

‘Modern-day lynching’ must stop  
Floyd’s brother tells US Congress

REUTERS, Washington

George Floyd’s younger brother took his grief to the US Congress on Wednesday with an impassioned plea that lawmakers not let his brother’s death be in vain, lamenting that he “didn’t deserve to die over \$20” in a what he called a lynching.

The House of Representatives Judiciary Committee held the first congressional hearing to examine racial injustice and police brutality following George Floyd’s May 25 death after a Minneapolis policeman knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

“They lynched my brother. That was a modern-day lynching in broad daylight,” Philonise Floyd, 42, of Missouri City, Texas, near Houston, told the committee, his voice breaking with emotion.

The Democratic-led House is moving forward with sweeping reform legislation that could come to a vote by July 4, while Senate Republicans are crafting a rival plan.

George Floyd, 46, was unarmed when taken into custody outside a market where an employee had reported that a man matching his description tried to pay for cigarettes with a counterfeit bill.

“George wasn’t hurting anyone that day. He didn’t deserve to die over \$20. I’m asking you, is that what a black man’s worth? \$20? This is 2020. Enough is enough,” his brother said. “It is on you to make sure his death is not in vain.”

“I’m here to ask you to make it stop. Stop the pain,” Philonise Floyd testified. “George called for help and he was ignored. Please listen to the call I’m making to you now, to the calls of our family and the calls ringing on the streets of all the world.”



The statue of Edward Colston, a colonial-era slave trader, being retrieved from the harbour in Bristol, southwest England yesterday after it was toppled by anti-racism protesters last weekend; a beheaded statue of Christopher Columbus is seen in Boston, Massachusetts; and a statue of Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of the Scout movement and who supported slavery, is pictured on the promenade in Bournemouth, southern England, yesterday, after the council said it would remove the statue.



PHOTO: AFP

They have ‘blood on their hands’

Colonizers’, slavers’ statues toppled, vandalised in US, UK amid anti-racism protests

AGENCIES

Statues of Christopher Columbus from Boston to Miami have been beheaded and vandalized as calls to remove sculptures commemorating colonizers and slavers sweep America on the back of anti-racism protests sparked by the death of George Floyd.

Italian explorer Columbus, long hailed by school textbooks as the so-called discoverer of “The New World,” is considered by many to have spurred years of genocide against indigenous groups.

A statue of the navigator standing on a prominent plinth in central Boston was beheaded overnight, police said Wednesday.

Almost 2,400 kilometers away in Florida, another memorial at a waterfront park in downtown Miami was defaced, with red paint sprayed on its hands alongside messages that read “Our streets,” “Black Lives Matter” and “George Floyd.”

“That man literally has blood on his hands. Us putting the fist on his chest and the blood on his hands is symbolic,” one protester told the Miami Herald.

And in Minnesota -- where Floyd died in police custody on May 25 -- protesters on Wednesday tied ropes around the neck of a Columbus statue outside the state Capitol and hauled it down to cheers and applause, images from CBS affiliate WCCO showed.

Earlier in the week in Virginia, demonstrators used ropes to pull down the eight-foot (2.44-meter) statue

Columbus statues vandalized from Boston to Miami

Statue of scout founder Baden-Powell to be taken down in Britain

Trump nixes idea of renaming US bases honoring Confederate heroes

Australian PM calls for racism protesters to be charged



and then dumped it in a nearby lake, the Richmond Times-Dispatch said.

The wave of attacks comes as pressure builds in the United States to rid the country of monuments associated with racism following massive demonstrations over the killing of Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis last month.

Statues of Columbus -- regularly denounced in a similar way to Civil War generals of the pro-slavery south -- have been controversial for years in parts of the US, and many have been vandalized in the past.

A jogger running past the fallen Boston statue Wednesday said she approved of the decapitation.

“Just like black people in this country, indigenous people have also been wronged. I think this movement

is pretty powerful and this is very symbolic,” she said.

Dozens of American cities have over the years replaced “Columbus Day” in October -- which became a federal holiday in 1937 -- with a day of tribute to indigenous peoples.

The attacks on Columbus and Confederate memorials follow a similar incident in Bristol, England, on Sunday when demonstrators toppled a statue of a 17th Century slave trader Edward Colston and dumped it in a harbor during anti-racism protests.

Yesterday, a local authority in southern England said it would remove a statue of Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the worldwide scouting movement.

Baden-Powell is widely hailed for setting up the scout movement which boasts 54 million members worldwide. In a poll in 2007, he was voted the 13th most influential person in the United Kingdom in the 20th century. But critics say he held racist views and was a supporter of Adolf Hitler and fascism.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said Wednesday that US military bases honoring Civil War Confederate leaders will not be renamed, pushing back on pressure to rid public places of monuments glorifying the once pro-slavery South.

Ten bases honoring generals from the secessionist South, which lost the Civil War and its struggle to preserve slavery, are in the spotlight.

UN General Assembly will be virtual for the first time

This year’s UN General Assembly will be held virtually for the first time in history because of the coronavirus pandemic, its president announced Wednesday. The meeting is still scheduled for September 22-29 but will be carried out with previously recorded speeches by world leaders. Member states must send the UN an embargoed speech of up to 15 minutes by their president, prime minister, or UN ambassador at least five days before the assembly. And a diplomat from each mission can attend a real life session during which the speeches will be broadcast or read aloud from the podium of the UN assembly hall.

Mask that can kill germs!

A team of scientists at India’s School of Biomedical Engineering under the Indian Institute of Technology in Varanasi has developed an anti-microbial five-layered face mask that it claims can kill pathogenic microorganisms. Traditional masks acts only as a filter to stop the entry of microbes to oral and nasal airways but does not have any effect on the microbe which get stuck to the mask surface. But the Indian team came up with a solution. The first layer of the mask can degrade any type of Ribonucleic acid (RNA), the next layer is anti-microbial, the third one is for air filtration and the fourth and fifth layers are ‘comfortable layers’ which will remain close to the nose and mouth, a lead scientist of the project said. The mask has hydrophobic surface on the outer layer to deflect water droplets containing the viruses, he added.

Scientists unlock secret to the perfect cuddle



In this era of social distancing and depressing news, we could all do with a good hug. Now scientists have analysed what makes the perfect cuddle -- just don’t squeeze too tight. A team from Japan’s Toho University measured the calming effect on infants of hugs of different pressures, and when given by strangers compared to from parents. According to the results, published in the journal Cell, babies were soothed more by a medium-pressure hug than just being held but the calming effect decreased during a “tight” hug. The researchers kept the length of the hug to 20 seconds. Unsurprisingly perhaps, for infants older than 125 days, the calming effect was greater when receiving a hug from a parent than from a female stranger. So, the perfect hug is considered to be medium pressure from a parent, the scientists believe.

SOURCE: AFP, STAR REPORT



Nepalese youths brave the water cannon during a protest near the prime minister’s official residence, demanding better and effective response from the government to fight the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak as the number of infections spikes, in Kathmandu, Nepal, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

‘Don’t call me Kalar’  
BLM-inspired message reaches Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar activists inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement have launched their own anti-racism campaign in a country where many Muslims and people of Indian heritage are made to feel like outsiders.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar officially boasts a patchwork of 135 ethnic groups, but many have felt subjugated by the dominant Bamar.

The “Don’t Call Me Kalar” campaign launched on Facebook aims to stymie the use of a term that historically refers to people from the Indian subcontinent, but today is often intended as a slur.

It has helped whip-up hatred against the Rohingya, a long-persecuted Muslim minority barred from citizenship and forced out in droves by the military.

But the term is also employed against supposedly accepted minorities, particularly those with darker skin.

Zay Linn Mon and his friends started the campaign on Facebook after seeing the Black Lives Matter protests reverberate globally following the killing of an unarmed black man in the US.



misbehaving children saying that “big kalar” will come for them.

Some supporters have posted “I don’t call someone Kalar” across their profile pictures.

The campaign has also attracted a wave of largely indignant reaction, with thousands of comments, many laden with obscenities against the activists.

“What should we call the Kalar if we don’t use the word Kalar?” challenged Nay Lin, while another Facebook user asked if they want “what is happening in the US” to happen in Myanmar.

Activist Zay Linn Mon knows the word will not disappear overnight, but says the awareness campaign is a start.

“When we say we don’t like it, respect that and don’t use it.”

India denies visas to US panel on religious freedom

AGENCIES

India has turned down a travel request for members of a US government panel seeking to review its religious freedom, saying foreign agencies had no standing to assess the constitutional rights of citizens.

The visa snub to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) on Wednesday came as the US Congress released its own religious freedom report while a top Trump administration official said he was “very concerned” about the South Asian country’s situation.

India’s Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said the government firmly repudiated the surveys of the USCIRF, which had little knowledge of the rights of Indian citizens, describing it as biased and prejudiced.

The step was taken because the government saw no grounds for a foreign entity such as the USCIRF to pronounce on the state of Indian citizens’ constitutionally protected rights, he said, adding that India would not accept any foreign interference or judgement on matters related to its sovereignty.



Jaishankar

Since taking power in 2014, India’s Hindu nationalist government led by Narendra Modi has faced criticism for attacks on Muslims and other minorities.

In its report in April, the USCIRF had called for the world’s biggest democracy to be designated a “country of particular concern”, along with China, Iran, Russia and Syria. The panel had urged sanctions against officials in Modi’s government after it excluded Muslims from the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed in December last year.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday released a new 2019 International Religious Freedom Report in Washington, DC. The report documents major instances of violations of religious freedom across the world.

Referring to India, the report highlighted the revocation of Indian-administered Kashmir’s autonomy by the Modi government in August, the passage of the CAA in December, and attacks by Hindu vigilante groups on Muslims and Dalits (community once referred to as “untouchables”) over the cow, an animal considered sacred by Hindus.

We’re preparing for the worst

Exhausted Indian doctors fear virus crisis has only begun

AFP, New Delhi

Doctors in one of India’s top private hospitals shuffle through the intensive care unit wearing full protective suits. Every bed is occupied by coronavirus patients, and fear is building that the worst is still to come.

“We don’t know when this is going to peak,” Dr Deven Juneja told AFP during a pause from his rounds at the Max Smart Super Speciality Hospital in New Delhi, as heart monitors beeped throughout the ward.

“All of us are hoping for the best, but we are mentally and physically prepared for the worst.”

Indian authorities have in recent days been loosening their months-long lockdown on people movement that had been aimed at curbing the spread of the coronavirus. However they were forced into the easing for economic reasons and, while people across the country of 1.3 billion resume more normal travel, the number of infections is soaring.

There are almost 10,000 new confirmed cases every day and declared infections are now over 275,000 -- the fifth highest in the world.

Officially there have been nearly



8,000 coronavirus deaths, although the true number is widely believed to far higher.

Newspapers carry stories of patients dying after being denied care. The government is turning cricket stadiums into field hospitals. Crematoriums are struggling to cope.

In New Delhi, the situation is particularly dire with the city government this week predicting the caseload will balloon 20 fold to more than half a million by the end of July, which the health care system appears woefully ill-prepared for.

Ambulances arrive constantly at the Max hospital, which like other private facilities in the teeming city of 20

million people has been ordered by the government to set aside 20 percent of its beds for coronavirus patients.

With families not allowed to see virus patients, Juneja has to double up as a caregiver, although he is unable to even hold his patients’ hands.

Juneja said the surge had started to be felt over the past few days.

Vinita Thakur, a nurse in a covid ward, said wearing the protective suits for long hours in the hot Indian summer required immense “physical and mental courage”. “There is a lot of sweating and because of that we get burns and rashes. But we have to do it, we are on the frontline, we can’t make any excuses.”

NEWSIN  
brief

Malaysia pulls out of hajj pilgrimage

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia yesterday pulled out of the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah over coronavirus fears days after neighbouring Indonesia, the world’s biggest Muslim-majority nation, also withdrew. Millions travel from around the world to Saudi Arabia every year to perform the hajj, a ritual that every Muslim must do once in their lives if able. Saudi Arabia is yet to announce a decision on whether the pilgrimage will be held this year.

OIC slams Israeli on annexation plan

AFP, Riyadh

Israel’s plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank mark a “serious escalation” that threatens the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has said. Following a virtual meeting of OIC foreign ministers, the pan-Islamic body said it “warns against the dangerous intention of Israel”. Israel intends to annex West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley, as proposed by US President Donald Trump, with initial steps slated to begin from July 1.

Turkey snubs Egypt’s Libya peace initiative

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday rejected an Egyptian peace initiative in Libya after a series of military victories by forces loyal to Tripoli against strongman Khalifa Haftar and said it favoured a binding ceasefire under UN auspices. Egypt and United Arab Emirates support Haftar against the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) which is backed by Turkey.