

Second UK policeman exposed to Novichok

AFP, London

A second UK police officer was exposed to a Soviet-era nerve agent used in last year's attack on a former Russian spy in the English city Salisbury, British detectives said yesterday.

Former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia fell into comas after coming into contact with a banned chemical called Novichok in March 2018.

They both survived but a local resident named Dawn Sturgess died after picking up a perfume bottle UK police believe was used to transport it from Russia.

The UK government is seeking the extradition of two suspected members of Russia's military intelligence service that London believes carried out the attack on Kremlin orders.

Moscow denies its involvement.

Detectives from Britain's 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 Sturgess's friend Charlie Rowley picked it up in a park in June.

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.

Big losses for small traders

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sacrificial animals to Kamalapur cattle market and made a loss of Tk 1 lakh.

Sanwar, Jinarul, Milon and many more cattle traders who incurred losses alleged that a large number of cattle were imported until the government became strict about it around two weeks ahead of Eid. As a result, there was a surplus of cattle in the market, they said.

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

According to an estimation of his department, the number of cattle including cow, buffalo and goat were 1.17 crore against the demand of 1.10 crore.

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

CATTLE FARMS MADE BIG FORTUNE

Although the small scale traders made losses, cattle farms made big fortune from the cattle markets in Dhaka.

Sadeeq Agro of the capital's Mohammadpur said they sold over 1,500 cattle on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha this year.

Maidul Islam, in-charge of the farm, said most of their cattle were sold in-house and they made a good profit.

Another farm Sharif Agro, situated in Keraniganj, sold over 200 cattle during the Eid season.

Saiful Islam, in-charge of Sharif Agro, said they not only sold their cattle but also bought 20 more as the price fell in the last few days of Eid markets.

Dr Golam Mostafa, deputy livestock officer of Chuadanga, said most of the big cattle were sold online by the farms.

Besides, he also said that many cattle traders made losses as their production cost increased.

"A cattle that weights 200 kg needs two kilogrammes of granular feed including wheat husk and rice bran every day. These feed price went up at least by Tk 10 per kg at least two months before Eid. As a result, the production cost went up," he explained.

If the traders continue to face losses they will become uninterested in farming, he warned, adding this could make a crisis of cattle during Eid in future.

July of 2019

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"Nine of the 10 hottest Julys have occurred since 2005-with the last five years ranking as the five hottest," the NOAA said.

Alaska had its hottest July since it began keeping records in 2005, several countries in Europe saw new temperature records, and it was also the hottest month ever across Africa as a whole.

Average Arctic sea ice meanwhile set a record low for July, running 19.8 percent below average, and surpassing the previous historic low of July 2012 according to an analysis by the National Snow and Ice Data Center using data from NOAA and NASA.

Average Antarctic sea ice was 4.3 percent below the 1981-2010 average, making it the smallest for July in the 41-year record.

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."



A soldier stands guard along a street during a lockdown in Srinagar of India yesterday, as the country celebrates its 73rd Independence Day. Related stories on page 8.

PHOTO: AFP

3 factors behind rawhide mess

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

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 rawhide.

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. Also, prices of leather goods were going down 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, bulls and buffaloes, said rawhide traders.

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

According to him, tanners were not buying hide from small traders after the tannery hub was shifted to Savar from Hazaribagh. He also blamed slack government monitoring and a fall in 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 increasing awareness about animal rights.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of Policy Research Institute, talked in favour of rawhide export for ensuring good prices 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 feed crunch.

Already having invested hefty sums, they see bleak days ahead.

Road crashes claim 20 lives

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Rowsan, the local bus driver, and it's 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 who 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 on the Dhaka-Khulna highway around 2:00pm. Tuhin died on the spot, said Ataur Rahman, OC of Bhanga Highway Police Station.

In Barishal, a motorcyclist was killed and another injured after the motorbike was hit by a bus in Notunhut area of Babuganj upazila around 1:130pm.

The deceased could not be identified immediately, said Dibakar Chandra Das, OC of Babuganj police station.

In Tangail, a college student was killed after his motorbike collided head-on with a pickup in Boali area under Sakhipur upazila around 9:30am.

The deceased was identified as Ishiaq Ahmed, 18.

The pick-up driver and his helper fled the scene, said Amir Hossain, OC of Sakhipur 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 protestors 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 crystallised 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.