

Canada’s Trudeau rebuked on ethics ahead of election

AFP, Ottawa

Canada’s ethics watchdog rapped Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Wednesday, concluding in the lead-up to October elections that he broke rules by arm-twisting his attorney general to settle a criminal case against engineering giant SNC-Lavalin.

The scandal, revealed earlier this year, tarnished the prime minister’s golden boy image, and cost two ministers and two senior officials their jobs, while support plunged for his Liberals before they clawed back some ground. New polls show the party in a dead heat with the opposition Conservatives.

Independent parliamentary ethics commissioner Mario Dion said Trudeau and his officials had wrongly sought to “exert influence over the attorney general in her decision whether to intervene in a matter relating to a criminal prosecution.”

It marks the second time that Trudeau has been found in breach of Canada’s ethics laws, after being rebuked in 2017 for accepting a paid family vacation on the private island in the Bahamas of the Aga Khan, a business magnate and spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims.

Trudeau must pay a small fine of up to Can\$500 (US\$375) for contravening Canada’s conflict of interest act, but with only two months before national elections the political costs could be much steeper.

SNC-Lavalin, one of the world’s major engineering firms, was charged in 2015 with allegedly paying Can\$47 million in bribes between 2001 and

2011 to secure contracts in Libya during the rule of former strongman Moamer Gaddafi, and of defrauding the Libyan government of Can\$130 million.

The charges relate to the world’s largest irrigation scheme -- the Great Man Made River Project -- to provide fresh water to the cities of Tripoli, Benghazi and Sirte.

An opposition party leader, Jagmeet Singh, called the ethics breach “outrageous,” while Conservative Party chief Andrew Scheer said it was “an unforgivable assault on the independence of our justice system.”

“Canadians understand we have to be vigilant against those who want to abuse the power of their office and engage in this type of corrupt behavior and I do believe this will be top of mind in this election,” Scheer added.

Trudeau has steadfastly denied accusations that his inner circle sought to shield SNC-Lavalin from a corruption trial.

On Wednesday, he offered a nuanced mea culpa.

“I disagree with some of (the commissioner’s) conclusions but I fully accept this report and take responsibility for everything that happened,” he said.

“But at the same time, I can’t apologize for standing up for Canadian jobs, because that’s part of what Canadians expect me to do.”

Earlier his office released an independent review of the joint roles of Canada’s attorney general and justice minister, rejecting calls to split the two jobs.

EU water bombers join Greek firemen to douse island wildfire

AFP, Athens

Greece yesterday deployed nearly 400 firefighters backed by EU firebombers to try to put out a massive wildfire on the island of Evia burning through a pristine pine forest for a third day.

“We are more optimistic today because the winds have died down,” Yiorgos Kostopoulos, civil protection supervisor for Evia, told state TV ERT.

Firefighters managed to contain the fire in a ravine near the village of Platana, backed by nearly 100 vehicles, nine helicopters and 12 planes, including two from Italy and one from Spain.

“We are doing whatever we can to create additional fire defences near the village,” Kostopoulos said as an earth mover dug a trench behind him.

The wildfire has caused inestimable damage to the local 550-hectare

mountain wildlife sanctuary of Agrilitsa.

It could take another two days to extinguish the flames, a fire department spokesman told Thema radio.

“My shed was burned, there are no more trees for resin collection, so apart from my house, I have nothing else,” a local resident told state TV ERT.

The EU’s Copernicus emergency management service has calculated that at least 2,300 hectares (nearly 5,700 acres) have been lost to the fire.

Local community head Dimitris Yiannoutsos told web TV Open there was “total destruction” in the forest but admitted that with the fire still active, officials were “unable to fully estimate the extent of the damage.”

Second UK cop

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Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) network said “traces of the nerve agent” were found in blood samples taken from a second police officer who showed signs of exposure at the time.

It said the dose was “very small” and the officer, who has requested anonymity, “continues to receive support” from the Salisbury police.

Detective sergeant Nick Bailey has recovered after receiving a larger dose

of Novichok.

“The investigation remains ongoing, and there are parts of the picture that we are continuing to piece together,” the CTP said.

“In particular, we are keen to hear from anyone who may have seen the counterfeit ‘Nina Ricci’ perfume box or bottle” between the day of the Skripal poisoning and the day of Sturgess’s friend Charlie Rowley picked it up in a park in June.

3 factors

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About fixing a minimum rate at the field level, he said he would discuss the matter with other ministries, tanners and merchants soon.

Delwar Hossain, president of Bangladesh Hide and Skin Merchants’ Association, said there was a lack of coordination among the government, merchants and tanners in handling the situation.

Asked, he rejected a government allegation of price manipulation by a section of businessmen by creating a syndicate.

On Tuesday, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi blamed a section of businessmen for manipulating the market prices of rawhide.

Rawhide was sold at significantly low prices over the last 11 years as merchants didn’t buy it at the government-fixed rates, he told journalists at his Rangpur residence, reported Bangla daily Prothom Alo.

Sources in the sector said the syndicate made the move as tanners already had a good stock of rawhide and also due to low prices of leather goods in the international market.

Talking to The Daily Star, Delwar said the crisis over rawhide appeared as tanners did not clear their dues to merchants before Eid.

“Had the tanners disbursed the full amount, merchants could have bought rawhide from small traders,”

he said.

He said tanners cleared some Tk 35 crore of dues of nearly Tk 400 crore before Eid.

This Eid, over 1 crore animals were sacrificed across the country. Of them, some 45 lakhs were cows and buffaloes.

Md Shaheen Ahmed, chairman of Bangladesh Tanners’ Association (BTA), opposed Delwar’s statement on clearing dues.

According to him, tanners were not buying hide from small traders after the tannery hub was shift to Savar from Hazaribagh. He also blamed slack government monitoring and a fall of demand for leather products for the recent crisis.

He said the demand for non-leather products was going up due to changing fashion trends and awareness about animal rights.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of Policy Research Institute, talked in favour rawhide export for ensuring good price and breaking the syndicate.

“If export of rawhide is allowed, interests of the farmers and other poor people will be protected,” Mansur said.

Meanwhile, many small traders could not sell rawhide to merchants yesterday due to the fund crunch.

Already investing hefty sums, they see bleak days ahead.



Security personnel stands guard along a street during a lockdown in Srinagar, India yesterday, as the country celebrates its 73rd Independence Day, which marks the end of British colonial rule. More on page 8.

PHOTO : AFP

Japan temple

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troubles. It’s changing Buddhism,” added Goto.

The adult-sized robot began service earlier this year and is able to move its torso, arms and head.

But only its hands, face and shoulders are covered in silicone to replicate human skin.

Clasping its hands together in prayer and speaking in soothing tones, the rest of the droid’s mechanical parts are clearly visible.

Wiring and blinking lights fill the cranial cavity of its open-top head and snake around its gender-neutral, aluminium body.

A tiny video camera installed in the left eye completes an eerie, cyborg-like frame seemingly lifted straight out of a dystopian Hollywood sci-fi thriller.

Developed at a cost of almost \$1m in a joint project between the Zen temple and renowned robotics professor Hiroshi Ishiguro at Osaka University, the humanoid -- called Mindar -- teaches about compassion and of the dangers of desire, anger and ego.

“You cling to a sense of selfish ego,” it warns worshippers. “Worldly desires are nothing other than a mind lost at sea.”

With religion’s influence on daily

life flat-lining in Japan, Goto hopes Kodaiji’s robot priest will be able to reach younger generations in a way traditional monks can’t.

“Young people probably think a temple is a place for funerals or weddings,” he said, trying to explain the disconnect with religion.

“It might be difficult to relate to fuddy-duddy priests like me, but hopefully the robot is a fun way to bridge that gap. We want people to see the robot and think about the essence of Buddhism.”

Goto insisted, however, that Mindar was no gimmick to boost income from tourists.

“This robot teaches us ways to

overcome pain,” he said. “It is here to save anyone who seeks help.”

Big losses

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cattle market, made a loss of Tk 1 lakh.

Small scale traders like Sanwar, Jinarul and Milon alleged that ample amount of cattle, a large portion of which was imported, forced them to make loss.

Asked, Mahbubur Rahman, director (production) of Department of Livestock Services, admitted that there was surplus of cattle in the market this year.

He, however, blamed the high price of cattle feed for the loss of small scale traders.

Road crashes claim 18 lives

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Rowshan, the local bus driver, and its passenger Mira died on the spot.

Another victim, who could not be identified, was taken to a local hospital where he was declared dead.

Police seized both buses, said Ataur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Bhanga Highway Police Station.

The second accident took place around 11:30am when a motorbike hit a man, who was standing beside the road in Sadarpur upazila’s Baburchar area.

The victim was identified as Sattar, who was declared dead after being taken to hospital, said Lutfar Rahman, OC of Sadarpur Police Station.

In Kishoreganj, three people were killed and four others injured in a road accident in Katiadi upazila’s Aachmita area.

The dead were identified as Jalal Mia, 30, driver of a CNG-run auto-rickshaw, and its passengers Omar

Faruq, 20, and Tofazzol Hossain, 28.

Quoting locals, police said the accident occurred when a CNG-run auto-rickshaw, heading towards Bhairab from Karimganj with six passengers, collided head-on with a truck around 11:15am.

After the accident, the three victims were taken to a local hospital where on-duty doctors declared them dead.

Police seized the truck but its driver managed to flee, said Md Shafiqul Islam, OC (Investigation) of Katiadi Police Station.

In Sirajganj, at least two people were killed and 20 injured as three buses collided at the Konabari point near the Bangabandhu bridge west-zone highway.

The accident occurred around 2:30pm when a Dhaka-bound Hanif Enterprise bus collided head-on with North Bengal-bound Five Star Paribahan bus at Konabari point,

after which another bus hit the Hanif Enterprise bus, said police quoting witnesses.

The accident left two people dead on the spot, one of whom was the driver of the Five Star Paribahan bus. The other victim could not be identified immediately, said Sayed Shahid Alam, OC of Bangabandhu Bridge West Zone Police Station.

Vehicular movement on the Bangabandhu bridge highway remained suspended for half an hour due to the huge traffic jam after the accident.

In Mymensingh, a madrasa student was killed and four of his family members were injured in a road accident in Phulpur upazila’s Imadpur area.

The dead was identified as Jayed, 6, son of Abdul Malek.

The accident took place around 1:00pm when a CNG-run auto-

rickshaw heading to Sherpur collided head-on with a Mymensingh-bound bus at Imadpur area on the Mymensingh-Sherpur road, leaving Jayed dead on the spot.

The victims were all passengers of the auto-rickshaw. Police seized the bus, but its driver and helpers managed to flee the scene, said Imarat Hossain Gazi, OC of Phulpur Police Station.

In Gopalganj, a motorcyclist was killed while his wife was injured in a road accident at Gopalpur area under Kashiani upazila.

The dead was identified as Tuhin Mollah, 45.

The accident took place when Tuhin lost control and his motorbike overturned in Gopalpur area around 2:00pm. Tuhin died on the spot, said Ataur Rahman, OC of Bhanga Highway police Station.

Beijing will not sit by and watch

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were assembling in Shenzhen.

The parade comes as the US president linked a possible trade deal with Beijing to a peaceful resolution to the political unrest that has roiled the semi-autonomous Chinese city for 10 weeks.

Trump has urged China to “humanely” resolve the violent stand-off with pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong.

“Millions of jobs are being lost in China to other non-Tariffed countries. Thousands of companies are leaving. Of course China wants to make a deal. Let them work humanely with Hong Kong first!” Trump wrote on Twitter, in the first clear indication that the trade deal could be threatened by how Beijing reacts to the protests.

“I have ZERO doubt that if President Xi wants to quickly and humanely solve the Hong Kong problem, he can do it,” Trump said in a subsequent tweet, suggesting a “personal meeting” with Chinese

counterpart Xi Jinping.

The Hong Kong protests were sparked by opposition to a plan to allow extraditions to the mainland, but have since morphed into a wider -- sometimes violent -- call for democratic rights.

The movement represents the greatest challenge to Beijing’s authority since the city was handed back by the British in 1997 under a deal that allowed it to keep freedoms that many Hong Kongers feel are being eroded.

WEEKEND RALLIES

Activists are planning another series of mass rallies this weekend in a bid to show their cause still maintains broad public support despite violent scenes during a disruptive occupation of the airport.

On Tuesday, chaos erupted at one of the world’s busiest transport hubs as protesters physically stopped travellers from boarding flights, battled riot police and assaulted two men they accused of being Chinese

infiltrators.

Beijing -- which has refused to grant any concessions to the protest movement -- has seized on the airport violence, with state-media churning out a deluge of condemnatory articles, pictures and videos.

Until the airport protest, hardcore demonstrators had largely focused their anger towards the police, or state institutions such as the city’s parliament and Beijing’s main office in the city.

The chaotic scenes inside the airport have prompted some soul-searching within the largely leaderless movement over whether that violence has undermined their cause.

As some groups sent out apologies, messaging forums used to organise protests have filled with calls to support a planned rally on Sunday organised by the Civil Human Rights Front -- a group that advocates non-violence and has previously managed to get colossal crowds onto the streets.

HANDS-OFF APPROACH

Trump’s tweets on Hong Kong appeared to signal something of a change in his approach to the city.

In recent days he has come under fire from both sides of the political aisle for shying away from the issue, avoiding criticising Beijing even as he cited US intelligence reports of Chinese forces moving to the territory’s border.

China has portrayed the protests as a foreign-funded attempt to destabilise the motherland rather than a popular revolt against its policies.

Washington and Beijing have imposed tariffs on \$360 billion in two-way trade, but Trump has delayed tariffs on electronic goods from China, giving investors hope for a detente in the trade conflict.

The introduction of Hong Kong as a potential bargaining chip in those talks could produce a further wrinkle.

Beijing has made it clear it is in no mood to offer concessions to the city’s protesters.

Myanmar rebels kill at least 15

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they had acted in retaliation.

“The military launched offensives in our area so we are fighting to defend ourselves,” TNLA spokesman Major Mai Aik Kyaw said.

“The Aung San Suu Kyi-led ... government is trying to make peace, but nothing can happen if the military doesn’t participate in it,” he added.

He also confirmed the attacks were coordinated with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and Arakan Army (AA).

The AA is currently fighting the military, or Tatmadaw, in conflict-

scarred western Rakhine state, but is in a tight alliance with the other rebel groups.

“We assume they carried out the attacks because the Tatmadaw seized tonnes of drugs a few weeks ago,” military spokesman Zaw Min Tun said.

In July, narcotics police were met with heavy artillery fire when they launched a major drugs crackdown in Kutkai township in neighbouring Shan state.

Huge stockpiles of chemicals as well as millions of dollars worth of ice, the highly addictive crystalised

form of meth, were seized in a single raid.

The escalation in hostilities in Myanmar’s fractured north is another setback for civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s bid bring peace to the country amid a stuttering transition from full military rule.

The Nobel laureate came to power following a landslide election win in late 2016, vowing to prioritise peace talks between ethnic armed groups, the military and civilian government. But the conflict has escalated in northern Kachin and Shan states as well as the western Rakhine region on

the border with Bangladesh.

The “Golden Triangle” -- a lawless wedge of land intersecting China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos -- has long served as a base for opium and heroin production.

A unilateral ceasefire in Shan state declared by the military in December is officially due to finish in two weeks, even though clashes with armed groups have continued.

China’s plans to invest in major infrastructure projects have added another dimension to the conflict with groups vying for control of increasingly valuable territory.