacher, who lives in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania, has denied any involvement in the putsch.

Calling for an international probe into the accusation, Gulen told ZDF that he would be ready to answer to such an investigation.

"An international organisation should investigate the case. If their accusations stand, then I will accept what they want. But they have neither succeeded in showing any concrete proof nor given an answer to my suggestion. Therefore, these are all just mere assertions," he said.

The preacher accused Ankara of using the putsch as an excuse to crack down on followers of his Hizmet movement, which runs a network of private schools, businesses and media outlets.

"It was all planned in advance. They needed a serious excuse. If there is such an excuse then the case would be accepted by the international community, or so that's what they thought," said Gulen.

Ankara has on several occasions asked the US authorities to extradite Gulen, sending them documents which allegedly show evidence of his involvement in the putsch.

## Myanmar probes handling of child slavery case

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's president yesterday ordered an investigation into how authorities handled the case of two girls who say they were enslaved and tortured for years by the owners of a tailor shop.

The teenagers were rescued this month and their story has gripped a country appalled by the abuse they suffered and the police's failure to intervene earlier.

The girls, aged 16 and 17, said they spent five years working as housemaids at the shop in downtown Yangon where they were beaten, burnt and deprived of sleep and food.

Their families said police refused to help them free the girls on multiple occasions.

They were rescued this month after a local journalist alerted the human rights commission.

Yesterday, Myanmar's president Htin Kyaw ordered a report on how authorities had handled the case.

"The President's office has instructed the home affairs ministry to report in detail on how Kyauktada police station officials took action," his office said in a statement.

"The President's office has... been studying the performance of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission," it added.

The girls were just 11 and 12 when a friend took them to Myanmar's bustling commercial capital with the promise of good jobs as housemaids.

AFP reporters who visited them in their tiny village this week saw evidence of horrific wounds on their bodies, including scars from where they say they were stabbed with scissors and branded with a hot iron.

One of the girls' fingers were twisted at strange angles -- she says they were broken as a punishment by her captors.

The head of their village told AFP they are now under police protection at a Yangon police station.

Their family has been paid around \$4,000 in compensation by the shop owners, who were arrested on human trafficking charges this week.

The girls are among tens of thousands of children from poor rural areas sent to work as domestic helpers for Myanmar's growing pool of wealthier, urban middle-class households.

The impoverished country is the world's seventh-worst for child labour, according to risk analysts Verisk Maplecroft, just ahead of India and Liberia.

# Indian court clears pair over Scarlett Keeling killing

AFP, Panaji

Two Indian men were yesterday cleared of the rape and homicide of 15-year-old British schoolgirl Scarlett Keeling whose bruised and seminaked body was found on a Goa beach eight years ago.

Friends and relatives of the two accused, Samson D'Souza and Placido Carvalho, cheered as the verdict was read out in a packed courtroom in the state capital Panaji.

Scarlett's mother Fiona MacKeown said she was devastated by the outcome and promised to fight to overturn the verdict.

"I am reeling. It's been eight years of agony. I feel devastated and will definitely be challenging the verdict," MacKeown, who looked shell-shocked

as the ruling was delivered, said outside the court.

D'Souza and Carvalho had been charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder, using force with intent to outrage a woman's modesty and of administering drugs with intent to harm.

They both broke into smiles as Judge Vandana Tendulkar told the packed courtroom: "I find them not guilty of all charges."

MacKeown told AFP she was aghast that they had also been let off the lesser charges, saying she had no faith in the Indian legal system.

"The judicial system will support the criminals, not the tourists or victims. It seems that guys here can operate above the law and get away with murder," she said.

## Cancel their plots

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to tanners at Savar and seal their factories in Hazaribagh if they fail to shift their factories to Savar by December," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bela.

The government should include experts from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) and representatives of green organisations in the CETP monitoring board to ensure proper functioning of the plant, she observed.

The operation of the CETP has to be monitored closely on a regular basis, she said, adding that almost all factories in the country have ETBs, at least on paper, but those remain idle due to lack of monitoring and that is why emphasis has to be on monitoring.

Following the relocation of all the tanneries, the government should find ways to make proper use of the land in Hazaribagh with a buffer zone for the local residents, Rizwana advised.

Prof Delwar Hossain of Buet, consultant of the CETP project, said the plant at the moment is ready to treat 12,500 cubic metres of effluent per day. However, following the completion of the project, it would be able to treat 25,000 cubic metres of effluent over the same period.

Installation of two modules of the CETP has already been completed and the remaining two modules will be commissioned by December. Moreover, the chrome treatment plant has also become operational, said Prof Delwar.

As per an agreement, the foreign experts of the plant would provide free technical support as well as training on its operation and maintenance for two years following its commissioning, he said, adding that the opportunity of reaping this benefit would be missed if the CETP remains idle during this period due to unavailability of effluent from tanneries.

## Missiles batter

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In the Al-Kalasseh district, three buildings were levelled by a single strike, and rescue workers were trying frantically to reach survivors using a single bulldozer and their bare hands.

**PRECURSOR TO GROUND OPERATION**

The White Helmets' headquarters in the Ansari district was badly damaged along with an ambulance and a fire engine. A second centre operated by the group was also hit.

Also in Aleppo province, the Observatory reported 12 deaths in a Russian raid on the rebel-held town of Beshkatine and 11 killed in raids by unidentified aircraft on Islamic State group stronghold Al-Bal.

The bombardment came a day after the Syrian army announced an offensive to recapture east Aleppo, which has been held by the rebels since mid-2012 but has been surrounded by government forces since July.

The army urged civilians to distance themselves from "the positions of terrorist groups" and pledged that fleeing residents would not be detained.

A high-ranking military source confirmed that the bombardment was preparation for a ground assault.

"We have begun reconnaissance, aerial and artillery bombardment," he told AFP.

"This could go on for hours or days before the ground operation starts. The timing of the ground operation will depend on the results of the strikes and the situation on the ground."

Another military source in Damascus said "the goal of the operation will be to expand the area under the army's control".

He said reinforcements had already been brought to Aleppo.

The talks between Kerry and Lavrov in New York on Thursday broke up

Abu Naser Khan, chairman of Poba, said the tanners are not serious about shifting their factories to Savar and they continue to come up with new excuses every now and then just to delay the process.

The tannery owners are negligent and they are only interested in financial gains, accused Mohammad Abdul Matin, general secretary of Bapa.

M Abu Taher, chairman of leather goods manufacturing firm Fortuna Bangladesh, said the process of relocation to Savar was being delayed due to financial constraints.

The tannery owners cannot cover the relocation and setup costs of their factories by obtaining loans from commercial banks against the new plots at Savar as the government did not register the plots in the names of allottees, he added.

The government should urgently arrange soft loans for the tannery owners and register the plots to the allottees, said Taher.

Earlier on July 18, the Supreme Court ordered owners of 154 tanneries to pay Tk 10,000 in daily compensation for damaging the environment in Hazaribagh. The apex court reduced the compensation amount to Tk 10,000 after the tanners moved an appeal before it against a June 16 High Court order that had asked each factory to pay Tk 50,000 in daily compensation.

Half of the money, the SC order said, would go to Bangladesh Liver Foundation for running charitable activities while the rest would be deposited in the coffers of the government.

The move came at a time when the tannery owners, despite repeated government warnings, had been procrastinating over the relocation of tanneries to Savar on the outskirts of the capital.

after Russia refused US demands that it promise to immediately ground the Syrian regime's air force.

**NEW AID ROUTE?**

"We cannot continue on the same path any longer," Kerry said, adding that "credibility" had to be restored to the process.

"The only way to achieve that is if the ones that have the air power in that part of the conflict simply stop using it."

The conflict in Syria has cost more than 300,000 lives and displaced over half the country's population since it erupted in March 2011.

In a bid to relaunch peace talks, Kerry and Lavrov announced a ceasefire on September 9, with Moscow responsible for forcing government troops to stand down and allow in UN aid convoys.

Washington was supposed to pressure rebel forces to respect the truce and distance themselves from jihadists, but the ceasefire fell apart acrimoniously and the Syrian army declared it over on Monday.

UN peace envoy Staffan de Mistura said Thursday's failed talks were "long, painful and disappointing" and warned of escalating violence.

In Geneva, the UN said yesterday it was considering a different route to send desperately needed aid to east Aleppo to circumvent the blocked main supply route.

In Damascus, an analyst close to the regime said it was no coincidence that the Aleppo assault began as the New York talks broke down.

"In Aleppo, negotiations are being conducted by fire," he said.

"The Americans must understand that so long as they don't implement their commitments, particularly for the... to distance themselves from... (jihadists), the Russians and the Syrian army will advance."