

International

New criminal charges against four Minneapolis policemen

Nights of escalating unrest give way to peaceful protests

MINNEAPOLIS: Prosecutors on Wednesday leveled new criminal charges against four Minneapolis policemen implicated in the death of a black man pinned by his neck to the street during an arrest that sparked more than a week of nationwide protest and civil strife. The added murder charge filed against one officer already in custody and the arrest of three more accused of playing a role in the killing of George Floyd, 46, came as several nights of escalating unrest gave way to mostly peaceful protests.

Thousands of demonstrators massed near the White House lit up their cellphone flashlights and sang along to the 1970s soul tune "Lean on Me," before resuming a chorus of anti-police chants. In a further display of self-policing seen in Washington and elsewhere this week, a number of protesters urge some of their more provocative cohorts to stop taunting police and leave. Several major cities scaled back or lifted curfews imposed for the past few days. But not all was calm. In New York City's Brooklyn borough, police in riot gear charged into a crowd of about 1,000 protesters defying a local curfew, albeit peacefully, near an outdoor plaza, and clubbed demonstrators and journalists as they scurried for cover in a downpour of heavy rain. The confrontation in Brooklyn seemed to be the biggest exception to a calmer night, hours after the new charges in Minneapolis.

More charges

Derek Chauvin, jailed Friday on charges of third-degree murder and manslaughter, was

newly charged with second-degree murder. The added charge, defined under Minnesota law as unintentionally causing another person's death in the commission of a felony offense, can carry a sentence of up to 40 years, 15 years longer than the maximum sentence for third-degree murder. Chauvin, 44, was the white officer seen in widely circulated video footage kneeling on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes as Floyd gasped for air and repeatedly groaned, "Please, I can't breathe." Floyd, whom police suspected of trying to pass a counterfeit bill to pay for cigarettes, was pronounced dead at a hospital shortly after the May 25 encounter. Three fellow officers fired from the Minneapolis police department along with Chauvin the next day were charged on Wednesday - each with aiding and abetting both second-degree murder and manslaughter.

The three men - Thomas Lane, J Alexander Kueng and Tou Thao - have also been taken into custody. Aiding and abetting second-degree murder carries the same maximum punishment as the underlying offense - 40 years in prison. Floyd's death has become the latest flashpoint for long-simmering rage over police brutality against African Americans, propelling the issue of racial justice to the top of the political agenda five months before the US presidential election on Nov. 3. The spectacle of city streets flooded with angry though mostly peaceful protesters - punctuated by scenes of arson, looting and clashes with police - have fueled a sense of crisis. The upheavals have flared following weeks of social lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic,

city, a curfew is a "balancing act."

"The idea is not to interfere with people's ability to protest, to demonstrate, to express their frustrations, to have their say," he told AFP. "But it is to create a tool... so that the police have the ability to intercept them beforehand and prevent them from doing the sorts of activities that we obviously all are opposed to." New York had not used such a measure since August 1943, when the historically black neighborhood of Harlem was placed under a strict curfew for three days following riots. That rioting was also sparked by police brutality: a white police officer shot and wounded a black soldier called Robert Bandy after he intervened in the arrest of a black woman, according to reports at the time.

As tensions soared over the weekend, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Chicago announced on Saturday that they were introducing the extreme measure of nighttime curfews. Minneapolis, where Floyd was killed and the epicenter of the violence, had already introduced one. Washington DC followed suit on Sunday, with New York announcing its own the following day.

Authorities said the curfews were not intended to curtail people's right to protest - as protected by the First Amendment - but to crack down on violence and looting which was generally taking place after dark. —AFP



This combination of handout photos shows (left to right) ex-officers Derek Chauvin, Tou Thao, J Alexander Kueng and Thomas Kiernan Lane. The Minneapolis police officer accused of killing George Floyd, an unarmed African American man was arrested and charged with murder on May 29 as authorities sought to restore peace after three nights of violent protests left parts of the city in flames. — AFP

which has forced millions of Americans out of work and disproportionately affected minorities.

Trial months away

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, a black former US congressman, has requested bail of \$1 million for each of the four former officers charged in the Floyd case. "This is a significant step forward on the road to justice, and we are gratified that this important action was brought before George Floyd's body was laid to rest," Benjamin Crump, attorney for the Floyd family, said in a statement. Ellison told a news conference winning a conviction "will be hard," noting that Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman, whose

office filed the original charges against Chauvin, is the only prosecutor in the state to have successfully convicted a police officer for murder. Fully investigating the case "is going to take months," he said. Protests erupted in Minneapolis the night after Floyd's death and quickly spread to dozens of cities large and small across the United States. In many cities, demonstrators defying nighttime curfews have been met by police in riot gear firing tear gas, mace and rubber bullets to disperse unruly crowds. National Guard troops have been activated in several states to assist local law enforcement. Authorities and some protest organizers have blamed much of the lawlessness on outside agitators and criminal elements. — Reuters

America's curfews: Controversial, but are they effective?

NEW YORK: Violent protests over the death of a black man in police custody led several US cities to impose curfews, but do they help maintain order or merely further antagonize demonstrators? The demonstrations were sparked by the killing of George Floyd, who suffocated on Monday last week when Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

America's worst civil unrest since the 1960s ensued, and saw New York - the fabled "City that Never Sleeps," already reeling from the coronavirus - impose its first curfew in almost 80 years. Widespread looting, arson and clashes between police and protesters led authorities to also introduce ad hoc curfews across a host of other cities, including Washington DC, Los Angeles and Chicago. For Dennis Kenney, an expert in criminal justice at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, part of New York's City Univer-

Mixed messages as sports world backs protesters

LOS ANGELES: If Megan Rapinoe decides to take a knee at next year's Olympic Games, she could get a reprimand. If she does it at the women's World Cup in 2023, she could get a round of applause. Over the past week, athletes, sports teams and leagues have expressed solidarity with protesters demanding an end to systemic racism and police brutality in the United States. But the chorus of concern has, in several cases, highlighted a sharp contrast between the solemn statements of support and how some sports bodies view protests by their own athletes.

In Germany, three Bundesliga players including Borussia Dortmund's Jadon Sancho and Schalke's US midfielder Weston McKennie were placed under formal investigation by the German FA (DFB) for protesting against racism during matches last weekend. Sancho marked his goal by removing his shirt to reveal a t-shirt with the slogan "Justice For George Floyd" - the African-American man whose death during an arrest by police in Minneapolis last

week triggered the wave of US protests. McKennie wore a black armband with the message "Justice for George."

German authorities said they were obliged to investigate the players because of longstanding FIFA regulations which forbid footballers from displaying any "political, religious or personal" messages on their kit during games. Yet all players under scrutiny were told Wednesday they will not face punishment. That followed a statement from FIFA which appeared to mark a clear softening of the previous stance, with the world football governing body stating that leagues should now consider the "context" of each protest and apply "common sense." FIFA President Gianni Infantino later went even farther. "For the avoidance of doubt, in a FIFA competition the recent demonstrations of players in Bundesliga matches would deserve an applause and not a punishment," Infantino said. That shift in FIFA's position could easily create headaches at some point in future as administrators wrestle with the subjective standards of "context" and "common sense." The FIFA edict would already appear to contradict rules put in place by the United States Soccer Federation. US Soccer - which this week posted a "United Against Racism" message across social media - introduced a regulation in 2017 requiring players to "stand respectfully" during the playing of the US national anthem. —AFP