

Cop charged with murder for killing Rayshard Brooks

An Atlanta police officer was charged on Wednesday with murder for the shooting death last week of Rayshard Brooks in a fast-food parking lot, while a fellow officer facing lesser charges has agreed to testify against his colleague. The death of Brooks further heightened US social tensions at a time of national soul-searching over police brutality and racism in the criminal justice system. Brooks, a 27-year-old father-of-three, "never presented himself as a threat" and showed no aggressive behavior toward the two white officers involved in the confrontation last Friday, Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard told a news conference. Garrett Rolfe, the officer who shot Brooks and was dismissed the next day, was charged with 11 criminal counts, including felony murder, assault with a deadly weapon and violating his oath of office, Howard said.

India, Mexico, Norway, Ireland elected to UNSC

The UN General Assembly elected on Wednesday four new members of the Security Council for 2021 and 2022, with Canada losing out again. India, Mexico, Norway and Ireland were chosen as non-permanent members, while Djibouti and Kenya -- both of which failed to receive the two-thirds vote majority required to win -- will go to a second round of voting. In the Asia-Pacific region, India -- which has been trying unsuccessfully to win a permanent seat in an expanded Security Council -- ran unopposed to win 184 votes out of the 192 countries that participated in the election. The General Assembly also elected Turkish diplomat Volkan Bozkir as its president for the 2020-21 session on Wednesday.

Malaysia to send Rohingyas back out to sea: report



Malaysia is considering a plan to send nearly 300 Rohingya Muslim refugees detained after arriving on a damaged boat back out to sea once the ship has been fixed, two security sources, who declined to be identified, told Reuters yesterday. Muslim-majority Malaysia has been a favoured destination for ethnic Rohingya fleeing persecution in Myanmar and more recently, refugee camps in Bangladesh, in search of better prospects. But Malaysia has said it will no longer accept Rohingya refugees after tightening border controls to rein in the spread of the novel coronavirus. Malaysia had earlier asked Bangladesh to take back 269 Rohingya refugees, who were detained upon their arrival on June 8, but Bangladeshi officials had rejected the request.

SOURCE: REUTERS, AFP,

Optimism fades in South Asia

Region reels from virus surge as lockdowns lifted; experts warn worst yet to come

AFP, Islamabad

Early optimism that South Asia might have dodged the worst ravages of the coronavirus pandemic has disappeared as soaring infection rates turn the densely populated region into a global hot spot.

After several months trailing the US and western Europe, cases of COVID-19 are surging across South Asia -- home to almost a quarter of the world's population -- where the virus is wreaking havoc on fragile medical systems and underfunded health agencies are pushed to breaking point.

Overflowing hospitals from Kabul to Dhaka are turning away suspected virus patients, mortuaries are being overwhelmed as cemeteries and crematoria struggle to cope, and desperate families are searching for help for critically ill loved ones.

"The situation is catastrophic," Abdur Rob, a senior doctor at Bangladesh's Chittagong General Hospital, told AFP. "Patients are dying in the ambulances on the roads as they shunt between hospitals looking for (intensive care) beds or hospital admission."

Archie Clements, the vice-chancellor of the health sciences faculty at Curtin University in Western Australia, said the situation would likely worsen.

The growth curve "is still in an exponential phase", Clements said.



"We could be heading towards a larger number of deaths in the weeks ahead."

Devastating scenarios are playing out as cash-strapped governments choose between enforcing lockdowns or watching low-income families slide deeper into poverty, often with no safety nets to catch them.

India is the fourth worst-hit country in the world with more than 354,000 confirmed cases -- though limited testing means the true number is likely much higher. The number of fatalities leapt by more than 2,000 to top 11,900 on Wednesday after Mumbai and New Delhi updated their figures.

India won plaudits in late March for imposing one of the world's strictest lockdowns. But millions of migrant

workers were left jobless and, unable to get home, sometimes held in crowded facilities that increased the risk of transmission. As the government steadily lifts restrictions, cases have surged.

In neighbouring Pakistan, which has recorded more than 160,000 cases and over 3,000 deaths, Prime Minister Imran Khan resisted a nationwide lockdown, saying the country could ill afford it.

Authorities have warned that Pakistan would likely see more than one million cases by July, and the World Health Organization has called for new lockdowns, a measure Khan rejected.

Last week, burial figures released by nine state-run graveyards in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, as well as dozens of small graveyards in a

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

WHO hopes hundreds of millions of vaccine doses this year, 2 billion next year

China restricts travel as 21 new cases reported in past 24hrs

Brazil cases nears 1m as cases soar in Latin America

neighbouring city, showed at least 1,600 additional deaths in April and May, a top Bengali news site reported.

Yet health ministry data show only 450 people died from COVID-19 in the two cities during the period.

Similar anecdotes are emerging in conflict-battered Afghanistan, which has only acknowledged more than 26,000 cases and 500 deaths -- seemingly impossibly low numbers for a country that failed to enforce lockdowns.

Meanwhile, travel restrictions were placed on nearly half a million people near Beijing yesterday as authorities rushed to contain a fresh outbreak of the coronavirus. The surging infections in China have raised fresh doubts about how soon the world can control the pandemic, which has seen more than 8.3 million cases and nearly 450,000 deaths.

Brazil recorded 1,269 additional Covid-19 deaths on Wednesday, bringing its official death toll from the novel coronavirus to 46,510, the most in the world outside the United States.

As cases spiral across the world, World Health Organization raises hope for virus vaccine. WHO hopes hundreds of millions of doses of coronavirus vaccine can be produced this year and 2 billion doses by the end of 2021, chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan said yesterday.

NEWSIN brief

Mortar blast at Afghan religious school kills 9

AFP, Kunduz

A mortar bomb blast inside a religious school in northern Afghanistan yesterday killed at least nine students, police said. "As per initial investigation, the explosion was caused by a mortar that had somehow been carried inside the madrasa," police sources told AFP, adding many of the dead were aged under 18. Six students were wounded in the explosion in the Ishkamish district of Takhar province.

Iran navy test-fires new cruise missiles

AFP, Tehran

Iran test-fired a "new generation" of cruise missiles yesterday, the navy said, in the first such military exercises since 19 sailors were killed last month in a friendly fire incident. The armed forces' website published pictures of the drill in the Gulf of Oman showing missiles being fired from a warship and the back of a truck, and a vessel exploding out at sea. A statement said both short- and long-range missiles were test-fired. They "destroyed the designated targets 280 kilometres away, and their range can be increased even further," said the statement.

Rockets hit Baghdad's Green Zone

AFP, Baghdad

Rockets hit Baghdad's Green Zone, home to the US embassy, yesterday, the fifth such attack in 10 days, security sources inside the high-security district told AFP. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage. Like previous attacks, there was no claim of responsibility. Since October, when US killed Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, at least 32 attacks have targeted American interests in Iraq that the US has blamed on Iran-backed factions among Iraq's security forces.

Over one percent of humanity displaced: UN

AFP, Geneva

More than one percent of the world's population - a record 80 million people - have now been forced to flee their homes due to violence and persecution, the UN said yesterday.

By the end of 2019, one out of every 97 people in the world was living uprooted and displaced, according to a fresh report by the United Nations refugee agency, highlighting swelling displacement from conflicts in places like Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"One percent of the world population cannot go back to their homes because there are wars, persecution, human rights violations, and other forms of violence," UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi told AFP in an interview.

The UNHCR agency found that by the end of last year, a record 79.5 million people were living either as refugees, asylum seekers or in so-called internal displacement within their own countries, marking a dramatic increase of nearly nine million from a year earlier.

"This is a trend that has been going on since 2012: the figures are higher than the year before," Grandi said, pointing out that this meant "there has been more conflict, there has been more violence that has pushed people away from their homes."



Grandi noted that 10 years ago, the number of people living in displacement around the globe stood at around 40 million. "So it has basically doubled. And we don't see this trend diminishing," he said.

Thursday's report showed that at the end of 2019, nearly 46 million of those displaced remained inside their own country, while 26 million had fled across borders as refugees. Another 4.2 million people were asylum seekers.

Grandi said a full 68 percent of the world's refugees come from just five countries: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar.

Coronavirus spreads much faster at home

AFP, Paris

The novel coronavirus is twice as infectious within households than similar diseases such as SARS, with a substantial number of additional infections spreading before a COVID-19 sufferer shows any symptoms, according to modelling released yesterday.

Researchers based in China and the United States said their findings could have profound impacts on reducing the number of new infections as the pandemic progresses.

Using data on 350 COVID-19 patients and nearly 2,000 of their close contacts in the city of Guangzhou, China, the researchers estimated the virus' "secondary attack rate" -- that is, the probability that an infected person transmits the disease to someone else.

They found that while the average patient had just a 2.4 percent chance of infecting someone they did not live with, that figure jumped to 17.1 percent -- around one in six -- among cohabitants.

According to their models, which rely on data collated in January and February but have been updated to reflect the latest developments, the likelihood of household infection was highest among over-60s, and lowest among under-20s.

The overall chances of infecting a family member or live-in partner with COVID-19 are twice as high as with SARS, and three times higher than MERS, another coronavirus, they found.

Significantly, the researchers found that the probability of a COVID-19 carrier infecting a family member or flatmate was significantly higher -- 39 percent -- before they started showing symptoms than afterwards.

Trump unfit for office

Says Bolton as his memoir alleges the US president sought China's help for re-election; Trump calls his firmer adviser 'liar' and a 'dope'

REUTERS, Washington

Donald Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton said the US president is unfit for office, according to interview excerpts released yesterday after portions of the top aide's upcoming book revealed a withering portrayal of his ex-boss.

"I don't think he's fit for office," Bolton told ABC News in an interview. "I don't think he has the competence to carry out the job."

The longtime foreign policy hawk, who left the White House in September, accused the president of sweeping misdeeds in order to seek re-election, including explicitly seeking Chinese President Xi Jinping's help, according to portions of his behind-the-scenes account.

Trump also expressed a willingness to halt criminal investigations to favor dictators he liked, Bolton said in excerpts published in several major newspapers on Wednesday that allege far more extensive accusations of impropriety than those that drove Trump's impeachment.



Trump hit back at Bolton, calling him "a liar" in an interview with the Wall Street Journal. The paper also published excerpts Wednesday of the book, titled "The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir," as did the Washington Post.

Together, the excerpts portray a US president mocked by his top advisers who exposed himself to far more extensive accusations of impropriety than those that drove the Democratic-led House of Representatives to impeach Trump last year.

The Republican-led Senate acquitted Trump in early February. Trump was accused of withholding US military aid last year to put pressure

on newly-elected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to provide damaging information on Democratic political opponent Joe Biden.

"Had Democratic impeachment advocates not been so obsessed with their Ukraine blitzkrieg in 2019, had they taken the time to inquire more systematically about Trump's behavior across his entire foreign policy, the impeachment outcome might well have been different," Bolton wrote.

The US Justice Department has sued to block Bolton from publishing the book, citing risks to national security.

According to the book, Trump told China's Xi in June 2019 to go ahead and build camps for its mostly Muslim Uighur minority and other Muslim groups despite the Trump administration's criticism of China's mass detention.

Bolton also wrote that Trump said invading Venezuela would be "cool" even as the US government has said it does not favor using force to topple Venezuela's socialist President Nicolas Maduro.



Army officers salute to pay tribute to Sunil Kumar, an Indian soldier who was killed in a border clash with Chinese troops in Ladakh region, before his cremation in Maner, Bihar, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



A Palestinian boy argues with Israeli border police members over the removal of an animal shed belonging to Palestinians, near Hebron in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Four killed in Indian shelling in POK

AFP, Islamabad

Four people have been killed in a shelling by the Indian army along the de facto India-Pakistan border in Kashmir, the Pakistan military and local officials has said.

Major General Babar Iftikhar said on Twitter that the Indian military had violated a ceasefire in the disputed region, killing four "innocent civilians" and wounding one more in the southern part of Pakistan-administered Kashmir. "Pak Army troops responded effectively to Indian firing," Iftikhar said, without elaborating.

Local officials told AFP the deaths had been caused by artillery shells landing in two neighbouring villages.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir. Tensions increased between the nuclear-armed neighbours after India revoked Kashmir's autonomy on August 5 last year and imposed movement and communications restrictions to quell unrest.

A new spat erupted this week after New Delhi accused Islamabad of torturing two Indian diplomats who had been arrested in an alleged hit-and-run in the Pakistani capital. Islamabad rejected the claims. The fracas comes after New Delhi expelled two officials from Pakistan's high commission on June 1 for alleged "espionage activities" -- claims Islamabad has also rejected.

TERRITORIAL DISPUTE WITH INDIA

Nepal okays new map

REUTERS, Kathmandu

The upper house of Nepal's parliament yesterday approved a new map of the country including land controlled by India, in a row that has strained ties between the South Asian neighbours.

India, which controls the region -- a slice of land including the Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani areas to the west of Nepal -- has rejected the map, saying it was not based on historical facts or evidence.

Members in the 59-seat National Assembly, or upper house, voted 57-0 in favour of a constitutional amendment bill seeking to replace the old map, chairman of the house Ganesh Prasad Timilsina said. The bill was passed by the lower house over the weekend.

The new map requires President Bidhya Devi Bhandari's approval.

The row over the map began last month after India inaugurated an 80-km (50-mile) road from the northern state of Uttarakhand to Lipulekh on the border with the Tibet region of China, about 19 km of which passes through the area Nepal says belongs to it. The road cuts the travel time and distance from India to Tibet's Mansarovar lake, considered holy by Hindus.

Nepal says the land belongs to it as a river in the region formed its western border with India under an 1816 treaty with the British East India Company. Nepal, which was never a part of British India, and New Delhi differ over where the river originates.

The disputed land, about 372 square km (144 square miles) in area, is strategically located at the tri-junction between Nepal, India and the Tibet region of China. India has kept a security presence in the area since a border war with China in 1962.

