

## International

# Moroccan teenagers' death sparks reform push in Spain

## Leaked video shows Tahiri's last moments

**MADRID:** A leaked video showing the death of a Moroccan teenager at a Spanish juvenile detention Centre has sparked demands for his case to be reopened and the method used to restrain him banned. Iliass Tahiri, 18, died on July 1, 2019 at Tierras de Oria detention Centre in the southern Almeria province as security staff strapped him to a bed, using a procedure denounced by rights groups as dangerous. Police opened an inquiry at the time but the case was closed after a judge ruled it "accidental" death.

However, CCTV footage of Tahiri's last moments in which he shows no signs of violence - a requisite for authorities to resort to such a restraint - was leaked to a Spanish newspaper. "If you see the video, you'll never believe it was accidental as the judge said," his brother Anass Tahiri, 22 said. "The video shows how they killed him. It's murder," said Anass, whose family has lodged an official appeal against the case's dismissal. Published by El Pais, the footage emerged as global protests raged following the death of George Floyd in the US when a policeman knelt on his neck.

The video's authenticity has been confirmed by a spokeswoman for Ginso, the private company managing Tierras de Oria. Within a week of its publication, the Spanish ombudsman's office called for the abolition of such procedures in juvenile detention centers. On June 18, the Almeria public prosecutor's office asked for the case to be reopened, denouncing as "illegal" the protocol for using such restraints. Tahiri's case centers on mechanical restraint - strapping a person to a bed so they can't hurt themselves or anyone else - but can only be used if they are agitated, aggressive or violent.

### 'Unnecessary aggression'

In the video, six men roughly wrestle Tahiri on to a bed face down, at one point kneeling on his buttocks to tighten a strap around his waist, eventually realizing he's no longer breathing. Tahiri, who arrived in Spain in 2017, was placed in juvenile detention over "some problems in the street", his brother said. He had been at Tierras de Oria for two months when he died. The day before, the teenager was visited by his mother and told her he'd been subjected to threats and abuse, Anass recalled. "He wanted her to get a lawyer to get him out because he'd reached the point that he'd rather be in prison than in that Centre," he said, adding that his brother had been on suicide watch.

In a statement to AFP, Ginso said "the need for the restraint procedure was demonstrated (during the investigation) as was its correct application by staff who complied scrupulously with the protocol," saying its use was "exceptional" and only undertaken with the "minimum necessary force".

But Andalusia's Human Rights Association (APDHA) says mechanical restraint is "standard practice" in juvenile centres, where it is often used for discipline or punishment. "What the video shows is a grossly disproportionate use of force given Iliass' attitude, involving completely unnecessary aggression and violence when he was restrained," APDHA's Francisco Fernandez Caparros told AFP. "Clearly his death occurred while they were applying the restraints... it was this situation of stress and violence that killed him," he said. Two other youngsters have died after being restrained: one in Madrid in 2011, and another in Spain's Melilla enclave in 2018.



**SAN ROQUE:** Anass Tahiri, 22, shows a video on his mobilephone capturing the death of his brother Iliass, at his home in San Roque, near Algeciras. — AFP

### A swift reaction

Ombudsman Francisco Fernandez Marugan called on the government to change the law. "A swift and radical decision is needed that will end the use of mechanical restraints once and for all," he said. "Nobody else must die in these circumstances in Spain." The Almeria public prosecutor also ordered that all such restraints be "immediately" suspended. The restraint protocol puts

youngsters "at serious unjustified risk", and where that results in injury, those responsible for approving such procedures will be held criminally liable, it said in a legal document. Contacted by AFP, the regional justice ministry declined to comment on the prosecutor's statement. But a spokeswoman said it would "respect and abide by" all judicial decisions. The closing of the Tahiri case "is currently being appealed," she said. — AFP

## Second wave worry stirs in Australia

**SYDNEY:** Australia's second most populous state yesterday said a man in his 80s died overnight from the coronavirus, the country's first death from the virus in more than a month, as concerns about a second wave of infections saw thousands queue for COVID-19 tests and supermarkets impose new restrictions. Victoria state reported 20 overnight cases, Victoria Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton told reporters in Melbourne, taking the state tally to nearly 1,900 after recording 17 on Tuesday and 16 the day before.

"When we get additional cases, there will be a risk of people dying or be at risk of further cases being hospitalized and going to intensive care," Sutton said. "That's why we need to get on top of numbers." The upswing in new cases in Victoria has sparked fears of a second wave, with 241 cases in the state so far identified as community transmission, an increase of eight from Tuesday. Victoria has asked for assistance from the country's military, a spokeswoman for Premier Daniel Andrews said. Those personnel will assist Victoria in enforcing a 14-day quarantine requirement imposed on all Australians and permanent residents returning from overseas.

Authorities in Victoria, which has become the virus hotspot in Australia, have been trying to contain the spread of the virus in half a dozen suburbs in the largest city of Melbourne hit by a spike in cases. Authorities believe the surge in new cases has been



**MELBOURNE:** A long queue of cars wait at a drive-through COVID-19 testing site located in a shopping centre carpark in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

caused by family get-togethers attended by people with mild symptoms. The state on the weekend extended its state of emergency for another month and reimposed restrictions on gatherings after seeing a sharp rise in daily infections.

The uptick in new infections has seen thousands of people seek COVID-19 tests. With elevated demand, police shut one drive-by clinic 20 minutes after it opened as it quickly became overwhelmed. Testing facilities that have been able to stay open have reported wait times of up to four hours, though authorities said anyone who wants a test will be accommodated. The concern has also seen people rush to supermarkets in Victoria, with Australia's

biggest supermarket chain, Woolworths Group, imposing fresh limits on specific goods in the state.

Shoppers in the state will be limited to two items of products including toilet paper, hand sanitizer, flour, sugar, pasta, long-life milk, eggs and rice. "While we have healthy stock levels to draw on, we're taking this precautionary step to help prevent excessive buying and support appropriate social distancing in our Victorian stores," said Claire Peters, managing director of Woolworths' supermarkets division. In March, Australia's major grocers put strict limits on purchases of toilet paper as shoppers stripped shelves in a rush of panic buying spurred by fears over a coronavirus lockdown. — Reuters

## India and Pakistan to expel embassy staff in spy row

**NEW DELHI:** India said on Tuesday it would expel half the staff in Pakistan's embassy in New Delhi over alleged spying by officials there, prompting Islamabad to say it would respond in kind. Relations between the nuclear-armed rivals are strained and tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats, often on charges of espionage, are common. Neither country has a permanent ambassador in place and in the last month each country has accused the other of illegally detaining and torturing its diplomats. "They (Pakistan) have been engaged in acts of espionage and maintained dealings with terrorist organizations," the Indian foreign ministry said in a statement.

In response, Pakistan's foreign ministry said its staff had acted lawfully, and that it would expel half of India's embassy in Islamabad "as a reciprocal measure". India earlier said it intended to voluntarily cut staff at its embassy in Islamabad by the same amount. Both countries said the affected officials had been asked to leave within a week. The latest round of hostility began when India expelled two Pakistani diplomats on May 31, after they were held for alleged spying, claims Islamabad said were "baseless". Last month Indian police released a pigeon belonging to a Pakistani fisherman after an investigation found that the bird, which had flown across the contentious border between the two countries, was not engaged in spying. — Reuters



**Indian High Commission officials Dwimu Brahms (right) and Selvadhas Paul sit in a car after their release from the Pakistan authorities for the accusation of been involved in a hit-and-run incident, as they return to India at the India Pakistan Wagah Border Post about 35 km from Amritsar. — AFP**

## Ghana apologizes to Nigeria over the embassy demolition

**ABUJA:** The Ghanaian leader has apologized to Nigeria over the demolition of its embassy building in Accra, the Nigerian presidency said. "President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana Tuesday spoke with President Muhammadu Buhari, expressing his sincere apology for demolition of a building on the premises of Nigerian High Commission in Accra, Ghana," said a statement from the presidency late Tuesday. Akufo-Addo has also ordered investigation into the incident, it said, adding that some suspects had been arrested and would be charged. Armed men reportedly entered the Nigerian High Commission compound

in Accra on Friday to supervise bulldozers to demolish a building under construction.

### Nigeria summons envoy

Meanwhile, Nigeria summoned a senior Ghanaian diplomat to complain over "attacks" on its embassy compound in Accra that saw a building demolished, the foreign minister said. Nigeria "summoned the Charge d'Affaires of the High Commission of Ghana to Nigeria, Ms Iva Denoo to demand urgent explanation on the recent attacks on a residential building in our diplomatic premises and reinforcement of security around diplomatic premises and staff," Geoffrey Onyeama wrote on Twitter. Armed men reportedly entered the Nigerian High Commission compound in Ghana's capital Accra on Friday to supervise bulldozers to demolish a building under construction. Onyeama on Sunday demanded those responsible must be punished, adding that Nigeria was in talks with the Ghanaian authorities over the matter. — Agencies

## Jordan Valley: Strategic plain with resources

**JERUSALEM:** An agricultural plain with precious water resources, the Jordan Valley makes up nearly a third of the occupied West Bank and is in Israel's sights to annex. Israel considers control of the plain, which sits between two desert mountain ranges, essential for its security. If Israel presses ahead with annexation, the valley will mark the country's western border with Jordan. The kingdom is just one of two Arab nations, along with Egypt, to have a peace deal with Israel.

But the Israeli military sees the sparsely populated valley as a potential buffer zone in case of ground attacks. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in January described it as "vital" to Israel, vowing his government would "apply sovereignty" to the area. For the Palestinians, such a step would destroy "all chances of peace". Ne-

tanyahu has said annexation would exclude Palestinian population hubs such as the city of Jericho, which risks becoming an enclave surrounded by Israeli territory under the plan.

### Controlled by Israel

Around 10,000 Israeli settlers live in the Jordan Valley, out of more than 450,000 in the entire West Bank, according to figures from NGOs and the Israeli government. The valley is home to some 65,000 Palestinians, including around 20,000 Jericho residents, according to Israeli anti-occupation organization B'Tselem. Israeli settlements are viewed as illegal under international law, but Washington broke with this consensus in November and said it should be up to Israeli courts to decide on their legality. The majority of the Jordan Valley is already administered by Israel, as it forms part of the West Bank's "Area C" as outlined in the Oslo peace accords of the 1990s. Area C covers around 60 percent of the West Bank, while Area B, which accounts for roughly 22 percent, is under Palestinian civil rule but Israeli security control. — AFP

## Quake in south Mexico kills 6

**OAXACA:** A 7.4 magnitude earthquake struck southern Mexico on Tuesday, killing six people, sending hundreds fleeing from their homes and forcing the closure of a major state-owned oil refinery. Hundreds of aftershocks were reported in the hours following the initial tremor, which was felt in Mexico City, some 700 kilometers (430 miles) distant from the epicenter in Crucecita, in Oaxaca state.

"We had to leave because there is a risk that the market will collapse. We are hardly selling anything because of the pandemic and now if the market is closed we will have a worse time," said Juana Martinez, 60, a flower-seller in Oaxaca city. All the deaths occurred in Oaxaca, with the majority due to the collapse of buildings. A woman died near Crucecita, and five other people died in towns located within 150 kilometers of the epicenter, officials said.

The 7.4 quake struck at a depth of 23 kilometers, the US Geological Survey reported. An initial tsunami warning was later reversed. There was no damage reported to "strategic infrastructure" including ports, airports, refineries and hydroelectric plants, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said in a video published on social media. Mexican Oil said its refinery in Salina Cruz in Oaxaca had been shut down as a precaution after a fire broke out at the plant "that was immediately stifled." One of the dead from the earthquake was a worker at the refinery, who was killed after falling off a high structure.

Other refineries in the state are operating as normal, Mexican Oil said. Rescuers were battling to reach a remote area of the rugged state amid reports that 15 workers had become trapped while constructing a highway. The quake also caused slight damage to four hospitals and a clinic, as well as to churches, markets and other buildings, authorities said. Six hours after the quake, 447 aftershocks had been recorded across the region, the strongest at a magnitude of 4.6. The US Pacific Tsunami warning center initially said hazardous waves as high as three meters could strike anywhere within 1,000 kilometers of the quake's epicenter, affecting the Pacific coast of Mexico and Central and South America.

### Quake adding to virus woes

Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum also activated response protocols, adding that two people had been injured. Apart from some building facades falling, she said there had been "no major incidents" reported. The earthquake was felt in several parts of the capital of 8.8 million people which in 2017 was hit by a 7.1 magnitude quake that left 360 people dead throughout the country. That same year, 96 people died after an 8.1 magnitude quake struck the south of the country, with Oaxaca the worst affected state. The quake has hit at a time when Mexico is already reeling from the coronavirus pandemic. It has suffered more than 23,000 COVID-19 deaths - the second most in Latin America - and 191,410 cases. On Tuesday the country recorded its highest number of cases in a 24-hour period, with 6,288 new infections, according to the Ministry of Health.

Medical staff were evacuated from some hospitals in the capital alongside patients, although those suffering from the coronavirus remained isolated inside the buildings, alongside their caretakers. "All those that are in an area with COVID patients remain inside, only those of us who weren't there at the time" have come out, said Jaime Gomez, a nurse at a hospital caring for coronavirus patients. — AFP