

International

In tears and shock, Poland bids farewell to its murdered mayor

Stabbed in the heart in front of hundreds of people

GDANSK: Poles gathered yesterday in the Baltic port city of Gdansk to bid an emotional farewell to murdered liberal mayor Pawel Adamowicz, whose public stabbing has raised questions about hate speech in politics in the country. Around 3,500 people, including President Andrzej Duda and EU Council President Donald Tusk, a longtime friend of Adamowicz, attended the ceremony at St Mary's Church, one of the largest brick churches in the world, where his casket will be permanently located.

Polish Nobel Peace laureate Lech Walesa also attended the ceremony, being held on what Duda has declared a day of national mourning. Adamowicz, 53, was stabbed in the heart in front of hundreds of people at a charity fundraiser last weekend by an ex-convict wielding a knife.

"It's a sad day for the people of Gdansk. We feel we have lost a father," said Tomasz Ceglinski. "I am 24 years old and he was in power for all of my life," he said. "Every year, we saw changes in the city: investments, new roads, shopping centers and cultural institutions all thanks to him. It's my duty to be here," he told AFP.

The mayor's 27-year-old attacker, who reportedly has a history of mental illness, had previously been sentenced to more than five years in jail for armed robbery. Recently released, the man claimed he was wrongly imprisoned by the previous government — led by the centrist Civic Platform (PO) party, to which Adamowicz once belonged. For many Poles, the mayor's murder was fuelled by online hate speech and toxic divisions between the main political parties.

"It's hatred that killed Pawel," PO leader Grzegorz Schetyna told lawmakers on Wednesday. "A well-

organized, crazy hatred directed at a man who with the help of thousands of Gdansk residents was building this great, proud and free city," he added. Politicians from PO and the ruling conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party have traded barbs for years, as have their supporters online, with critics accusing the government of tacitly condoning the atmosphere of hostility. Numerous media outlets have compared Adamowicz's murder to the 1922 assassination of president Gabriel Narutowicz by a fanatical nationalist at a time of rampant hatred. Since Adamowicz's death, police have detained several individuals for uttering or writing threats against other politicians.

Political violence

Scores of mayors from across Poland and abroad attended the funeral. Giant screens around the church allowed city residents to watch the funeral. Tens of thousands of people have already queued for hours to see the late mayor's casket, covered in white flowers and the city's red flag, and to sign a book of condolence at the city's European Solidarity Centre.

Gdansk, a city of around half a million people, was the cradle of Poland's anti-communist Solidarity movement in the 1980s. Adamowicz, mayor of Gdansk for two decades, was backed by the PO party in 2018 municipal polls and won re-election with 64 percent of the vote. The capital Warsaw has named Adamowicz an honorary citizen. The attack on Adamowicz is unusual as political violence is rare in Poland. The last attack on a political figure was in 2010 when a man fatally shot an aide at a regional PiS office before stabbing another employee, who survived. —AFP



GDANSK: (Row R, L to R) President of the European Council Donald Tusk and his wife Malgorzata, former Polish president Lech Walesa, his wife Danuta Walesa, former Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski and his wife Jolanta Kwasniewska attend the funeral ceremony of the late mayor of Gdansk Pawel Adamowicz in St Mary's Basilica. —AFP

From Westgate to Dusit, Kenyan response praised

NAIROBI: Kenya's security response to the Islamist assault on the Dusit hotel complex in Nairobi shows the numerous lessons learned since a chaotic intervention when the Westgate mall was attacked in 2013, according to analysts. The swift reaction, under a single chain of command, with the site rapidly cordoned off and procedures put in place to deal with survivors, has received widespread praise in the aftermath of the assault which left 21 dead, 28 injured and saw some 700 people rescued. "It was an operation which appeared well-executed," said a regional security analyst, requesting anonymity.

"From a purely operational point of view, if the toll remains as it is, it is almost a miracle. We know how complicated it is, even with exceptionally well-trained people," he added, highlighting the tricky layout of the Dusit complex with its numerous buildings and parking lots. "Across the spectrum, we've seen greater seriousness in all aspects of counterterrorism, both prevention and response," since Westgate, said Matt Bryden, director of the Sahar think-tank in Nairobi.

AFP journalists covered both attacks from the inside and while the first hours of the operation against Somali Islamist group Al-Shabaab in Westgate were marked by total confusion, the deployment of police forces and sealing off of the DusitD2 complex were done in an ordered and rapid manner. In both cases, it was plainclothes police officers and armed civilians — mostly from the Indian community — who were the first to intervene and help rescue those caught inside. At DusitD2 a number of heavily armed westerners, from private security companies and members of diplomatic security, were also present from the start.

More efficient, better tactics

Very quickly, elite Kenyan police units took over, while officers attached to the presidency also rapidly showed up. Black-clad members of the anti-terrorist unit and members of the paramilitary General Service Unit (GSU) with their red berets quickly deployed as did a bomb squad. "It was much more efficient, and it seems to have been better coordinated and the tactics they employed were better practiced, they had better equipment so all in all, a much better performance," said Bryden. The perimeter was quickly cordoned off and secured, in contrast to Westgate where it took until nightfall to seal off the area after the attack which began at lunchtime. —AFP

Italy still hunting 30 'terrorists' abroad

ROME: Italian authorities are still hunting 30 "terrorists" on the run abroad, the interior ministry said yesterday, days after far-left activist Cesare Battisti was jailed ending 37 years as a fugitive. "Thirty terrorists on the run, 27 from the left, three from the right: the names are on Interior Minister Matteo Salvini's desk," said a ministry statement. Fourteen of those being sought were believed to be in France, but the ministry said it would not be releasing the list or any names.

The updated list was compiled by the police and security services after the arrest of Battisti, said the ministry. Former communist militant Cesare Battisti, wanted in Italy for four murders in the 1970s, began serving a life sentence in a Sardinian prison on Monday. An international police squad tracked him down and arrested him in Bolivia earlier this month. Salvini, Italy's far-right interior minister, celebrated his capture in comments earlier this week. "Finally, after 37 years, a killer, a delinquent, an infamous person, a coward who has never asked for forgiveness, will finish up where he deserves," he said on Monday. —AFP

No serious injuries to Prince Philip after car crash

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II's 97-year-old husband Prince Philip visited hospital for "a precautionary check-up" on Friday that found "no injuries of concern" after a car crash the previous day that rolled the Land Rover he was driving. "On doctor's advice the Duke of Edinburgh visited the Queen Elizabeth hospital... this morning for a precautionary check-up," a Buckingham Palace spokeswoman told AFP. "This confirmed his royal highness had no injuries of concern," she added, without specifying the extent of any minor injuries.

This contrasted with a statement from Buckingham Palace on Thursday that stated the prince "was not injured". The queen has issued no public comment about the crash. The accident occurred near the queen's Sandringham Estate in south east England, where the couple spend much of the winter. A nine-month-old baby who was in the back seat of the other car, a Kia hatchback, was also uninjured, while one woman in the vehicle broke her wrist and the other cut her knee, local police said, stirring a debate in Britain Friday about old age and driving.

"We are aware of the public interest in this case, however, as with any other investigation it would be inappropriate to speculate on the causes of the colli-

sion until an investigation is carried out," a police statement said. Images published by the British media showed a dark Land Rover on its side by the curb, driver's side down, its windshield smashed, glass and metal debris scattered across a road running by a leafy park. "I was driving home and I saw a car, a black (Land) Rover come out from a side road and it rolled," witness Roy Warne told BBC Radio on Friday.

The Land Rover "was turning on its side over and over," he told The Sun newspaper in a separate interview. He said one of the two women in the Kia "was the mother of the child and she was quite upset". Philip and the other driver were given breath tests, which is standard police procedure. No alcohol was detected. The accident made the headlines in most British papers. "MY LEGS! MY LEGS!" The Sun splashed on its front page — the words Prince Philip reportedly "yelled" as he was pulled from the wreckage. "I was blinded by the sun," the paper quoted him as saying.

Love for speed

Philip, known for his forthright manner and off-color jokes, retired from public life in 2017 and underwent a hip replacement operation last April. Tall, slim and built like a retired serviceman, the former navy officer spends most of his time driving, gardening and enjoying family life at royal estates, according to Buckingham Palace. He was last seen in public with the queen at Princess Eugenie's wedding in October. But he missed the royal family's annual Christmas Day church service.

Macron's debate put to test as 'yellow vests' stage tenth protest

PARIS: France's "yellow vests" took to the streets yesterday for a 10th straight weekend of anti-government protests, defying attempts by President Emmanuel Macron to channel their anger into a series of town hall debates. A police source said the authorities expected the protests to be "at least as big as last week" when over 80,000 people demonstrated over inequality, the privileges enjoyed by senior public servants and the governing style of a president accused of arrogance.

Last week's turnout confirmed that, after a lull at the end of the year, the protesters behind the biggest crisis in Macron's presidency remain fully mobilized. The centrist leader is hoping that the launch this week of a "grand national debate" on policy will mark a turning point. One of the yellow vests' top demands is that ordinary citizens be given a greater say in policy-making. Macron this week kickstarted two months of public con-

sultations on issues ranging from taxation to public services, spending over 12 hours in total debating with mayors at two separate gatherings in the north and south-west of the country.

The debates mark a return to form for the 41-year-old president who won election at the head of a grass-roots movement that went door-to-door asking the French what kind of changes were needed. A prodigious debater he appeared this week to relish the return to campaign-style politics. But many yellow vests have announced plans to boycott the discussions scheduled in dozens of towns and villages, seeing them as an attempt to drain support from a movement that erupted in mid-November over fuel taxes and quickly broadened into a campaign of weekly protests that have regularly ended in clashes with police and destruction of property.

The growing number of demonstrators to suffer serious injuries at the hands of the police has compounded their anger towards the state. The "Disarm" collective, a local group that campaigns against police violence, has counted 98 cases of serious injuries, including 15 cases of people losing an eye, mostly after being hit by rubber bullets. Yesterday, protesters plan to march from Invalides war museum in Paris through the left bank of the Seine. Some 80,000 security force members are on duty again nationwide, 5,000 of them in Paris.



WINDSOR: In this file photo taken on October 12, 2018 Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (L) and Britain's Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh (R) wait for the carriage carrying Princess Eugenie of York and her husband Jack Brooksbank to pass at the start of the procession after their wedding ceremony at St George's Chapel. —AFP

Known as the Duke of Edinburgh in Britain, Philip is also well-known for his love for speed. The royal family website says the duke "learned to fly all type of aircraft", passing a Royal Air Force test in 1953. In 2016, alongside the queen, he drove former US President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle around Windsor Castle after they landed nearby in the presidential helicopter.

'Age old debate'

The accident stirred up what The Sun described as Britain's "age-old debate" about whether and when the elderly should give up driving. The issue is especially sensitive in the case

of the royals, with the Daily Mail noting: "There's only one person who can tell him to stop driving. But will she dare?" Official figures from November show 3,136 people in Great Britain aged 97 and over still hold driving licences. The oldest were four people aged 107.

In Britain, licenses expire when a person turns 70 and have to be renewed through a simple self-assessment test every three years. The Daily Mail asked whether the duke would now "sacrifice one of his last indulgences". The BBC's Jonny Dymond suggested that he might. "It might be that the duke is about to be persuaded to give up the wheel." —AFP



PARIS: Protesters take part in an anti-government demonstration called by the "Yellow vest" movement. —AFP

Warning against debate 'bluff'

Macron is pinning his hopes on the debate to quash the image of a leader out-of-touch with the concerns of people in rural France. Polls show mixed feelings among the French, with around 40 percent saying they would like to take part but around two-thirds saying they do not believe the consultations will end the protests. "I'm warning you, Mr President. This debate must not become a big bluff," the mayor of the south-central village of Saint-Cirgues, Christian Venries, warned Macron at a public meeting Friday in his region.

To fend off accusations that his policies favor rich urbanites the most, former investment banker Macron has already scrapped a controversial fuel tax hike that would have squeezed car-dependent rural-dwellers. He has also unveiled a 10-billion-euro (\$11.5-billion) package of wage increases and tax relief for low earners and retirees that threw off France's deficit targets. The measures fell short of the mark for the protesters, who are demanding a radical policy shift in favor of low earners, buoyed by polls that show widespread sympathy for their cause. —AFP