



Police officers stand in front of the supermarket in Hamburg, Germany on July 28, where a man with a knife fatally stabbed one person and wounded four others as he fled, police said. He was then arrested. (Inset): In this photo, a police car stands in front of a refugee shelter in Hamburg, Germany, while police searching the facility in connection with a stabbing attack in a supermarket. (AP)

## Focus

## 'Call of faith'

## Grozny becomes a showcase for Islam

GROZNY, Russia, July 29, (AFP): As the plane from Moscow touches down in Grozny, the capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, a young woman wraps a scarf around her hair.

"Here it's better to be veiled," she told AFP.

On Grozny's streets, many women follow her example and wear headscarves or a hijab that covers the chest, while others are in long dresses that hide their arms and legs.

"We don't force women to wear a headscarf," the city's mayor Muslim Khuchiyev said. "But we remind them that this is the Chechen tradition and what our faith calls for".

Under authoritarian leader **Ramzan Kadyrov**, in power since 2007, the role of Islam has grown massively in the Russian North Caucasus republic.

In Grozny, dozens of mosques have been built from the ruins of a city devastated after separatists waged two wars against the Russian army.

Grozny hit the headlines in recent months after Russian opposition daily Novaya Gazeta published a report alleging that gay men were being persecuted by the Chechen authorities.

Homosexuality in the conservative region is taboo. Kadyrov, 40, has also expressed support for polygamy, which is against the law in Russia, saying that "for me, the most important thing is Islamic law".

With alcohol sales restricted, school children studying the canons of Islam and women officially encouraged to wear headscarves for work and study, regional authorities are actively promoting Islam.

Malika, 29, goes to the mosque every day with her husband.

"In the last two or three years, people have become more and more religious," she said, adding that she makes her daughter take lessons in religious morality.

## Encourage

"Of course the authorities encourage us. A religious woman is a good mother, a religious man is a peaceful person," said Malika as her phone rang to alert her to one of the five daily calls to prayer, which are also broadcast around the city over loudspeakers.

"Grozny has emerged from ruins to become a modern Muslim city, a showcase for Islam," Khuchiyev said. Taking pride of place in the centre of Grozny is the Akhmad Kadyrov Mosque, named after Kadyrov's father. Chechnya's previous leader Akhmad Kadyrov was assassinated in 2004.

It was opened in 2008 on the site of the ruined former parliament building, destroyed by Russian bombs.

Now "the largest mosque in Europe... is already not big enough," said Khuchiyev.

Asked about financing for the mosque, the mayor simply said "the money came from Allah," echoing a phrase often used by Kadyrov himself to bat away questions about public spending.

Most of the city's grand reconstruction projects were enabled by lavish funding from Russia.

Since taking power Kadyrov has sought to eliminate the Islamist insurgency known as the Caucasus Emirate that grew out of the pro-independence fighting units in the second Chechen war that erupted in the late 1990s.

"We absolutely had to build new mosques so that people came back to the good Islam," Khuchiyev said.

Khuchiyev means that Chechens should embrace religion without being drawn into the Caucasus Emirate or the Islamic State group, to which the Emirate has now sworn allegiance.

A large number of Chechens have joined IS fighters in Syria and Iraq, according to Russian authorities.

In recent years, Kadyrov has expanded his message to address the wider Islamic world.

After the violence erupted this month at a sensitive holy site in Jerusalem, he seemed to declare support for Palestinians on his highly popular Instagram account.



A US soldier puts a helmet on a child as they stand on a US army vehicle during a presentation of US vehicles and weapons in Kumanovo on July 28. Some 300 US soldiers, accompanied by 95 Macedonian soldiers, will participate in a joint exercise 'DRAGON GUARDIAN 17' at the largest Macedonian military base and training area in Krivolak, east-central Macedonia. (AFP)



Szymanski



Rajoy

## Europe

**EU acts against Poland:** The European Commission launched legal action on Saturday against what it sees as Polish government attempts to undermine the independence of judges.

It has given Warsaw a month to respond. EU commissioners decided to launch the "infringement procedure" for violating European Union law at a meeting on Wednesday, the first step in a legal process that may end at the bloc's top court, pending publication of Poland's new law.

A Polish deputy foreign minister said on Saturday the Commission's decision was "unjustified" because the organisation of the legal systems in EU members was up to member states and not EU institutions.

The Commission is concerned about discretionary power given to Poland's minister of justice to prolong the mandates of judges who reach retirement age, as well as to dismiss and appoint court presidents.

It said a key legal concern was the introduction of different retirement ages - for female judges at 60 and male judges at 65.

Polish Deputy Foreign Minister **Konrad Szymanski** told state news agency PAP that court presidents in Poland performed mostly administrative functions.

He also said the new regulation on the retirement of judges was aimed at bringing it into line with a reduction in the retirement age that enters into force in October. (RTRS)

**Spain challenges Catalan move:** The Spanish government has filed an appeal with the country's constitutional court against a reform passed by the Catalan parliament to fast-track bills through the regional parliament, Prime Minister **Mariano Rajoy** said Friday.

Catalonia's majority separatist lawmakers hope the reform they approved on Wednesday will pave the way for an independence referendum in the wealthy northeastern region called for October 1

## Extremism

## Russia arrests 7 for preparing Saint Petersburg attacks

## Hamburg attacker a 'known Islamist'

HAMBURG, July 29, (AFP): The suspect who killed a man with a knife in Hamburg supermarket was a known Islamist, German officials said Saturday, adding that his motives remained unclear as he also suffered from psychological problems.

Identified as a 26-year-old man of Palestinian origin, he had arrived in Germany in 2015, but was due to be deported as his application for asylum was rejected.

The assault risks reopening a bitter debate over refugees two months before general elections, putting pressure on Chancellor Angela Merkel over her decision to open Germany's borders in 2015, letting more than a million asylum seekers in.

"He was known as an Islamist but not a jihadist," said the German port city's interior minister Andy Grote, noting "there are indications of radicalisation".

But the minister stressed that while there could have been an Islamist motive for the attack, the suspect also suffered from "psychological instability".

Police piecing together the assault on Friday said the man had entered the supermarket and took a kitchen knife measuring around 20 cm from the shelves.

He later wounded two other men in the supermarket before fleeing, slashing others along the way, before he was overpowered by courageous passers-by.

Witnesses told AFP the man had brandished the bloodied knife, shouting "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Greatest") as he fled the scene, but that bystanders gave chase and flung chairs to stop him.

If confirmed as an Islamist attack, it would be the first in Germany since Tunisian Anis Amri drove a truck into crowds at a Berlin Christmas market on Dec 19, killing 12 and injuring 48.

Germany has been on high alert over the threat of a jihadist assault since Amri's rampage in Berlin, for which the Islamic State group claimed responsibility.

Like the Hamburg suspect, Amri was

due to have been deported after his asylum request was turned down, but the process was held up by a lack of identity documents.

News website Spiegel Online named the supermarket attacker as Ahmad A, while officials said he had not filed an appeal against Germany's decision to reject his asylum application.

In fact, he had helped to obtain documents to facilitate his departure from Germany.

On the day of the attack, he had even gone to the authorities to ask if the identify papers had arrived. Police chief Ralf Meyer said the suspect was "almost exemplary" in this aspect.

Heavily armed police who searched a Hamburg asylum seekers' shelter where the man lived did not find any weapons.

At the asylum shelter in a leafy suburb, the suspect's neighbour, who gave his name only as Mohamed, described him as "very intelligent".

"He was always helping other asylum seekers with their paperwork," the 31-year-old Syrian refugee told AFP.

But in recent weeks, he "had a crisis, he bought Islamist clothes and read the Koran very loudly in his room".

"And three weeks after Ramadan, he had another crisis. He started to drink heavily and smoke joints ... he was sad that his mother was ill and that his asylum request was rejected," recounted Mohamed.

## Also:

**MOSCOW:** Russia's FSB security agency said Friday it had detained seven nationals from **Central Asia** who were "preparing terrorist attacks" in **Saint Petersburg**, which suffered a metro bombing in April.

Those held were suspected of planning to hit "the railway system and major public gathering places" in Russia's second city, the FSB said in a statement.

Russia has stepped up security since a suicide bomb attack in the Saint Pe-

tersburg subway killed 15 and injured dozens on April 3.

The alleged perpetrator, was a 22-year-old Russian citizen who was born in ex-Soviet Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia.

The bombing was claimed by a little-known group, the Imam **Shamil Batalion**, which experts say is linked to al-Qaeda.

**PARIS:** France's first jihadist de-radicalisation centre is set to close after less than a year, the government said on Friday.

The centre in Pontourny, western France, which opened in September 2016, was aimed at convincing radicalised 18 to 30-year-olds to turn their back on extremism.

But Interior Minister **Gerard Colombe** said the experiment "has not been conclusive".

The centre can accommodate 25 people, but has never had more than nine residents, none of whom have completed the de-radicalisation programme. The centre has been empty since February.

**BRATISLAVA:** Slovak police on Friday said they had charged far-right leader **Marian Kotleba** with promoting extremism, over cheques he gave to poor families for a sum that carries symbolic weight in neo-Nazi circles.

Kotleba, who leads the Kotleba-Party Our Slovakia (LSNS), was charged on July 20 and accused of "promoting sympathy towards a movement aimed at suppressing fundamental rights and freedoms," police spokesman **Martin Waldl** told AFP.

Local media reported that the charge stemmed from a charity event LSNS organised in March.

According to the local pluska.sk news site, Kotleba handed out three larger-than-life cheques for 1,488 euros (\$1,748) at the event. The number 1,488 is a well-known neo-Nazi symbol.

The reform means that any piece of legislation in Catalonia can now be adopted quickly, with fewer checks and balances. (AFP)

**Remains found on Mont Blanc:** Body parts that could belong to passengers killed in one of two Air India plane crashes more than 50 years ago have been found on Mont Blanc in the French Alps, sources said Friday.

Daniel Roche, who is fascinated by air plane accidents and has spent years combing the Bossons Glacier looking for remains, made the discovery on Thursday. "I had never found any significant human remains before," he told AFP. This time however he had found a hand and the upper part of a leg.

In January 1966, an Air India Boeing 707 from Bombay to New York crashed near Mont Blanc's summit, killing all 117 people on board.

Another Air India flight crashed on the mountain in 1950, killing 48 people. Roche said the remains he had found could be of a female passenger from the 1966 Boeing 707 flight, as he also discovered one of the plane's four jet engines.

Roche contacted local emergency services in the Chamonix valley who took the remains down the mountain by helicopter and they were due to be examined by experts. (AFP)

which Madrid deems illegal. "By presenting this appeal the government is fulfilling its duty to make sure the law is upheld," Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy told a news conference. "Catalan society needs to be protected

from a radical and divisive project which is being imposed on them by force," he added.

"There will not be any referendum on October 1...this is not constitutional and it is not legal."



Russian sailors stand on the deck of a Tarantul class Corvette 'Chuvashiya' as it travels along the River Nevar in Saint Petersburg on July 28, during the Naval parade rehearsal. Naval Military Parade will take place in Saint Petersburg on Russia's Navy Day on July 30. (AFP)