

Stolen truck slams into cars in Germany

● Police said it was too soon to speculate about a motive

● A white articulated lorry slammed into around nine cars

AFP | Limburg, Germany

A stolen truck ploughed into several cars in the centre of the German city of Limburg leaving a number of people injured, police said yesterday, adding that the driver had been detained.

Police said it was too soon to speculate about a motive for the incident, which began when a man seized the truck at 5:20 pm (1520 GMT) on Monday.

"We currently do not have sufficient information about what was behind it," the police said.

The white articulated lorry slammed into around nine cars waiting at a traffic light opposite the courthouse in Limburg in western Hesse state, crushing them together.

Police said "around nine people were slightly injured," including the driver of the stolen



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POLICE

vehicle.

Police staged a major deployment of officers and vehicles, with a helicopter circling overhead the city of 35,000, about an hour's drive from Germany's financial capital of Frankfurt.

The site was cordoned off by police and brightly lit up as tow trucks removed the damaged cars one by one.

'Didn't say a word'

The original driver of the

truck, who was not named, was quoted by daily *Frankfurter Neue Presse* (FNP) as saying a man had "dragged" him out of his lorry.

He said the man, in his 30s with short dark hair and a full beard, had yanked open the driver-side door and stared at him wide-eyed before forcing him out of the vehicle.

"I asked him 'What do you want from me?'," he told FNP. "He didn't say a word."

The truck sped into the

parked cars a few hundred metres (yards) further on and came to a stop on the central reservation of a six-lane road.

When the man behind the wheel of the truck emerged from the crash, several passers-by provided first aid, FNP said.

"The passers-by said the driver said 'Allah' several times" and spoke Arabic, FNP reported.

Police did not confirm this account.

Bettina Yeisley from Limburg, whose office is next to the scene of the crash, told FNP that she heard a loud bang and ran out onto the street with colleagues.

They found the man sitting beneath a tree, without knowing the circumstances.

"He was bleeding from the nose, his hands were bloody, his trousers torn. He said that everything hurt. I asked him his name and he said, 'My name is Mohammed'."

Authorities urged users of social media not to jump to conclusions on the motive.

"We are not ruling anything out," a spokesman for the state police force said, quoted by DPA said. "But we call on you: don't take part in speculation!" the regional police wrote in several tweets.

Russia bestows medal on US astronaut in failed launch

Moscow

Russia has decorated NASA astronaut Nick Hague, who survived an aborted space launch last year, with one of its highest honours, the Order of Courage, a Kremlin decree said on Tuesday.

Hague along with Russian cosmonaut Aleksey Ovchinin had a close brush with death when their Soyuz rocket failed minutes after blast-off from Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan in October last year. They were forced to eject and make a harrowing emergency landing.

It was the first such accident in Russia's post-Soviet history.

In a decree released on Tuesday, the Kremlin commended 44-year-old Hague for his "courage and high professionalism" shown during life-threatening conditions. After the accident Hague and Ovchinin successfully launched to the International Space Station aboard another Soyuz.

Venezuelans turn to alternative medicine amid shortages

AFP | Caracas

The small waiting room at the home of self-styled healer "Brother Guayanes" in Caracas' rundown Petare district fills up quickly with patients -- business has never been better.

With Venezuela's chronic medicine shortages and hyperinflation, more and more people are turning to alternative medicine to treat common ailments in the crisis-wracked South American country.

"We go to the hospital and there's nothing there. They don't have medicines, or they're too expensive, what are we to do?" said Rosa Saez, 77, who has come to get treatment for a painful arm.

Carlos Rosales -- he uses the more ceremonious "Brother Guayanes" for his business -- is finishing up a "spiritual intervention" on a patient in what passes for his surgery.

The patient lies, eyes closed, on a cot as, in a series of swishes and clicks, the healer waves five pairs of scissors one after another over his prone body.

The healer says he performs 200 such interventions a week in a dim, candle-lit room that features two camp beds and an array of plaster statues that Rosales says represent "spiritual entities".

A regular visitor to the spiritual center, Saez says she has faith in Rosales' methods: "He healed my kidneys."



Patients wait at the spiritual healer's clinic in Petare

Natural healing

All across Venezuela, but particularly in poor areas like Petare, patients cannot hope to afford the price of medicines that due to the economic crisis, have become exceedingly rare.

Venezuela's pharmacists' federation say pharmacies and hospitals have on average only about 20 percent of the medicine stock needed.

Rosales' clinic is muggy with the smell of tobacco. A crucifix suspended from a chain around his neck, he practices a seeming mixture of smoke-blowing shamanism, plant-based medicine and mainstream religion.

Posters hung near the entrance re-

mind clients to arrive with a candle and tobacco and "Don't forget that payment is in cash".

Much like a general practitioner, Rosales spends time consulting with his patients, examining them with a stethoscope, before offering a diagnosis. Often he prescribes potions based on plants and fruit, such as pineapple and a type of local squash known as chayote.

"We know medicines are necessary," he says. "I'm not against medicine, but my medicine is botany."

Plants replace drugs

At her stall in a downtown Caracas market, 72-year-old Lilia Reyes says she has seen her trade in medicinal plants



Venezuelan spiritual healer "Brother Guayanes" poses at his clinic in the Caracas neighborhood of Petare



Esperanza Castillo, 74, waits for treatment at the clinic with her daughter

flourish.

"I can't keep up with the demand," she said at her stall, bathed in the aroma of camomile, one of the 150 plants

she sells.

Careless consumption of some herbs can be deadly, warns Grismery Morillo. A doctor at a Caracas public hospital, she says she has seen many cases of acute liver failure in people who have eaten certain roots.

According to Venezuela's opposition parties, some 300,000 chronically ill people are in danger of dying from the shortages of medicines.

But despite the risks, people like Carmen Teresa say they have no alternative.

In the kitchen of her restaurant which closed down three years ago as the economic crisis took hold, the 58-year-old Colombian prepares an infusion of fig leaves to treat "diabetic neuropathy".

The painkillers needed for the condition are "too expensive" and prices are going up due to hyperinflation, so she is cutting back on the pills and supplementing her treatment with herbal infusions.

She needs at least four tablets a day to keep her diabetes at bay. Her mother, bedridden since breaking a leg a year ago, suffers from Alzheimer's disease and needs five pills a day for hypertension.

"I'm still taking my pills, but I reduced the dose," says Teresa, who is also replacing cholesterol pills with lemon juice.

'I've never raped a woman,' says French director Besson

Paris

French film director Luc Besson on Monday denied raping or drugging a young actress -- the first time the maker of "The Fifth Element" has spoken publicly about the sex allegations against him.

A judge reopened a rape investigation into the movie mogul on Friday, eight months after Paris prosecutors had dropped a case brought by the Dutch-Belgian actress Sand Van Roy, who claimed that Besson had repeatedly raped her over a two-year



French director Luc Besson faces a number of accusations of assault or harassment

period. She is one of nine women who have said they were assaulted or harassed by the powerful director and producer.

Van Roy, 28, had minor roles in his "Taxi 5" and "Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets".

Besson has admitted having a relationship with Van Roy but dismissed her as a "fantasist".

"This case is a lie from A to Z. I did not rape that woman, I have never raped a woman in my life," he told BFMTV.

"I have never lifted a hand to a woman, I have never threatened

a woman... I never drugged this woman as has been said. That is a lie," he said in extracts from the interview, which will be broadcast in full on Tuesday.

'I made some mistakes'

The maker of hits such as "Nikita", whose legal problems have coincided with a run of box office failures, also denied ever harassing women or holding them against their will.

However, Besson, 60, said that he had a relationship with Van Roy and had made "some mis-

takes".

"I betrayed my wife and my children. It did not only happen once, it happened several times during our 20 years of marriage," he added.

Van Roy first went to the police in May 2018 after spending the night with Besson in a luxury Paris hotel.

Two months later she said that she had been raped four times during over the two years when she had been "in a controlling professional relationship" with the director.

She said she had feared for her career if she complained.

Police questioned Besson about the accusations in October 2018.

One actress later told prosecutors that she had to escape on "her hands and knees" from an audition in Besson's Paris office in 2002.

A source close to the new investigation said preliminary inquiries into accusations by another woman are still underway in Paris.