

International

Videos pile pressure on US police over racism, killings

Public trust in US police erodes amid shocking footages, fatal shootings

MINNEAPOLIS, US: More shocking bodycam footage, more fatal shootings by officers, and a murder trial nearing its conclusion — public trust in the US police has seldom been more strained. Video evidence showing apparent wrongful use of deadly force has been piling up, fueling a fierce debate on policing across the United States. “I am a Black man, and I know from experience that the police just aren’t professional and the leadership they get isn’t right,” said Darnell Squire, 46, who sells T-shirts and baseball caps from a street stall in a Minneapolis suburb.

“They aren’t around to protect the community, or to make people feel safe, whatever they say — that has been clear since I was a child. “I don’t trust promises from the government about things changing, and I don’t trust the system or the courts. For me, the problem starts at the top.”

In a court in Minneapolis, former officer Derek Chauvin is on trial for murder over the killing of George Floyd, with closing arguments next week before the jury delivers its verdict. As the trial examined grueling video of Floyd dying while Chauvin knelt on his knee, outside the courtroom, fresh examples of police killings have stoked anger and protests. An officer who stopped young Black man Daunte Wright in a Minneapolis suburb last Sunday shot him dead in his car after mistaking her Taser for a gun — all caught on bodycam.

In another case, Chicago police on Thursday released graphic footage of an officer shooting dead 13-year-old Adam Toledo in a dark alley last month, apparently suspecting he had just dropped a gun.

‘This is a long fight’

“I will feel the same even if Chauvin is convicted — this is a long fight,” said Selena McKnight 46, a local activist in Minneapolis who regularly attends protests against police misconduct. “Just look at the videos that come out every day. We will keep fighting. The trial is just one case, and this battle is not over until justice is always served.”

The images of Floyd, Wright, Toledo and others dying at the hands of police have been contrasted to officers dealing with aggressive white men.

On Wednesday, in a town outside Minneapolis, an officer was assaulted with a hammer and dragged at high-speed by a vehicle driven by a white, 61-year-old man. The suspect, who is accused of attacking shop staff who asked him to wear a COVID-19 mask, rammed a police car and drove off with the officer hanging onto his car.

No shots were fired, and the man was later arrested. “Was that man shot? No, of course not. That tells you all you need to know about police prejudice,” said McKnight. “We might think that all this video footage can make a difference, but it just shows what we all know has been going on for a long time.”

Ahead of the Chauvin trial verdict, the United States is braced for potentially violent protests if he is acquitted of murder. Downtown Minneapolis has been largely boarded up and deserted during the trial, with armed National Guard troops patrolling in armored vehicles.

On Friday night there were new protests in Brooklyn Center, the suburb where Wright was shot, with about 500 people gathering before police moved in to break it up. Officers said some protesters came wielding shields and baseball bats, while glass bottles were thrown. About 100 people were arrested, public safety officials said.



PORTLAND, OR: Protesters march along the Hawthorne Bridge following the police shooting of a homeless man in Lents Park Friday in Portland, Oregon. —AFP

There were also protests over the death of Toledo in Chicago, where several hundred turned out. “I fear the police, not Covid-19,” said Minneapolis resident Tesfaye Habte, who was born in Ethiopia. “If I am driving and I see them, I worry they will shoot me because of my color. It seems to

have got worse in recent years in this city.

“With the protests, both sides are doing bad things. “America is democracy, the constitution and free speech, but the police are very aggressive and inhuman. I follow this trial and I am worried.” —AFP

In Brazil, graveyard shift reveals rising cost of pandemic

SAO PAULO: In almost three decades of working in Sao Paulo’s largest cemetery, the oldest gravediggers can’t remember performing more than 10 night burials. But since the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic swept across Brazil, that exception has become the rule.

The vertiginous rise in deaths in Sao Paulo in recent months has forced the mayor of the country’s richest and most populous city to adapt funeral planning to avoid being overwhelmed. Now, in addition to hiring more personnel and vehicles, night shifts have been added in four of the 22 municipal cemeteries, where 600 graves are dug every day. One of these is Vila Formosa, the largest cemetery in Latin America and a showcase for the lethal cost of the pandemic in Brazil, where more than 360,000 people have already died from COVID-19.

Eritrea admits troops in Tigray, vows pullout

ADDIS ABABA: Eritrea has acknowledged its troops are participating in the war in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region but has vowed to pull them out amid mounting international pressure. The first explicit admission of Eritrea’s role in the fighting came in a letter posted online Friday night by the country’s information minister, written by its UN ambassador and addressed to the Security Council.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray in November to disarm and detain leaders of the region’s once dominant political party, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). For months the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments denied Eritreans were involved, contradicting testimony from residents, rights groups, aid workers, diplomats and even some Ethiopian civilian and military officials.

Abiy finally acknowledged the Eritreans’ presence in March while speaking to lawmakers, and

At 6 pm the night shift clocks in. Two huge lamps powered by generators start up, illuminating the graves and filling the air with the smell of diesel. It is the start of autumn here, and in this tree-lined cemetery on the outskirts of Sao Paulo the temperature has dropped to around 16 degrees Celsius (60 degrees Fahrenheit). Eight gravediggers clad in white overalls, face masks and gloves arrive in two vans. They get out and form a circle around the graves, hands behind their backs and heads bowed to observe a minute of silence.

Then, they fetch their shovels and lay to rest the first deceased of the night. “Are there no relatives?” asks one. “No. You can go ahead,” answers another, clutching the deceased’s documents in his hand. In May 2020, during the first onslaught of the pandemic, the cemetery hired three excavators to dig 60 graves a day. Now, there are six machines digging 200 graves a day, say the workers, who labor until 10 pm.

More than 300 burials a day

Fifty rented vans are used to move bodies, due to a lack of hearses to cope with the influx of dead. The mayor’s office has denied local media reports that school buses have been pressed into service.

vowed soon after that they would leave. Friday’s letter from Eritrea said that with the TPLF “largely thwarted”, Asmara and Addis Ababa “have agreed—at the highest levels—to embark on the withdrawal of the Eritrean forces and the simultaneous redeployment of Ethiopian contingents along the international boundary.”

On Thursday UN aid chief Mark Lowcock told the Security Council that despite Abiy’s earlier promise, there had been no evidence of a withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the region. He also said aid workers “continue to report new atrocities which they say are being committed by Eritrean Defense Forces.”

Eritrea’s information minister, Yemane Gebremeskel, said on Twitter Saturday that Asmara had summoned the UN’s resident coordinator in Eritrea and the local head of the UN humanitarian coordination office to protest “wayward practices and fallacious reports... on basis of opaque networks/affiliations with TPLF.” Tigray residents have repeatedly accused Eritreans of mass rape and massacres, including in the towns of Axum and Dengolat.

Both Eritrea and Ethiopia blame the conflict on TPLF-orchestrated attacks on federal army camps in early November and describe it as a campaign to restore law and order.

COVID compared with other deadly viruses

PARIS: The global death toll from COVID-19 passed three million yesterday with the pandemic already having killed more people than most other viral epidemics of the 20th and 21st centuries. But there have been notable exceptions. The post-World War I Spanish Flu wiped out 50 million people, according to some estimates. And over the decades AIDS has killed 33 million.

Here are some comparisons: Flu epidemics

In 2009, the H1N1 virus, or swine flu, caused a global pandemic and left an official death toll of 18,500. This was later revised upwards by The Lancet medical journal to between 151,700 and 575,400 dead. That brings it close to seasonal flu, which accounts for between 290,000 and 650,000 deaths worldwide every year, according to the World Health Organization. In the 20th century, two major non-seasonal flu pandemics—Asian flu in



A patient uses a new non-invasive technology that can reduce the need of intubation at the COVID-19 area of the Centenario Hospital in Sao Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul state, southern Brazil Friday. —AFP

Shortly after, a van arrives with another casket. A large group of relatives surrounds the grave where the 57-year-old man, who died of COVID-19, is to be buried. The dead man’s sons ask if they can place a yellow and green shirt from the Brazilian soccer team on top of the coffin. The gravedigger who is holding the burial documents nods his assent. “It’s the only thing we can do,” he says. —AFP



MEKELE: A woman leans on the wall of a damaged house which was shelled as federal-aligned forces entered the city, in Wukro, north of Mekele. —AFP

Eritrean UN ambassador Sophia Tesfamariam reiterated this position in her letter Friday. “We are indeed appalled by attempts to blame those who were forced to resort to legitimate measures of self-defense that other countries would have done under similar circumstances,” she wrote.

“The allegations of rape and other crimes lodged against Eritrean soldiers is not just outrageous, but also a vicious attack on the culture and history of our people.” —AFP

the illness in its tracks and heavily reduce the risk of contamination. This treatment has helped bring down the death toll from its peak in 2004 of 1.7 million deaths to 690,000 in 2019, according to UNAIDS.

The hepatitis B and C viruses also have a high death toll, killing some 1.3 million people every year, most often in poor countries. In 2002-2003, COVID predecessor SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) that emerged from China was the first coronavirus to spark global fears, but killed just 774 people in the final toll.

Three million equals

As a matter of comparison, the figure of three million people represents a little bit more than the population of Jamaica or Armenia. It is also three times the toll of the Iran-Iraq war which raged from 1980-1988, or 2,000 times more than the 1,500 who died in the sinking of the Titanic. Over the past month, more than 10,000 people have died every day from the coronavirus.

It is as many as the 10,000 children who die every day from hunger around the world, according to the UN. —AFP



LAHORE: Supporters of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) offer Friday prayers along a blocked street before taking part in a protest after their leader was detained following his calls for the expulsion of the French ambassador, in Lahore Friday. —AFP

French nationals in Pakistan refuse call to leave

ISLAMABAD: The French community in Pakistan is torn between disbelief, fear and annoyance in reaction to their embassy’s call for them to leave the country after Francophobic rioting this week by an extremist Islamic party. Most, it seems, have decided to stay put. In a terse three-line email, accompanied by the words “urgent”, the embassy in Islamabad on Thursday recommended its nationals and French companies temporarily leave Pakistan, because of “serious threats”.

Western governments should treat people who insult the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) the same as those who deny the Holocaust, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said yesterday. Speaking after a week of violent protests in Pakistan by a radical Islamist party outraged by French government support for magazines publishing cartoons of Mohammed, Khan said insulting the prophet hurt Muslims around the world. “We Muslims have the greatest love & respect for our Prophet,” he tweeted. “We cannot tolerate any such disrespect & abuse.”

The email, which did not specify the nature of the risks, caused shock and consternation among the few hundred-strong French community. Jean-Michel Quarantotti, who has taught French at the American school in Islamabad for three years, was first alerted to the embassy advisory by a student. “I won’t hide from you that at first I felt a little bit of fear, panic,” he told AFP. “It’s not my first foreign country—I did a lot before arriving in Pakistan—but I was really shocked. I didn’t expect to go through this.”

His first thought was to pack up and leave, but after discussing the situation with colleagues he said reason took over from emotion. “The Pakistanis around me advised me to stay,” he said. “They told me that they would protect me.”

“It was very touching to see the solidarity around me, from people who told me: ‘We are here for you, do not worry, we will defend you.’” The embassy announcement came after days of violent protests orchestrated by the radical Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) after the arrest in Lahore Monday of leader Saad Rizvi, who had called for a march on the capital to demand the expulsion of the French ambassador. Four policemen were killed in the rioting.

Many of the French people contacted by AFP questioned the timing of the embassy’s message as the Pakistani government had just announced the ban on the TLP and seemed to have the situation under control. “Yes, there are a lot of risks to live here,” said Quarantotti, “but we don’t need to panic the French community with words that are badly chosen. —AFP