



German Chancellor Angela Merkel attends a meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group at the Bundestag in Berlin, Germany yesterday.

PHOTO:
REUTERS

Merkel's fourth term

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The failure of exploratory coalition talks involving her conservative bloc, the liberal pro-business Free Democrats (FDP) and environmental Greens raises the prospect of new elections and casts doubt over her future after 12 years in power.

Negotiations broke down after the FDP withdrew saying they had found insufficient common ground with her Christian Democratic/Christian Social Union bloc and the Greens.

President Walter Steinmeier said Germany was now facing the worst governing crisis in the 68-year history of its post-World War Two democracy. After meeting Merkel, he warned parties not to shirk their democratic duties - remarks seemingly targeted at the FDP and Social Democrats (SPD), who yesterday ruled out renewing their "grand coalition" with the conservatives.

"Inside our country, but also outside, in particular in our European neighbourhood, there would be concern and a lack of understanding if politicians in the biggest and economically strongest country (in Europe) did not live up to their responsibilities," he said in a statement.

Business leaders also called for a swift return to talks.

With German leadership seen as crucial for a European Union grappling with governance reform and Britain's impending exit, FDP leader Christian Lindner's announcement that he was pulling out spooked investors and sent the euro falling in the morning.

Both the euro and European shares later recovered from early selling, while German bond yields steadied near 1-1/2 week lows, as confidence about the outlook for the euro zone economy helped investors brush off worries about the risk of Germany going to the polls again soon.

Steinmeier's intervention suggests he regards new elections - desired by half of Germany's voters according to a poll - as a last resort. The Social Democrats have so far stuck to a pledge after heavy losses in the September election not to go back into a Merkel-led broad coalition of centre-left and centre-right.

The main parties fear that another election so soon would let the far-right, anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party add to the 13 percent of votes it secured in September, when it entered parliament for the first time. Polls suggest repeat elections would return a similarly fragmented parliament.

The failure of coalition talks is unprecedented in Germany's post-war history, and was likened by newsmagazine Der Spiegel to the shock election of US President Donald Trump or Britain's referendum vote to leave the EU - moments when countries cast aside reputations for stability built up over decades.

The unravelling of the German talks came as a surprise since the main sticking points - immigration as well as climate change policy - were not seen as FDP signature issues.

Green politician Michael Kellner accused Lindner of "bad theatrics", one of many who suggested the liberal, pro-business party had never been serious about negotiating.

"It is better not to rule than to rule the wrong way," Lindner said, announcing his withdrawal in the small hours, blaming the breakdown on a lack of progress on education and tax policy - areas that had been seen as less contentious.

Responding to criticism, FDP vice chairman Wolfgang Kubicki said a tie-up would have been short-lived. "Nothing would be worse than to get into a relationship about which we

know that it will end in a dirty divorce," Kubicki said.

The SPD, which came second in the September election, said it had no wish to recreate its alliance with Merkel and that voters should be given a say.

"We are not afraid of repeat elections. In such a situation, the ... voters must reassess what is going on," SPD leader Martin Schulz told a news conference. He added that a minority government was not a practical option in Germany.

Even if the SPD or the FDP revisit their decision, the price for either party to change its mind could be the departure of Merkel, who since 2005 has been a symbol of German stability, leading Europe through the euro zone crisis.

AfD leader Alexander Gauland demanded Merkel's resignation.

The inability to form a government caused disquiet elsewhere in Europe, not least because of the implications for the euro zone reforms championed by French President Emmanuel Macron.

Germany's political impasse could also complicate and potentially delay the Brexit negotiations - Britain has just over a year to strike a divorce deal with the EU ahead of an exit planned for March 29, 2019.

"It's not in our interests that the process freezes up," Macron told reporters in Paris, adding that he had spoken with Merkel shortly after the failure of talks.

Dutch Foreign Minister Halbe Zijlstra described Germany's political disarray as "bad news for Europe".

A Kremlin spokesman said Russia was following events closely. "We wish for the swiftest and most successful end to this process," said Dmitry Peskov.

Video of Indian politician peeing in public goes viral

AFP, Mumbai

An Indian ruling party politician has been left red-faced after a video of him urinating in public went viral on World Toilet Day, despite government efforts to stop people relieving themselves in the open.

Ram Shinde, a minister for water conservation in the western state of Maharashtra, was filmed answering the call of nature in a field by the side of a road Saturday.

The clip spread online the following day. November 19 marks the United Nations' official World Toilet Day, which aims to raise awareness about the health risks caused by a lack of lavatories.

Shinde -- a member of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party -- defended his actions with an excuse familiar to many, effectively saying: "When you've got to go, you've got to go".

"I have been travelling continuously for the last one month reviewing the Jalyukta Shivir scheme," he told the Press Trust of India (PTI), referring to drought-prone Maharashtra's water conservation programme.

"Continuous travelling in high temperatures and dust made me ill. I was suffering from fever and when I couldn't find a toilet while travelling, I had to relieve myself in the open."

India is notorious for its lack of toilets. Some 70 percent of Indian households do not have them while around 600 million people, nearly half the population, defecate in the open, according to UNICEF.

Three years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged to build toilets for everyone by 2019.

The government has so far helped install more than 50 million lavatories across the country of 1.25 billion people and has been encouraging citizens to break old habits and use them.

Calls by AFP to Shinde's mobile phone went unanswered Monday.

Armed Forces Day

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development and progress of the Armed Forces.

President Abdul Hamid, also the supreme commander of the Armed Forces, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued messages on the occasion.

The president in his message yesterday said, "Independence is our great achievement, to make it more meaningful we should continue our efforts. The government has formulated "Forces Goal-2030" for the development of the Armed Forces."

He expressed his strong belief that the Armed Forces members would continue their efforts to uphold their honour through hard labour, sincerity and patriotism.

The PM said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had set up Bangladesh Military Academy, Combined Arms School and training schools for each military core.

"Our government has been continuously working for modernisation of the Armed Forces," she added.

The chiefs of the three services will pay courtesy calls on the president at the Bangabhaban and the PM at the Armed Forces Division at Dhaka Cantonment.

On November 10, a DMP team

arrested Niloy's father Abu Torab Khan, 56, mother Sadia Hossain Lucy, 46, and sister Tajreen Khanam, 29, in Gulshan area in connection with the case. They are from Charigram village in Mithamoin upazila of Kishoreganj.

CTTC Additional Deputy Commissioner Abdul Mannan said they came to know about Karim's involvement in the case from Torab and since then they had been trying to arrest Karim.

He claimed that they along with LIC (Lawful Interception) unit of Police Headquarters and Bogra district police in a drive arrested Karim around 9:30pm on Sunday.

He further claimed Karim joined Neo JMB at the beginning of last year.

Asked about the claim of Karim's mother that her son was picked up from their home 11 days ago, Mannan said he knew nothing about it.

KARIM IS 'INNOCENT'

Karim's 50-year-old mother Sabera Karim yesterday said, "My son is innocent. He leads a very simple life..."

Niloy is absconding.

Police yesterday said Karim is an accused in a case filed after a suspected suicide bomber, Saiful Islam of "Neo JMB", was killed during an anti-militancy operation at Hotel Olio International at Panthapath on August 15. The law enforcers claimed they foiled the plot through the operation.

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Ruling party moves

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vote for impeachment, an investigative committee is formed by lawmakers, who report back to both houses of parliament. Each house must then vote by a two-thirds majority for him to be stripped of office.

Mugabe's weekend speech capped an extraordinary weekend that saw Zimbabweans celebrate while also venting their anger in ways that would have been brutally repressed just a week ago.

But their joy quickly turned to despair as Mugabe brushed aside the turmoil, blithely declaring on Sunday he would chair a top-level meeting of the party that had just disavowed him. Hundreds of noisy demonstrators gathered at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare yesterday to call for Mugabe to stand down.

'HE'S LOST HIS MARBLES'

Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change, called Mugabe's speech a "complete reversal of the people's expectations".

"The so-called negotiation with the army did not produce the dignified exit that the nation was expecting."

Chris Mutsvangwa, head of the influential war veterans' association, called for less restrained protests than those staged at the weekend in an effort to dislodge Mugabe.

"He's lost his marbles," he said.

Though Mugabe has struggled with public speaking in recent years, the wily statesman appeared alert and attentive as he delivered his address.

"It might take days and weeks, but Mugabe is on his way out," said Charles Murambwa, a 46-year-old bus driver.

The crisis erupted on November 13 after a factional squabble over the presidential succession erupted into the open.

Mugabe's wife Grace, 52, secured prime position to succeed him when 55-year-old vice president Emmerson Mnangagwa, who is close to the military leadership, was fired.

After Mnangagwa fled abroad, the

Cops now claim

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University in 2012, was picked up from his Gulshan home just a day after NSU teacher Mubashar Hasan went traceless. The teacher is still missing.

With the book importer, three alleged victims of enforced disappearance, out of at least 10 people who had been abducted or gone missing from the city since August 22, are claimed to have been arrested in different cases.

The missing persons include journalist Utpal Das. Businessman Aniruddha Roy returned home recently 81 days after his abduction.

According to the DMP news portal, Karim, 32, is known as hitman alias "Jin" and he is a top leader of militant outfit "Neo JMB".

It says he along with another key leader of the banned outfit, Akram Hossain Khan Niloy, had planned and financed the plot to carry out an attack on a gathering paying homage to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the National Mourning Day on Dhanmondi Road 32.

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