

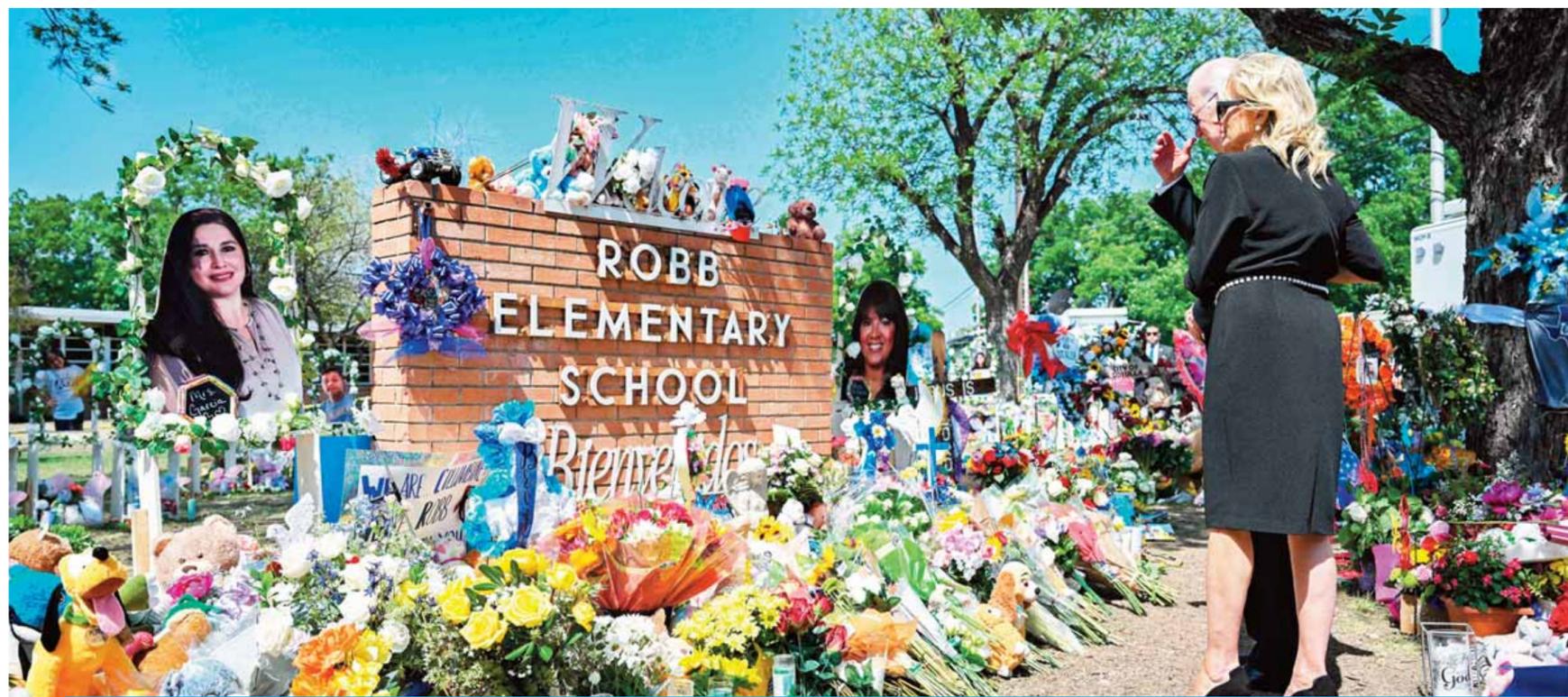


Historic leftist win in first round of Colombian vote

## Bodies pulled from wreckage of crashed Nepalese plane

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UVALDE, Texas: US President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden pay their respects at a makeshift memorial outside of Robb Elementary School on May 29, 2022. — AFP

# Uvalde begs Biden to 'do something'

## Heartbroken Texas school massacre town boos governor Abbott

**UVALDE, Texas:** Desperate pleas for a stop to the gun massacres plaguing the United States rang out Sunday during President Joe Biden's visit to Uvalde, where he prayed for the 19 children and two teachers slain by a teen gunman in the small Texas town. "Do something!" rang out shouts from a crowd in the street as Biden left Sacred Heart Church where he attended mass with mourning relatives.

"We will. We will," Biden responded to the crowd, before heading to private meetings with relatives of the dead and with first responders. Biden, accompanied by his wife, Jill Biden, was in Uvalde less than two weeks after making a similar trip to the site of another mass shooting - this time targeting African Americans in a racist attack - in Buffalo, New York.

The first couple began by visiting a makeshift shrine at Robb Elementary School, where last Tuesday the teen gunman walked in with an AR-15-type semi-automatic and began his slaughter. Both wearing black, the Bidens held hands in front of the memorial, walking slowly along the thicket of wreaths, bouquets, white crosses and blown-up photos of the slain children.

Biden, whose adult son Beau died seven years ago this Monday from cancer, and whose first wife

and infant daughter perished in a car accident, made the sign of the cross, appearing to wipe away a tear. The arrival of the Bidens' motorcade at the school was met with applause from a crowd. However, illustrating the tension in the town, there were boos at the appearance of Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott, who strongly opposes new restrictions on gun ownership. "We need changes," shouted one man.

"Our hearts are broken," Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller said at the church. Biden was not scheduled to speak publicly in Texas, but on Saturday he renewed his so-far fruitless call for Congress to overcome years of paralysis to toughen firearms regulations - especially on weapons like the AR-15. "We cannot outlaw tragedy, I know, but we can make America safer," Biden said.

Ricardo Garcia, who works at Uvalde's hospital, said he was "honored" Biden came to visit his town, but wanted to see more action on gun control. The 47-year-old was at work on Tuesday when first responders brought in children from Robb. "I just can't get out of my mind that screaming in the halls from the moms when they got the bad news," Garcia said. "It's still there. I can't sleep at night."

Harrowing accounts emerged of the ordeal faced

by survivors of Tuesday's attack, where the behavior of the police is under severe scrutiny. Ten-year-old Samuel Salinas was sitting in his fourth-grade classroom when the shooter, later identified as Salvador Ramos, 18, barged in and announced: "You're all going to die." Then "he just started shooting," Salinas told ABC News.

Texas authorities admitted Friday that as many as 19 police officers were in the school hallway for nearly an hour before finally breaching the room and killing Ramos, saying the officers mistakenly thought that he had stopped killing and was now barricaded. Parents have expressed fury and on Sunday the Justice Department announced an inquiry "to identify lessons learned and best practices to help first responders prepare".

Surviving children described making desperate, whispered pleas for help in 911 phone calls while police waited. Some played dead to avoid drawing the shooter's attention. Eleven-year-old Miah Cerrillo smeared the blood of a dead friend on herself to feign death. Salinas said he thinks Ramos fired at him, but the bullet struck a chair, sending shrapnel into the boy's leg. "I played dead so he wouldn't shoot me," he said.

Another student, Daniel, whose mother would

not provide his last name, said he saw Ramos fire through the glass in the classroom door, striking his teacher. Though his teacher lay on the floor bleeding, she repeatedly told the students, "Stay calm. Stay where you are. Don't move," Daniel told The Washington Post.

### 'Have the courage'

Vice President Kamala Harris on Saturday attended the funeral of a victim of the Buffalo mass shooting - Ruth Whitfield, who was among 10 people killed on May 14, allegedly by a self-described white supremacist. "Congress must have the courage to stand up, once and for all, to the gun lobby and pass reasonable gun safety laws," Harris tweeted.

The Uvalde shooting was the deadliest school attack since 20 children and six staff were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012. But Congress has repeatedly failed to agree on possible new gun regulations. This time might be different, some lawmakers say. Democratic Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy said Sunday there were "serious negotiations" underway involving members of both parties. — AFP

## Indian rapper killed in gang related violence

**NEW DELHI:** An Indian rapper with a major following both at home and among the diaspora in Canada and Britain was gunned down near his hometown in a gang-related killing, Indian police have said. Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu - known as Sidhu Moose Wala to his 11 million followers on YouTube and millions of fans - was driving his SUV in the northern state of Punjab when he was attacked by suspects in two or three cars who fired about 30 bullets on Sunday afternoon.



Sidhu Moose Wala

Viresh Kumar Bhawra, state police chief, said the killing "looks like an inter-gang rivalry" and added that a Canada-based gangster known as Goldy Brar "has claimed the responsibility on behalf of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang". Bhawra, who is facing questions about reducing Sidhu's security detail last week, said the rapper was not travelling with his bodyguards and even left his bullet-proof vehicle at home.

Moose Wala, 28, earned a particularly large following among young Punjabi men with his catchy rap videos that attacked rival singers and politicians, and portrayed him as a man who fought for the community's pride, delivered justice and gunned down his rivals. The rapper unsuccessfully contested state elections as a candidate for India's main opposition Congress party earlier this year.

The political bid attracted additional scrutiny and criticism of Sidhu's work with rivals accusing him of glorifying guns, Sikh nationalism and gang culture. His biggest hits, such as "Legend", "Old Skool", "Devil" and "Just Listen", are among the most popular tunes on different short-video platforms in India. — AFP

## Around 100 dead in clashes between Chad gold miners

**N'DJAMENA:** Around 100 people have died in clashes between gold miners in northern Chad, Defense Minister General Daoud Yaya Brahim said on Monday. Violence broke out on May 23 at Kouri Bougoudi near the Libyan border, sparked by a "mundane dispute between two people which degenerated", he said, adding that the toll was "around 100 dead and at least 40 wounded".

The clashes occurred in the Tibesti Mountains, a rugged and lawless region in the central Sahara some 1,000 km from the capital N'Djamena. The discovery of gold there 10 years ago sparked a rush of miners from across Chad and neighboring countries, and tensions often run high. The latest clashes were between Mauritians and Libyans, Yaya Brahim said.

He spoke to AFP by phone from the area, where

he said he was with a large military contingent sent to help restore order. "This isn't the first time that there's been violence among gold miners in the region, and we have decided to suspend all gold mining at Kouri until further notice," he said, adding that "the great majority (of mines in the area) are illegal".

The incident was first announced last Wednesday, when Communications Minister Abderaman Koulamallah said in a statement there had been "loss of human life and several wounded," but gave no further details. The same day, the head of Chad's National Human Rights Commission, Mahamat Nour Ibedou, told AFP that after the fighting broke out, "the government sent in a force to intervene, which fired on people". "According to our information, there are at least 200 dead," he said, adding that he had no evidence to support this figure.

Succes Masra, who heads an opposition party called The Transformers, and Chad's main armed rebel movement, the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), also gave a toll of some 200 dead. But Yaya Brahim denied this figure and said the authorities were not to blame. "The defense and security forces absolutely did not open fire, and

there were not 200 deaths," he said. On Monday, another rebel group in the region, the Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic (CCMSR), said in a statement there had been "carnage," which had unfolded "under the complicit gaze of the security forces."

### Troubled region

The Tibesti region is notorious for ethnic troubles and for fostering revolts that have marked Chad's history since the vast central West African country gained independence from France in 1960. In Jan 2019, several dozen people died in Kouri when fighting erupted between Libyan Arabs and people from the eastern Chadian region of Ouaddai.

Koulamallah, in comments to AFP last Wednesday, described the gold-mining area as a "hostile zone, almost lawless, it's the Far West. They all go there because there's gold, so there's conflict."

The impoverished Sahel state last year lost its 30-year ruler, Idriss Deby Itno, who was killed during an operation against rebels. His place was taken by his son, General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, at the head of a 15-member military junta. — AFP

## Guards accuse 'Zionists' of killing colonel

**TEHRAN:** Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Monday accused "Zionists" of shooting dead a colonel in Tehran earlier this month, days after the Zionist entity reportedly told the US it was behind the killing. Guards Colonel Sayyad Khodai, 50, was fatally shot on May 22 outside his home in the east of the Iranian capital by assailants on motorcycles. He was hit with five bullets, according to official media.

It was the most high-profile killing inside Iran since the Nov 2020 murder of top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh - an act Tehran blamed on

arch-enemy the Zionist entity. Khodai was killed "by the most vicious people, the Zionists, and God willing, we will avenge his death," head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Major General Hossein Salami said during a visit to his family, according to the Guards' Sepah News website.

The general did not, however, use the term "Zionist regime", routinely used by the Islamic republic as a direct reference to the Zionist entity. "The enemy pursued him (the colonel) from the heart of the White House and Tel Aviv for months and years, door to door and alley to alley to martyr him," Salami added. The New York Times reported last week that the Zionist entity has told the United States that the Zionist state was behind the killing of Khodai. The US daily cited an anonymous "intelligence official briefed on the communications".

Iran had earlier blamed Khodai's killing on "elements linked to the global arrogance", its catch-all term for the United States and allies including the

Zionist entity. According to the New York Times, Zionist officials claimed Khodai was the deputy commander of a "secret unit within the Quds Force", involved in "planning plots against foreigners, including (Zionists)". The Quds Force is an elite unit of the Guards in charge of external operations. The source, who spoke to the Times on condition of anonymity, said the Zionist entity told US officials the killing was meant as a warning to Iran to halt the operations of this covert group.

Iran's state television has said that Khodai was a member of the Quds Force and that he was "known" in Syria, where Iran has acknowledged deploying "military advisers". The Guards described Khodai as a "defender of the sanctuary", a term used for those who work on behalf of Tehran in Syria or Iraq. Iran maintains significant political influence in both countries and has backed President Bashar Al-Assad's regime in Syria's grinding civil war. — AFP