

## International

# Two more teenagers killed as knife murders in Britain soar

## Surge in knife crime blamed on drug gangs, social media provocations

**LONDON:** Two teenagers were killed in knife attacks in Britain over the weekend, bringing the total number of people killed in stabbings this year to at least 24 and pushing the bloodshed to the forefront of national concern. British Interior Minister Sajid Javid said he would be meeting police chiefs this week to find ways to tackle the problem as he called for an end to the "senseless violence".

"Young people are being murdered across the country, it can't go on," Javid said. Police say the surge in knife crime in a country where guns are hard to obtain has been driven by several factors, including rivalries between drug gangs, cuts to youth services, and provocations on social media. Many have occurred in poor areas of the capital, London.

The issue has shot to the top of the political agenda after figures show the number of deaths from stabbings reached a record high last year. The num-

ber of children in England aged 16 and under being stabbed rose by 93 percent between 2016 and 2018.



**At least 24 stabbed to death this year**

At the same time, police have suffered big cuts in staffing and funding under austerity measures imposed by Prime Minister Theresa May's govern-

ment. In the latest deaths, 17-year-old schoolboy Yousef Ghaleb Makki, was stabbed in a village near Manchester while he was visiting a friend. Two boys, also aged 17, have been arrested on suspicion of murder.

Jodie Chesney, a 17-year-old Girl Scout, was killed in a knife attack in a park in east London. Her family have called her murder a "totally random and unprovoked attack". "A Knife to the Heart of Britain", the Daily Mail splashed across its front page on Monday along with a photograph of Chesney. British media also made much of the fact that Makki lived in an affluent area and went to a private school. Most attacks take place in more deprived areas with higher general crime rates.

### National emergency

Two weeks ago, three teenagers were stabbed in

Birmingham, central England, prompting a senior regional police official to say Britain was facing a national emergency. A total of 285 knife and sharp instrument homicides recorded in the year ending March 2018, the highest number since Home Office records began in 1946. The previous high was in the year ending March 2008, with 268 homicides by stabbing.

Nineteen murders have taken place in London this year, according to the Metropolitan police. The government said it had set out a range of actions to tackle violent crime, including a 200 million pound (\$265 million) youth fund and an independent review of drug misuse. It has also proposed an extra 970 million pounds in police funding for 2019-20. "We're taking action on many fronts & I'll be meeting police chiefs this week to hear what more can be done. Vital we unite to stop this senseless violence," Javid said. — Reuters

### News in brief

#### Helicopter crash kills five

**TEHRAN:** An emergency medical helicopter crashed in a southwestern Iranian village yesterday en route to treat a pregnant mother, killing all five people on board, state TV reported. "Following the request to save the life of a 26-year old pregnant mother who needed emergency care ... a helicopter was dispatched which unfortunately had an accident," said Pir Hossein Koolivand, who heads Iran's emergency services. "Three crew members and two first aid workers were martyred", he added. Koolivand did not elaborate on the cause of the crash. The crew was dispatched to a mountainous village 30 kilometers from Shahr-e Kord city in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province, emergency services spokesman Mojtaba Khaledi told semi-official news agency ILNA. State news agency IRNA said the helicopter collided with a transmission tower, while state TV said it had crashed into the mountains. — AFP

#### CEO widow, stepsons charged

**PETALING JAYA:** The widow and teenage stepsons of a Malaysian CEO who died last year were charged with his murder yesterday, in a shocking twist to a case that has captivated the country. Nazrin Hassan was the chief executive of Cradle Fund, a Malaysian firm that is an agency of the finance ministry and invests in start-ups. He died at his home outside Kuala Lumpur in June last year. It was initially thought he was killed after his mobile phone exploded and started a fire. But the fire and rescue department later found traces of petrol at the scene, and his death was reclassified as murder. His wife, 43-year-old Samirah Muzaffar, and her two sons from a previous marriage, aged 13 and 16, were arrested in the early hours yesterday. They were later brought to a magistrates court outside the capital, where a huge scrum of journalists was waiting, and charged with murder. — AFP

#### Up to 100 feared trapped

**JAKARTA:** Indonesian authorities warned yesterday that up to 100 people could still be trapped and feared dead inside a collapsed illegal gold mine despite a painstaking rescue effort that has so far plucked 19 people alive from the rubble, but also seen nine deaths. Search teams at the unlicensed mine on Sulawesi island have been hampered by steep terrain, unstable soil and dangerously narrow mining shafts since a landslide caused the accident last Tuesday. While authorities said the search and rescue effort would continue for another week, they made no mention of continuing efforts to get food and water to any possible survivors. National disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said the number of miners inside the shafts at the time of the accident was still not known as survivors had given varying tallies. — AFP

#### Archbishop accuses Russia

**SIMFEROPOL:** The head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Moscow-annexed Crimea said yesterday he had been released by police, accusing Russian authorities of seeking to tarnish his reputation. Archbishop Kliment was taken off a bus in the Crimean capital of Simferopol on Sunday as he was preparing to travel to southern Russia to visit a Ukrainian who is being tried on terrorism charges. Kliment said he had been reported for allegedly stealing religious items from his own church and swearing at the bus station. "This is absolutely absurd: they are accusing a priest of stealing church ware and indecency," the 49-year-old Father Kliment said. He said he was reported for allegedly swearing by an apparently homeless man who swore himself. "It was rather funny," Archbishop Kliment, who was released late Sunday, accused the Russian authorities of seeking to tarnish his good name and prevent him from attending the trial of Ukrainian Pavlo Hryb. — AFP

## French police hit with poo bombs

**MARSEILLE:** French police are facing a new form of weapon during "yellow vest" protests — bags of fecal matter thrown bomb-like by demonstrators. On Saturday "bags filled with faeces were thrown at police and exploded. Three policemen were soaked through with it," Rudy Manna from the Alliance police trade union in the southern port city of Marseille told AFP. One policeman also suffered an elbow injury when hit by "a poop-filled projectile", Marseille police headquarters said.

Similar incidents took place in the southern city of Montpellier, police trade union representatives said. Police said there had been calls on social media ahead of Saturday's demonstrations for demonstrators to arm themselves with "Caca-tovs" - after Molotov cocktails but filled with "caca", the French term for poo. "The policemen were deeply humiliated," Manna said, adding that none of the perpetrators, hidden in a crowd of about 1,000 demonstrators in Marseille, had been identified.

Saturday marked the 16th straight weekend of "yellow vest" demonstrations in France since November, which have often seen security forces targeted with



**PARIS:** Protesters gather on the Denfert-Rochereau square in Paris, during an anti-government demonstration called by the 'Yellow Vest' (gilets jaunes) movement. — AFP

stones and other projectiles. Authorities said nearly 40,000 people took part. A total of 11 people have died during the demonstrations which began over fuel

taxes but mushroomed into a revolt by people in rural and small-town France against French President Emmanuel Macron. — AFP

## Merkel's successor slammed as intersex toilet joke falls flat

**BERLIN:** German Chancellor Angela Merkel's anointed successor, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, faced harsh criticism yesterday over a carnival joke that ridiculed intersex people. The CDU party chief and likely future conservative candidate for the chancellery, usually dubbed just AKK because of her tongue-twister name, made the joke in a carnival speech last week. Attempting to poke fun at politically progressive Berlin, she said newly introduced toilets for intersex people were "for those men who don't know whether to pee standing up or sitting down".



**Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer**

The comment was greeted with jeers, fanfare and booming laughter in the Lake Constance town of

Stockach in southern Germany, but fewer people were laughing when it was shared on the website queer.de and Twitter. "Another one of those days that make you cringe... is it really that difficult to make a humorous speech without flat jokes beating up on minorities?" commented lawmaker Jens Brandenburg of the liberal FDP party. Similar criticism rained down from MPs across party lines on 56-year-old AKK, the former premier of the tiny state of Saarland.

The Social Democrats' general secretary Lars Klingbeil charged that the comment showed "an absolute lack of respect" for intersex people, whose legal status was only formally recognized in Germany last year. The newspaper Koelner Stadt-Anzeiger in Cologne, a city at the heart of Germany's carnival tradition, slammed AKK's joke as "low-brow", "sordid", "populist" and tapping into society's "culture wars". AKK, a devout Catholic who has spoken out against same-sex marriage, was named "Miss Homophobia 2018" in an online poll conducted by gay and lesbian rights group Enough is Enough. — AFP

## Late winter snow hits US northeast

**NEW YORK:** New York faced its biggest snowstorm of the winter yesterday as snow spread across the northeastern United States, infuriating commuters who juggled canceled planes and trains and faced icy travels ahead as temperatures plunge. A band of winter weather stretching from Maryland to Maine dumped 15 inches (38 cm) of snow overnight on downtown Boston and 5 inches (13 cm) on New York's Central Park, said meteorologist Marc Chenard of the National Weather Service.

That was enough for New York Mayor Bill de Blasio to take the rare step of shutting the nation's largest public school system and for New Jersey Transit, the largest statewide public transportation system in the United States, to cancel about a dozen commuter trains. "This is horrible!" said Steve Wesley, 56, as he shoveled snow from his driveway in Maplewood, New Jersey, a New York City suburb. Wesley's two-mile local commute by

car was delayed nearly two hours by the four to six inches of snow.

"This is not what I want to be doing," said Wesley, a sales representative for a power equipment distributor. "I'm usually the first one into the office. And if I get there and the parking lot is not plowed, I'll be shoveling that too." Nearly 1,000 US flights were canceled, most at Boston Logan International and New York area airports, according to FlightAware.com. Government offices and libraries in Boston were closed. In New Jersey, where Governor Phil Murphy declared a state of emergency ahead of the storm, state workers had a two-hour delay.

Commuting challenges may mount over the remainder of the work week as snows melt and then temperatures drop, icing over roadways. "Each day is a little bit cooler," said Chenard, noting the week's highest temperatures for the Northeast will be in the low 30s. "You'll get some melting during the day, especially when the sun is hitting the snow, and then at night it's going to be cold enough to refreeze. Any road surfaces that aren't treated, certainly could get icy at night into the morning." — Reuters



**NEW YORK:** A boy sleds in Central Park after a late season snowstorm, causing New York Mayor Bill de Blasio to announce that New York City public schools would be closed. — AFP

## Germany to strip dual national militia fighters of citizenship

**BERLIN:** Germany plans to strip dual nationals who fight for a foreign militant group of their German citizenship, the government said yesterday, as Western nations eye the return of IS jihadists warily. "There are plans to introduce a legal amendment, for Germans with multiple nationalities who fight for a terror militia, to lose their German citizenship," said interior ministry spokeswoman Eleonore Petermann.

Justice Minister Katarina Barley has separately said that the change would be "implemented soon", her spokeswoman said. Under German law, individuals with more than one nationality can already lose their German citizenship if they fight for a foreign army without permission from the German defense ministry. The amendment would therefore add participation in combat for a foreign militant group to the existing law.

The new rule would also only apply under strict conditions—the individual must be above 18 years of age, and have more than one nationality, so that he or she would not be left stateless after losing the German citizenship. The legal change will not apply retroactively, meaning that German IS fighters who are already jailed will not be affected. Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert rejected claims that the amendment would leave dual nationals feeling like "second-class citizens".

"We must not forget what this is about," he said. "This is about concrete participation in combat operations for a terror militia abroad," he said. Merkel's government had committed to examining such an amendment during their coalition negotiations last year, he noted. With the Islamic State organization crumbling, many European countries are now being confronted with the urgent question of what to do with returning fighters. — AFP