

## International

# Fear, anger as border guards tighten net in south Mexico

## Mexico deploys 6,000 officers to the southern border

**TAPACHULA:** Sitting inside a truck at a checkpoint near Mexico's southern border, a soldier is scrolling through images on a screen, looking for human forms hidden in cargo vehicles. The scanning equipment delivering the images to his computer is part of Mexico's new bid to stop undocumented migrants and human traffickers. It is a crackdown that is about to get stronger, under the deal the Mexican government struck Friday with the United States to avoid President Donald Trump's threatened tariffs.

At another checkpoint nearby, officers inspect minibuses and taxis heading north from the Suchiate River, the frontier between Mexico and Guatemala. It does not take them long to find an undocumented family traveling in a minibus. They make them get off a father, mother and three children, including a baby and put them in a van with bars on the windows. It is likely the first step toward deportation. "We're here 24/7," one border officer tells AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. And the Central American migrants fleeing in droves from desolate poverty and brutal street-gang violence have begun to feel the impact. Migrant detentions have tripled in Mexico since January, to 23,679 in May. Deportations are also up, to 16,507 last month.

### Clamping down

As part of its deal to avert Trump's threat of five-percent tariffs on all Mexican goods—which would have risen incrementally to 25 percent by October—President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's government has agreed to deploy 6,000 officers from Mexico's new National Guard to the southern border starting today.

That will make it that much harder for Central Americans to slip through what has traditionally been a highly porous border. Though some migrants and activists remain defiant. The new deployment "might make the big caravans disappear, but not migration in general. It will continue one way or another," said Ernesto Castanedo, an activist at the Buen Pastor migrant shelter in the southern city of Tapachula.

The shelter houses 600 migrants, mostly Hondurans taking a break on their northward trek. The migrants watch TV, play football and wash their clothes as Unicef workers give their children impromptu classes. "It doesn't matter what Donald Trump does, he can never stop us," said another migrant, 57-year-old Josue Arenal, from Honduras. "Migrants always sneak through. He can close the border, build a

thousand walls, migrants are always going to find a way."

### Contraband of all sorts

AFP reporters saw undocumented migrants crossing the border at dawn on rafts, a day after the US-Mexican deal was announced. The customs officers on the bridge appeared indifferent to the thriving black-market operations ferrying migrants and stolen gasoline across the river. "They should go after organized crime," not migrants, said Abraham, 49, a one-time migrant from El Salvador who now works in a migrant shelter.

He experienced first-hand the dangers migrants face when he made his own attempt to reach the United States by hopping the freight train known as "The Beast." Members of a Mexican gang—one of many known for preying on migrants—robbed him and threw him off the train. Severely injured, he spent five years recovering in hospital, before returning to El Salvador. When he made it back to his village, he found his family had already given him up for dead. At the local cemetery, they had erected a tombstone with his name on it over an empty grave. — AFP



**CHIAPAS:** Migrants heading to United States gather around a fire at a shelter in Tapachula, Chiapas state, Mexico. — AFP

## How safe is your state? US scores low on human rights

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Police brutality, migrant abuse and Death Row ensured the United States scored poorly among rich countries in a new survey released - assessing human rights from Mexico to Mozambique. The Wellington-based Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) quizzed experts in all of the 19 nations it assessed, including civil society groups, lawyers and journalists, and gauged how each state treats its citizens.

"On safety from the state, the United States is performing significantly below the others," said Anne-Marie Brook, co-founder of HRMI, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. She compared the US performance against that of Australia, New Zealand, Britain and South Korea, all of whom belong to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. "The United States is the only one that has the death penalty, extrajudicial killings, like police killings that are not justified, and all the things going on at the border with children separated from parents," she said.

Countries surveyed were Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, South Korea, Vietnam, Nepal, Mozambique, Angola, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Britain, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the United States, Mexico, Venezuela and Brazil. Among areas examined: freedom of expression and association, the right to participate in government, and harm inflicted by the state or its agents, from torture to political arrests. Countries were scored across multiple categories, making an overall ranking impossible to set.

The United States also scored low on citizens' right to health and food, and on the right to live free from torture. Deaths involving police in the United States average nearly three a day, researchers wrote in the American Journal of Public Health last year, with black and Latino men twice as likely as white men to die during interactions with police. The US treatment of migrants also came under close scrutiny since US President Donald Trump made stemming immigration from Mexico a high priority of his administration.

US border patrol agents have apprehended almost 45,000 unaccompanied children at the southwest border since October. "For the average person who has bought into the idea of the United States as a world leader, leading democracy, they may find the results surprising," said Brook. The HRMI now had data for about two years, making it difficult to point to trends, she said, though minority groups were identified as most at risk in the countries surveyed.

In Asia-Pacific, Vietnam performed poorly on empowerment rights - freedoms related to opinion, expression and assembly. "The groups identified as most at risk are human rights advocates, journalists, people with particular political affiliations or beliefs, people who protest or engage in non-violent political activity," Brook said. In Latin America, safety from the state was worsening as minority groups encounter police violence, she added.

Britain notched up marked inequalities in quality of life, with disabled Britons especially at risk of rights violations. Australia received a poor score on the right to freedom from torture, which the survey called "a serious problem". The survey singled out free speech as a "very concerning" issue in Nepal. Launched in 2016, HRMI is a global and collaborative project run by academics and people working in human rights. Funded by grants and donations, they track the human rights performance of nations based on their commitments. — Reuters

## To deter shootings, Americans shun naming suspects

**WASHINGTON:** As the superintendent of Jefferson County School District in Colorado, Jason Glass oversees one of the most troubled pieces of property in the United States: Columbine High School. The site of the one of the first - and still among the deadliest - school shootings in the country, Columbine has proved an enduring headache for the school district ever since two students killed 12 of their classmates, a teacher and themselves in 1999.

In an open letter published this week, Glass detailed how every year hundreds of people try to get on campus to "reconnect with the 1999 murders," while in the years that followed, many other school shooters took inspiration from the Columbine attack. Around the 20th anniversary of the killings this year, reports that an armed woman had traveled to the area triggered a lockdown of the high school - and of many other schools in the area - only for the woman to be found dead, an apparent suicide.

"Columbine High School has a gravitational pull for these sorts of individuals," Glass wrote. "Most of them are there to satisfy curiosity or a macabre, but harmless, interest in the school. For a small group of others, there is a potential intent to do harm." Now the school district is considering following the dramatic example set by many other property owners whose buildings were the site of

carnage. "Today school safety experts recommend tearing down buildings where school shootings take place," Glass said. "Since the morbid fascination with Columbine has been increasing over the years, rather than dissipating, we believe it is time for our community to consider this option for the existing Columbine building."

Such a move is not undertaken lightly. Glass said officials were considering asking voters to approve a rise in property taxes to provide "an additional \$60-\$70 million" to build a new high school with added safety features. Yet despite efforts to improve security in US schools and other public buildings in the 20 years since the Columbine killings, the United States still sees hundreds of mass shootings every year.

In a bid to halt the bloodshed, authorities now strive to deny the killers the infamy many of them seek. Late last month, after a city employee killed 12 people in a Virginia municipal building, police and elected officials paid tribute to the victims but made a point of rarely speaking the killer's name. "I did it once," Virginia Beach police chief James Cervera said in an interview. After announcing the shooter's name at a press conference, he took to referring to the man as "the suspect," or "the shooter."

### 'Contagion'

Researchers say the "copy-cat effect," in which mass shooters take inspiration from other mass shooters in pursuit of fame and recognition, is real. Sherry Towers, a professor of mathematics at Arizona State University, applied models usually used for studying diseases to mass shootings. She told AFP high-profile mass shootings that attracted lots of media attention prompted a "contagion," inspiring others. Adam Lankford, a professor of criminology



**COLORADO:** In this file photo, school children hug each other in the parking lot outside Columbine High School in Littleton - the site of a school shooting where 15 students and teachers were killed by two former students in a suicide mission. — AFP

at the University of Alabama, said some mass shooters get as much media attention as Hollywood movie stars.

"That's a reward that imitators are pursuing," he said. "Some mass shooters explicitly said that infamy is better than obscurity." Towers said there was a growing understanding among news outlets and politicians that the public eye should not be focused on the perpetrators. Following the killings of 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch in March, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern vowed never to mention the shooter's name. "He is a terrorist. He is a criminal. He is an extremist. But he will, when I speak, be nameless," she said. — AFP

## Deal, no deal or delay: What will May's successor do about Brexit?

**LONDON:** Who are the candidates vying for British Prime Minister Theresa May's job and what have they said about Brexit? May has resigned, triggering a contest that will bring a new leader to power, with most of the frontrunners expected to push for a cleaner break with the European Union. Below are the 11 Conservative lawmakers who have said they are running and what they have said about Brexit. They are arranged in the order listed by oddschecker, a website that compiles bookmakers' odds.

### Boris Johnson, 54

The bookmakers' clear favorite was the face of the official 2016 referendum campaign to leave the European Union. The former London mayor resigned as foreign minister in July last year in protest at May's handling of the exit negotiations. Johnson said in a campaign video that Britain would leave the EU on Oct. 31 "deal or no deal". He has also said a second referendum on EU membership would be a "very bad idea" and divisive.

In a newspaper column, he said: "No one sensible would aim exclusively for a no-deal outcome. No one responsible would take no-deal off the table." He has said he would withhold a previously agreed 39 billion pound (\$49.66 billion) Brexit payment until the European Union gives Britain better exit terms. Local media reported he told a leadership hustings that the Conservatives would not be forgiven if Britain did not leave the EU by Oct. 31 and would face "political extinction." Johnson was educated at Eton College and Oxford University.

### Jeremy Hunt, 52

Hunt replaced Johnson as foreign minister in July after serving six years as health minister. That role made him unpopular with many voters who work in or rely on the state-run, financially stretched National Health Service. On Brexit: A "Remain" supporter in the 2016 referendum, Hunt now says that while he would prefer to leave the



**Conservative MP Boris Johnson**

EU with a deal, he believes a no-deal exit is better than no Brexit.

However, in a Daily Telegraph article he became the most senior leadership contender to reject a threat to leave with no deal by the end of October, saying parliament would block any such move. "Any prime minister who promised to leave the EU by a specific date - without the time to renegotiate and pass a new deal - would, in effect, be committing to a general election the moment parliament tried to stop it. And trying to deliver no-deal through a general election is not a solution; it is political suicide," he wrote.

"A different deal is, therefore, the only solution ... That means negotiations that take us out of the customs union while generously respecting legitimate concerns about the Irish border." He has not however entirely ruled out a no-deal exit, saying he could consider it as a last resort, but that it would likely force a national election in which the Conservatives would be punished by voters. Hunt was educated at Oxford. He speaks fluent Japanese.

### Andrea Leadsom, 56

A pro-Brexit campaigner, Leadsom made it to the last two in the 2016 contest to replace Prime Minister David Cameron following the referendum. She withdrew after a backlash to an interview in which she said being a mother gave her more of a stake in the future of the country, seen by critics as an unfair attack on May, who has no children. Leadsom resigned as Leader of the House of Commons last month, saying she did not believe the May government's approach would deliver on the Brexit referendum result. On Brexit: She told the Sunday Times she would put significant effort into encouraging the EU to come up with a "deal that we can all live with", but also said Britain had to leave by the end of October, with or without a deal. Leadsom was educated at the University



**Britain's Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt**

of Warwick before spending 25 years in banking and finance.

### Michael Gove, 51

Gove, one of the highest-profile Brexit campaigners during the 2016 referendum, scuppered Johnson's 2016 leadership bid by withdrawing his support at the last moment to run himself. Seen as one of the most effective members of May's cabinet as environment minister, Gove supported her Brexit strategy.

On Brexit: Gove said he believed he could unite the party and deliver Brexit. Writing in the Daily Mail newspaper, Gove said he would seek a Canada-style free trade agreement with the EU, ruled out a second referendum, and pledged that Conservative lawmakers would be involved in shaping Britain's negotiating position. "We must leave the EU as soon as we can. I want us to leave before October 31 and that will be my goal. I won't be engaging in can-kicking or dithering," he said, adding that he would "always choose Brexit over no Brexit". "If, finally, it comes to a decision between no deal and no Brexit, I will choose no-deal," he said. But Gove said he would not give up on progress and rush into a no-deal Brexit when a deal could be reached with "just a little more time and effort". He said any delay could be a few days or weeks. Leaving without a deal could mean parliament forcing Britain into a general election, he said. Gove, who was adopted as a child, was educated at Oxford University.

### Rory Stewart, 46

A former diplomat who once walked 6,000 miles across Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal, Stewart was recently promoted to International Development Secretary. Stewart was first elected to parliament in 2010 and backed remaining in the EU in the 2016 referendum. He opposes a "no deal" exit and vocally advocated May's deal with

Brussels. On Brexit: He told Sky News that he favored a "pragmatic, moderate Brexit". He said he would not seek to change May's withdrawal agreement, which has been rejected by parliament three times, and said anyone who said they could do so by October was "deluding themselves or deluding the country". "We have a deal negotiated with the European Union on the Withdrawal Agreement. What I would be doing in parliament and with the British people is sorting out that political declaration and landing it so we can get out and move on." Stewart was educated at Eton College and Oxford University.

### Dominic Raab, 45

Raab, a hardline Brexiteer, quit as May's Brexit minister last year after just five months in the job, saying her draft exit agreement did not match the promises the Conservative Party made in the 2017 election. He had held junior ministerial roles since being elected in 2010. Raab, a black belt in karate, campaigned for Brexit. On Brexit: Raab told the BBC that he plans to seek a "fairer deal" with Brussels, including renegotiating the customs and border plans relating to Northern Ireland. He also said he would not delay Brexit beyond October, however, and was prepared to leave without a deal.

Raab said he expected that if Britain left without a deal, it would likely get to keep around 25 billion pounds of its 39 billion pound exit payment, and the government could use that money to support businesses through Brexit. He caused a stir when he refused to rule out proroguing, or suspending, parliament until the Brexit deadline to prevent lawmakers blocking a no-deal Brexit. Parliament Speaker John Bercow said proroguing parliament would never happen and other candidates have criticized Raab's stance as undemocratic.

Proroguing parliament, which usually happens once a year so the government can outline a new legislative program, is a "prerogative power" - it is a decision for the prime minister, which is given effect by the Queen. Hannah White, deputy director of the Institute for Government think tank, said: "Suspending parliament to prevent democratically elected representatives from making a decision you suspect they wish to take would amount to a coup against Parliament and risk bringing the Queen into a terrible conflict." The son of a Jewish refugee, Raab was educated at Oxford University. — Reuters