

Hold on tight

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reverberate across all of Europe.

Hours earlier, European leaders had hailed pro-EU candidate Alexander Van der Bellen's trouncing of nationalist Norbert Hofer in Austria's Presidential election as a victory over nationalism.

French President Francois Hollande tweeted the "Austrian people have chosen Europe."

Germany's Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said "all of Europe is relieved."

Both men are paying particularly close attention as they, along with the Dutch, face their own elections next year.

In a Europe awash with an apparently infectious populism, how votes go beyond their borders is suddenly very relevant.

Their relief over the Austrian vote was short lived. Renzi's referendum defeat hands Italy's EU skeptics a stronger mandate and possibly enough clout in Parliament or the polls to push their agenda.

COULD ITALY LEAVE THE EU?

The biggest winners will be former comedian turned politician Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement party (M5S). They are anti-EU and want Italy freed from the constraints of the European single currency. It's the sort of change the EU is unlikely to give easily, if at all.

The stage is slowly being set for a possible Itexit.

Renzi had been doing well in the polls until he staked his political future on the referendum. His enemies saw their chance and pounced, and that includes other anti-EU parties like the Northern League, or Lega Nord.

The message for Brussels is clear: if anti-EU sentiment can bring down the Prime Minister then it might surely pluck Italy from the dwindling group of 27 nations.

AUSTRIAN BLOW TO FAR RIGHT

Austrians, on the other hand, have been swayed over the past six months to move away from Hofer's anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim message.

An annulled election in May put him just 31,000 votes behind Van der Bellen. This time he trailed by 7%.

Hofer said he wanted Austria to remain part of the EU but he wanted changes to Europe's open border policy, not the core ideal of the EU's founding fathers.

Jayalalithaa

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honourable chief minister of Tamil Nadu ... at 11:30pm [local time] today [December 5], Chennai's Apollo Hospital said in a statement released to the media.

Doctors had been treating the 68-year-old former film star, who enjoys an almost god-like status in Tamil Nadu.

Hundreds of devotees have kept a round-the-clock vigil outside the private hospital in the state capital Chennai since she was first admitted in September suffering from a fever. Their numbers have swelled since her condition worsened on Sunday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered his condolences over her demise.

"I will always cherish the innumerable occasions when I had the opportunity to interact with Jayalalithaa ji [honorific]. May her soul rest in peace," Modi said on Twitter.

Her political party, AIADMK, on Twitter said: "our beloved leader, the Iron lady of India ... Amma, is no more."

To millions of her followers, the chief minister was known simply as Amma (mother).

But Hofer's appeal might have waned since May in part because of the EU's success in stopping migrants from getting to Austria's borders. The so-called Balkan route was shut down with the help of Turkey and Greece.

So while last year close to one million migrants passed through Austria, helping Hofer's anti-migrant message resonate through Austria's eight million population, it had lost some of its potency come the December vote.

French Nationalist Marine Le Pen responded to Hofer's loss with a tweet congratulating his Freedom Party for fighting "with courage."

"They'll be victorious in the next legislative elections!" she added.

Her Twitter feed quickly moved on to other topics, an effort it seemed not to dwell on the kick to the nationalist cause.

RISE OF NATIONALISM?

She didn't have to hold her silence for long however, no sooner were the Italian exit polls signalling Renzi's political demise, she tweeted "well done to our friend Matteo Salvini for his victory of NO," congratulating the northern Italian nationalist.

She went on to tweet, "The Italians have moved away from Renzi and the EU. We must listen to this thirst for freedom and protection on nations!"

Le Pen's roller coaster went down and then finished high but the ride is far from over.

Mainstream politicians have been struggling to grapple with her rise -- some point to frustrations over globalization, uncertainty about the economy and erosion of national identity -- even so they haven't found a fix.

And while they take comfort in the victory of pro-EU President elect Alexander Van der Bellen, they will no doubt be pondering what his victory really means.

He isn't just Western Europe's first Green Party President, he is Austria's first President who isn't from the country's two principle political parties.

Sunday's message is clear: European leaders need to brace themselves for a wild ride ahead.

4 held for 'mugging'

Arrestees include BCL leader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested four suspected snatches, including an upazila-level leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League, in the capital's Pallabi area yesterday.

The arrestees are Tuhin Khan, general secretary of Gopalganj's Kashiani upazila unit BCL, Palash Kumar, Mamunur Rahman and Monwar Hossain. All of them are from the same upazila, said Dadon Fakir, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station.

The arrests were made following information that the four had been snatching valuables of locals, riding on motorbikes, for long, the OC said.

Police said incidents of snatching increased in Pallabi area in recent times, and they were receiving complaints that bike-riding muggers snatching away valuables like laptops, mobile phones and handbags of pedestrians.

Tipped off, law enforcers picked up a man with a laptop near Popular Diagnostic Centre in the area. Following information provided by man, they detained the three others from a flat in Pallabi early yesterday morning.

Three laptops and several mobile phones were recovered from the flat, the OC said, adding that a case was filed against the four.

BNP to take its

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reinstatement of the clause that defines "the Defence Services of Bangladesh" as "a law enforcement agency" along with other forces.

She also focused on strengthening the EC, and stressed the need for vesting magisterial power in EC officials, appointing election observers, delimiting constituencies and updating the voter list.

A press conference on November 21, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said the party sought appointment of the president.

The tenure of the current EC expires in February next year.

Rome bans

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The ban targets anyone attempting to portray a historical subject such as ancient Roman soldier in photographs or videos for cash.

Anyone caught breaking the new regulation will face a €400 fine as Rome's authorities attempt to "protect public order" and guard the capital's "cultural, artistic and monumental heritage".

The rickshaw ban applies to any vehicle partially or fully powered by pedals used to transport people around the city.

This is not first time gladiator impersonators have been banned in Rome, the latest regulations replace previous public orders which expired on November 30.

One centurion impersonator and father of two told the Italian newspaper Il Corriere: "In Verona, characters pay €10 in order to occupy land for a day; there's an online application and then they're allowed to work."

"Why isn't that possible in Rome?"

Rome authorities claimed unauthorised gladiators were able to make up to 12,000 Euros (£10,000) each month through overcharging tourists for holiday snaps.

Trials missing deadline

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give any reason for missing the deadline.

The SC registrar general's report said the SC administration recently issued a circular asking the tribunal judges to follow the provisions of the law.

The law ministry in its report said it asked the public prosecutors to follow the legal provisions, Assistant Attorney General Shahidul Islam Khan told The Daily Star.

After examining the reports, the HC asked the authorities concerned to ensure that provisions of section 31(ka) of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act are strictly applied in practice and appropriate actions are taken against the judges, public prosecutors and investigating officers for failure to comply

with the law.

The SC administration, the law ministry and the home ministry will take action against the judge, the public prosecutor and the investigating officer concerned.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Hassan passed the order during the hearing of a suo motu case on the issue.

The judges on November 1 had asked the law secretary and the SC registrar general to explain in 30 days whether the legal provisions are applied in practice and the SC and law ministry have taken any step in this regard.

The bench had passed the order during hearing a bail petition of Milad Hossain, accused in a case filed under the law.

Petitioner's lawyer Cumar Debul Dey said the case was filed with Rangunia Police Station in Chittagong on February 19 last year against Milad on charge of killing his wife.

The case was transferred to the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-2 of Chittagong.

The tribunal framed charges in the case on March 21 this year, but could not finish the trial in 180 days, the lawyer said, adding that no witness in the case appeared before the court yet.

Milad, now behind bars, recently filed a petition with the HC seeking bail in the case.

The HC yesterday ordered the lower court to finish the trial in 60 days.

Double delight for Aman growers

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dominated by low-output indigenous varieties.

"We have got a very good Aman production this season. And the current price offered for paddy in the market is better than what we got in the last Aman season," said Abdul Jalil, a farmer from Naogaon's Niamatpur on phone.

Jalil, who grew coarse varieties of Aman on more than 3.5 acres of land and finer varieties on another one acre, not only spoke for him. He confirmed that other growers in the district also had good production to the tune of 65 maunds an acre on average.

Coarse rice is selling at up to Tk 750 a maund, he said, which is quite high a price compared to Tk 550-600 during the last Aman season.

Farmer Entazul Haque, of Baliaangi in Thakurgaon, said Aman production in Thakurgaon is also good and the prices encouraging.

For each sack of 80-kg coarse rice,

farmers are offered up to Tk 1600, which was Tk 1200-1300 in the last season.

Abdul Majid Bablu, a trader in Kushtia's Khajanagar, keeps track of trends in the rice market.

He said Aman paddy supplies to the mills and wholesalers of Khajanagar have been good and the prices are good too in comparison to those of last Boro season as well as last year's Aman season.

Khajanagar boasts one of the biggest rice markets in the country, known for its supply of, among other varieties, Miniket (originally 'minikit') most consumed in Dhaka.

A bumper Aman production cheered growers who did reduce Boro acreage earlier for low prices but bounced back by growing Aman on higher acreage and eventually reaped the benefit.

An initial Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) estimates showed 1.38 percent fall in Boro acreage to 4.77 million hectares in the Boro season

ending in May this year. On the other hand, as per the preliminary data of the DAE, this season's Aman acreage was upped by two percent to 5.69 million hectares, which made significant contribution to the higher Aman output.

Meantime, to support Aman growers the government last week announced procurement of 0.3 million tonnes of rice at a premium rate of Tk 33 a kg, two taka more than the price it offered in the last year's Aman season.

According to the BBS estimation, Aman production grew steadily year-on-year basis -- 12.8 million tonnes in fiscal 2011-12 to 13.2 million tonnes in fiscal 2013-14 and 2014-15 and 13.5 million tonnes in last fiscal.

Experts say any further rapid growth will only be possible if breeders put efforts in developing high-yield Aman varieties with the same zeal that they did for Boro.

Mentally ill man languishes in jail

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on Facebook made allegedly by a Hindu youth.

Palash had first landed in Brahmanbaria jail. On November 18, he was shifted to Comilla Central Jail so that he could be provided with treatment. He is now kept in a cell specialised for prisoners with mental illness.

"There is no good hospital for treating patients with mental sickness in Brahmanbaria. So, we sent him to Comilla so that he gets better treatment," said Nurunnabi Bhuiyan, jail superintendent at Brahmanbaria district prison.

On November 18, Polash was taken to Comilla Medical College Hospital where a physician gave him medicine. He was then brought to Comilla Central Jail.

"He is now receiving treatment at the prison," Mujibur Rahman, jail superintendent at Comilla prison, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"He behaves abnormally and hardly talks," added Mujibur.

Nasirnagar locals say most of the one hundred people arrested over the October 30 attacks were not involved in the incident, and Polash is one of the innocent victims of the blanket arrest.

Contacted, Nasirnagar police

claimed that they made the arrests after identifying the attackers from the video clips of the incident.

Police picked up the mentally challenged man from Datmondol village around 2:00 am on November 7. His father repeatedly told police that his son was mentally ill and pleaded with them not to arrest him.

Ohid said he along with his wife Halima Begum went to Nasirnagar Police Station that morning, and requested police to release their son. But they were not even allowed to meet Polash, the eldest of their five children.

Polash was later produced before a court, which sent him to Brahmanbaria jail.

"Everyone in our village knows that my son is mentally ill. How he can be an attacker," Ohid said over a mobile phone.

As Ohid doesn't have a mobile phone, this correspondent called his neighbour Alamgir to contact him.

Ohid said he visited his son twice at Brahmanbaria jail -- first alone and then with his wife. "I took her [Polash's mother] with me as she was crying to see Polash."

Last week, he went to Brahmanbaria jail to see his son

only to find that Polash was taken to Comilla. "Someone told me that he was taken to a mental hospital in Comilla. I don't know how I can find him," he said.

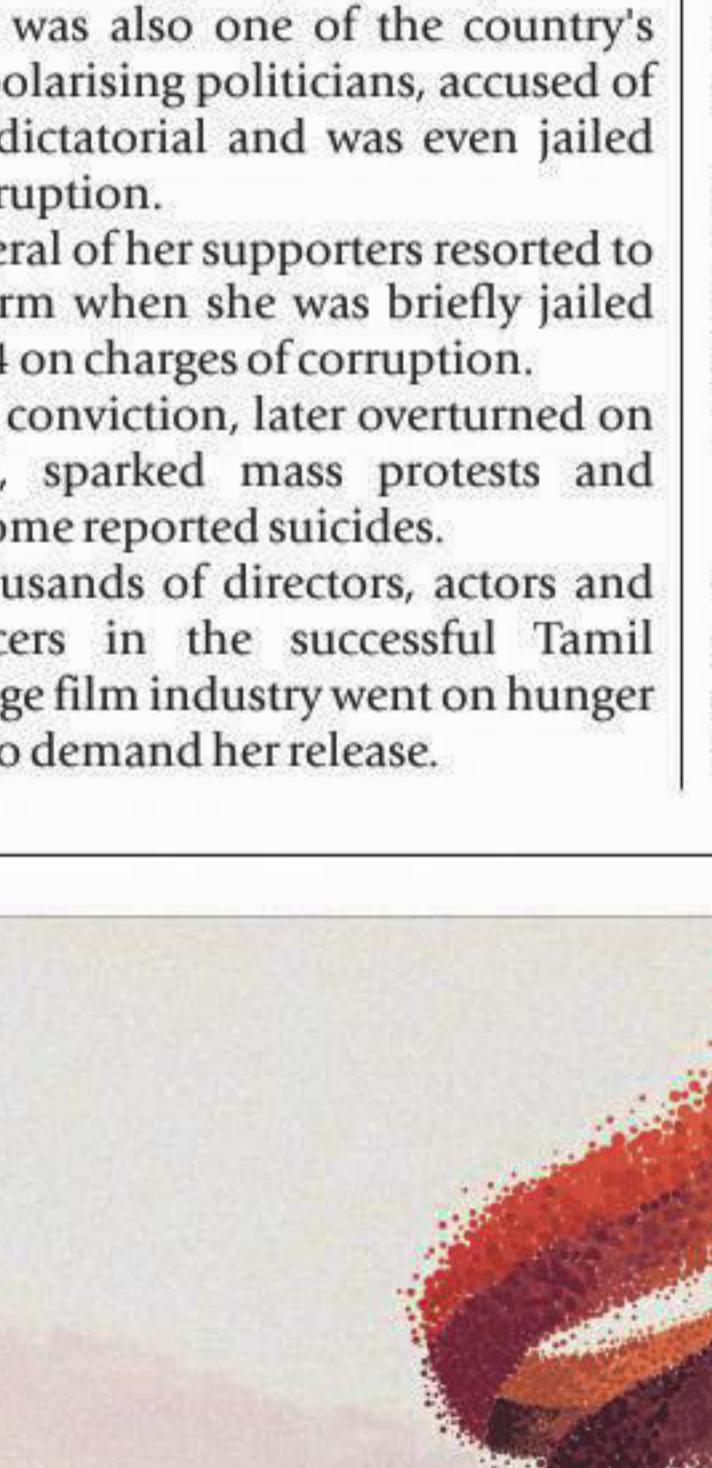
Polash started behaving abnormally about seven years ago. As his condition deteriorated, his father took him to a doctor in Nasirnagar. But his condition didn't improve. He was then treated by a shaman. It also didn't work and Ohid stopped his son's treatment two years ago.

Like others in Datmondol village, union parishad member Siddiquar Rahman also knows about Polash's condition. "Villagers avoid him as he suddenly gets violent... We all were surprised to know that he was arrested and put in jail."

Ohid said he had to shackle his son in the house several times to prevent him from going out.

Talking to this correspondent, Human Rights Commission Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque said it was "very unwise" on the part of the police to arrest the mentally challenged man and put him in prison.

Persons like him are supposed to be treated especially. Police denied him his rights by arresting him and putting him in prison, added Reazul.



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