

## NZ MOSQUE MASSACRE

# TALES OF HEROISM, TRAGEDY EMERGE

New Zealanders flocked to memorial sites to lay flowers and mourned the victims of the twin mosque massacres yesterday, as testimony emerged of epic heroism and harrowing suffering in the gun attack that has claimed 50 lives.

**HERO REFUGEE CHASED GUNMAN AWAY**

When Afghan refugee Abdul Aziz saw a man brandishing a gun outside his mosque in Christchurch, he ran towards the attacker armed with the only weapon he could find -- a hand-held credit card machine.

"You don't have much time to think, whatever you think of, you just do it, you know," Aziz told AFP, brushing off the "hero" tag as local Muslims gathered to thank him for saving relatives and friends.

Initially thinking someone was setting off firecrackers, Aziz became suspicious and ran out of the mosque, grabbing a small credit card processing device. Outside, he was stunned to find an armed man wearing military-style fatigues.

Aziz hurled the machine at Tarrant and then ducked between cars as the self-confessed fascist unleashed a barrage of shots at him.

Unhurt, he picked up an empty shotgun the gunman had discarded and shouted "come on here" repeatedly in an effort to draw him away from his sons and the other worshippers.

"When he see the gun in my hands, I don't know what happened, he dropped the gun and I chased him with my own gun."

**BOOKSHELF SAVED ME**

As the bullets tore into worshippers during Friday prayers, taxi driver Abdul Kadir Ababora threw himself to the floor and wedged himself under a bookshelf used to hold the Qurans, praying he would see his wife and kids again.

Like so many who attended weekly prayers at Christchurch's Al Noor mosque, Ababora had come to New Zealand from Ethiopia in 2010 hoping to find peace and prosperity.

Ababora said the mosque's imam had just started delivering the English translation of the khutbah -- the sermon during Friday prayers -- when the gunfire erupted outside.



Ababora said he instinctively fell to the ground and managed to squeeze himself against a bookshelf that held the Qurans worshippers used during prayers. Crucially, it made his body a slightly smaller target.

"I just pretended as if I am dead," he said.

Ababora said he was sickened at how methodical the killer was, firing round after round into the crumpled pile of bodies in a well-planned attack he later learned was broadcast on Facebook.

**PAK TO AWARD 'COURAGE' OF CITIZEN**

A Pakistani victim of the Christchurch attack who apparently tried to tackle the gunman before being shot dead will be awarded posthumously in his home country for his courage, Prime Minister Imran Khan said yesterday.

Video of the massacre shows one man gunned down as he approaches the shooter, while others flee.

The man is believed to be Naeem Rashid, although his face is blurred in the footage and he has yet to be formally identified.

"Pakistan is proud of Mian Naeem Rashid who was martyred trying to tackle the White Supremacist terrorist & his courage will be recognised with a national award," Khan tweeted yesterday.

Pakistan has several awards to recognise civilian bravery, and Khan did not specify which one would be awarded to Rashid, whose son also died in the massacre.

Rashid's elder brother Khurshid Alam told AFP in the northwestern Pakistani city of Abbottabad that the award "means a lot" to his family.

SOURCE: AFP



(From top left, clockwise) Residents pay their respects by placing flowers for the victims of the mosques attacks in Christchurch at the Masjid Umar mosque in Auckland; a service is held at a church for the victims; people gather hoping to find out information on a missing person; a get-well note is seen on a window of a door at the family home of a victim; and Sydney Opera House seen lit in a show of solidarity with victims. All photos are taken yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

## 'FB has blood on its hands'

### Global condemnation grows after terror attack livestreamed on social media platforms

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern yesterday said she would be looking for answers from Facebook and other social media firms about how an attack that killed 50 mosque-goers was livestreamed on their platforms.

Saying there were "further questions to be answered" by the tech giants, Ardern said Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg had been in contact and "acknowledged what has occurred here in New Zealand".

A horrific video shot by the gunmen who carried out the mosque massacre was livestreamed on Facebook before being removed by the company.

But the stream, lasting 17 minutes, was shared repeatedly on YouTube and Twitter, and internet platforms were scrambling to remove videos being reposted of the gruesome scenes.

"We did as much as we could to remove, or seek to have removed, some of the footage that was being circulated in the aftermath of this terrorist attack," Ardern said.

"But ultimately it has been up to those platforms to facilitate their removal."

"I do think that there are further questions to be

**"But I sadly have to say the capacity to actually assist fully is very limited on the technology side": Aussie PM**

answered."

In a statement yesterday, Mia Garlick of Facebook New Zealand vowed to "work around the clock to remove violating content".

"In the first 24 hours we removed 1.5 million videos of the attack globally, of which over 1.2 million were blocked at upload," the company said.

Mary Anne Franks, a professor of law at the University of Miami, said there is "simply no responsible way to moderate a true live streaming service."

Facebook has always known the service has the potential to "encourage and amplify the worst of humanity, and it must confront the fact that it has blood on its hands," she said.

Ardern was joined by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison in expressing doubts that current rules go far enough.

Morrison said that social media companies had "co-operated" since the attack.

"But I sadly have to say that the capacity to actually assist fully is very limited on the technology side."

He said "assurances were given" that once such content was pulled down, a regime would make sure it did not go back up. "Clearly it hasn't (happened)."

## Shooter's family 'shattered' by his deeds

AFP, Sydney

The family of the Australian man arrested for the slaughter of 50 Muslim worshippers in New Zealand said yesterday they were stunned and "shattered" by his horrific deed.

"We're all gob-smacked, we don't know what to think," Brenton Tarrant's grandmother, Marie Fitzgerald, told Australia's Channel Nine network.

"It's just so much... to take in that somebody in our family could do anything like this," Fitzgerald said from her home in New South Wales state.

Tarrant grew up in the small town of Grafton and showed no signs he would later become enthralled with white nationalist ideology while travelling in Europe and then turn that hatred into violence.

"It's only since he travelled overseas I think that the boy has changed, completely," she said, adding that as a teen, Tarrant was interested mainly in computer games.

Tarrant's uncle, Terry Fitzgerald, said they learned of his role in the massacre at two mosques in Christchurch from the television.

## NZ's Ardern burnishes leadership

REUTERS, Wellington

The calm and compassion shown by New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in response to the killing of 50 Muslims by a suspected white supremacist has burnished the credentials of a leader whose youth and celebrity had given critics' doubts.

In the hours after the carnage in Christchurch on Friday left New Zealanders reeling, the 38-year-old Ardern struck all the right notes.

She promptly labelled the worst peacetime mass killing in New Zealand as terrorism, and set about reassuring a nation that has been largely unscathed by the violence and fears that have afflicted other countries in the past two decades.

A day after the attack, Ardern led a multi-party group to visit grieving families and Muslim community members.

Wearing a black head



scarf, she hugged relatives and let them set the pace and agenda as she listened and offered comfort.

"The prime minister, when she came wearing her scarf, that was big for us," said Dalia Mohamed, who was mourning Hussein Mustafa, the father-in-law of her daughter and a volunteer at the Al Noor mosque where more than 40 people died.

Ardern also promptly made tightening gun laws, which may prove politically difficult, a priority for her government.

"Ardern's performance has been extraordinary - and I believe she will be strongly lauded for it both domestically and internationally," said political commentator Bryce Edwards of Victoria University in Wellington.

## UK govt warns it might not hold vote this week

AFP, London

British leader Theresa May's government warned yesterday it might not hold a planned Brexit vote this week unless it feels it can secure a win that avoids a lengthy delay to pulling out of the EU.

London has been paralysed by political inaction and chaos as it barrels toward the March 29 end of its 46-year involvement in the bloc without a plan.

Parliament has twice resoundingly rejected the separation terms May reached with the other 27 EU leaders last year.

She doggedly vowed to bring them back by Wednesday for a third vote that -- if it succeeds -- would see her ask the EU for a "technical" Brexit delay until June.

But May warned yesterday that another defeat would almost certainly require a delay so long that Britain would have to take part in European Parliament elections in May.

This would mean "we will not leave the EU for many months, if ever," May wrote in

The Sunday Telegraph.

Two of her top ministers then warned that May might not even submit her deal for a third vote unless she secures sufficient support from her own party members who had previously voted against it.

"It would be difficult to justify having a vote if you knew you were going to lose it," International Trade Secretary Liam Fox told Sky News.

"We will only bring the deal back if we are confident that enough of our colleagues... are prepared to support it so that we can get it through parliament," finance minister Philip Hammond said on the BBC.

"I mean we are not just going to keep presenting it if we haven't moved the dial," Hammond said.

Some European ministers have suggested postponing Brexit until the end of 2020.

A delay that long could give Britain time to decide to either keep much closer EU ties or even have Brexit reversed in a new national poll -- two options welcomed by a range of European officials.

### BREXIT IMPASSE



## Little to bury

### Ethiopians hold funeral for plane crash victims

AFP, Addis Ababa

Ethiopians were yesterday holding funerals for friends and relatives who perished in last week's Ethiopian Airlines crash, which killed all onboard and saw the worldwide grounding of the Boeing aircraft involved.

Families in 35 nations were left bereaved when the Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft plummeted from the sky just minutes into its flight to Nairobi last Sunday, killing all 157 passengers and crew on board.

One week after the crash, relatives of the 17 Ethiopian victims gathered with hundreds of others at Holy Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa, sobbing and holding portraits of their loved ones as an Ethiopian Orthodox priest said the last rites.

"What I can't forget is that she left an eight-month-old child and didn't come back," said Meselech Petros, whose sister Amma Tesfamariam was a flight attendant on the doomed aircraft. Caskets draped in the Ethiopian flag were brought to the cathedral in a convoy of black hearses accompanied by hundreds of mourners. But it was not clear what the coffins contained.

On Thursday, as grieving families and friends visited the area where the plane went down, an AFP correspondent saw them being handed plastic water bottles filled with earth from the site. Ethiopia's government has said it may take up to six months to identify the remains.

## Over 60,000 people fled

### Says SDF as offensive on last IS holdout in Syria intensifies; 100 jihadists, families surrender

REUTERS, Baghouz

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said yesterday over 60,000 people, mostly civilians, had flooded out of Islamic State's last enclave in eastern Syria since a final assault to capture it began over two months ago.

SDF spokesman Kino Gabriel told journalists that 29,600 people, the majority of whom were families of fighters of the militant group, had surrendered since the US-backed forces led by the Kurdish YPG laid siege to the town of Baghouz and its hinterland on the Euphrates River.

Among them were 5,000 militants, the SDF said.

Another 34,000 civilians were evacuated from Baghouz, the last shred of territory held by the jihadists who have been driven

from roughly one third of Iraq and Syria over the past four years, Gabriel said.

Former residents from the region say many of the civilians who came out of the Baghouz area in recent weeks were Iraqi Sunnis with close tribal ties on the other side of the border in Deir al-Zor, a Sunni heartland.

They sought sanctuary in Syria for fear of revenge attacks by the Iraqi Hashd al Shaabi, the Iranian-backed Shia militias in Iraq who swept through their areas when the militants

lost control.

Another SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali told Reuters only around a hundred militants and their families had surrendered overnight in the remaining spot where headline insurgents have been mounting a desperate last-stand defence.



## Flash floods kill 58 in Indonesia

AFP, Sentani

Flash floods in Indonesia's eastern Papua province have killed at least 58 people, an official said yesterday, as rescuers battled mud, rocks and fallen trees in the hunt for survivors.

The death toll was expected to rise as emergency services struggled to reach people in hard-hit areas, with more than 70 people injured and 4,150 evacuated.

The floods -- triggered by torrential rain and landslides on Saturday -- damaged numerous homes in the northeastern town of Sentani, said national disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho.

"The number of casualties and impact of the disaster will likely increase as search and rescue teams are still trying to reach other affected areas," he said.

The waters had receded but officials were still trying to evacuate people from areas obstructed by "fallen trees, rocks, mud and other material", Nugroho added.

In Doyo, one of the most affected areas, a housing complex was littered with huge rocks believed to have rolled down from a nearby mountain, an AFP reporter at the scene said.

Sediment and waste swept by the floods piled up on the pavement.

The non-stop wail of ambulance sirens could be heard, as heavy equipment was used to clear the roads.

The government has announced a 14-day state of emergency, said Jayapura police chief Victor Dean Mackbon.

## NEWSIN brief

### Four killed in train blast in Pakistan

REUTERS, Quetta

Four people were killed and 10 injured in Pakistan yesterday when a bomb went off on a train track in the resource-rich province of Baluchistan, where separatist rebels have been fighting the security forces for years. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

### Taliban captures 50 Afghan border police

REUTERS, Kabul

At least 50 members of the Afghan security forces have surrendered to the Taliban in a fight for control of Afghanistan's western province of Badghis, local officials said. "These soldiers have been fighting against the Taliban for years," a provincial official said.

### Philippines out of ICC amid drug war inquiry

AFP, Manila

The Philippines was officially out of the International Criminal Court yesterday, though the beleaguered tribunal has pledged to pursue its examination of alleged illegal killings in the government's drug war. Under court rules, Manila's withdrawal took force a year after it told the United Nations that it was quitting the tribunal.

### BITS OF HISTORY (MARCH 17)

**1948:** Britain, France and the Benelux countries signed the Brussels Treaty providing for military cooperation in case of attack.

**1963:** Mount Agung volcano on the island of Bali erupted, killing at least 11,000 people.

**2003:** In a 13-minute White House speech President George W. Bush ordered Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq with his sons by 4:15 am (0115 GMT) on March 20 or face the might of the US military.