

International

Three held after police worker stabbed to death near Paris

Murder revives trauma of a spate of deadly attacks last year

PARIS: French investigators were yesterday questioning three people linked to a Tunisian man who stabbed a police employee to death near Paris in a suspected Islamist attack. The murder at a police station in Rambouillet, a commuter town about 60 kilometers (40 miles) from Paris, revived the trauma of a spate of deadly attacks last year.

The victim was a 49-year-old woman named as Stephanie M, a police administrative assistant and mother-of-two, who was stabbed twice in the throat at the entrance of the station. Her 36-year-old attacker named as Jamel G., who had not been known to police or intelligence services, was shot and fatally wounded by an officer at the scene.

President Emmanuel Macron, who was out of the country on a visit to Chad, tweeted that France would never give in to "Islamist terrorism". The latest violence targeting police is likely to focus attention further on the danger of Islamic extremism in France and wider concerns about security a year ahead of a presidential election. Prime Minister Jean Castex said he would hold a meeting in Paris with ministers and security officials after the killing. National anti-terrorism prosecutors have opened a terror investigation.

Chief anti-terror prosecutor Jean-Francois Ricard confirmed "comments made by the assailant" indicated a terror motive.

Security stepped up

Jamel G's father and two other people were taken into custody on Friday, and questioning was continuing yesterday as police delve into his background, contacts and possible motives. The assailant had arrived in



The sister of a 36-year-old Tunisian man identified as Jamel Gorchene, who stabbed to death a French police employee at her workplace southwest of the French capital Paris is pictured at the entrance of the family residence in the northeastern town of M'saken yesterday. — AFP

France illegally in 2009 but had since obtained residency papers, a police source said. He had just moved to Rambouillet. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen immediately questioned why the attacker had been able to settle in the country, and hit back at recent criticism about police brutality in France.

"We need to get back to reason: supporting our police, expelling illegal immigrants and eradicating terrorism" she wrote on Twitter. Polls show her running close to Macron in next year's election, though experts warn that surveys conducted so far ahead and during a pandemic should be interpreted with caution. About 30

police officers wearing balaclavas raided the suspect's home in Rambouillet on Friday, AFP reporters said.

At the same time police in the Paris region searched the home of the person who had sheltered Jamel G. when he first arrived in France, sources close to the inquiry said. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, who also visited officers in Rambouillet, said security would be stepped up at stations nationwide.

Spate of attacks

France has been repeatedly targeted by Islamist attackers since 2015, with a series of incidents in the

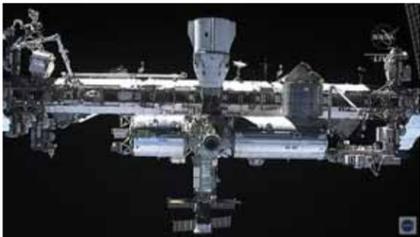
last year keeping terrorism and security as a leading concern. Macron's government has introduced legislation to tackle religious extremism, which would make it easier for the government to close places of worship and track foreign funding of mosques.

The bill has been condemned by critics who see it as stigmatizing Muslims. Last September, a Pakistani man wounded two people with a meat cleaver outside the former offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. In October, a young Chechen refugee beheaded teacher Samuel Paty who had showed some of the caricatures to his pupils in a crime that profoundly shocked the country.

Later that month, three people were killed when a recently-arrived Tunisian went on a stabbing spree in a church in the Mediterranean city of Nice. In the most serious recent attack against French police, three officers and one police employee in Paris were stabbed to death in October 2019 by an IT specialist colleague who was himself then shot dead. These attacks came after the massacres carried out by extremists from 2015 that began with the killing of staff in the offices of Charlie Hebdo in January that year. In France's deadliest peacetime atrocity, 130 people were killed and 350 were wounded when Islamist suicide bombers and gunmen attacked the Stade de France stadium, bars and restaurants in central Paris and the Bataclan concert hall in November 2015. The following year a man rammed a truck into a Bastille Day crowd in Nice, killing 86 people. Just a few weeks earlier, in June 2016, two police officers were stabbed to death at their home outside Paris by a man claiming allegiance to the Islamic State group. — AFP

Recycled SpaceX Crew Dragon brings crew to ISS

WASHINGTON: A recycled SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule with four astronauts docked with the International Space Station early yesterday, the third time Elon Musk's company has safely delivered humans to the orbital outpost. The spacecraft named Endeavour, piloting itself autonomously, began docking at 5:08 am Eastern time (0908 GMT) above the south Indian Ocean. The process was completed around 10 minutes later. "Hard capture complete, welcome Crew-2," said US astronaut Shannon Walker, current commander of the ISS. "Thanks Shannon, we're glad to be here," replied Endeavour's commander, US astronaut Shane Kimbrough. The crew will begin boarding after 7:15 am (1115 GMT) once the hatches are opened.



This screen grab taken from the NASA live feed shows the International Space Station taken from the SpaceX's Crew Dragon spacecraft before docking, yesterday. — AFP

The Crew-2 mission, which includes the first European, Thomas Pesquet of France, blasted off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida before dawn on Friday, around 23 hours earlier.

Endeavour first flew to the ISS on the Demo-2 mission in May 2020, ending almost a decade of US reliance on Russia for rides to the ISS following the end of the

Ex-aide attacks UK's Johnson in blogpost tirade

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's former top aide launched an extraordinary tirade Friday after a series of incriminating leaks, claiming the Conservative leader lacks "competence and integrity". Dominic Cummings, who stepped down as his top adviser in December, used a personal blog to allege that Johnson told his staff to lie to the media, tried to block an inquiry, and solicited potentially illegal donations. In response, a Downing Street spokesperson said "all reportable donations are transparently declared and published", and added: "The PM has never interfered in a government leak inquiry."

Cummings, the controversial brains behind the 2016 campaign for Britain to leave the European Union, was appointed chief adviser by Johnson when he took power in July 2019. He helped to secure a thumping election victory that December, but his frequent clashes with colleagues are said to have led to persistent tensions and he left government a year later. Cummings was particularly blamed for undermining the government's coronavirus lockdown message when he went on a lengthy cross-country journey with his family, claiming he and his wife needed help from relatives after they both developed COVID-19 symptoms. Even some Conservatives expressed concern over Cummings' explosive charges, which were seized on by opposition parties ahead of UK-wide local elections on May 6.

Labor deputy leader Angela Rayner said "the Conservatives are fighting each other like rats in a sack and slipping deeper and deeper into the mire of sleaze".

Space Shuttle era. It was the first time a capsule has been reused for crewed spaceflight and the mission also featured a reused rocket, accomplishing key cost-saving goals of NASA's partnerships with private industry. Two Crew Dragons are now parked side by side at the ISS, underscoring hard-charging SpaceX's position as the US space agency's primary transport provider.

Musk has made no secret of his push to drive humanity onward to the Moon and Mars, and told a post-launch press conference: "I think we're at the dawn of a new era of space exploration."

The arrival of the latest space quartet—which also includes American Megan McArthur and Japan's Akihiko Hoshide—will bring the number of people on the station to 11. That's two shy of the record of 13 set in 2009.

Major step for Europe

The mission is also a major milestone for Europe, which named the mission "Alpha" after the star system Alpha Centauri. "This is really the golden era for us in terms of exploitation of the International Space Station," Frank De Winne, head of the European Space Agency (ESA)'s ISS program told AFP. Germany's Matthias Maurer and Italy's Samantha Cristoforetti are set to follow Pesquet on SpaceX missions, this fall and next spring respectively.

The next module of the ISS, built by Russia, should reach the station in July and will include a robotic arm built by ESA that Pesquet will help make operational, added De Winne. ESA will also be a key partner to the United States in the Artemis program to return to the Moon, providing the power and propulsion component for the Orion spacecraft, and critical elements of a planned lunar orbital station called Gateway.

The Crew-2 team has around 100 experiments in the diary during their six-month mission. These include research into what are known as "tissue chips"—small models of human organs that are made up of different types of cells and used to study things like aging in the immune system, kidney function and muscle loss. In terms of the environment, by the time Crew-2 returns in fall, it will have taken 1.5 million images of the Earth, documenting phenomena like artificial lighting at night, algal blooms, and the breakup of Antarctic ice shelves. Another important element of the mission is upgrading the station's solar power system by installing new compact panels that roll open like a huge yoga mat. — AFP

"It shows breathtaking contempt for the country," she said. In his blog, Cummings claimed the prime minister had proposed torpedoing the leak inquiry because its findings might prove problematic with Johnson's fiancée. He also said he had warned Johnson against plans to use Conservative Party donations in an "unethical, foolish, possibly illegal" way to renovate his Downing Street apartment.

Cummings was responding to newspaper headlines Friday reporting that Johnson's staff blamed the ex-aide for leaking embarrassing text messages, including some that have embroiled billionaire inventor James Dyson in a Westminster lobbying scandal.

'Stop the leak inquiry?'

"The Prime Minister's new Director of Communications Jack Doyle, at the PM's request, has made a number of false accusations to the media," Cummings stated in his lengthy post. "It is sad to see the PM and his office fall so far below the standards of competence and integrity the country deserves."

Friday's reports, sourced to anonymous Downing Street officials, blamed the ex-advisor for leaking text messages Johnson exchanged with Dyson early last year about tax arrangements during the pandemic. It prompted the government to launch an internal inquiry, the latest probe into a series of leaks from within Whitehall. Cummings denied being the leaker himself, pushing back in particular over a damaging disclosure of government plans that forced Johnson into bringing forward one period of lockdown last November. He claimed that an earlier internal investigation over that leak was blocked by Johnson after it identified the likely culprit.

"I will have to fire him, and this will cause me very serious problems with Carrie as they're best friends," Cummings said Johnson told him, referring to his fiancée Carrie Symonds. "Perhaps we could get the Cabinet Secretary to stop the leak inquiry?" he claimed the leader added. — AFP

Dating app boast nets US Capitol riot charges

SAN FRANCISCO: A Bumble dating app boast about invading the US Capitol left a man facing criminal charges on Friday after his prospective match turned him in to police. The case against Robert Chapman, who lives in the city of Yonkers in New York State, came together with the help of Bumble text messages, Facebook posts, and video captured by

police body cameras, according to an FBI criminal complaint. Chapman, who also uses the last name Erick, is charged with violent entry and disorderly conduct at the Capitol, FBI agent Kenneth Kroll said in the complaint. The prospective date alerted the police after receiving a text message on Bumble from a prospective match who said "I did storm the Capitol and made it all the way to Statuary Hall." Kroll identified Chapman as being among those shown in video taken by Capitol police body cameras when rioters stormed the building in a deadly attack on January 6.

Evidence in the case included Facebook photos of the accused man in Statuary Hall, in keeping with the Bumble boast. Former US president Donald Trump has been accused of inciting the deadly January 6 insurrection. — AFP



N'DJAMENA: French President Emmanuel Macron pays his respects in front of the coffin of late Chadian president Idriss Deby during his state funeral in N'Djamena, Chad, Friday. — AFP

Chad bids farewell to Deby as France, allies back his son

N'DJAMENA, Chad: Chad on Friday staged a state funeral for veteran ruler Idriss Deby Itono, a linchpin in the fight against the Sahel's jihadist insurgency, as France and regional allies voiced backing for his son and successor, Mahamat Idriss Deby. The elder Deby, who had ruled the vast semi-desert state with an iron fist for 30 years, died from wounds sustained fighting rebels at the weekend, the army said Tuesday. His death has stunned the Sahel and its ally and former colonial ruler France, battling a jihadist revolt that in nine years has swept across three countries.

The unrest has claimed thousands of lives and forced hundreds of thousands from their homes. Deby's coffin, draped in the national flag and surrounded by elite troops, was driven to the Place de la Nation square in the capital N'Djamena for ceremonies attended by foreign leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron. A 21-gun salute sounded out for Deby, who only last August had been declared a field marshal—the first in Chad's history—after leading an offensive against jihadists in the west of the country. Macron, in his tribute to the fallen president, said "you lived as a soldier, you died as a soldier, weapons in your hands".

"France will never let anyone, either today or tomorrow, challenge Chad's stability and integrity," Macron pledged. But Macron also called on the newly-appointed military government to foster "stability, inclusion, dialogue, democratic transition".

A similar message was conveyed personally to Deby's son when he met earlier with Macron and the presidents of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, a French presidential aide said. The African Union meanwhile called on Chad's security forces "to respect the constitutional mandate and order, and to expeditiously embark on a process of restoration of constitutional order and handing over of political power to the civilian authorities." The body's Peace and Security Council also called for "an all-inclusive national dialogue" and expressed "grave concern" over said the establishment of a military council.

The younger Deby, a 37-year-old four-star general commanding the elite Republican Guard, was named president and head of a military council

immediately after his father's death was announced. Parliament and the government were dissolved.

He will wield full powers but has promised "free and democratic" elections after an 18-month transition period that can be extended once. The move has been branded an "institutional coup" by the opposition. The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), underscoring the "terrible repression" under Deby, on Friday urged the swiftest possible return to civilian rule.

Deby's death was announced the day after he was declared the winner of an April 11 election—giving him a sixth mandate after three decades at the helm. The army said the 68-year-old had died on Monday from wounds suffered while leading troops in battle against rebels who had crossed from Libya. The Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) has vowed to pursue its offensive after a pause for the funeral, with spokesman Kingabe Ogozoumei de Tapol telling AFP that the rebels were "en route to N'Djamena".

Unstable country

Deby seized power in a chronically unstable country in 1990 and had twice thwarted attempted coups with support from France. He was repeatedly returned to office in elections condemned by opponents as fraudulent. But he gained a reputation in the West as an unflinching ally in the fight to roll back jihadists, whose campaign has shaken the vast, impoverished Sahel. Chad has well-respected armed forces and hosts the headquarters of France's 5,100-strong Barkhane anti-jihadist mission.

It also partners Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger in a regional anti-jihad coalition called the G5 Sahel. The group may name Burkina's president, Roch Marc Christian Kabore, as interim leader to succeed Deby, who had been its chairman under a rotational arrangement, a source at the G5 Sahel secretariat in Noukacott said.

French armored escort

Macron, who left for France mid-afternoon, was the only Western head of state to attend the ceremony. French armored vehicles escorted Macron to the embassy after his arrival at the military base used for Barkhane's headquarters, an AFP journalist saw. The funeral was followed by prayers at the capital's Grand Mosque. Deby's remains were then flown a thousand kilometers (600 miles) east to the village of Amdjarass near the Sudanese border, where he was to be buried alongside his father, close to his birthplace of Berdoba. — AFP