

World News Roundup

Poland

PiS lead

Election puts relation at risk

WARSAW, Oct 22, (RTRS): Poland's general election on Sunday may propel a new nationalist-minded government into European politics, deepening divisions over the migration crisis and straining relations with Berlin, Brussels and Moscow.



Kaczynski

The Eurosceptic Law and Justice party (PiS), led by former prime minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, has toned down its anti-EU rhetoric since its first time in power in 2005-07, but diplomats in Brussels are worried that EU decision-making may soon be obstructed by a returning member of the awkward squad.

The staunchly conservative Kaczynski has nominated a less combative politician, Beata Szydlo, to be prime minister to lure disgruntled voters of the outgoing pro-European government.

But his deep distrust of big European powers, particularly Germany, remains intact and analysts say he is still expected to pull the strings.

"It may not be to the liking of everyone when you pursue your interests," said Witold Waszczykowski, a leading PiS foreign policy expert and deputy foreign minister in the previous PiS government. "But the EU is not an altruists' club."

With a more assertive Poland, the 28-member bloc will have a harder time dealing with Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War Two, negotiating a global deal on climate change and forging a united stance towards a resurgent Russia in the east.

In a parliamentary debate in September, Kaczynski said the pro-European government of Civic Platform had no right to take decisions on accepting migrants under foreign pressure because the decision may hurt the daily lives of Poles.

He later said refugees should be checked for diseases and parasites, a comment that drew accusations of using ultra-nationalist, fascist imagery to fan hatred and fear.

Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz ignored Kaczynski's warnings and made a deal with Brussels to take in about 7,000 refugees. With Kaczynski at the controls, that would not have happened.

PiS has made clear it does not want Poland to join the euro in the foreseeable future, until it reaches west European levels of prosperity. But Civic Platform was in no rush to join anyway.

The party supports an EU of strong nation states, making it a natural ally Eurosceptic Britain, but the two are likely to clash over the rights of Poles working in the United Kingdom to in-work and welfare benefits, which London wants to curb.

"Clearly there are things we share with (Prime Minister David) Cameron, mainly this push for a less bureaucratic, more cost-effective EU that does not seek deeper political integration," Waszczykowski said.

Poland will need EU cooperation to win new concessions for its highly-polluting coal sector, which PiS says is a pillar of the economy and of energy security.

While experts agree Warsaw has no choice but to transition from dependency on coal towards renewable sources of energy, the country may need more time and funds to switch to clean energy.

This could be tougher if Law and Justice antagonises Germany and other big European powers as it did in 2007 when Kaczynski invoked the number of Poles killed by the Nazis in World War Two to justify demands for greater voting power within the EU.

Jean-Claude Juncker, now president of the European Commission, told Kaczynski back then: "You will not be happy in the long-run if you are always looking in the rearview mirror."

During the last PiS-led government, Poland delayed the ratification of the EU's Lisbon treaty and blocked the launch of talks on a partnership pact with Russia.

Warsaw also needs cooperation from other EU member states to sustain sanctions on Russia over its annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula and its role in destabilising eastern Ukraine.

Law and Justice is particularly hawkish on Russia following the 2010 crash of Poland's presidential jet in which Kaczynski's identical twin, Lech, who was head of state, died along with 95 other high-ranking officials affiliated with the party.



Swedish police officers secure the area outside a primary and middle school in Trollhattan, southwestern Sweden, on Oct 22, where a masked man armed with a sword injured an adult and four students before being arrested by police. (AFP)

Sweden

Black day for Sweden: PM

Stabbing attack kills teacher, student

TROLLHATTAN, Sweden, Oct 22, (Agencies): A knife-wielding masked man stabbed four people Thursday at a school in southern Sweden, killing a teacher and a student before being shot dead by police, authorities said. One student thought the man had something to do with Halloween.

Students fled from the Kronan school in Trollhattan, near Goteborg, Sweden's second-largest city, as the attack took place in a nearby cafe just after 10 a.m., police said. The school has 400 students ranging from preschool to high school.

Police arrived to find one male teacher already dead and three other people seriously wounded — two male students aged 11 and 15 and another male teacher, police spokesman Thomas Fuxborg told The Associated Press. Police fired two shots, one of which hit the attacker, he said.

One student and the attacker died later at the hospital, authorities said.

The attacker, a 21-year-old from Trollhattan, knocked on the doors to two classrooms and stabbed those who opened them, police spokesman Thord Haraldsson told a press conference. He said the man had "sharp stabbing weapons," which another police official told the AP may have included a sword.

Police searched the attacker's home and found "interesting" things, Haraldsson added, without elaborating.

Police spokesman Stefan Gustavsson said authorities knew the attacker had killed the teacher "because of the wounds he had."

Laith Alazze, a 14 year-old student

at Kronan, said at first he thought the attacker — who was clad in black and wearing a mask — had something to do with Halloween.

"One of my friends walked over to him to challenge him, but when we saw he stabbed him (the teacher), we ran away," Alazze told Sweden's TV4.

The attacker had gunshot wounds to his lower chest and died later Thursday at the hospital, officials said.

Police spokeswoman Maria Randsalu said the second victim was a student, but did not say which one.

The three wounded, all in serious condition, underwent surgery at the Norra Alvsborgs Lanssjukhus hospital. Dr. Lars Spetz told reporters the teacher had been stabbed in the abdomen while the two students were stabbed in the abdomen, liver and chest.

"They hover between life and death," Spetz said.

Swedish media said the school held a meeting Thursday morning to discuss teachers' fears that they could not control access to the school. The Dagens Nyheter newspaper said students must go through a public cafe to reach the school's cafeteria and other parts of the building.

Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven, who went to the scene, described Thursday as a "black day."

"My thoughts go out to the victims and their families, the students and staff, and the whole community that has been affected," Lofven said. "No words can describe what they are going through right now."

King Carl XVI Gustaf said Sweden

was "in shock" following the attack and that the royal family received the news "with great dismay and sadness."

Police were alerted about the incident at 10:10 am (0810 GMT) and have already identified the attacker.

However they have not disclosed any information about him and the motive for the attack remains unclear.

"When we first saw him, we thought it was a joke. He was wearing a mask and black clothes and (carrying) a long sword. Some students wanted to take their picture with him and feel the sword," one unidentified student told news agency TT.

When the man started attacking people, he quickly realised it wasn't a joke and fled as the assailant went from classroom to classroom looking for victims.

TT said several knives were used in the attack.

Police said there was "a lot of confusion" at the school, saying there were still pupils and teachers inside more than two hours after the attack.

According to its website, the Kronan school has around 400 pupils, including many newly-arrived immigrants.

Swedish media described it as a "problem school".

It had been criticised by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate for its lax security and on account of a number of disruptions which prevented the pupils from learning.

Teachers had complained to the inspectorate about the school library and cafe being open to the public and creating an insecure environment for

the children, TT reported.

Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven was expected to visit the town later on Thursday, parliament's Twitter account said.

"This is a black day for Sweden," Lofven said in a statement.

"My thoughts go to the victims and their families, the students and staff, and the entire community. No words can describe what they're going through right now."

Crisis teams were at the school assisting parents and students. But some parents outside were unhappy at the way the school handled the attack.

"No one from the school called me. I found out what happened from a neighbour when I was carrying out the trash. I got into my car and came here," one father told TT after being reunited with his young daughter.

The girl, who was not identified, said the head teacher had come into her classroom and told them to stay inside and lock the door.

"We didn't know what was happening," she said.

Trollhattan is an industrial town of 57,000 and home to the former Swedish carmaker Saab which filed for bankruptcy in 2012.

School attacks are rare in normally-tranquil Sweden.

A 1961 school shooting in Kungälv, in southwestern Sweden, left one person dead and six others injured.

No other mass shootings have occurred since then, though at least one attack has been foiled, in the southern city of Malmo in 2004. Other threats have been issued but not followed through.



French researcher in Microbiology, Genetics and Biochemistry Emmanuelle Charpentier (left) and US Professor of Chemistry and of Molecular and Cell Biology, Jennifer Doudna (right) pose for an exhibit made by children of the genome at the San Francisco park in Oviedo, on Oct 21. Charpentier and Doudna have been awarded the 2015 Princess of Asturias Award for technical and scientific research. (AFP)



Pope Francis



Rouhani

Europe

Pope to host Rouhani: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani will visit Pope Francis on Nov 14, the Vatican announced Thursday in the latest sign of relatively warm relations between the Holy See and the Islamic Republic.

Rouhani will call at the Vatican as part of an official trip to Italy, which has led European attempts to rebuild trade and investment ties with Tehran following the July nuclear deal.

Pope Francis received the Iranian vice-president for family affairs Sahindokht Molaverdi in February and has been a prominent backer of the nuclear accord as a significant step towards stability in the region.

The last Iranian president to visit the Vatican was Mohamed Khatami, who held talks with Jean-Paul II in 1999 and subsequently attended the Polish pope's funeral in 2005.

Paul VI (1963-78) is the only pope to have visited Iran and that was only a brief stopover on his way to Asia in 1970.

But the 1979 Islamic revolution did not lead to a break in diplomatic relations.

Iran outlaws conversions to Christianity but the country's eastern Catholics remain free to exercise their religion.

Vatican relations with Tehran are smoother than with several Arab Gulf states seen as placing greater restrictions on Christians' religious freedom.

French cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the pontifical council for inter-religious dialogue, has made several visits to Tehran.

There is even collaboration in the unlikely area of astronomy: an Islamic-Christian seminar on the subject was organised in January at the Vatican's observatory outside Rome. (AFP)

Conspiracy theories fill media: Conspiracy theories worthy of a Dan Brown novel sprouted in the Italian media on Thursday, with accusations that Pope Francis's enemies were looking to undermine him after a newspaper reported he had a brain tumour.

The Vatican angrily denied

Wednesday's story, calling it irresponsible and inexcusable, but rather than fading out of sight, the saga has inflated into a cloak-and-dagger whodunnit.

"Who wants the pope dead?", the main headline in Il Giornale newspaper said. La Repubblica and La Stampa, both respected dailies, wrote of a "shadow of a plot" on their front pages.

Most papers concluded that the story was false. But rather than dismissing it as

a journalistic error, commentators and churchmen in the land that gave the world Machiavelli, the master of political cunning, looked for hidden intrigue.

The common denominator was that the pope's foes within the Vatican and the Catholic Church want to weaken his authority as a pivotal meeting of world bishops on family issues nears its end on Sunday.

La Repubblica quoted Argentine

Bishop Victor Manuel Fernandez as fearing a well-planned "apocalyptic strategy" against Francis by conservatives who want to destabilise the Church and block his attempts to change it.

Leading political columnist Massimo Franco wrote in Corriere della Sera daily that the story was probably "hatched in the most murky Vatican underground and was aimed at de-legitimising the pontiff".

La Stampa called the saga part of a

"calumny to block change". (RTRS)

5 found dead in France: Three children and their parents have been found dead at their home near the northern French city of Lille, a local prosecutor said late Wednesday.

The bodies of a six-month-old boy, his four-year-old brother and 10-year-old sister along with their mother, 40, were found in their beds at the two-storey home in a residential neighbourhood, about seven kilometres (five miles) west of Lille.

The father, 42, had hanged himself and left a note, dated October 16, explaining his actions, local prosecutor Frederic Fevre told AFP.

"He spoke of being in debt and major financial difficulties," said Fevre.

"We can't exclude the possibility that at least one of (the family) were suffocated," he added.

Police sealed off the house and were investigating the tragedy.

Christelle, a neighbour, told AFP that the family had only lived in the area for "around a year".

"This is a very calm and residential neighbourhood, the children often rode their bikes and scooters on the pavement," she added.

According to another source, the family had not been seen for several days.

An aunt and a childminder sounded the alarm and were taken for psychological counselling after rescue workers discovered the five bodies. (AFP)



A participant poses for a photo during the InterpoliteX-2015 exhibition of police and military equipment in Moscow on Oct 22. (AFP)

Russia military unit in 'Arctic' by 2018

MOSCOW, Oct 22, (AP): A Russian military unit will be permanently stationed in the Arctic by 2018, the defense minister said on Thursday.

Sergei Shoigu told Russian news agencies on Thursday that the "creation and arming" of the Arctic military unit should be completed by 2018. Shoigu also said Russia is building several new bases in the Arctic as well as rebuilding six Soviet-era air bases there.

"We are not hiding this from anyone: we have practically finished building bases on the Novosibirsk Archipelago and on Kotelniy Island," Shoigu said.