

FT BIG READ

France: Hollande's travails

By Anne-Sylvaine Chassnay

Christopher Cajuste's Haitian parents settled near Paris in the 1970s, escaping poverty in their own country. Now their son, born and raised in Bobigny on the northern periphery of the French capital, is planning to leave France to escape unemployment. More than one-third of the suburb's young residents are jobless. Among them is Mr Cajuste, a 23-year-old business school graduate queuing for unemployment benefits in the packed local job center.

He says being the dark-skinned son of immigrants does not help. In a recent job interview he says he sensed surprise in the interviewer's gaze. "I have a western-sounding name. I could see the person didn't expect someone like me," Mr Cajuste says. "If I don't get a job in February, I'm moving to London. I don't have time to waste."

His friend Ayoub Djabari, also 23 and jobless, says he has travelled "to all corners of France" to find an apprenticeship, the logical next step after getting a high school diploma in energy sciences. Instead, still living with his Algerian-born parents, he has moved from one temporary job to another - seven in all from waiter to warehouseman - over two and a half years.

At least one in four people aged under 25 in France is unemployed. And being the child of immigrants makes you twice as likely to be jobless, according to France Stratégie, a government-funded think-tank. Mr Cajuste and Mr Djabari are disillusioned with politics in general and President François Hollande in particular who they say has let them down.

"Nothing has changed with Hollande," Mr Cajuste says. "Right or left, it doesn't do much for jobs." More than three-quarters of Bobigny residents voted for the Socialist leader in the 2012 presidential elections. Four years on, in an echo of the mood in other leftist strongholds across France,



François Hollande, France's president, speaks during a news conference with U.S. President Barack Obama, not pictured

disaffection is plain to see. In 2014, Bobigny, a town where most people are on low incomes, elected a centre-right mayor for the first time since the end of the Second World War, ending the Communist party's 70-year reign.

With presidential elections in 15 months it is people like Mr Cajuste who will determine whether Mr Hollande keeps his job for a second term. The president's reinvention as a

"wartime leader" after November's attacks in Paris gave him a short-term ratings boost. Now attention has returned to his poor economic record and failure to deliver on his promise to cut an unemployment rate of 10.2 per cent, more than double that of Germany.

In a New Year's Eve address, the French president pledged to fix what he called an "economic and social state of emergen-

cy", declaring unemployment to be his "first priority". It was an unsubtle nod to his earlier vow to seek re-election in 2017 only if he succeeded in reducing joblessness. The speech was also tacit recognition that the failure to do so has provided fertile ground for the far-right National Front.

"Bad economic results have overshadowed whatever credibility Hollande had built after the attacks," says Bruno Cautrès, a political sciences professor at Sciences Po. "Nobody believes him any more when he says unemployment will decrease. There's increasing perplexity, especially within his own party, over everything he does."

Despite the attacks by Islamist extremists that left 130 people dead in November, unemployment re-

mains the priority for voters, according to an Odoxa survey. Mr Hollande's approval ratings have already slumped back to their pre-attack levels with only a quarter of those polled holding a positive opinion of his presidency, according to TNS Sofres.

With most surveys predicting a duel between Marine Le Pen, the National Front leader, and the as yet undecided center-right candidate in the second round of the 2017 presidential poll, the president's legitimacy as the natural candidate of the left is being challenged. Left-leaning intellectuals including Thomas Piketty, the French economist, have called for primaries to pick a candidate to unify the left.

"It has been four years and there is no clear economic policy, no clear

plan. The government is improvising constantly," says Mr Piketty. "If the left wants its candidate to qualify for the second round, it needs a big debate on the program."

France last year emerged from three years of stagnation but its 1 per cent growth still lags behind the Eurozone average of 1.5 per cent. Economists estimate that matching that average would be a minimum requirement if France is substantially to reduce unemployment.

Before last January's attack on Charlie Hebdo, the satirical magazine, Mr Hollande's approval rating had dropped as low as 12 per cent. But in the aftermath the Socialist leader - perceived as indecisive and lacking influence on the international scene - underwent a transformation. ▶▶

“Bad economic results have overshadowed whatever credibility Hollande had built after the attacks

BRUNO CAUTRÈS

France: Hollande's travails (continued)

Confronting homegrown terrorism allowed him to restore some of his authority. In the past year he has forced through a law enhancing snooping powers for French intelligence agencies, declared a state of emergency and sought to intensify the world's military fight against Isis, the Islamist group behind the attacks. He is now seeking to amend the constitution to enlarge the scope of the state of emergency, a clause that was written in 1955 during the Algerian war of independence.

The war rhetoric has silenced the opposition right but at a cost. Christiane Taubira, justice minister, is among the senior Socialist party figures to have voiced their opposition to the Hollande plan to strip the citizenship of dual nationals convicted of terrorist crimes - a purely symbolic measure previously advocated by Ms Le Pen and Nicolas Sarkozy, the former center-right president. Critics argue that the measure is both discriminatory and ineffective in preventing terrorist acts.

Thierry Pech, director of center-left think-tank Terra Nova, says Mr Hollande probably saw an opportunity to destabilize the right by appearing tough on security before next year's election but it has divided his own camp. "The nationality-stripping plan is an example of political maneuvering that backfired," Mr Pech says.

The split has strengthened Socialist hardliners who have railed against Mr Hollande's pro-business shift initiated in 2014. The U-turn - Mr Hollande had imposed €11bn in additional taxes after winning power - was symbolised by €41bn in tax breaks



Mourners light candles at a Place de la République in Paris, France on Saturday, Nov. 14. French President Francois Hollande blamed Islamic State militants for coordinated strikes in Paris that left 127 dead

for companies over three years. Rebel Socialist lawmakers insist it is a mistake and that a more statist deregulated some over protected sectors. Stubbornly high unemployment makes it hard for

Despite the attacks by Islamist extremists that left 130 people dead in November, unemployment remains the priority for voters

approach is needed. They have lashed out at Emmanuel Macron, the reformist economy minister, who extended Sunday trading and

Mr Hollande to prove them wrong: the number of unemployed has swollen by 600,000 since April 2012, a month before he was elect-

ed, to 3.8m in November. The economy is plagued by a two-tier labour market in which employees holding permanent jobs enjoy some of the world's most generous benefits, while low-skilled workers struggle on hyper-flexible temporary contracts.

In Ham, a red-brick town of about 5,000 inhabitants in the northern Picardy region, optimism has evaporated. A century-old plant that produces industrial taps and valves had weathered the financial crisis, the eurozone's troubles and France's sluggish recovery. The company used about €1.4m tax credits from the government and last year

orders increased alongside profits.

Now, however, its US owner, Pentair, has said it will close the factory, lay off 120 workers and move production to the Netherlands, Italy and Taiwan. The closure will hit an already depressed region. Once a bastion of the left, it has seen disenchanted voters turn to the National Front.

Ms Le Pen attracted 41 per cent of the votes in Ham in the first round of voting in regional elections last month. The mainstream right came second, while the Socialist party attracted only 13 per cent in an area where Mr Hollande took two-thirds of second-round votes in the 2012 presidential poll.

A short distance from the Pentair factory, workers at Meca-Hydro, a family-owned parts factory, are also feeling the effect of its closure. Pentair generates a quarter of its revenues. Jean-Pierre Corne, the 55-year-old founder, says he will have to cut jobs after the Pentair decision.

Mr Corne, who started his business 32 years ago, describes the Hollande reforms as timid and ineffective. "It has deteriorated around here over the past three to four years," he says. "Hollande has only sprinkled measures here and there without much of an impact. Instead of announcing a series of incremental things, he should go for something more

radical."

It is a view echoed by economists who welcome Mr Hollande's plans to reform the country's sclerotic jobs market, simplify its labor laws and lift barriers in over-regulated sectors but question the limited scope of the measures.

"There is a wide consensus among economists that we need a more flexible permanent job contract, but it's still taboo for the left," says Gilles Moec, economist at Bank of America Merrill Lynch. "Macron keeps saying there is a problem of insiders holding on to their privileges. Well, just do it then."

Even this modest reformist drive has, over the past two years, provoked ructions, with Mr Hollande trying to appease rebellious Socialist party members to improve his re-election chances. With the FN lurking voters from both right and left, however, relying on a social democratic approach will not work, Mr Pech argues. Mr Hollande will have to make amends with his leftwing hardliners and avoid splits.

On Monday he revealed an "emergency" €2bn jobs package. Its flagship measure is the creation of 500,000 training schemes for the unemployed, a move that would conveniently take a few thousand people out of the official unemployment statistics this year.

He has vowed to keep pursuing structural reforms, including a much-awaited overhaul of the country's complex labor laws, without breaking any taboos; he has vowed not to touch the permanent job contract, the 35-hour week and the minimum wage.

France "should not align itself with models that, if they were applied here, would be rejected without yielding any benefits", Mr Hollande told business leaders and unions on Monday. "Between irresponsible liberalism and dead-end paralysis, there's a way."

In Ham, however, Raymond Dessaint, a 56-year-old Pentair worker who joined the factory when he was 17, says he will not vote for Mr Hollande again. "Everything he says is hot air. A lot of my comrades say they vote for the FN." Asked what he would do if the second round of the next presidential election features Ms Le Pen against Mr Hollande, he snaps: "I'm not voting for anyone."

Opposition: Splits over Sarkozy offer little comfort to president

If François Hollande was hoping to gain some momentum from the troubled state of the centre-right party he may be disappointed. Polls suggest that the Socialist leader stands a better chance of qualifying for the second round of the 2017 presidential race, and therefore securing another term, if Nicolas Sarkozy wins his partynomination in November primaries.

But with Les Républicains divided over Mr Sarkozy's strategy since he returned to politics two years ago, that scenario is looking less likely by the day. "Sarkozy's political comeback has failed," says Laurent Bouvet, a political sciences professor at the University of Versailles. "A

lot of rightwing bigwigs are letting him down. It's not a positive development for Hollande. Sarkozy is a golden candidate for him."

Mr Sarkozy has opted to tack further to the right to stem the flow of support to the anti-immigrant National Front, a strategy that helped him win the presidency in 2007. The shift has simply allowed Mr Hollande to extend his reach to the centre.

In local elections in December, the FN posted record scores, forcing centre-right candidates to rely on the backing of Socialist party voters to win regional councils (and thwart the FN) in the north and in the south east. Polls consistently show Mr Sar-

kozy and Mr Hollande neck and neck for the second place behind Marine Le Pen, the FN leader, in the first round of any presidential contest. A more centrist candidate on the right, such as Alain Juppé, the 70-year-old mayor of Bordeaux and Mr Sarkozy's main challenger in the primaries, would be a safer bet to qualify for the 2017 run-off.

To rekindle support, Mr Sarkozy is publishing a book on Monday, France for Life, in which he lays out "my mistakes as well as my successes" to "restore trust", he wrote on his Facebook page this week.

"Mission impossible? Perhaps. But at least I would have ... tried," he wrote.

By Lori Hinnant in Drancy

From Paris suburb to bloody attack, portrait of IS jihadis

EVEN under extended police questioning, Samy Amimour never hid his disdain for France, his desire to leave, or his belief that the apocalypse was near. But he told investigators he would not kill: “I am against the murder of innocents, no matter where they are.”

Three years later, Amimour returned from Syria, gunned down dozens of innocents at a rock show, and died inside the Bataclan with a suicide belt strapped to his body.

Court documents, transcripts of hours of investigator interviews, and phone and bank records seen by The Associated Press trace the path of Amimour and two of his closest friends from the Paris suburb of Drancy to Syria’s war zone.

Amimour and Charaffe El Mouadan, the trio’s charismatic leader who would take the nom de guerre Souleymane, would end up dead. The third, Samir Bouabou, is believed to be in Syria still.

Drancy is a short ride from Paris on one of the unreliable suburban trains that feed into the city. Ethnically mixed, solidly middle class, the town has a mix of single-family homes and unlovely but serviceable apartment complexes. Amimour grew up on the third floor of a small building; the tidy houses of his two friends are a short walk away.

A shared love of football drew them together as young adolescents, with Islam serving as the glue that held them in the same orbit over the years to come. By 2012, they were in their mid-20s, each living with his parents. El Mouadan told investigators joblessness suited him, by allowing him to perform his daily prayers.

“The time when I was working for a company I couldn’t practice my religion correctly. That’s why I want to leave and live in a Muslim country,” he said.

Amimour was the only one with steady work — after a stint as a mail sorter, and brief jobs at H&M and the Carrefour grocery chain, he was hired as a bus driver in 2011. His routes took him through the neighborhoods of his childhood, with of the stops just outside his apartment complex. By most measures, it was a good job. He hated it.

On Oct 5, 2012, Amimour handed in his resignation letter in person. Ten days later, after his arrest on charges of trying to join a foreign terrorist organization, a seemingly astonished officer asked him why he had quit his job.

“There are a lot of things in the job that don’t mesh with my personality,” he said. “I was often pushed to the



An investigator working outside the Bataclan concert hall, in Paris

edge by frequent aggressions and provocations by passengers. Physically also. Since I stopped I have far less back pain and I didn’t want to be destroyed by the age of 35.”

■ Ethnically mixed, solidly middle class, Drancy has a mix of single-family homes and unlovely but serviceable apartment complexes

But his resignation was prompted as well by plans he and his two friends had hatched to leave France. El Mouadan did most of the legwork, making inquiries about Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and making Facebook contact with ano-

ther French speaker who encouraged him to go to Mali.

It was El Mouadan who first signed up for a shooting class in early 2012 at a gun club with ties to the police. He told his friends to sign up as well, suggesting they first shave their beards in order to get the required doctor’s certificate. Both signed up for a class in April.

For reasons unexplained, El Mouadan and Amimour each took out loans of 20,000 euros (USD21,700) loans, parking the money in their accounts.

Traveling to North Africa in late spring of 2012, El Mouadan sent his new wife links to jihadi videos to watch while he was gone: “Once we get things clear and you’ve seen the videos and you understand everything, you will change how you think.” In May, he promised to take her to live in the mountains and “go to war.”

That summer, French investigators took notice of the three, carrying out surveillance operations that included posting officers at their homes and even snapping high definition photos of El Mouadan

at the Paris airport. In early October, the inquiry shifted to high gear, with increasingly frantic requests for GPS tracking, phone and bank records and, in the case of Amimour, work and vacation schedule.

They were arrested at dawn on Oct. 15, undergoing days of questioning in custody about their planned trip before they were finally released.

Amimour was unambiguous about France: “There is a sense of oppression toward the Muslim community, of stigmatization by the media, that weighs on everybody. For example at work you cannot do prayers at the moment they need to be done. If a woman wants to wear a veil, it’s a problem. If you want to grow a beard, that also. And then there is an environment that doesn’t conform to Islam. Which is normal in a non-Muslim country, but difficult to live for a Muslim.”

He talked about the apocalypse, which he said he sensed was near, echoing a central tenet of the Islamic State group that he would ultimately join, and he said he wanted to prepare by “becoming

more religious and protecting myself geographically. To distance myself from major cities and their evils.”

All three young men denied they meant any harm. All three left for Syria less than a year later.

Investigators have not publicly pinpointed when Amimour returned to France. His family apparently learned he had returned only after he was identified as one of the suicide attackers inside the Bataclan on Nov. 13, 2015.

Survivors of that terrifying night said two of the gunmen — one of them possibly Amimour — surveyed their bloody work and debated what to do next.

“Should we call Souleymane?” one asked, according to French media. “We will deal with this our own way,” came the response.

A total of 130 people died that night, most of them at the rock concert.

U.S. airstrikes killed El Mouadan on Dec. 24, the military said, describing him as an Islamic State leader with direct links to the Nov. 13 bloodshed who “was actively planning attacks against the West.” AP

After blizzard, snowed-in US East Coast prepares to dig out

By Seth Borenstein and Jennifer Peltz

MILLIONS of Americans were preparing to dig themselves out yesterday after a mammoth blizzard with hurricane-force winds and record-setting snowfall brought much of the U.S. East Coast to an icy standstill.

Travel bans barring non-emergency vehicles from the roads of New York City and Baltimore were expected to be lifted and mass transit systems that had been partially suspended during the storm were scheduled to run again.

But even as United Airlines said limited service might begin later in the afternoon in New York City, airports in the Washington D.C. area remained closed yesterday, and other airlines started to cut today's services in addition to the 7,000 already-canceled weekend flights.

The massive snowstorm brought both the nation's capital and its largest city to a stop, dumping as much as 90 centimeters of



Shovelers remove snow in front of the Municipal Service Building in Philadelphia

snow and stranding tens of thousands of travelers. At least 18 deaths were blamed on the weather, resulting from car crashes, shoveling snow and hypothermia.

The snow dropped 68.1 centimeters in Central Park, the second-most recorded since 1869. The snowfall narrowly missed tying the previous record of 68.3 centimeters set in February 2006. The snow finally stopped

falling in New York City around 10 p.m. Saturday night, though authorities insisted people stay indoors and off the streets as crews plowed deserted roads and police set up checkpoints to catch violators.

The storm dropped snow from the Gulf Coast to New England, with areas of Washington surpassing 76.2 centimeters. The heaviest unofficial report was in a rural area of West Virginia,

not far from Harpers Ferry, with 101.6 centimeter.

"This is kind of a Top 10 snowstorm," said weather service winter storm expert Paul Kocin, who co-wrote a two-volume textbook on blizzards.

The usually bustling New York City looked more like a ghost town. With Broadway shows dark, thin crowds shuffled through a different kind of Great White Way, the nickname for a section of the theater district. And Bruce Springsteen canceled yesterday's scheduled show at Madison Square Garden.

In Washington, monuments that would typically be busy with tourists stood vacant. All mass transit in the capital was shut down on the weekend.

Seventeen-year-old Alex Cruz, helping a neighbor shovel snow Saturday in Silver Spring, Maryland, couldn't help but notice the emptiness.

"It's like living out in the middle of Wyoming," he said.

Throughout the region, drivers skidded off snowy, icy roads in accidents that killed several people Friday and Saturday. Those killed included a 4-year-old boy in North Carolina; a Kentucky transportation worker who was plowing highways; and a woman whose car plunged down a 91-meter embankment in Tennessee. Three people died while

shoveling snow in Queens and Staten Island.

An Ohio teenager sledding behind an all-terrain vehicle was hit by a truck and killed, and two people died of hypothermia in southwest Virginia. In North Carolina, a man whose car had veered off an icy-covered road was arrested on charges of killing a motorist who stopped to help.

In Kentucky, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, drivers were marooned for hours in snow-choked highways.

Roofs collapsed on a historic theater in Virginia and a horse barn in Maryland, while seaside towns in New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland grappled with flooding.

The snow was whipped into a maelstrom by winds that reached 120 kph at Dewey Beach, Delaware, and Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, the weather service said. From Virginia to New York, sustained winds topped 48 kph and gusted to around 80 kph. And if that weren't enough, the storm also had bursts of thunder and lightning.

Stranded travelers included Defense Secretary Ash Carter, whose high-tech aircraft, the Domsday Plane, couldn't land at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland after returning from Europe. Carter was rerouted to Tampa, Florida. **AP**

ASK THE VET

by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



WARNING SIGNS OF DIABETES IN CATS

WE are currently picking up a lot of diabetic cats and dogs in Macau just by regular screening and looking for the typical signs. These warning signs of diabetes should be taken seriously, as diabetes is a complex condition that may lead to blindness if left untreated. Diabetes may manifest through a wide range of symptoms starting from increased urination and thirst to lethargy. Check with your veterinarian if you notice one or several of these diabetes symptoms.

EXCESSIVE THIRST

Excessive thirst is among the symptoms of diabetes. This is due to the fact that the cat cannot properly assimilate the glucose after meals and there will be a high level of glucose in the blood, so he will try to dilute the elevated concentration of glucose. Polydipsia is symptomatic for several other diseases including urinary tract infections or hyperthyroidism, so you should watch out for additional symptoms or get a clear diagnosis from your vet.

EXCESSIVE URINATION

Excessive urination or polyuria is symptomatic of felines with diabetes and may be due to:

- The increased level of glucose in the blood
- The fact that the cat consumes an in-

creased amount of liquids

You can monitor your cat and see if there are changes in the urination schedule. You can also watch the litter box and establish if your cat eliminates more urine. If tested, the urine will have an elevated level of glucose, as this cannot be stored in the cells of the body and is ultimately eliminated.

WEIGHT LOSS IN DIABETIC CATS

A cat with diabetes will lose weight, despite the fact that he may have an increased appetite. This is due to the fact that the body doesn't get the needed nutrients and starts using the glucose stored in the fat deposits and the muscles.

DIABETES AND INCREASED APPETITE

Increased appetite or polyphagia is due to the fact that the cat's body will not assimilate glucose properly and will feel the need to provide more energy for survival. The lack of nutrients in the blood will send a signal to the cat's brain and he will eat more. You may find your cat looking for food in addition to his meals.

CAT DRY MOUTH

Dry mouth is among the symptoms of diabetes in cats, but it may be more difficult to detect. However, the cat may drink more water also due to the fact that he feels his mouth is dry.



DIABETES AND A CAT'S LACK OF ENERGY

A cat with diabetes may be lethargic, as he doesn't have enough energy. The lack of energy results from the fact that the body cannot assimilate the glucose. Glucose is formed from the food consumed by the cat. When the cat has an insulin deficiency, the glucose cannot enter the cells.

DIAGNOSING DIABETES IN CATS

Diabetes can be diagnosed with a test of urine and some blood tests. Both the blood and the urine tests will reveal abnormal levels of glucose. The vet will examine the cat and establish if the symptoms are indicative of diabetes. Additional tests can be performed to establish if the condition has caused any damage in the cat's body.

In advanced stages, cataracts may occur.

Please contact your Vet for a checkup and full blood test if you see any of these symptoms starting

Hope this helps
Till next week
Dr Ruan

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