

RACIAL HATE Gunman kills 3 black people in Florida

AFP, Washington

A white man driven by racial hatred shot dead three Black people in a Florida discount store Saturday before taking his own life after a standoff with police, authorities said.

"He targeted a certain group of people and that's Black people. That's what he said he wanted to kill. And that's very clear," Jacksonville Sheriff TK Waters told a news conference about gunman, who was in his early 20s.

According to the sheriff's office, the shooter, who has not yet been identified, entered a Dollar General store wearing a tactical vest, armed with an AR-style rifle and a handgun.

Manifestos discovered by the gunman's family shortly before the attack "detail the shooter's disgusting ideology of hate," Waters said.

Iran files legal case against singer urging veil removal

AFP, Tehran

Authorities in Iran have begun legal proceedings against a prominent pop singer over his latest song urging women to take off their mandatory headscarves, the judiciary said yesterday.

The action against Mehdi Yarrahi comes almost a year after the death in custody of Iranian Kurd Mahsa Amini, 22, triggered months of protests around the country.

Amini had been arrested for alleged breach of the Islamic republic's strict dress code requiring that a woman's head and neck be covered.

Yarrahi, 41, on Friday released a song called "Roosarito", which means "Your Headscarf" in Farsi, expressing support for last year's protest movement.

A legal case was filed against Mehdi Yarrahi following the release of an illegal song which defies the morals and customs of the Islamic society," the judiciary's Mizan Online website said.

It was not immediately clear what the formal charges were. Yarrahi was not in custody.

Yarrahi's three-minute video clip incorporated the protest movement's slogan, "Woman, life, freedom."



Protesters carry mock coffins covered with the Palestinian flag as they demand the return of the bodies of their slain relatives held by Israeli forces, during a rally in Nablus city in the occupied West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Russia downs two Ukrainian drones

One killed near border; Ukraine destroys four cruise missiles during Russian air strike; second ship departs Odesa port after grain deal collapse

AGENCIES

Russia said it downed two Ukrainian drones flying over border regions yesterday, after the governor of Belgorod region said a drone carrying explosives had killed a man.

Russia and the Moscow-annexed Crimean peninsula have been hit by a wave of attacks in the past month, since Kyiv warned in July it aimed to "return" the conflict to Russian territory.

"(During) the night and morning hours... Two unmanned aerial vehicles were detected and destroyed in flight over the territory of the Bryansk and Kursk regions," Moscow's defence ministry said.

The governor of Russia's Kursk region, which lies next to the Ukrainian border, said a drone had crashed into an apartment building in Kursk city overnight, blowing out windows on several floors.

It was not clear whether this was one of the drones reportedly shot down by the defence ministry earlier.

"There were no fires, none of the residents were injured," governor Roman Starovoi said on social media, sharing an image of what appeared to be a charred mark on a tower block.

The attack came a day after the

governor of Russia's neighbouring Belgorod region said a drone attack killed a man in the village of Shchetinovka, less than one mile (about two kilometres) from the Ukrainian border, reports AFP.

The Ukrainian armed forces dropped an explosive device from a drone when the man was on his dacha plot cutting grass," governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said Saturday evening, announcing the man died from shrapnel wounds.



The Ukrainian military destroyed four cruise missiles over northern and central Ukraine during an overnight Russian air strike, Kyiv's air force reported early yesterday.

It said Ukrainian forces had detected up to eight airborne targets but that there were no immediate reports of strikes, adding that the rest of the targets were "probably false".

Meanwhile, three Ukrainian

military pilots including a "mega talent" who yearned to fly F-16s were killed on Friday when two L-39 combat training aircraft collided over a region west of Kyiv on Friday, the air force said.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, who is counting on swift training of crews to fly up to 61 F-16 fighter jets promised by his Western allies, said in his nightly video address that the three men included Andriy Pilshchuk, callsign Juice, "a Ukrainian officer, one of those who greatly helped our state."

Air force spokesperson Yuri Ihnat described Pilshchuk - who was fluent in English and aged 29 when Reuters interviewed him in December - as a "mega talent" and leader of reforms.

"You can't even imagine how much he wanted to fly an F-16," Ihnat wrote on his Facebook page. "But now that American planes are actually on the horizon, he will not fly them."

Ukraine's prosecutor general's office announced a criminal investigation had been opened into whether flight preparation rules were violated.

The second vessel blocked by Russia's withdrawal last month from a UN-brokered deal allowing the safe passage of grain through the Black Sea has left Ukraine's Odesa port, a senior Ukrainian government official said yesterday.

WEST BENGAL

8 killed, 5 hurt in blast at firecracker factory

TNN, New Delhi

At least 8 people were killed and five others injured after a massive blast was reported at an illegal firecracker factory in North 24 Paraganas's Duttapukur, barely 3km away from West Bengal State University.

The explosion happened at around 10:00 am yesterday when several people were working at the factory in Nilgun's Moshpole in Duttapukur police station area, around 30 km north of Kolkata, police said.

According to sources, the roof of the building was completely blown away, and charred and dismembered bodies of the victims landed on roads. Those injured have been admitted to Barasat Hospital for treatment.

A huge contingent of police and personnel of the disaster management department are also at the spot, they added.

Twelve people were killed in a similar explosion at an illegal firecracker factory in Purba Medinipur district's Egra in May.

Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari of the BJP alleged that the state has turned into the storehouse of powder kegs.

FUKUSHIMA DISCHARGE Japan reports wave of Chinese phone harassment

AFP, Tokyo

Tokyo has urged Beijing to "ensure the safety of Japanese residents in China" after a wave of telephone harassment targeting businesses in Japan sparked by the controversial discharge of Fukushima wastewater.

While Japan insists the release of the treated water is safe - a view backed by the UN's nuclear watchdog - China has staunchly opposed it and banned all Japanese seafood imports, saying it contaminates the ocean.

The Japanese government yesterday published new data showing waters off Fukushima continued to post radioactivity levels well within safe limits.

Calls from China began flooding Japanese businesses from Thursday, when operator TEPCO started releasing water used to cool the stricken nuclear reactors at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Japanese businesses and groups, ranging from a concert hall in Tokyo to an aquarium in northern Iwate, reported that they had started receiving so many calls from Chinese speakers that they had difficulty conducting normal operations.

Hiroyuki Namazu, a senior Japanese diplomat in charge of Asian and Oceanian affairs, voiced his regret about the calls and told senior officials at the Chinese embassy in Tokyo to call for calm in China, the Japanese foreign ministry said in a statement late Saturday.

Similar incidents have also occurred in China against Japanese facilities, Namazu told Chinese embassy officials, according to the statement.

Myanmar expels top E Timor diplomat

AFP, Bangkok

Myanmar's junta yesterday ordered the expulsion of East Timor's top diplomat in the country over a meeting his government held with a banned shadow administration. The Southeast Asian nation has been locked in crisis since the military seized power in February 2021. The military has designated the shadow administration known as the National Unity Government (NUG) - dominated by exiled lawmakers - as a terror organisation. Last month, East Timor's President Jose Ramos-Horta met with NUG foreign minister Zin Mar Aung in the capital Dili. Yesterday, Myanmar's ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the "irresponsible actions" of East Timor, ordering the country's Charge d'Affaires in Yangon "to leave no later than 1 September 2023".

AIRCRAFT CRASH 3 US Marines die in Australia

REUTERS, Sydney

Three US Marines died in an aircraft crash off the coast of northern Australia yesterday while transporting troops during a routine military exercise, officials said. Five others were "transported to Royal Darwin Hospital in serious condition", Marine Rotation Force - Darwin said in a press release. They were among 23 Marines on the MV-22B Osprey tilt rotor aircraft when it crashed, the statement said, adding the cause of the crash was being investigated. The crash occurred on the remote Tiwi Islands at approximately 9:30 am, the statement said. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called the incident "tragic".

Academic activities in peril

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was made the chairman of Food and Agro Process Engineering as there was no senior teacher in that department.

There are only four lecturers in the department.

On the other hand, the Jyoti University of Science and Technology, established in 2007, has a student-to-teacher ratio of 12:1 and the Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, established in 1999, has a ratio of 22:1.

Inadequate number of teachers is not the only issue plaguing the BSMRSTU. The dearth of experienced teachers is also acute, directly affecting the quality of education at the science university.

The university's teaching staff has only 40 teachers who hold MPhil or PhD, with only two professors -- Prof Dr M Shahjahan of Physics (tenured) and Prof Sheikh Ashiqurrahman Prince of Management Studies (contractual) -- and 14 associate professors.

The lack of experienced teachers affects the quality of education, said Prof Kamruzzaman, also an associate professor of Applied Chemistry and Chemical Engineering.

He said, "Science and technology universities are different from

public universities and require special lectures along with hands-on training in labs. That's why we need experienced teachers to enhance the quality of education here."

While teachers struggle to complete their courses, they often face barriers due to the shortage of classrooms and labs.

In addition to an administrative building, only two academic buildings with around 85 classrooms have been built.

At least five departments, including Civil Engineering, Tourism and Hospitality Management and Sheikh Hasina IT Institute, have to hold classes at the administrative building while students of the History Department have to attend their classes in a rented room, according to university sources.

Many departments do not have any laboratories. Among other departments, Civil Engineering, Environmental Science and Disaster Management, Psychology, Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Science and Veterinary Medicine especially lack proper lab facilities.

This further disrupts the students' learning experience and adds to the burden on the faculty, said Nazmul Hossain, chairman of Animal Science and Veterinary

Medicine department.

"We have only one classroom for our 200 students. We can hold classes of one batch at a time. It takes more time to complete their courses, which is an extra burden both to us and the students," he said.

Besides, the departments, especially those which have more practical and sessional courses, should have at least one laboratory each, he added.

Only 2,000 students stay in five dormitories at the university. However, facilities in the dormitories are insufficient, as there are no reading rooms or library facilities each.

Ujjal Mondol, a student of Law Department, stays in a rented flat outside of the campus. He said house rent and other living costs near the university areas are much higher in Gopalganj. It's becoming increasingly difficult for his family to bear the costs, he added.

Another student Sanjana Rahman of Agriculture Department said there is a concern about security, especially for the female students, as there were several incidents where students came under attack by locals.

Students and teachers held many demonstrations demanding immediate attention to these issues.

According to university sources, such demonstrations have become a regular occurrence, diverting students' attention from their studies. However, they said the bigger problem is that at least 70 students were attacked by local goons while staging demonstrations.

Talking about the shortage of infrastructure and teachers, former BSMRSTU Registrar Md Morad Hossain claimed the previous administration is largely responsible for the current state of affairs at the university.

When former vice-chancellor Khondoker Md Nasiruddin took charge in 2015, the number of departments was 20 and the number of seats was 1,430. But when he left in 2019, the number of departments and seats increased to 34 and 2,905 respectively, according to sources with knowledge of the university's academic activities.

The former vice-chancellor was subsequently removed in 2019 due to his involvement in many irregularities, they said.

This correspondent made repeated attempts to reach the former vice-chancellor but he did not respond to any of the calls made or text messages sent to him.

Asked about the initiatives the current administration has taken to

address the issues, Vice-Chancellor Prof AQM Mahbub said the number of seats has been reduced since the 2020-21 academic year.

Talking about security issues, he said more dormitories are needed to accommodate all the students. "We have a plan to build two 10-storey halls."

As for the quality of education, he said so many departments are not required in a science and technology university but it is not possible to close the new departments that have already been opened. That's why we are trying to recruit more teachers, especially experienced teachers to address the high student-to-teacher ratio.

"The University Grants Commission has already given us approval to recruit senior teachers from renowned universities on a temporary basis, so that our students get quality education," Prof Mahbub added.

This newspaper talked to several educationists about the issues encountered by the students at the BSMRSTU.

Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique expressed his concern about the establishment of new universities without having built basic infrastructure.

He said the lack of resources

serves as an obstacle to providing quality education to students, ultimately jeopardising their future.

As the Gopalganj BSMRSTU is a new institution, it may not attract professors or associate professors. Therefore, he explained, at the initial stage the university should consider appointing young teachers, such as assistant professors.

As for providing guidance to the young teachers, he suggested appointing visiting professors who can share their experiences and collaborate with the regular faculty to enhance the quality of teaching and better educate the students.

But it is the responsibility of the UGC to address these issues and ensure that new universities are fully equipped to function effectively, Prof Siddique added.

Commenting on this, Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said when students are deprived of the required facilities during their academic journey, the educational institution fails to achieve its intended goals.

About resolving the issues, he said the UGC has to take the responsibility to address them.

"The government should think more and work more before establishing new universities," he added.