



Two trucks get stuck in a huge pothole on Ghtail-Guptabrindabon road in Tangail. The 30km road is in extremely bad shape and in need of repairing. At night, passengers and transport workers often become victims of mugging when their vehicles get stuck in potholes.

PHOTO: STAR

HOLOCAUST COMMENTS Le Pen's party swaps leader

AFP, Paris
The party of French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen changed its interim leader for the second time in four days yesterday after her first stand-in was accused of praising the work of a Holocaust denier.

Le Pen announced on Monday she was temporarily stepping aside as leader of the National Front (FN) to remain "above partisan considerations" while campaigning in the second round of the presidential election.

She goes head-to-head against centrist Emmanuel Macron in a runoff on May 7.

Jean-Francois Jalkh, an FN member of the European Parliament, was named as her interim replacement but immediately became embroiled in controversy over remarks about World War II Nazi gas chambers -- a subject that has repeatedly tripped up Le Pen.

In an interview for a French academic journal published in 2005, Jalkh said: "On the problem of the gas chambers... we should be able to talk about this problem."

According to the author of the journal entitled "Le Temps des Savoires" (The Time of Knowledge), Jalkh praised the work of Robert Faurisson, a convicted Holocaust denier.

"What I'm saying, and what really surprised me, in the work of a genuine negationist or revisionist... is the well-worked, rigorous nature of the argument put forward," Jalkh was quoted as saying.

Yesterday, the FN announced that Steeve Briois, the popular mayor of the northern town of Henin-Beaumont, would take over from Jalkh.

"Mr Briois will take over the interim leadership and there'll be no more talk about it," FN vice president Louis Aliot told BFMTV news channel.

Aliot said Jalkh denied making the remarks about the Holocaust. Jalkh, who is also accused of illegal campaign financing over Le Pen's failed 2012 presidential bid, did not return repeated requests for comment by AFP.

Le Pen has sought to purge the FN of the anti-Semitism that has been the hallmark of her firebrand father, party co-founder Jean-Marie Le Pen. She kicked her father out of the party for repeatedly claiming that the Nazi gas chambers were a "detail" of World War II.

Netanyahu hits out at 'insensitive' German diplomacy

AFP, Berlin

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday slammed Germany's foreign minister as "insensitive" over refusing to cancel meetings with rights groups critical of Israel's government, amid rising tensions between the two allies.

Netanyahu had scrapped talks with Sigmar Gabriel at the last minute, after Germany's top diplomat pressed on with plans to meet with Israeli rights groups Breaking The Silence and BTselem.

In an interview with Germany's biggest selling Bild daily, Netanyahu defended his decision.

"Foreign diplomats are welcome to meet with civil society activists and members of the opposition and anyone else they'd like," he said.

'Not many 27-yr-old men could take over a regime'

Trump praises North Korean leader

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

President Donald Trump is currently engaged in a match of escalating rhetoric and even military posturing with Kim Jong Un. And Trump has some thoughts on his adversary -- thoughts in which Trump notably appears to empathise with him.

In a new interview with Reuters, Trump weighs in on whether the North Korean dictator is a rational leader by pointing to the situation in which he found himself: Succeeding his late father, Kim Jong Il, at a very young age.

"He's 27 years old," Trump said. "His father dies, took over a regime. So say what you want, but that is not easy, especially at that age."

Trump went on to clarify that he was not praising the North Korean leader.

"I'm not giving him credit or not giving him credit; I'm just saying that's a very hard thing to do," Trump said. "As to whether or not he's rational, I have no opinion on it. I hope he's rational."

Trump's comments come notably as his secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, is signaling a rare willingness to hold direct talks with North Korea in search of a diplomatic solution. Tillerson tells NPR in an interview, "Obviously, that will be the way we would like to solve this."

Tillerson also appeared to lay the groundwork for diplomacy Thursday, telling Fox News's Bret Baier that the North Korean leader may not be as

crazy as his reputation suggests.

"All indications, Bret, by intelligence agencies ... are that he is not crazy," Tillerson said. "He may be ruthless, he may be a murderer, he may be someone who in many respects we would say, by our standards, is irrational. But he is not insane."

Tillerson added: "And indications are in the past that when certain events have happened, he has taken -- made rational choices."

So it seems possible that Trump's comments are part of a calculated effort to reason with the North Korean leader -- in hopes that he would give up his nuclear ambitions voluntarily. Trump seems to take things a step further than merely saying Kim Jong Un is rational, granting that he was put in a difficult spot leading his nation at such a young age.

Teddy bears

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He said he got the idea when a friend was involved in an accident.

According to Estonian police statistics, around 200 children a year are involved in traffic accidents.

The teddy bears will also be used to help comfort children caught up in other situations, like domestic violence, police officer Lea Barenson told Reuters.

The crowd-funded project HuggyBear aims to buy 1,000 teddy bears.

3 dead

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additional superintendent of police in Chapainawabganj, told this newspaper.

According to hospital sources, all the four were wearing jeans and black T-shirts.

The four "Neo JMB" militant suspects had holed up at a one-storey house at Shibnagar of Chapainawabganj's Shibganj upazila, said police.

Law enforcers cordoned off the house early Wednesday, and an operation codenamed "Eagle Hunt" was launched in the evening.

Members of SWAT (Special Weapons And Tactics) entered the hideout around 5:30pm on Thursday and found the four bodies lying in a room.

They also brought Abu's pregnant wife Sumaiya Begum and their six-year-old daughter Khadiza out of the house alive. Sumaiya suffered a bullet wound in one leg while Khadiza was rescued unhurt.

Police recovered the four bodies yesterday afternoon and sent those to the Sadar hospital for autopsy.

Around 8:30pm yesterday, Abu's uncle Yeasin Ali received his nephew's body from police. While he was taking the body to his village home at Trimohoni, Shibganj police intercepted him midway and brought the body to the morgue.

"We brought the body back for security reasons. We will decide on it in line with the instructions from the high-ups," said Habibur Islam, officer-in-charge of Shibganj Police Station.

He said they were preparing a list of

firearms, explosives and bomb-making materials recovered from the hideout. Once it is completed, a case would be filed over the incident.

Police yesterday sealed off the one-storey house.

Meanwhile, Sumaiya was shifted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for better treatment on Thursday night.

Seeking anonymity, one of the doctors, who are treating her, said an X-ray showed that there were shotgun pellets inside her injured leg.

But the doctors decided not to operate on her leg at this moment, as she needs to recover from fractures in the leg first.

At the hospital, Sumaiya told investigators that three persons came to their house on Tuesday evening, a day before law enforcers cordoned off the house.

Her husband Abu told her that they were his friends who came from Chittagong, and that they would stay in the house for a couple of days, according to an official of a law enforcement agency.

Sumaiya also said she had no idea that her husband was involved in militancy.

Law enforcers told this correspondent that they believe the three came to the area to collect firearms for "Neo JMB" members, as Shibganj is known as a common route for smuggling firearms.

They said they would interrogate her further once her condition improves.

[Our Rajshahi correspondent contributed to this report]

Sacked South Africa minister warns of ANC meltdown

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's former finance minister Pravin Gordhan, who was dramatically fired by President Jacob Zuma, has warned that the ruling ANC party could lose power in the next election.

Gordhan -- widely seen as a bulwark against government corruption in South Africa -- also appeared to back deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa to succeed Zuma.

"I think there are many of us who are extremely worried that if we continue as we are in the African National Congress (ANC), we are likely to lose the 2019 elections," Gordhan told CNN late Thursday.

"If we, like any business organisation or political organisation, fail to muster the right leadership, stick by the right kind of values and do the right thing... then of course we will, as an organisation, fail."

The party slipped to 55 percent of the vote in last year's local elections -- its worst-ever result.

The ANC will hold a conference in December to pick a new party leader who will be its candidate for the 2019 elections -- and Gordhan gave his clearest indication yet that he will back Ramaphosa to succeed Zuma.

"Mr Ramaphosa has been extremely brave. He has spoken truth to power at difficult times," said Gordhan.

"He has demonstrated that he is a leader of great mettle that would serve South Africa well into the future."

Zuma, 75, is due to step down as head of the ANC in December, and as president ahead of the 2019 general election.

Among many corruption scandals, he has been accused of being in the sway of the wealthy Gupta business family, allegedly granting them influence over government appointments and contracts.

2 members

FROM PAGE 16
In the case statement, Mizanur Rahman mentioned that the traffickers tricked his son Mehedi Hasan and neighbour Selim into going to Libya with promises of lucrative jobs six months ago.

Mizanur, a resident of Narsingdi's Belabo upazila, said Dulal called him on April 5 and claimed that Mehedi and Selim were in their custody in Libya and demanded Tk 50,000 for each victim's safety.

He asked Mizanur to give the amount to Saiful.

Mizanur's son Mehedi also called him and said Dulal and Harun often tortured him and Selim.

To stop the torture, Mizanur gave Tk 30,000 to Saiful in Fatullah on April 22. But Saiful called him hours later and asked for Tk 1.9 lakh.

When Mizanur refused to pay the money, Mehedi and Selim were tortured in Libya.

Hazrat also called Mizanur and asked for money several times this month.

The grieving father then went to police and filed the case.

After they were arrested in Fatullah area, Hazrat and Saiful in primary interrogation admitted that they forced several families of trafficking victims to give Tk 30-32 lakh in recent months. Police recovered Tk 5 lakh from the houses of the arrestees.

Police are trying to arrest several other suspected members of the gang. Kamaluddin, officer-in-charge of Fatullah Police Station, said.

Major conflict

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"I believe he is trying very hard. I know he would like to be able to do something. Perhaps it's possible that he can't. But I think he'd like to be able to do something," Trump said.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on Thursday that China had asked North Korea not to conduct any more nuclear tests. Beijing had warned Pyongyang it would impose unilateral sanctions if it went ahead, he added.

Tillerson did not say when China made the threat. He was due to chair a meeting with UN Security Council foreign ministers yesterday, where he said he would stress the need for members to fully implement existing sanctions as well as possible next steps.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang, asked about Tillerson's remarks, would not say what actions China might take if there were a new nuclear test and would not comment directly on what Tillerson had said.

"We oppose any behaviour that goes against Security Council resolutions. I think this position is very clear. This is what we have told the United States. I think North Korea is also very clear about this position," Geng told reporters.

Geng also said UN meeting should not fixate on new sanctions.

MISSILE DEFENCE, CARRIER GROUP

In a show of force, the United States is sending the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier group to waters off the Korean peninsula, where it will join the USS Michigan, a nuclear submarine that docked in South Korea on Tuesday. South Korea's navy has said it will hold drills with the US strike group.

Admiral Harry Harris, the top US commander in the Pacific, said on Wednesday the carrier was in the Philippine Sea, within two hours' striking distance of North Korea if needs be.

Harris also said a US missile defence system being deployed in South Korea to ward off any North Korean attack would be operational in coming days.

China has been angered by the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), com-

plaining that its radar can see deep into China and undermines its security.

Trump said in the interview he wants South Korea to pay the cost of the THAAD, which he estimated at \$1 billion. South Korea, one of Washington's most crucial allies in the region, said the United States would have to bear the cost, pointing to possible friction ahead.

Trump has vowed to prevent North Korea from being able to hit the United States with a nuclear missile, a capability experts say Pyongyang could have some time after 2020.

North Korea has conducted five nuclear tests and numerous missile tests, including one this month, a day before a summit between Trump and Xi in Florida.

Trump, asked if he considered North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to be rational, said he was operating from the assumption that he is rational. He noted that Kim had taken over his country at an early age.

11 bad cops

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the Kafrul club.

Military police stopped a microbus at a checkpoint at Kachukhet in Dhaka Cantonment area on April 18 and detained the 11 members of DB (east) when they were trying to take away four men from New Wave Club in Kafrul.

Later, the DB members were handed over to police.

The 11 are Senior Assistant Commissioner Ruhul Amin, Inspector Mohammad Gias Uddin, Sub-inspector Zahidul Islam, Assistant Sub-inspector Lutfar Rahman, ASI Mahbubur Rahman, ASI Tofazzal Hossain, constables Abdul Latif, Azizul Haque, Jahangir Alam Khan, Tawhidul Islam and Zillur Rahman.

A day after the incident, the DMP suspended eight of them.

Around a month earlier, the same DB members had allegedly snatched money and valuables from some people at the same club.

Several locals said the club on the third floor of a six-storey building is known for gambling, the allegation the club authorities deny.

Saviour of expecting mothers

FROM PAGE 16

unsurprising since it was her first attempt at midwifery. Her brother-in-law was delivered and something else happened that day, something Sonajan herself could barely have imagined: her lifelong career was begun.

Nowadays Sonajan lives with extended family including her husband, two adult sons and a daughter, and grandchildren. At a time in life when she might well relax a little to enjoy the daily life of the household, Sonajan is busy. She still attends at least five deliveries per month.

By habit, when informed of an approaching delivery, Sonajan stays for up to ten days at the home of the mother-to-be, in any house regardless of religion or status. "I advise all expectant mothers to eat good food, take rest and heed the advice of doctors," she says. For her selfless service to others, across fifteen villages Sonajan is renowned.

She takes no fee for her services despite the reality of her own economic struggle. Her husband used to cut earth. She worked as a housemaid and sometimes as a cook. "I never thought to take money as a midwife," she says. "I do it to contribute to society. It is my social responsibility." Impressively her family agrees. They have always offered encouragement.

"I feel so proud when I help to deliver a baby," Sonajan says. "According to Islam, everything is created by Allah. A human life is the best creation of Allah. When a baby is born in front of me, I almost feel that I am a part of Allah's new creation."

For many women in Manikganj, Sonajan is also there at life's end. Along with her midwifery, she gives final ritual baths to the deceased. News of the death of any nearby village woman is sure to find Sonajan's ears. "I will always help others," she says, "for as long as I live."

Bhutan to stay out

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and Nepal had inked the Motor Vehicles Agreement for Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN MVA)" on June 15, 2015, in Thimphu.

"While the other three countries have already ratified the agreement, the Royal Government of Bhutan is in the process of completing its internal procedures for ratification, to address the concerns raised by the domestic stakeholders."

"In the meanwhile, to facilitate the early implementation of BBIN MVA, the royal government has decided to give its consent for the entry into force of the agreement among the three member states [Bangladesh, India and Nepal] without any obligation to Bhutan. The agreement will enter into force for Bhutan after its ratification process is completed," the statement said.

However, the statement hastened to add that Bhutan government "views BBIN as a platform, encompassing key areas such as energy, trade, information, communication and technology. Strengthening regional cooperation is especially significant for a landlocked country like Bhutan and therefore, the royal government remains fully committed to the BBIN process, including BBIN motor vehicle agreement."

While India, Bangladesh and Nepal has ratified the deal, Bhutan's parliament is yet to do so in view of opposition from the parties there on the ground of enhanced traffic and air pollution and potential loss of jobs if vehicles from other countries are allowed free movement in Bhutan, sources said.

Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay has reportedly conveyed to the other three countries that he does not

have the required number in the Upper House of parliament to have the BBIN MVA ratified.

The sub-regional road connectivity was agreed on after the Saarc motor vehicles agreement was vetoed by Pakistan at the Saarc summit in Kathmandu in November 2014.

18 BCL men

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Hall unit President Tahsin Ahmed Rasel and General Secretary Mehedi Hasan Taposh, clashed in the dormitory over "grabbing seats".

Carrying machetes, iron rods and sticks, BCL men attacked members of the rival groups, leaving at least 12 students injured, said witnesses.

The BCL central committee expelled Salman of Bijoy Ekattar Hall and suspended Masud, Pranto, Sajib, Shuvo, Riad, Rafiqul and Sobuz of SM Hall from the organisation in connection with the incident.

In another incident, two BCL factions backed by Sir AF Rahman Hall unit president and general secretary clashed in the dormitory on April 6.

The clash ensued between the two groups over watching a Bangladesh-Sri Lanka cricket match on TV. Five BCL men were injured in the clash.

The incident led to the suspension of Raju Ahmed, Rashed Rajon, Apel Mahmud, Saddam Hossain, Salauddin Ahmed Sazu and Monzur Ahmed Rana from the BCL. They are all from Sir AF Rahman Hall.

BCL activists Rasel, Nahid, Rashed, Faruk and Jamil of the same dormitory were suspended from the organisation for their involvement in the April 23 factional clash at the hall over sitting at the canteen.

The clash had left at least eight activists injured.