

### NY City police disband rough street unit

The New York Police Department is disbanding its aggressive anti-crime unit, a move aimed at turning alienated residents into crime-stopping allies, part of a nationwide push for policing reforms following the killing of George Floyd. In a major redeployment, the country's largest police force will reassign some 600 plainclothes officers in the anti-crime unit, the target of numerous complaints, to other duties, effective immediately, Commissioner Dermot Shea said on Monday. "Make no mistake, this is a seismic shift in the culture of how the NYPD polices this great city," Shea told a news briefing. "It will be felt immediately throughout the five district attorney's offices, it will be felt immediately in the communities that we protect." Floyd's, a black man, death has triggered national soul-searching over racial prejudice in American society and prompted calls for new ways of policing.

### Editors at VOA resign as Trump appointee arrives

The top two directors at Voice of America resigned on Monday, just as President Donald Trump's appointee began his role as chief executive of the parent organization of the US government-run international broadcaster. In a resignation letter to staff reported by VOA, Director Amanda Bennett and her top deputy, Sandra Sugawara, said the appointment of Michael Pack will not change anything about "your passion, your mission, your integrity." Trump accused VOA of amplifying Chinese propaganda after a segment on a light show marking the reopening of Wuhan, the city where the coronavirus pandemic first emerged. Pack is a close ally of conservative political activists including Steve Bannon, once a top aide to Trump and former executive chairman of the right-wing website Breitbart News.

### Trump seethes as FDA bans use of anti-malaria drug



The US Food and Drug Administration on Monday revoked its emergency use authorization for hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19, but quickly came under fire from President Donald Trump, who said only US agencies have failed to grasp its benefit in fighting the coronavirus. Based on new evidence, the FDA said it was no longer reasonable to believe that hydroxychloroquine and the related drug chloroquine may be effective in treating the illness caused by the novel coronavirus. The FDA also warned that the drugs have been shown in lab studies to interfere with Gilead Sciences Inc's antiviral drug remdesivir - the only medicine so far to show a benefit against COVID-19 in formal clinical trials.

SOURCE: REUTERS, AFP



Nathan Hale High School seniors join with others to protest against racial inequality in the aftermath of the death in Minneapolis police custody of George Floyd on their graduation day in Seattle, Washington, on Monday. Inset, A student holds a sign saying that Tamir Rice, killed by Cleveland Police in 2014, would have been a 2020 graduate with them. PHOTO: REUTERS

## North Korea blows up liaison office with South

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea blew up an office set up to foster better ties with South Korea in its border town of Kaesong yesterday after it threatened to take action if North Korean defectors went ahead with a campaign to send propaganda leaflets into the North.

North Korea's KCNA state news said the liaison office, which had been closed since January over fears of the novel coronavirus, was "tragically ruined with a terrific explosion".

South Korea also said the office had been blown up. Its media reported that an explosion was heard and smoke could be seen rising over Kaesong.

The office, when it was operating, served as an embassy for both of the old rivals and its destruction represents a major set-back for efforts by South Korea's President Moon Jae-in to coax the North into cooperation.

Tension has been rising over recent days with North Korea threatening to



cut ties with South Korea and retaliate over the propaganda leaflets, which carry messages critical of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, including on human rights.

KCNA said the office was blown up to force "human scum and those, who have sheltered the scum, to pay dearly for their crimes". North Korea refers to defectors as "human scum".

A South Korean military source told Reuters that there had been signs North Korea was going ahead with the demolition earlier in the day, and South Korean military officials watched live

surveillance imagery as the building was blown up.

The first diplomatic mission of its kind, the inter-Korean liaison office was established in 2018 as part of a series of projects aimed at reducing tensions between the two Koreas.

Earlier yesterday, North Korean state media quoted the military as saying it has been studying an "action plan" to re-enter zones that had been demilitarized under a 2018 inter-Korean pact and "turn the front line into a fortress".

South Korea's defence ministry called for North Korea to abide by the 2018 agreement, under which both sides' militaries vowed to cease "all hostile acts" and they dismantled a number of structures along the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone between the two countries.

South Korea's President Moon urged North Korea on Monday to keep peace agreements reached by the two leaders and return to dialogue.

## Opponents of security law are 'enemy of the people'

Says Hong Kong leader; N Korea backs China

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam yesterday urged opponents of Beijing's plan to impose national security legislation in the financial hub to stop "smearing" the effort, saying those who did were "the enemy of the people".

Beijing last month announced a plan to introduce legislation in Hong Kong to tackle secession, subversion, terrorism and foreign interference. The law could see Chinese security agencies set up bases in the city for the first time.

Critics see the law as the most serious threat to a "one country, two systems" formula, agreed when the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997 to protect its freedoms and role as a global financial centre.

The Chinese government and Lam's Beijing-backed city administration say the law will not curtail freedoms and will only target a small number of "troublemakers" and help bring stability after a year of anti-government protests.

The government has mounted a campaign to rally public support for the legislation, with billboards, a booklet with questions and answers and a video of Lam defending the law "in the public interest".

Meanwhile, Britain yesterday said that China's plan to impose national security legislation on Hong Kong would undermine the autonomy of its former colony and could threaten rights and freedoms there.

A diplomat from North Korea then took the floor to voice concern at "certain countries' attempt to use Hong Kong-related issues to interfere in China's domestic affairs". Hong Kong was "an inseparable part" where China's sovereignty is exercised and its constitution is applied, he said.

## UN slammed for taking Saudi coalition off blacklist

Israel, Myanmar also escape the 'list of shame'

AGENCIES

Campaigners have criticised the UN for removing the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen from a list of groups violating children's rights, adding that the coalition had been responsible for the death or injury of 222 children last year.

"The Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen will be delisted for the violation of killing and maiming, following a sustained significant decrease in killing and maiming due to air strikes," said the UN's newly-published annual report on children in conflict zones, adding that the death toll had fallen since an agreement signed in March 2019.

The report was issued as Houthi rebels reported that an airstrike from the Saudi-led coalition struck a vehicle carrying civilians in northern Yemen on Monday, killing 13 people, including four children.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) denounced Guterres for dropping the coalition from

the "list of shame," saying he was "ignoring the UN's own evidence of continued grave violations against children."

Inger Ashing of Save the Children called it a "shocking decision" by Guterres.

HRW and the Watchlist also criticised the secretary-general for leaving Israel off the blacklist despite it being responsible for 1,525 casualties among Palestinian children last year, including 29 deaths.

The report, which reviews several conflicts worldwide each year, said 4,019 children were verified as having been killed and more than 6,000 maimed in 2019. The numbers were similar to 2018, according to the UN.

The report also partially removed the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's armed forces, from the blacklist. They no longer appear for recruitment of children but remain on the list for sexual violence, killing, and maiming.

Save the Children described the move as "premature and dangerous".

### CHILD RIGHTS VIOLATIONS



Relatives of missing people take part in a protest outside the 26-A Military Camp, where Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador holds a news conference, in El Lencero, Veracruz state, Mexico, on Monday.

## Saudi faces perilous hajj call amid pandemic

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia is expected to scale back or call off this year's hajj pilgrimage for the first time in its modern history, observers say, a perilous decision as coronavirus cases spike.

Muslim nations are pressing Riyadh to give its much-delayed decision on whether the annual ritual will go ahead as scheduled in late July.

But as the kingdom negotiates a call fraught with political and economic risks in a tinderbox region, time is running out to organise logistics for one of the world's largest mass gatherings.

A full-scale hajj, which last year drew about 2.5 million pilgrims, appears increasingly unlikely after authorities advised Muslims in late March to defer preparations due to the fast-spreading disease.

A Saudi official told AFP: "The decision will soon be made and announced."

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, withdrew from the pilgrimage this month. Malaysia, Senegal and Singapore followed suit.

Many other countries with Muslim populations -- from Egypt and Morocco to Turkey, Lebanon and Bulgaria -- have said they are still awaiting Riyadh's decision. In countries like France, faith leaders have urged Muslims to "postpone" their pilgrimage plans until next year due to the prevailing risks.

But any decision to limit or cancel the event risks annoying Muslim hardliners for whom religion trumps health concerns. It could also trigger renewed scrutiny of the Saudi custodianship of Islam's holiest sites -- the kingdom's most powerful source of political legitimacy.

A decision to cancel the hajj would be a first since the kingdom was founded in 1932.

## More than 30 'active' alien civilisations in our galaxy!

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

There could be more than 30 alien civilisations in our galaxy, researchers have found in a major study.

A new paper looked to understand how many planets in our neighbourhood could be home to alien life, by assuming that life develops on other planets in a similar way to how it develops on Earth, and matching that to planets that could be home to similar evolution.

It found that there could be dozens of active civilisations waiting to be found in our Milky Way. But it could also shed light on our own fate, and suggest our prospects for long-term survival are lower than we may have thought.

"There should be at least a few dozen active civilisations in our Galaxy under the assumption that it takes 5 billion years for intelligent life to form on other planets, as on Earth," Christopher Conselice of the University of Nottingham said in a statement.

"The idea is looking at evolution, but on a cosmic scale. We call this calculation the Astrobiological Copernican Limit."

The Astrobiological Copernican limits come in two forms. One is the 'weak' limit, which suggests that intelligent life forms on a planet any time after 5 billion years. The other is the 'Strong' limit where life formed between 4.5 billion and 5 billion years ago.

## Worry more about climate, not COVID-19

Says James 'Gaia' Lovelock as he talks about humanity's existential threat

AFP, Paris

James Lovelock -- founder of the Gaia theory and, arguably, the field of Earth system science -- thinks the world has lost perspective in responding to the new coronavirus, and should focus on a far more formidable foe: global warming.

"My impression is that we have overreacted almost everywhere to the pandemic," he told AFP by phone from his home in southern England, where he has been in lockdown with his wife.

Lovelock, who will be 101 next month, has had the disconcerting habit in his 75-year career of being right about important things.

"Disconcerting" because his ideas have often been at odds with conventional wisdom, ahead of their time or, in the case of climate change, unbearably grim.

In the early 1960s, for example, when Nasa was determined to find life on Mars, Lovelock -- under contract at the Jet Propulsion Lab in California -- told his employers there almost certainly wasn't any, and then designed the experiment to prove it.

When he announced a decade later that Earth is best understood as a single, self-regulating superorganism, the notion was at first ridiculed by his peers.

By the 1990s, however, the complex interplay of all life forms with the water, air and rocks around them -- Earth's geo-bio-chemical balancing act -- was accepted as self-evident.



Lovelock -- who worked in the virus department of Britain's National Institute for Medical Research from the end of World War II to 1957 -- puts the global COVID-19 response into the context of earlier viral outbreaks.

"The flu pandemics were worse in terms of deaths, and no such reaction took place then," he said, adding that he barely recalled the 1957 Asian flu, which left more than a million dead worldwide. Another flu outbreak in 1968 was just as deadly. The new coronavirus has claimed more than 430,000 lives to date.

With his trademark flare for provocation, Lovelock said the pandemic could even be seen as beneficial, in a cruel Darwinian kind of way.

"It mainly kills off my age group -- the oldies -- and there are too many of us anyway," he said.

"At the same time, it is relatively harmless to the young."

The far bigger threat to humanity in the early 21st century is global warming, Lovelock insisted. "Climate change is more dangerous to life on Earth than almost any conceivable disease," he said. "If we don't do something about it, we will find ourselves removed from the planet."

With his 2006 book "The Revenge of Gaia" and its 2009 sequel "The Vanishing Face of Gaia", Lovelock became known as a prophet of climate doom, though he later walked back his most dire predictions, at least in terms of how quickly they might befall us.

But an uncharacteristic note of optimism has since crept into his analysis.

But if the glimmer of hope he offers will be welcomed by many climate activists who had written him off as a climate Cassandra, his solutions probably won't.

Even if humanity knows the causes of climate change, Lovelock doubts we can switch from dirty to clean energy quickly enough to avoid a scenario in which Earth itself -- via melting permafrost, the shrinking Arctic ice cap -- begin to drive global warming as well.

To buy time, he argues, we need to turn to technology.

"Many different ways to keep Earth cool have been suggested. One idea I find attractive is a sunshade in heliocentric orbit -- essentially a giant sun umbrella in space.