

## International

# Britain confronts colonial past with statue protests

## Anti-racism protests prompt fresh look at Britain's past

OXFORD: Thousands of people called on Tuesday for a statue of 19th century British imperialist Cecil Rhodes to be removed from an Oxford University college, as debate raged over the removal of other monuments to the nation's colonial past. Protesters chanted "Take it down" and "Decolonize", and held placards urging "Rhodes Must Fall" and "Black Lives Matter" beneath the statue at Oriol College.

The "Rhodes Must Fall" movement, which began in South Africa, failed in a previous attempt to have the statue removed but has been revived by a wave of anti-racism protests. Protesters sat with raised fists for nearly nine minutes in tribute to unarmed black man George Floyd, whose death in US police custody triggered outrage and condemnation worldwide. Sylvanus Leigh, 44, said the limestone statue of the Victorian-era tycoon, who founded the De Beers diamond company in what is now Zimbabwe, represented "a colonial mindset".

The care worker told AFP he could think of more deserving candidates for a statue. "Better to have Mother Teresa or Desmond Tutu," he said. The leader of Oxford City Council, Susan Brown, said it would be a "good thing" if Oriol, which was founded in 1326, applied for permission to remove the statue. The college had to "find the right balance between the laws that protect our historic buildings and the moral obligation to reflect on the malign symbolism of this statue", she added. Local MP Layla Moran called

Rhodes a "white supremacist who does not represent the values of Oxford in 2020".

### 'Uncomfortable truth'

The protest comes after activists toppled a statue to Edward Colton, a 17th century merchant who helped build the city of Bristol and played a leading role in slavery. Years of local debate over what to do with the statue came to an end on Sunday when it was thrown in the harbor. Campaigners in Wales are now demanding the removal of memorials to Napoleonic war hero Thomas Picton, who was accused of cruelty while serving as a governor in Trinidad. In Scotland, activists have called for changes to the streets named after the 18th and 19th century tobacco and sugar traders who made their fortunes through slavery.

A central London statue of Winston Churchill was defaced, with protesters blaming his policies for the death of millions during famine in the Indian state of Bengal in 1943. Mayor Sadiq Khan launched a review of city landmarks and street names, saying many reflected "a bygone era", and could better reflect the capital's diversity. "It is an uncomfortable truth that our nation and city owes a large part of its wealth to its role in the slave trade," he said. Late on Tuesday, an east London council said it had removed a statue of Robert Milligan, whose family owned sugar plantations in Jamaica, from the Docklands district and



### Officials remove state of slave trader Robert Milligan



LONDON: A video grab shows a statue of Scottish slaveholder Robert Milligan being removed from West India Quay, east London yesterday. — AFP

added it would "review" other monuments in the borough "to understand how we should represent the more troubling periods in our history".

### 'Cold reality'

Despite widespread support, some warned of an attempt to erase the past. "If you change the street

names it's easier to forget but it's better to have signs underneath to talk about what these men did," said student Kieran Weatherill, 24, in Glasgow. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he understood the "depth of emotion" triggered by Floyd's death and the anger from black and ethnic minority groups about discrimination. — AFP

## Rising violence against women in Latin America

MEXICO CITY: Violence against women has soared in Latin America during the coronavirus pandemic, with a 50% increase in domestic abuse reports in Colombia alone, a top aid group said on Tuesday, confirming fears that lockdowns would put many women in danger. Femicide, the murder of women because of gender, rose 65% in Venezuela in April, and online searches for protection from gender-based violence increased 30-fold in El Salvador and Honduras, US-based nonprofit International Rescue Committee said in a report.

Concerns had been raised that violence against women would rise in Latin America, where almost 20 million women and girls suffer sexual and physical violence each year, during lockdowns implemented to help slow the spread of the coronavirus. Prosecutors, victim support groups, advocates and the United Nations all raised fears that women would be locked at home with their abusers and unable to leave to get help. "Women and adolescent girls... in confined spaces 24 hours of the day, some completely stuck with their perpetrators," said IRC Latin America director Meghan Lopez. Latin America is now a center of the global pandemic, with more than one million cases across different coun-



TIJUANA: Locals visit the graves of their relatives at the Municipal Cemetery #13 in Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico amid the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

tries and many yet to reach the peak.

"I would say right now the epidemic in Central and South America is the most complex of all of the situations we face globally," said Michael Ryan, top emergencies expert at the World Health Organization, on Monday. In Mexico, emergency calls reporting attacks on women in Mexico jumped more than 50% in the first four months of the year compared with the

same period last year, government data showed. The country's president has denied the rising violence. The Organization of Salvadoran Women for Peace reported a 70% increase in complaints of violence against women in Central America between mid-March and late-May. But the numbers may be an undercount, as women find it harder to seek help or report abuse with lockdowns in place. — Reuters

## Outgoing Burundi leader Nkurunziza dies at 55

NAIROBI: President Pierre Nkurunziza, a fitness enthusiast who increasingly relied on religion and repression to rule the impoverished and unstable central African nation of Burundi for 15 years, has died, the government announced on Tuesday. He leaves behind a nation dotted with the unmarked graves of his political opponents, an economy in tatters and a question mark over whether infighting over his succession could divide the country's powerful generals and security chiefs.

Burundi is largely cut off by international donors after the United Nations documented the widespread rape, torture and murder of political opponents by ruling party activists and the state security forces. Independent journalists are largely in exile or in jail. Nkurunziza, who was 55, was due to stand down in August, when retired general Evariste Ndayishimiye, who successfully stood for the ruling party in last month's elections, was due to take over. The opposition said the elections were marred by rigging and violence, charges rejected by the constitutional court last week. Nkurunziza, backed by several generals, would have preferred his ally Pascal Nyabenda to succeed him, said Nelleke van de Walle, a Great Lakes analyst with the International Crisis Group think tank.

Nyabenda is a civilian who became the president of the national assembly. Nkurunziza planned to remain active in politics as "Supreme Guide of Patriotism", a

title that came with a 1 billion Burundi franc (\$535,000) pension and retirement villa. But other generals successfully lobbied for Ndayishimiye to stand in May's elections. Like Nkurunziza, he is a former militia leader from the Hutu ethnic group. Burundi's constitution says Nyabenda is now supposed to take over until his former rival Ndayishimiye starts his seven-year term at the end of August. "Despite the clarity of the constitutional path, there is a risk of infighting within the CNDD-FDD (ruling party) because different generals supported different candidates during the ruling party primaries in January," said van de Walle.

### Human rights

Burundi became diplomatically isolated after 2015, when Nkurun-

ziza's decision to run for a third term - a move his opponents said violated the peace deal that ended the civil war - sparked protests met with extreme violence by the youth wing of the ruling party, known as the Imbonerakure, and the security forces. Hundreds of thousands of Burundians fled into exile.

Burundi withdrew from the International Criminal Court in 2017, shut down the United Nations office on human rights last year, and expelled the representative of the World Health Organisation last month amid criticism of the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic. It has carried out very few tests and held large rallies during the election period. "As I learn of the passing of Pierre Nkurunziza, I think of the thousands of lives that his regime cut short. The families that won't see justice," tweeted Thierry Uwamahoro, a democracy activist and prominent government critic who lives in exile. Journalists and human rights workers are routinely targeted. — Reuters



In this file photo, Burundi's incumbent president Pierre Nkurunziza raises his fist as he reacts to supporters during the last campaign rally in Bujumbura. — AFP

## Darfur's militia leader Kushayb in ICC custody

BANGUI: Darfur militia leader Ali Kushayb is in the detention centre of the International Criminal Court to face allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity after surrendering in the Central African Republic, the court said on Tuesday. Kushayb is the first Sudanese suspect taken into ICC custody in The Hague. The court issued an arrest warrant for him in 2007, accusing him of persecution, murder and rape in the western Sudanese region of Darfur between 2003 and 2004. ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda hailed Kushayb's transfer - almost 20 years after his alleged crimes - as a long overdue milestone.

"The victims in the Darfur situation deserve to finally have their day in court," she said in a statement. Prosecutors say Kushayb was a top commander of pro-government Janjaweed militias that led attacks on towns and villages and is implicated in at least 199 murders and the forcing of 40,000 mainly Fur civilians from their homes. There was no immediate public comment by Kushayb on the accusations against him. The conflict in Darfur killed an estimated 200,000 people and drove 2.5 million from their homes. The United States said killings there amounted to a genocide. The ICC has not accused Kushayb of that crime.

A government source in Central African Republic said Kushayb had been arrested in the northern town of Birao and sent by plane to The Hague on Tuesday morning. Former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir is also wanted by the ICC. He faces charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity for atrocities committed by pro-government forces in Darfur. The ICC has no police force and relies on its 123 member states to carry out arrest warrants. The UN Security Council referred the situation in Darfur to the ICC, the world's first permanent war crimes court, in 2002. Five other arrest warrants related to Darfur are still outstanding including that of Bashir. The ICC did not say when Kushayb would first appear before the court. — Reuters

## Jihadist attack leaves 59 dead in NE Nigeria

KANO: Fighters from an IS-linked jihadist group on Tuesday killed 59 people in a raid on a herding village in northeast (NE) Nigeria's Borno state, local militia members and residents told AFP. Fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) drove into remote Felo village in Gubio district in the early afternoon, shooting fleeing residents and running them over with their vehicles. "Fifty-nine bodies were recovered from the raid on the village," anti-jihadist militia leader Babakura Kolo said. "Some of them were shot and others were crushed under the wheels," he added.

The attack is believed to be a reprisal for the killing of jihadist fighters by local vigilantes protecting the villagers' herd from theft by the militants, a local leader in the village said. "We have lost 59 kinsmen in such a short time," said the local leader who asked not to be named for his personal safety. The jihadists have been stealing livestock from the village, prompting residents to form a militia force to end the theft, said another militiaman Ibrahim Liman, who gave the same toll. The vigilantes have been "hunting for the insurgents" in the bushes, killing some of them in gunfights, Liman said. Gubio, 80 kilometers from the regional capital Maiduguri, has been repeatedly targeted by the jihadists.

The incessant attacks prompted the authorities to send more than 100 vigilantes and local hunters to protect the town and nearby areas against incursions from ISWAP. ISWAP is a splinter faction that broke away from Boko Haram in 2016. It has intensified attacks against the military in the last two years, repeatedly carrying out deadly strikes against soldiers. In recent months there has been an increase in attacks on civilians blamed on the group. The decade-long conflict has killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million from their homes in the northeast. The violence has spread to neighboring Niger, Chad and Cameroon, prompting a regional military coalition to fight the insurgents.

### Abuses rampant

Soldiers in three West African countries unlawfully killed or caused the disappearance of at least 199 people between February and April during stepped-up operations against jihadist insurgents, Amnesty International said yesterday.

Security forces in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger launched fresh offensives this year against militants linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State, who are threatening to overrun vast swathes of the Sahel region south of the Sahara Desert.

Those offensives have led to repeated accusations by human rights groups that security forces have committed atrocities, including executing displaced civilians - charges the authorities have alternately denied or promised to investigate. Amnesty researcher Ousmane Diallo said it was not clear if the rights abuses, documented in a new report published on Wednesday, were occurring more frequently than in years past but said they took place amid a flurry of activity by national armies after suffering significant losses in militant attacks. — Agencies