

INTERNATIONAL

'RACIALLY MOTIVATED' SHOOTING
Ten killed at US
grocery store

AFP, Buffalo

A heavily armed 18-year-old white man shot 10 people dead on Saturday at a Buffalo, New York grocery store in a "racially motivated" attack that he live-streamed on camera, authorities said.

The gunman, who was wearing body armor and a helmet, was arrested after the massacre, Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia told a news conference.

Gramaglia put the toll at 10 dead and three wounded. Eleven of the victims were African Americans.

The gunman shot four people in the parking lot of the Tops supermarket, three of them fatally, then went inside and continued firing, Gramaglia said.

He added that when police arrived, the shooter put the gun to his neck, but was talked down and surrendered.

Stephen Belongia, special agent in charge of the FBI's Buffalo field office, told the news conference that the shooting is being investigated as a hate crime.

US media outlets have reported officials are investigating a detailed "manifesto" posted online before the shooting, in which the suspect outlines his plans and racial motivations for the attack. Quoting from the manifesto, the New York Times reported the suspect had been "inspired" by white supremacist acts of violence, including the massacre of 51 Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019.

District Attorney Flynn's office said in a tweet that the suspect — identified as Payton Gendron of Conklin, New York — had been arraigned on a charge of first-degree murder, which carries a sentence of life without parole. He is being held without bail.

The US suffered 19,350 firearm homicides in 2020, up nearly 35 percent compared to 2019, data showed.



Palestinian wave national flags and carry giant mock keys (a widely used symbol of the Nakba, as many Palestinians kept the keys to their homes when they were forced into exile in 1948), as they march in a rally marking the 74th anniversary of the "Nakba" or "catastrophe", in the occupied West Bank town of Ramallah, yesterday. Each year Palestinians commemorate the "Nakba" on May 15, the official date of Israel's creation, as a result of which more than 760,000 Palestinians were pushed into exile or driven out of their homes. The annual demonstrations across the occupied West Bank, annexed east Jerusalem and inside Israel came with tensions high over the killing of 51-year-old Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh.

PHOTO: AFP

Rallies held
across US for
abortion rights

AFP, New York

Thousands of activists chanting, banging drums and wielding placards flooded streets across the United States on Saturday in a national day of action calling for safe and legal access to abortion.

The mass demonstrations were a response to a leaked draft opinion showing the Supreme Court's conservative majority is poised to overturn Roe v. Wade, a landmark 1973 ruling guaranteeing abortion access nationwide.

"Nobody has the right to make a decision on somebody else's body," said Hanna Williamson, 20, who drove three hours to join several thousand protesters in Washington.

Thousands more people assembled in a central square in Brooklyn, New York, to carry a giant pink banner that read: "Our Bodies. Our Futures. Our Abortions."

Thousands of people also rallied in Texas and Kentucky, with smaller events elsewhere in the country.

Sri Lanka lifts curfew
for Buddhist festival

New PM holds talks with World Bank, ADB

AGENCIES

Sri Lankan authorities lifted a nationwide curfew yesterday for an important Buddhist festival, but celebrations were muted as the island nation's new premier struggled to find his footing and tackle a worsening economic crisis.

A countrywide stay-home order has been in place for most of the week after mob violence left nine dead and over 225 wounded, sparked by attacks on peaceful demonstrators by government loyalists.

Protesters across the Buddhist-majority nation have for weeks demanded the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa over Sri Lanka's worst-ever economic crisis. Shortages of food, fuel and medicines, along with record inflation and lengthy blackouts, have brought severe hardships to the country's 22 million people.

Sunday marks Vesak, the most important religious event on Sri Lanka's calendar, which celebrates Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death.

The government has declared a two-day holiday and announced it was lifting the curfew for the day without saying when or whether it would be reimposed.

Newly appointed PM Ranil Wickremesinghe is struggling to form a unity government ahead of tomorrow's parliamentary session, the first since he took office.

Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa has already formally rejected an overture to join the new administration. But he added that his party would not block legitimate "solutions to the economic problems" in parliament.

Rajapaksa on Saturday appointed four new ministers, all from his own Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party, but the all-important

finance ministry remains vacant.

Official sources said the new prime minister could take the finance portfolio to spearhead ongoing negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for an urgent bailout.

Wickremesinghe, a veteran politician who was sworn in as prime minister for a sixth time on Thursday, has already met with diplomats from Britain, the United States, Japan, China and India to seek financial aid.

Wickremesinghe yesterday held discussions with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, his office said in a statement.

"The discussions with the organizations focused on assistance for the issues facing the supply of medicine, food and fertiliser," the statement said.

Hit hard by the Covid pandemic, rising oil prices and the Rajapaksa government's populist tax cuts, Sri Lanka is in the midst of its worst economic crisis since independence in 1948, with rampant inflation and shortages of fuel and other essentials.

A consignment of diesel using an Indian credit line arrived in Colombo on Sunday, New Delhi's embassy said in a tweet.

He said last week that shortages will get worse in the coming weeks, with reserves of useable foreign exchange needed to import essential goods falling below \$50 million.

His appointment has so far failed to quell public anger at the government for bringing Sri Lanka to the brink of economic collapse.

"All these people are hand-in-glove," Fareena, a resident of the capital Colombo, said of the new premier.

"When one goes, they bring another one of their guys in," she told AFP. "But to us, they are all the same."

Colombo to
probe LTTE
attack reports

THE HINDU ONLINE

Sri Lanka yesterday said it will "duly investigate" information flagged by Indian intelligence agencies — that ex-LTTE were "regrouping to launch attacks" in the island — and "strengthen security", a day after authorities denied the claim reported in The Hindu.

On May 13, The Hindu, citing Indian intelligence sources, reported that "some erstwhile cadre" had entered Tamil Nadu to "plan and execute" attacks in Sri Lanka.

The attacks were being timed with the 'Mullivaikkal anniversary', sources had indicated. They were referring to the civil war anniversary marked by Sri Lanka's Tamils on May 18 every year, to remember the tens of thousands of Tamil civilians who were killed during the final stages of Sri Lanka's civil war in May 2009.

Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence on Saturday denied the claims, calling the report "baseless".

However, the ministry yesterday said in a statement that upon inquiry, "the Indian intelligence services have informed Sri Lanka that the information has been given as general information and further informed that the investigations will be carried out in this regard and action will be taken to inform Sri Lanka about it."

Suicide blast kills
6 in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

A suicide bomber killed three children, age between 4 and 11, and three soldiers in an attack on a military vehicle in Pakistan's restive northwestern region bordering Afghanistan, officials said yesterday. The mountainous frontier separating Pakistan and Afghanistan has long been a hive of militant activity, with fighters using the porous border to escape state security forces. On Saturday evening a suicide bomber detonated in a small market near Miran Shah in North Waziristan, just 26 kilometres southeast of Afghanistan. The attack has not yet been claimed by any militant groups.

Lebanon eyes
change in polls

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon yesterday voted in its first election since multiple crises dragged it to the brink of failed statehood, a major test for new opposition groups bent on removing the ruling elite. Observers have warned not to expect any seismic shift, with every lever of power firmly in the hands of traditional sectarian parties and an electoral system rigged in their favour. A new generation of independent candidates and parties are hoping to kindle the change that an unprecedented anti-corruption uprising in 2019 failed to deliver. Once described as the Switzerland of the Middle East, Lebanon ranked second-to-last behind Afghanistan in the latest World Happiness Index released in March. More than 80 percent of Lebanon's population is now considered poor by the United Nations. The Lebanese pound has lost 95 percent of its value and most of the population only gets two hours of electricity a day.



Talks with US begin

FROM PAGE 12
The bilateral relations saw strains, especially due to the US sanctions against Rab and seven of its current and former officials imposed on December 10 last year.

The US and Bangladesh held Partnership Dialogue in Dhaka on March 20, foreign ministerial-level meeting on April 4 marking the 50 years of diplomatic relationship and Security Dialogue in Washington on April 6.

The US officials during their meetings made it clear that they want Bangladesh to be on its side over the Ukraine that was invaded by Russia, while also seeking to sign GSOMIA, a legally-binding agreement that ensures governments understand and commit to protecting classified military information in the case of purchasing defence equipment.

Signing such a deal is required for buying sophisticated defence equipment from the US. During the Security Dialogue in Washington

DC, Dhaka observed that the US equipment was very expensive. Washington responded that it could consider the aspect.

Diplomatic sources said the US also discouraged Bangladesh in the case of buying defence equipment from Russia. It is likely that these issues will be coming up in the dialogue.

Asked on the Indo-Pacific, a foreign ministry official said overall security environment in the Indo-Pacific region would be discussed and how the two countries could cooperate towards this end.

"Bangladesh is more interested in the economic framework of the Indo-Pacific. So, we will focus on it. We want prosperity of our people and people of the region," the official said. The US wants free and open Indo-Pacific that will be governed by international rules-based system.

A foreign ministry official said Bangladesh will strongly raise the Rohingya repatriation issue as the stay of more than a million

Rohingyas for long in the camps in Bangladesh could turn out to be a serious security concern.

Diplomatic sources said the US determining Myanmar's persecution against the Rohingyas a genocide and Biden's summit with Asean leaders last Friday are some important developments that can help create pressure on Myanmar.

In terms of countering terrorism, foreign ministry officials said Bangladesh is a success story of combating terrorism and would continue to do the same. US assistance towards this will be welcome.

Bangladesh and US armed forces also took part in a number of joint exercises on disaster management, and its importance is growing as cyclones and other disasters are a regular phenomenon in the country.

"Military to military exercise means that the two countries can cooperate when the need arises," said a diplomatic source.

Finland

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period from their application for membership to accession, he said, adding that doors are open for both countries to join the alliance.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he had spoken to his Turkish counterpart on Ankara's concerns and he was confident a consensus could be reached.

Finland's parliament will convene to debate the membership proposal today.

Russia lost

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Ukrainian troops on the eastern front in the Donbas.

Izium straddles the Donets river, about 120 km from Kharkiv on the main highway heading southeast.

"The hottest spot remains the Izium direction," regional governor Oleh Sinegubov said in comments aired on social media.

India on trail of his laundered money

FROM PAGE 1
Earlier on Saturday, Halder was arrested in Kolkata's Ashoknagar along with his five cohorts. All of them were produced before a special court dealing with cases filed under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. It approved five-day remand for five of them including Halder under the ED custody and one under judicial custody.

Public money that Halder and his associates siphoned off to India and other countries would be repatriated upon confiscation of his properties, said Attorney General AM Amin Uddin.

Asked under what process he would be brought back to Bangladesh, he said that hopefully it would be possible to bring him back soon.

"... we have a money laundering case [against Halder] pending here. Steps will be taken to bring him back to complete the trial in that case. The issue will be discussed tomorrow," he

told journalists at his office yesterday.

"He was arrested based on the information provided by our Anti-Corruption Commission and Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit..."

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan said it's possible to bring back the money that Halder had laundered to India. But that would be a complex and time-consuming process.

It could take three to six months to bring Halder back to Bangladesh, said the lawyer adding that if he is not tried in India, it wouldn't take that long to repatriate him.

It's essential to bring him back because he was at the centre of scams involving huge amounts of money, Khurshid pointed out.

Others were also involved in those scams and their identities will come to light through his [Halder] interrogation."

ACC Deputy Director Gulshan Anwar Proddhan

said Halder took bribes for facilitating loans through forgery.

"We have traced Tk 250 crore in Halder's salary account," he said adding that charges were pressed against PK Halder in a case filed for amassing Tk 426 crore illegally.

So far, the ACC has found that Halder had investments of Tk 200 crore in a five-star hotel in Cox's Bazar, 10,000 decimals of land in Narayanganj's Rupanji, four acres of land in Mymensingh, over 60 bighas of land in Purbachal, an 11-storey market on a nine-katha plot worth around Tk 40 crore, Tk 300 crore investment in resorts in Rangamati, several flats worth about Tk 20 crore and around Tk 100 crore in different bank accounts.

Under the alias "Shibshankar Halder", PK Halder forged documents including ration card in West Bengal, Indian Voter ID card, Permanent Account Number and multi-purpose Aadhar

card. He used those to buy properties in India with the laundered money.

Halder's name came up for discussions during the "anti-casino" drives in Bangladesh in 2019.

There are allegations that he embezzled Tk 10,200 crore from People's Leasing and Financial Service (PLFS), International Leasing and Financial Service Limited, FAS Finance, and Reliance Finance.

The ACC has so far filed 36 cases over the scams and Halder has been made the prime accused in those.

PLFS is now in the process of liquidation while the rest are in a bad shape.

Fossils

FROM PAGE 12
The 9-foot-long Deinonychus, which roamed western North America, was named for its distinctive and deadly claw on each foot, says the auction house. Deinonychus means "terrible claw" in ancient Greek.