



Daily Express

Sri Lanka's International Newspaper

Registered in the Department of Posts of Sri Lanka under No: QD/146/News/2020

COVID-19 and curfew in Sri Lanka

- Fifty two individuals were confirmed as COVID-19 positive yesterday (3), taking Sri Lanka's tally of the novel coronavirus infection to 1735. All the cases are from among those quarantined in various facilities across the country. Eight hundred and eighty eight individuals are receiving treatment and 836 have been deemed completely recovered. Eleven have succumbed to the virus.
- A two-day countrywide curfew came into effect at 10:00 p.m. yesterday and is scheduled to be lifted at 4:00 a.m. on Saturday (6). The country will be under lockdown for the entirety of today (4) and tomorrow (5), PosonPoya day.
- Today is declared a holiday for the public sector on account of the countrywide curfew.
- The National Election Commission to decide on a date for the general elections on Monday (8).
- The second penumbral lunar eclipse of 2020 will begin at 11.15 p.m. Sri Lanka Standard Time, tomorrow, but there will be no dark shadow as in total or partial lunar eclipses, just a reduction of the Moon's brightness
- The Ministry of Health issues guidelines to be followed by the Elections Commission, election officials, voters, employees of the public, political parties and candidates and private sector the media and the public.
- The health ministry says face masks not required when driving private vehicles, but mandatory when travelling in three-wheelers and other hired vehicles.

Coronavirus toll 380,428 deaths at 1100 GMT yesterday

PARIS - The novel coronavirus has killed at least 380,428 people since the outbreak first emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT yesterday (3).

At least 6,399,710 cases of coronavirus have been registered in 196 countries and territories. Of these, at least 2,756,500 are now considered recovered.

The tallies, using data collected by AFP from national authorities and information from the World Health Organization (WHO), probably reflect only a fraction of the actual number of infections.

Many countries are testing only symptomatic cases or the most serious ones.

The United States is the worst-hit country with 106,181 deaths from 1,831,821 cases. At least 463,868 people have been declared recovered.

After the US, the hardest-hit countries are Britain with 39,369 deaths from 277,985 cases, Italy with 33,530 deaths from 233,515 cases, Brazil with 31,199 deaths and 555,383 cases and France with 28,940 deaths and 188,322 cases.

China - excluding Hong Kong and Macau - has to date declared 4,634 deaths and 83,021 infections. It has 78,314 recovered cases.

Europe overall has 180,209 deaths from 2,192,755 cases, the United States and Canada have 113,639 deaths from 1,924,231 infections, Latin America and the Caribbean 54,871 deaths from 1,098,686 cases, Asia 17,262 deaths from 590,534 cases, the Middle East 9,833 deaths from 427,035 cases, Africa 4,483 deaths from 157,874 cases, and Oceania 131 deaths from 8,599 cases.

-AFP

Trump administration to block Chinese airlines from flying to US

WASHINGTON - The Trump administration said yesterday (3) it would block Chinese passenger airlines from flying into or out of the United States starting June 16 in retaliation for a similar ban by the Chinese government on US companies, further escalating tensions between the world's two biggest economies.

Relations between the countries have deteriorated sharply in recent weeks as officials scuffled over the origin of the pandemic and China's move to tighten its authority over Hong Kong. With the election just five months away, President Donald Trump and his campaign have taken a much tougher stand against China.

The aviation dispute threatens to further chill economic relations and disrupt business ties between the United States and China. Flights between the countries were already sharply curtailed by the pandemic and Chinese restrictions on foreign airlines that effectively halted trips by United Airlines, Delta Air Lines and American Airlines, the major US carriers that go there.

China's aviation regulators said March 26 they would limit foreign carriers to one flight per week based on schedules that were in place earlier that month. But those three airlines had already stopped service to the country by then because of the coronavirus. Chinese airlines continued to fly to US cities.

The Chinese restrictions became a problem only in recent weeks, as Delta and United sought to resume flights to China in June. Both carriers appealed to the Civil Aviation Authority of China but did not receive a response.

-NYT

Trending News

USA: The Trump administration selects five companies as the most likely candidates to produce a vaccine for the coronavirus, a critical step in the White House's effort to deliver on its promise of being able to start widespread inoculation of Americans by the end of the year.

- Defence Secretary Mark Esper says he is against using active duty troops to quell the protests for racial justice gripping the country.

Germany: Police reveal they have identified a new suspect in the disappearance of British girl Madeleine McCann in 2007, saying the 43-year-old man may have killed her.

WHO: The World Health Organization says it would resume using a controversial drug in coronavirus trials, while Italy led European nations reopening borders even as the pandemic carved its deadly path through Latin America.

Libya: Forces backing the country's unity government have re-seized Tripoli international airport after heavy fighting with rival troops supporting strongman Khalifa Haftar.

Spain: Lawmakers vote to extend the state of emergency a final time through to June 21 as Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez urges an embittered opposition not to succumb to the "poison of hate."

UN: The UN rights chief decries "structural racism" in the United States, and voices alarm at the "unprecedented assault" on journalists covering protests across the country after George Floyd's death in custody.

Lesotho: Former first lady, Maesaiah Thabane, returns to custody after a court revoked bail that she had been controversially given over the murder of her husband's estranged wife.



-STR/AFP

A man holding an umbrella walks past a damaged ferris wheel and shacks at the beach in Alibag town of Raigad district yesterday (3), following cyclone Nisarga landfall in India's western coast. Coronavirus-hit Mumbai appeared to escape the worst of Cyclone Nisarga as the first severe storm to threaten India's financial capital in more than 70 years left it largely unscathed after ripping

roofs off buildings in nearby coastal towns. Mumbai and its surrounds are usually sheltered from cyclones -- the last deadly storm to hit the city was in 1948 -- but authorities evacuated at least 100,000 people, including coronavirus patients, from flood-prone areas in the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat. The storm made landfall near the coastal town of Alibag, around 100 kilometres (60

miles) south of Mumbai, yesterday afternoon, and then crossed Maharashtra's coast, with its path veering to the east of Mumbai and gradually weakened by evening. The cyclone brought heavy rainfall -- with winds of 100-110 kilometres per hour (60-70 miles per hour) and gusts of up to 120 kph. Mumbai experienced downpours throughout the afternoon, with strong winds toppling

trees in some cases. City authorities said there were no reports of injuries or deaths, though the rains caused compound walls to collapse in some neighbourhoods. The beach town of Alibag fared worse, with the cyclone tearing roofs off homes and overturning mobile food stalls. The coastal town is a favoured haunt of Bollywood stars and industrialists, who own holiday homes there

Sri Lanka among nations accused by UN of censorship during pandemic

GENEVA - The UN rights chief warned yesterday (3) that China and other Asian countries, including Sri Lanka, were using the coronavirus crisis as an excuse to clamp down on free expression and tighten censorship.

In a statement, Michelle Bachelet expressed alarm over how censorship had been tightened in several countries, along with arbitrary arrests and detention of people who criticize their government's response, or even who simply share information or views on the pandemic.

"Arrests for expressing discontent or allegedly spreading false information through the press and social media, have been reported in Bang-

ladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam," the statement said.

The UN High Commissioner said she recognized the need to restrict harmful disinformation to protect public health, or any incitement of hatred towards minority groups.

But she insisted that this should not result in purposeful or unintentional censorship.

"While governments may have a legitimate interest in controlling the spread of misinformation in a volatile and sensitive context, this must be proportionate and protect freedom of expression," Bachelet said.

"This crisis should not be used to re-

strict dissent or the free flow of information and debate," she said.

Her statement listed problems in each of the Asian countries identified. For China, the UN rights office said it had received information on "more than a dozen cases of medical professionals, academics and ordinary citizens who appear to have been detained, and in some instances charged, for publishing their views or other information on the situation related to COVID-19," or for being critical of the government's response to the crisis.

In India, it pointed out that several journalists and at least one doctor had been charged for their public criticism of the authorities' response

to the crisis. And in Indonesia at least 51 people were reportedly being investigated under the criminal defamation law for allegedly spreading "fake news" on the pandemic.

In Cambodia meanwhile, the rights office said it had documented the arrest of 30 people, including a 14-year-old girl, for COVID-19 related public comments and social media posts.

"In these times of great uncertainty, medical professionals, journalists, human rights defenders and the general public must be allowed to express opinions on vitally important topics of public interest," Bachelet said.

-AFP

Eight killed in Indian pesticide factory blast

AHMEDABAD - At least eight people were killed and 74 others injured in a blast at a pesticides factory in western India yesterday (3), authorities said.

Almost 5,000 people living in two villages near the plant in the Bharuch district of Gujarat state were evacuated as a precaution after a storage tank exploded, local official M D Modia said.

"The blaze is now under control," he said late yesterday. He said earlier that there was "no gas leakage and hence no threat" to the nearby population. Industrial accidents are common in India due to sometimes lax safety standards. Many factories are currently resuming operations as India's coronavirus lockdown is eased.

Last month 12 people were killed in a gas leak at a chemicals plant in Visakhapatnam in eastern India owned by South Korea's LG Chem.

-AFP

George Floyd's death All four officers face charges

MINNEAPOLIS - Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison is increasing charges against former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin to second-degree murder in George Floyd's killing and also charging the other three officers involved in the incident, according to a tweet from US Sen. Amy Klobuchar.

Ellison's official announcement was expected late yesterday (3), more than a week after Floyd was killed while in police custody in Minneapolis, sparking nationwide protests that call for the end to police violence against black citizens.

Chauvin, who had his knee pressed into Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes, had previously been charged with third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. Officers Thomas Lane and J.A. Keung, who helped restrain Floyd, and a fourth officer, Tou Thao, who stood near the others, were not initially charged.

-CNN

Johnson pledges to admit 3 million from Hong Kong to UK

LONDON - Prime Minister Boris Johnson raised the stakes in a confrontation with China over Hong Kong yesterday (3), promising to allow nearly three million people eligible for a British overseas passport to live and work in Britain, if Beijing were to impose a new security law on the former British colony.

Johnson's promise, made in a column in The Times of London, would open the door to a significant influx of people fleeing Hong Kong, should the situation in the city deteriorate further.

But it left unanswered questions about how difficult it would be for those arrivals to obtain British citizenship. Describing what he proposed as one of the

biggest changes in Britain's visa regime in history, Johnson said the 350,000 Hong Kong residents who hold British national overseas passports, as well as some 2.5 million who are eligible to apply for them, would be granted 12-month renewable visas that would put them on a path to citizenship.

"Many people in Hong Kong fear that their way of life - which China pledged to uphold - is under threat," Johnson wrote.

"If China proceeds to justify their fears, then Britain could not in good conscience shrug our shoulders and walk away; instead we will honour our obligations and provide an alternative."

-NYT

Quote for Today

Success is getting what you want. Happiness is wanting what you get.
-Dale Carnegie

Word for Today

Kitsch [kitch] - *noun* - something of tawdry design, appearance, or content created to appeal to popular or indiscriminating taste

Today in History

1989 - Tiananmen Square Massacre: Chinese troops clear the square of student protesters, unofficial figures place death toll near 1,000

Today is...

Hug Your Cat Day

A day to give your cats some extra TLC and thank them for their friendship and loyalty with a snuggle and a few extra scratches

HOT TOPICS

By Kelly Macnamara

Ahead of summit Global vaccine group urges virus solidarity

PARIS - The head of the global vaccine alliance has warned "nobody is safe unless everybody is safe" from the new coronavirus, urging international solidarity ahead of a fundraising summit as the pandemic threatens to trigger a resurgence of preventable diseases.

Scientists are racing to identify and test possible vaccines for COVID-19 as nations grapple with the economic and societal consequences of the virus lockdowns.

Seth Berkley of Gavi, the vaccine alliance, said the international community must ensure all countries will have access to any potential vaccines, regardless of their wealth.

"This is a global problem that needs a global solution and we have to all work together," he said.

He spoke ahead of a virtual summit hosted by Britain on Thursday, where Gavi hopes to raise at least \$7.4 billion to continue vaccination programmes against diseases like measles, polio and typhoid that have been severely disrupted by the pandemic.

The meeting will also see Gavi and its partners launch a financing drive to purchase potential COVID-19 vaccines, scale up their production, and support delivery to developing nations.

The fundraising goal for COVID-19 is \$2 billion, although Berkley said it was an initial sum as they kickstart negotiations with manufacturers and could go up "substantially."

The meeting comes as the pandemic exposes new ruptures in international cooperation.

US President Donald Trump last week announced he would pull out of the World Health Organization (WHO) and there are fears America may use its economic clout to buy up vaccines.

Berkley said that countries needed a "different mindset", adding that sharing access to drugs was not just a humanitarian and equality issue, but a global health security one.

"Nobody is safe unless everybody is safe. We saw the virus move from somewhere around Wuhan to 180 countries in less than three months, including islands and isolated areas," he said.

The World Health Organization, UN children's agency UNICEF and Gavi warned last month that the pandemic had hindered routine immunisation services in nearly 70 countries, affecting around 80 million children under the age of one.

Polio eradication drives were suspended in dozens of countries, including those still struggling with the debilitating illness, while measles vaccination campaigns were also put on hold in 27 countries, UNICEF said.

Recent Gavi-supported modelling from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical medicine estimated that for every COVID-19 death prevented by halting vaccination campaigns in Africa, up to 140 people could die from vaccine-preventable diseases. Berkley said the situation was improving, with new guidance on how to carry out immunisation campaigns safely.

But he said locating all the children who missed out on vaccines before new outbreaks emerge will be a "real challenge."

Today's (4) funding drive is for a five-year period in which the organisation aims to reboot halted programmes in the countries it supports -- allowing them to access vaccines at a much reduced cost -- with the goal of reaching some 300 million children.

Berkley said he was "cautiously optimistic" that the target would be reached, with more new countries pledging donations despite the economic strains of the pandemic.

Recalling past episodes when vaccine work was stalled by the outbreak of diseases such as Ebola and SARS, another coronavirus, he urged nations to move beyond "boom and bust" cycles of crisis planning.

"I don't think this coronavirus is going to go away like SARS did," he said.

He also warned of an "unprecedented" level of rumour and conspiracy theory around vaccinations, particularly from the northern hemisphere.

"Distrust between people in their government, the rumours and the intentional spread of false information is not only at an all-time high, but it also is being amplified by social media tools that didn't exist 20 years ago," he said. "So we have almost a perfect storm of problems."

-Agence France-Presse

French court orders extradition of Rwandan genocide suspect

PARIS - Rwandan genocide suspect Felicien Kabuga is to be handed over to an international court, a chamber of the Paris Court of Appeal has ruled.

Kabuga, born in 1933 or 1935, had been on the run for more than 20 years until French police last month tracked him down to a Paris suburb where he was living under a false name.

A UN court wants to try him on charges including genocide, complicity in genocide, persecution and extermination for his alleged role in the 1994 atrocities.

More than 800,000 Rwandans, members of the Tutsi ethnic group and moderate Hutus who tried to protect them, were killed during the genocide.

-dpa



By The New York Times

George Floyd protests

Impassioned rallies continue across US

For an eighth day and night, tens of thousands of people staged peaceful protests and impassioned marches across the United States, while the widespread destruction and looting that had followed demonstrations in recent days was largely absent.

President Donald Trump called on states to bring in the military to restore order and combat "lowlifes and losers", as an infantry battalion from Fort Bragg was dispatched to the nation's capital as part of a broader show of force. But governors resisted the president's entreaties, instead bolstering the police presence, changing tactics and imposing curfews to prevent people from using the protests as cover to wreak mayhem.

While demonstrators in many cities defied curfews, they did so peacefully.

They sang "We Shall Overcome" at the Barclay's Centre in Brooklyn, New York. Outside Wrigley Field in Chicago, crowds chanted "Hands up" as they raised their arms to the sky. In Los Angeles, hundreds gathered outside the home of Mayor Eric Garcetti, who earlier in the day had joined the crowds and taken a knee as he listened to pleas. On a bridge in Portland, Oregon, hundreds lay face down, hands behind their backs, for a 'die in' intended to emulate the death of George Floyd.

Floyd, a 46-year-old black security guard, died after his neck was pinned under a white police officer's knee for nearly 9 minutes in Minneapolis last week. The officer has been charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter. The killing, captured on video, was the spark for the outpouring of anger and anguish expressed in demonstrations in more than 140 cities for more than a week.

As the sustained protests have made clear, the fuse has been burning for a long time, and despair had mounted with each case of a black person dying at the hands of the police.

A week after Floyd's death, Minnesota said it had started a human rights investigation into the Minneapolis Police Department, citing evidence of systematic discrimination against people of colour, particularly African-Americans.

The Floyd family gathered in Houston on Tuesday (2) for a memorial and were joined by about 60,000 people, according to city officials. Speakers offered emotional testimonials to a man

they recalled as a "gentle giant." A video of Floyd's 6-year-old daughter, Gianna, taking in the outpouring of support was shared widely around the country.

"Daddy changed the world," she said.

— Washington: More than 1,000 protesters on Tuesday faced off with officers across a newly erected chain-link fence outside the White House, but the demonstrations remained largely peaceful. Dozens of military vehicles were deployed on the capital's streets.

— New York: Hundreds of demonstrators violated an 8:00 p.m. curfew in a standoff with the police at the entrance to the Manhattan Bridge. But overall there were fewer violent confrontations between the police and protesters and fewer acts of looting and vandalism than in recent days.

— Atlanta: Police and military personnel used tear gas to disperse a large crowd near Centennial Olympic Park shortly after the city's 9:00 p.m. curfew.

— California: The Los Angeles police made hundreds of arrests throughout the city on Tuesday night, said a spokesman, Officer Tony Im. Santa Monica enacted among the strictest curfews in the nation, starting at 2 p.m. local time.

— Philadelphia: Hundreds of protesters had gathered outside City Hall by Tuesday afternoon, and later tried to pull down a statue of a former Mayor Frank Rizzo, an early proponent of white identity politics. Mayor Jim Kenney said later that the statue had been taken down.

— Charlotte, NC: Protesters and the police skirmished after authorities ordered the crowds to disperse. Video showed officers surrounding demonstrators and using stun grenades, pepper spray and pepper pellets, tactics that were criticized by a black state lawmaker who represents Charlotte. The police, who said that they would conduct an internal review of the exchange, said that officers had been hit by bottles and rocks, and that a protester had thrown what they called a chemical agent at an officer on a bicycle. One protester who was arrested had a military-style rifle and two 30-round magazines, police said.

— St. Louis: Trump tweeted his condolences to David Dorn, a retired police captain who police said had been shot by a looter on Monday night. Dorn died the same night that four active-duty police

officers were shot during protests. Combat troops are deployed to the nation's capital and placed on standby.

Less than two hours before Washington's 7:00 p.m. curfew went into effect on Tuesday, military vehicles assumed positions across the city.

A crowd of protesters in Lafayette Square near the White House appeared to be at least twice that of a day earlier, and swelling.

With the imminent arrival of military units and the use of helicopters to suppress protesters on Monday (June 1) night — a tactic used for battles with insurgents abroad, now applied on US soil — some in the crowd whispered that more soldiers were on the way.

While the evening ended with only flashes of confrontations, the city's downtown is being flooded with agents from the FBI, the Bureau of Prisons, the US Marshals, Customs and Border Protection, and several other agencies, along with the military. Transportation Security Administration officers have also been called out of airports to help protect federal property.

The militarization of the response to the protest has stirred deep concerns and drawn widespread criticism, including from retired Adm. Mike Mullen, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who said that "our fellow citizens are not the enemy, and must never become so."

"I am deeply worried that as they execute their orders, the members of our military will be co-opted for political purposes," he wrote in an opinion piece in The Atlantic published on Tuesday, adding that America's cities and towns "are not 'battle spaces' to be dominated, and must never become so."

The federal law enforcement response is being run by Attorney General William P. Barr. It was also Barr who ordered federal officers to clear peaceful protesters out of Washington's Lafayette Park on Monday so that Trump could walk to a historic church and have his picture taken there, according to a Justice Department official.

In all, about 1,600 troops were being moved into the Washington area, according to the Pentagon, which described the troop movements as "a prudent planning measure."

-New York Times

'Sacrificed'

Anger in China over death of Wuhan doctor from coronavirus

WUHAN - The death of a doctor at Wuhan's 'whistle-blower hospital' has prompted a wave of anger at hospital authorities for not protecting frontline health workers in the face of the coronavirus outbreak.

Hu Weifeng, 42, a urologist at Wuhan Central hospital where the whistle-blower ophthalmologist Li Wenliang worked, died of the virus on Tuesday (2) after a four-month battle. Hu is the sixth doctor from his hospital killed by the virus.

Another doctor who spoke out, Ai Fen, said authorities told hospital staff not to wear protective gear so as not to cause panic and reprimanded her for "harming stability" when she tried to warn others of the virus. Li Wenliang also tried to warn friends and colleagues in December, and was punished — only to die of the virus in February, causing an unprec-

edented wave of public anger at authorities. A hashtag on Hu's death had more than 400 million views yesterday (3) with more than 46,000 comments. Many of them asked why the heads of the hospital have not been punished — specifically Cai Li, head of the Communist party committee of the hospital.

"From Li Wenliang to Hu Weifeng, the medical staff of Wuhan Central hospital lost the most during the outbreak. They were killed by the leaders of the hospital," one internet user on Weibo wrote.

"Wuhan officials have all been changed. What about the leadership of the central hospital?" one internet user asked, referring to the number of city and provincial-level officials who have been fired over their handling of the outbreak. "Cai Li is not even put under investigation. Are these doctors and nurses going to die in

vain?" another said. While most internet users posted candle emojis and thanked Hu for his sacrifice, others blamed the system that Cai is part of for suppressing voices like Li and Ai who could have warned medical staff and residents of Wuhan.

"The people were unable to fight against the authoritarian system and one after another they are sacrificed," one said. "Dealing with Cai Li is a challenge to the foundation of the system. Once it happens there will be problems later."

Hu reportedly suffered a brain haemorrhage in April and was in a coma before he died. According to Chinese media, when Hu was awake he told those around him: "I feel like a small boat in the middle of the ocean. At any moment I could be submerged."

-The Guardian

By Philip Pullella

Pope urges US reconciliation

Condemns racism and street violence

VATICAN CITY - Pope Francis called for national reconciliation in the United States yesterday (3), saying that while racism is intolerable, the street violence that has broken out is "self-destructive and self-defeating."

Francis broke his silence on the tensions in the United States, which has seen eight nights of protests over the death of a black man in police custody, by dedicating the entire English-language section of his weekly audience to the turmoil there.

He called the death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old African-American who died after a white policeman pinned his neck under a knee for nearly nine minutes, "tragic." Francis said he was praying for all who died as a result of the "sin

of racism," including Floyd. "My friends, we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life," Francis said. "At the same time, we have to recognise that the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost," he said.

Francis asked Americans to implore God for "the national reconciliation and peace for which we yearn." U.S. President Donald Trump came under fire from Christian leaders who criticised him for using religious symbols as a backdrop for staged photo opportunities. They condemned the administration's forceful displacement of peaceful protesters near the White House on Monday so Trump

could be photographed holding a Bible in front of an Episcopalian church.

On Tuesday (2) Catholics protested as Trump rode to a photo opportunity at a shrine dedicated to St. Pope John Paul II.

Washington's Roman Catholic Archbishop Wilton Gregory said in a statement that John Paul "certainly would not condone the use of tear gas and other deterrents to silence, scatter or intimidate them for a photo opportunity in front of a place of worship and peace."

Gregory, who is black, criticised the administrators of John Paul shrine, saying he found it "baffling and reprehensible that any Catholic facility would allow itself to be so egregiously misused and manipulated."

-Agencies

By Sameer Yasir and Kai Schultz

Powerful cyclone lashes Mumbai

As city grapples with coronavirus

NEW DELHI — A powerful cyclone slammed into India's coast yesterday (3) afternoon, striking the commercial hub of Mumbai, lashing beach towns with heavy rain and strong winds, and pushing thousands of people into emergency shelters.

Cyclone Nisarga made landfall with unusual force in the state of Maharashtra, home to Mumbai, a city of about 20 million. The region rarely experiences cyclones, and the last storm to threaten Mumbai with such intensity was more than 70 years ago.

Uprooted trees crashed into parked cars, and local television news reports showed cargo ships struggling to navigate choppy waters. But as the cyclone moved inland, passing over Mumbai in the afternoon, authorities said the city may have averted the worst. There have been no immediate reports of casualties.

Efforts to blunt the cyclone's destruction were threatened by the coronavirus outbreak. Mumbai, which sits on a narrow peninsula, is struggling to contain a rising number of infections, and more than 100 COVID-19 patients had been evacuated from a makeshift hospital to higher ground. The city is densely populated and low-lying, making it particularly vulnerable, and a lockdown to contain the virus is still in effect. The cyclone is "more tragic news," said Anil Parab, a minister with Maharashtra's governing Shiv Sena party. South Asia has considerable experience preparing for cyclones, which are referred to as hurricanes in the Atlantic and the north-eastern Pacific. Last month, about three million people were evacuated when another storm, Cyclone Amphan, struck eastern India and Bangladesh, killing more than 80 people. As Cyclone Nisarga moved closer to India Wednesday morning, Uddhav Thackeray, the chief minister of Maharashtra, ordered Mumbai's residents to stay home for two days and the city's airport was closed. Officials said they had evacuated up to 65,000 people from several coastal districts in the state.

In the neighbouring state of Gujarat, which was also in the storm's path, authorities said they had evacuated tens of thousands of people from coastal areas and provided them with shelter. The storm, powered by unusually warm water in the Arabian Sea, made landfall around 1:00 p.m. near the town of Alibag, about 30 miles south of Mumbai, with top wind speeds as high as 75 mph.

In recent years, India has significantly improved its disaster response capabilities, drafting meticulous evacuation plans and building thousands of emergency shelters. But many storm facilities have recently been converted into COVID-19 quarantine centres, stretching state resources thin, particularly in Maharashtra and Gujarat, the Indian states hit hardest by the coronavirus. When Sunil Deshpande, a fisherman in the Raigad district of Maharashtra, arrived at a shelter on Tuesday, government officials told people to maintain social distancing, but the building was so crowded that doing so was "nearly impossible," he said.

-New York Times

Unable to access online classes, Dalit girl kills herself

KERALA - Students have protested in southern India after the suicide of a teenage girl who was unable to attend online classes because she did not have access to the internet or television.

Schools have been shut across India since the country locked down its 1.3 billion people on March 25 to curb the spread of the coronavirus, leaving millions of children whose families cannot afford expensive devices with no access to education.

Among them was Devika Balakrishnan, the 14-year-old daughter of a daily wage labourer in the southern state of Kerala who was found dead near the family home on Monday (June 1), the first day of the new school term, having apparently taken her own life.

Indian media reports said the teenager went missing from her house on Monday afternoon. Her burned body was later recovered from a deserted spot near her house. An empty bottle of kerosene was found near her body.

"There is a television at home, but that has not been working. She told me it needed to be repaired, but I couldn't get it done. I couldn't afford a smartphone either," said the girl's father, who belongs to the underprivileged Dalit community (formerly referred to as "untouchables"), according to media reports. "I don't know why she did this. I said we could look at options, like going to a friend's house."

The young girl's mother had given birth a few weeks ago, and the family was suffering financially, said a report by the NDTV network.

Student activists in Kerala took to the streets to protest her death, which has highlighted the inequalities of the lockdown, with pupils in poor, rural areas far less likely to be able to learn online.

"The government action has put the poor students under stress and pressure," said Abhijith KM, who heads the Kerala Students Union and was among the protesters. "It should enable the poor students to obtain computers at interest-free loans to avoid similar cases in future," he told the Reuters news agency by phone from Kozhikode district.

He said the group had organized protests in all Kerala districts, but limited the number of protesters to 50 in each area so they could follow social distancing rules. Police said they used batons to disperse protesters in northern Malappuram district, where the victim was from.

One officer was injured when about 28 students tried to enter the district education office, Malappuram superintendent of police Abdul Kareem said.

India has begun easing its coronavirus lockdown, which was among the strictest in the world and left millions without work. But schools have not yet reopened, and Kerala began its academic year on Monday with classes broadcast on television and online for more than four million students. The protesters accused the government of not checking whether all students had the means to attend them.

Kerala's education minister expressed grief over the teenager's death and ordered an investigation.

Kerala is one of India's wealthier states and more than half its inhabitants have access to the internet, according to a 2018 report by the Internet And Mobile Association of India. It also has among the highest rates of internet use by women, the same report said.

Al Jazeera/Agencies

GLOCAL

Daily Express

Sri Lanka's International Newspaper

Express Newspapers (Cey) Pvt. Ltd.,
185, Grandpass Road, Colombo 14, Sri Lanka
Telephone: 0117 322 705 (Editorial) 0117 322 731 (Advertising)
0117 322 789 (Circulation)
Email – editor.dailyexpress@encl.lk/weekendexpress@encl.lk
Epaper - http://epaper.newsexpress.lk
Facebook – News Express Sri Lanka

President announces militarized Task Force for 'disciplined, virtuous, and lawful society'

COLOMBO - President Gotabaya Rajapaksa late Tuesday (2) announced a Presidential Task Force, headed by Secretary, Ministry of Defence and consisting entirely of military and police personnel to build a 'secure country and a disciplined, virtuous, and lawful society.'

The creation of the Task Force, entitled the 'Presidential Task Force to build a Secure Country, Disciplined, Virtuous and Lawful Society,' was announced by President Rajapaksa just hours after the Supreme Court dismissed petitions challenging his refusal to reconvene Parliament, paving the way for parliamentary elections to be held.

In an extraordinary gazette, the president tasked the Force with four points of action:

to curb the illegal activities of social groups which are violating the law which is emerging as harmful to the free and peaceful existence of society at present in some places of the country; to crack down on the drug menace, prevent entry of drugs from abroad through ports and airports and to fully eradicate drug trafficking in the country and to prevent other social ills caused by drug abuse; to take legal action against persons responsible for illegal and antisocial activities conducted in Sri Lanka from overseas; and to investigate and prevent any illegal and antisocial activities in and around prisons.

President Rajapaksa has also emphasized the necessity to liberate society from the drug menace, making it a primary task for the

group, and said it may issue instructions or request for assistance, which all government officers and other persons must comply with. The president also directed the Task Force to report to him, all cases of delay or default on the part of any public officer or officer of any ministry, government department, State Corporation or other similar institution in the discharge of duties and responsibilities assigned.

The Task Force will be chaired by Major General (Retired) Kamal Gunaratne and will have Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Defence, D.M.S. Dissanayake its Secretary. Other members include Army Commander Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva, Navy Commander, Vice Admiral Piyal de Silva;

Air Force Commander, Air Marshal Suman-gala Dias; Acting Inspector General of Police, C.D. Wickremarathne; Director General of Customs, Major General (Retired) Vijitha Ravipriya; Head of the National Intelligence Service, Major General (Retired) Jagath-Alwis; Director State Intelligence, Major General Suresh Salley; Director Army Intelligence Unit, Major General A. S. Hewavitharana; Director Navy Intelligence Unit, Captain S.J. Kumara; Director of Air Force Intelligence Unit, Air Commodore M.D.J. Wasage; Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Special Task Force of Police, T. C. A. Dhana-pala and Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Waruna Jayasundara.

-ENCL



-LAKRUWAN WANNIARACHCHI / AFP

A woman sews fabrics for a Buddhist flag in a shop ahead of Poson festival, in Colombo on Tuesday (2). Sri Lankan Buddhists are preparing to celebrate Poson, a Buddhist festival marking the introduction of the religion to the island, which falls on Friday (5). The government has declared a country-wide curfew today (4) and Friday, in its bid to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus

47 COVID-19 patients take coronavirus tally to 1730, 27 from the navy

COLOMBO - Forty seven individuals comprising 27 naval personnel, 19 returnees from Qatar and one from Kuwait, were confirmed as COVID-19 positive by 8:30 p.m. yesterday (2), taking Sri Lanka's tally of the novel coronavirus infection to 1730. Forty individuals, a bulk of them repatriated from the Middle East, were confirmed as COVID-19 positive on Tuesday (2).

The Ministry of Health said all those who tested positive were under quarantine at various facilities around the country. It said 836 patients had completely recovered and been discharged from hospitals, while 883

patients were receiving treatment in hospitals across the country.

With yesterday's confirmation, 798 naval personnel have so far been identified as COVID-19 positive, making it the largest cluster in the country. Of those having tested positive, in 424 had recovered as of yesterday.

Effective Monday (June 1), the government began carrying out PCR tests on all arrivals at the Bandaranaike International Airport, and directing them to nearby hotels until the results are confirmed.

-ENCL

Thondaman's funeral

Journalist on duty placed in self quarantine

COLOMBO - An area correspondent for a number of Tamil newspapers in the Dimbula area in Hatton who covered the funeral of the late minister, Arumugan Thondaman last week, one of his close contacts and a driver have been placed in self isolation for 14 days effective Tuesday (2), after showing COVID-19 symptoms.

Kotagala Public Health Inspector SoundarRagavan said the journalist and his associates had undergone PCR tests at the Dickoya Base Hospital, and have been placed in self quarantine.

The journalist had reportedly visited the late minister's funeral at his residence in Battaramulla and at the party headquarters of the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) as part of his reporting duties. All three will remain in self quarantine at their residences in Dimbula until the results of the first PCR testing is received and a second test is carried out.

Meanwhile, government yesterday (3) defended its decision to hold a state funeral for Thondaman, with former MP Susil-Premajayantha saying they took every possible measure to avoid the spread of the virus and had even gone to the extent of issuing guidelines to be followed by attendees. The government "even announced curfew" on Saturday (May 30) in the NuwaraEliya District along with the all-island curfew that followed the next day, he said.

Premajayantha's defence of the government's action came in the wake of widespread criticism that double standards were applied to the late minister's funeral, at a time when strict pandemic prevention measures are enforced on the rest of the population, forcing them to hold their funerals in as short a time as possible with minimal family participation.

-ENCL

Sri Lanka wins new business providing services to cruise ships anchored outside Colombo port

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka is providing anchoring, sludging and crew transfer services to two Princess Line ships anchored outside Colombo port, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) said yesterday (3)

The cruise ships, Crown Princess and Island Princess, can be seen from Marine Drive and Galle Face. "Both the vessels came for sludge and garbage removal, and to receive bunkering services," SLPA officials said, explaining that the Colombo port charges for all the service it provides while sludging and garbage clearance are provided by the local agents.

The Crown Princess disembarked 479 crew members, of which 380 were Indians and 99 Indonesians, while Island Princess disembarked 277 Indians.

The Indonesians then joined the Island princess while the Indians were flown home.

"Ultimately 600 odd Indian crew members were flown back via a charter flight while the ships cleared sludge and garbage," the officials said, adding, "We provide the services using available technologies and the crew changes take place without the direct involvement of Sri Lankans."

Sri Lanka halted cruise tourism in early March as the coronavirus spread to Europe and US, however, it is allowing cruise liners to dock in Colombo for supplies, fuel and crew changes on humanitarian grounds.

Sri Lanka started crew transfer services last month. Airport and Aviation Services and Island's ports are working together to help ships change crew as most of the airports remain closed.

The Aviation authority said that crew transfer service is a new business opportunity created due to the COVID pandemic.

-economynext.com

Debt office sells Rs 65bn in 2, 5 year bonds

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka has sold Rs 65 billion of bond at near market rates, data from the State debt office showed.

The debt office sold Rs 40 billion of 2-year, 6-month bonds maturing on 15.12.2022 at a weighted average yield of 7.90%.

A close maturing 15.01.2023 was last auctioned on May 12 at 8.05%.

The debt office also sold Rs 25 billion of 4-year 11-month bonds at a weighted average yield of 8.59%.

Similar maturities were quoted around 8.58/65% before the auction.

Sri Lanka did not hold an auction on June 1, where there was a bond maturity and coupon payment, dealer said.

The debt office is now communicating ceiling rate to the market before the auction. The full offer was sold below the ceiling rate.

It is not clear whether money will be printed if bids go up.

-economynext.com

EC to meet on Monday to set polling date

COLOMBO - The National Election Commission (NEC) will convene on Monday (8) to decide on a date to hold the parliamentary elections, its chairman Mahinda Deshapriya told reporters yesterday (3), following a meeting of the three-member commission earlier in the day.

Deshapriya said yesterday's meeting primarily focused on the necessary health and other measures to be taken when holding the election, and procedures to follow in the counting of votes.

He said a team from the Ministry of Health, including the Director General of Health Services, Dr. Anil Jasinghe, had met him yesterday to discuss the precautions that need to be taken during the election process and handed over guidelines on conducting elections during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deshapriya said discussions will be held with relevant officials and political parties on implementing the guidelines in the next few days.

According to Deshapriya, the guidelines rule out election rallies, and specify meetings be limited to around 30 people. It also rules out political parties from transport voters to

rallies. He said the health department has produced a booklet with detailed illustrated guidelines for polling staff and the candidates.

Deshapriya said the aim of the Commission was to hold the elections but not create community transmission, claiming, "Defeat COVID and let democracy win," was their slogan. Last week the polls chief said the Commission would need between 60 to 70 days to prepare for the polls, making the earliest day for polling around mid-August.

Earlier Health Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi said the "guidelines give directions as to how officials, as well as political activists, should go about their work," she said.

"There are guidelines on how election campaign meetings are to be held, how door-to-door canvassing should be conducted and many other matters," she said.

Nothing that the Health Officials have advised him the COVID-19 threat would be present until the end of next year, Deshapriya said the guidelines will apply for Local Government and Provincial Council elections, scheduled to be held next year.

-ENCL/economynext.com

Traps snare three endangered leopards

COLOMBO - Two endangered leopards - including a rare black one - have been killed by snares in Sri Lanka in less than a week, sparking calls for authorities to crack down harder on the cruel traps.

A third was found alive in a snare and released back to the wild after being tranquilized.

In the latest case, the bloated carcass of a leopard was discovered Tuesday (2) strangled by a wire snare on a cashew plantation on the edge of a forest reserve in Neluwa, some 145 kilometres (90 miles) southeast of the capital Colombo.

"It is possible that the trap was set for a sambar deer, but the leopard got caught instead," a wildlife official from the area told AFP.

A week earlier, a rare black leopard - also known as melanistic because the colour is a pigment condition rather than the mark of a separate species - was found trapped alive in the Nallathanni highlands, but died two days later. The third leopard was found Friday (May 29) at Yatiyantota, another highland

nature area, before being released back into the wild. Although setting snares in national parks and reserves is against the law, they are not illegal elsewhere and farmers often use them to protect crops or catch wild boar.

Sri Lankan conservationist Jayantha Jayewardene said the spate of leopard snaring might be villagers driven to desperation because the coronavirus lockdown had deprived them of income.

"For about two months these people have not had any work, and without money for food they are setting up snares to catch wild boar," Jayewardene told AFP.

"What we are facing is a bigger problem -- not just a wildlife issue."

There are believed to be less than 1,000 leopards in the wild in Sri Lanka, and harming the big cat is punishable by up to five years' jail.

Sri Lanka's Wilderness and Wildlife Conservation Trust called for all snares to be banned, and those who set them to be prosecuted.

-AFP

SLC says 3 former players in ICC graft probe

COLOMBO - Cricket's world body is investigating three former Sri Lankan players over alleged corruption, officials said yesterday (3), in the latest scandal to hit the sport in the country.

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) did not name the targets of the probe by the International Cricket Council Anti-Corruption Unit, but insisted no current national players were involved.

The board was responding to media reports on comments made by Sports Minister DulasAlahapperuma on Tuesday (2).

The reports said Alahapperuma had hinted current players were being investigated by the ICC for match-fixing.

"What the honourable minister actually mentioned was about an investigation launched by the ICC Anti-Corruption Unit against three former Sri Lanka players and not the current national players," the board said in a statement.

The ICC said it would not comment on any active investigation.

Sri Lanka introduced tough penalties for match-fixing and tightened sports betting restrictions in November in a bid to stamp out graft that has tainted the country's cricket team.

Allegations of corruption included claims of match-fixing ahead of a 2018 Test against England.

Betting on sports events in Sri Lanka was already illegal, but the new rules ban Sri Lankans from gambling on overseas contests. They face up to 10 years in jail and fines of up to \$555,000 for match-fixing.

The new law also bans people with family links to gambling businesses from sitting on cricket's governing body.

The provision was in part to target the former Sri Lanka Cricket president, ThilangaSumathipala, who was an executive committee member even though his family owns

a gambling business. Sumathipala, a businessman and politician, has repeatedly denied involvement in the gambling side of the family business.

A former sports minister, Harin Fernando, had said cricket in Sri Lanka was riddled with graft "from top to bottom," and that the ICC considered Sri Lanka one of the world's most corrupt nations.

Former Sri Lankan fast bowler Dilhara Lokuhettige was suspended in 2018 for corruption linked to a limited-over league.

He was the third Sri Lankan charged under the ICC anti-corruption code, following action against former captain and ex-chief selector Sanath Jayasuriya, and former paceman NuwanZoysa.

Jayasuriya was found guilty of failing to cooperate with a match-fixing probe and was banned for two years. Zoysa was suspended for match-fixing.

-AFP

By P.K. Balachandran

Colouring a new narrative?

Why the Presidential Task Force on archaeology in Eastern Province has no Tamil or Muslim

COLOMBO - The Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province, which was gazetted on Tuesday (2), has no Tamils or Muslims even though Tamils and Muslims together constitute two thirds of the population of the Province.

Secondly, the Task Force has a number of Sinhala-Buddhist monks but no representative of Hinduism or Islam. Thirdly, it has been placed under the Secretary of Defence, who is a retired Major General - Kamal Gunaratne.

The members of the Task Force are: Archaeological Chakravarthi Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera, the Chief Prelate for the Northern and Eastern Provinces; Chief Sanganyake of Thamankaduwa Direction, and Chief Incumbent of Arisimalai Aranya, Ven. Panamure Thilakawansa Thera; Major General (Retired) Kamal Gunaratne, Secretary, Ministry of Defence; Senarath Bandara Dissanayake, Director-General of Archaeology; Chandra Herath, Land Commissioner General; A. L. S. C. Perera, Surveyor General; Prof. Raj Kumar Somadeva, Senior Lecturer, University of Kelaniya; Prof. Kapila Gunawardena, Medical Faculty, University of Peradeniya; Deshabandu Thennakoon, Senior DIG, Western Province; H. E. M. W. G. Dissanayake, Provincial Land Commissioner, Eastern Province and Dilith Jayaweera, Chairman of Derana Media Network.

Major General (Retired) Kamal Gunaratne will be the Chairman of the Task Force and Senior Assistant Secretary to the President, Jeevanthi Senanayake, will be the Secretary.

Among the reasons cited for the president's decision to appoint the Task Force and its members are the government's responsibility to preserve the historical heritage of Sri Lanka and preserve it for future generations, as pledged in the policy statement 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour,' the growing danger of these heritages becoming degraded with time due to natural and man-made actions and Sri Lanka being a party to various conventions, both nationally and internationally to protect such heritages.

The Task Force is mandated to: identify sites of archaeological importance in the Eastern Province; identify and implement an appropriate program for the management of archaeological heritage by conserving and restoring such identified sites and antiquities; identify the extent of land that should be allocated for such archaeological sites and take necessary measures to allocate them properly and legally; preserve the cultural value of sites of archaeological importance and promote the uniqueness of Sri Lanka, both locally and internationally; and make recommendations for the promotion of such heritages.

The Task Force is the brainchild of the Buddhist Advisory Council (including the Mahanayakes) and appears to be aimed at ensuring the hold of the ruling Sri Lanka PodujanaPeramuna (SLPP) on the Sinhala-Buddhist constituency in the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

The appointment of the defence secretary, who is a former Major General, as chairman of the Task Force, conveys the political message that any decisions taken will be enforced in military style, giving the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist lobby confidence that the Gotabaya government means business. This lobby believes a manifest show of toughness is called for because Tamil nationalists (not just the pro-LTTE Eelamists) consider the North and East their "Traditional Homeland," which had been encroached upon by the Sinhala-Buddhists in the post-independence period through systematic 'colonization.'

Asked if there are no Tamil or Muslim archeologists in Sri Lanka who could have been included in the Task Force, renowned archeologist of Kelaniya University Prof. JagathWeerasinghe said there are at least ten Tamil archeologists some of whom are working in Batticaloa. However, he added that the non-inclusion of experts from other ethnic or religious groups was probably due to the existing national agenda to promote the interest of the majority community through an appropriate historical narrative.

Prof. Weerasinghe said archeology cannot be divorced from the present and seen only as a story of the past, noting that it is at once contemporary and historical. What is being done in Sri Lanka is to ignore the present and construct a past using archeology. In other words, those people (ethnic or religious groups) who currently reside in the archeological sites are wished away though they may have been living there for centuries.

He disapproved of the government's practice of bulldozing its way into archeological sites ignoring the needs of the locals, noting that no good archeological work can be done without the cooperation of the people living in and around the sites.

Weerasinghe recalled that when the famous archeologist ShiranUpendraDeraniyagala (now 78) wanted to excavate in Ib-bankatuwa in Dambulla, the Sinhalese who were living there would not part with their land. They even threatened to kill anyone who dared to touch their land. "They were eventually won over, but it took all of thirty years to finish the project successfully," he pointed out.

He was also surprised that the Presidential Task Force does not include senior and well known archeologists like Shiran Deraniyagala.

About the Author

P.K. Balachandran is a senior Colombo-based journalist who, in the past two decades, has reported for The Hindustan Times, The New Indian Express and Economist



This Newspaper supports the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka

Rights of Readers

The Editor and the journalists of this newspaper respect the "Rights of Readers" and endeavour to follow the Code of Professional Practice of The Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka, which is implemented by the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka.

If you have a grievance against us, you are welcome to contact us directly and we will strive to provide redress to you.

If you are not satisfied, you could complain to: **The Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka (PCCSL)**

For further information contact:
96, Bernard Soysa Mawatha (Kirulba Road), Colombo 5
Tel: 011 5353 635 Fax: 011 5335 500
E-mail: srockwood@pccsl.lk
Web page: www.pccsl.lk

COMMENTARY



President Donald Trump and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany at the Group of 7 meeting in Biarritz, France, Aug. 26, 2019. After years of snubs and American unilateralism, European allies have stopped looking to the president for leadership, and are turning their backs on him

-Erin Schaff/The New York Times

By Steven Erlanger

Embattled at home, Trump finds himself isolated abroad, too

BRUSSELS — With US cities burning and the coronavirus still raging, killing more people than in any other country, President Donald Trump also has growing problems overseas. He has never before been so isolated and ignored, even mocked.

In Europe, after years of snubs and US unilateralism, America's traditional allies have stopped looking to him for leadership, no longer trust that this president will offer them much and are turning their backs on him.

That was evidenced most obviously this week by the decision of the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, not to attend the Group of 7 meeting that Trump wanted so badly in Washington this month to show that the virus was behind him and the world was returning to normal.

Merkel cited the lingering threat of the virus, but a senior German official who spoke on the condition of anonymity made clear that she had other reasons to decline: She believed that proper diplomatic preparations had not been made; she did not want to be part of an anti-China display; she opposed Trump's idea of inviting the Russian president, Vladimir Putin; she did not want to be seen as interfering in US domestic politics.

And she was shocked by Trump's sudden, unilateral decision to pull out of the World Health Organization.

The divide between Trump and European allies was widening even before U.S. cities were convulsed by rioting. But the chaos on American streets, viewed from abroad, has only reinforced a sense that the conflicts that Trump seems to sow have caught up with him.

As Trump threatens to call in the military against his own citizens, he has become a president that some of America's closest allies prefer to keep

at arms' length, unsure of what he will do next and unwilling to be dragged into his campaign for re-election.

"Leaders in allied nations now think that criticizing Trump is to their advantage," said Marietje Schaake, a former Dutch European legislator, especially now with the unrest in U.S. cities and demonstrations supporting those protests in many European cities, including Amsterdam.

Even the European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell Fontelles, felt bold enough Tuesday to say that Europe is "shocked and appalled" by the police killing of George Floyd. He condemned an "abuse of power" and "an excessive use of force" and urged the United States to act "in full respect of the law and human rights."

On Monday (June 1), as if to underline the US president's isolation, it was the Russian president, Putin, that Trump placed a call, in which the two men discussed the virus, trade and "progress toward convening the G-7," the White House said.

Trump invited Putin to the meeting, according to the Kremlin. But if it happens at all, there are doubts that Putin would accept being invited solely as a guest, having been kicked out of the club for his annexation of Crimea and support for insurrection in eastern Ukraine.

Trump also called President Jair Bolsonaro, the hard-right leader of Brazil, on Monday.

"It all shows just how out of touch Trump is with allies," said Julianne Smith, a former Obama official now with the German Marshall Fund in Washington.

"This is a man isolated at home and abroad. He is trying to find friends in other places, knowing that relations with traditional allies are bad. But there are serious strains even with the author-

itarians he admires, like Xi Jinping and even Putin."

Trump "continues to believe allies can be abused and mistreated and that he can order them around and at the same time count on them," Smith said. "He doesn't understand that while the US is powerful, it doesn't always call the shots."

Merkel's refusal to come to Washington "says a lot about how fed up multiple leaders are around the world, who have seen how little return they've gotten on the investments they made into a relationship with Trump," she said.

With the virus and the riots, she added, "now there is a sense of America's weaknesses being exposed, and a feeling that the emperor has no clothes."

The threads unraveled quickly. As late as Thursday, European and US officials say, Trump's plans for a Group of 7 summit meeting in Washington were being negotiated with member countries and looked likely to go ahead. Then, Friday, Trump suddenly announced that he was pulling the United States out of the WHO, more than two weeks before his own stated deadline for the decision.

As so often in the past, on issues like unilateral US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal or the Paris climate accord or the Open Skies treaty or the sudden ban on air travel from Europe, Trump ignored the views of allies or did not consult them at all.

The WHO decision was a surprise to allies, and Merkel quickly said that she would not attend the proposed summit meeting.

Since then, both Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada have come out publicly against bringing Russia back into the Group of 7.

"For the British and Canadians to say no publicly is highly unusual," given

their closeness to the United States, said Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister.

As for Merkel, he said, given the lack of preparation, "the Germans suspected it was just a photo op with Trump in the White House."

Despite allied concerns, the Group of 7 matters, and plans for the meeting were going ahead given a general desire to come up with strong positions on Hong Kong and to try to influence Washington's policies on the virus, said Thomas Wright of the Brookings Institution.

But after the WHO announcement, Merkel decided that "if you're going unilateral, I'm not going to be there to support you," Wright said. "The allies all think he's all over the place and they'll try to avoid him."

President Emmanuel Macron of France has a more traditional French view, especially toward building an improved relationship with Russia, despite Crimea, given its proximity to the European Union, said Thomas Gomart, director of the French Institute of International Relations.

"In France toward Trump is a mix of sadness and anger," Gomart said. "Our main ally refused to exercise leadership during the corona crisis and is every day more provocative toward its allies and is creating divisions that are very actively exploited by China."

After nearly four years, Trump has no diplomatic accomplishments, Gomart said, listing failures on North Korea, the Middle East, a deterioration of relations with China and no improvement of relations with Russia. Instead, Gomart believes that Trump has damaged European security through his unilateral abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal as well as nearly every arms control agreement with Russia.

-New York Times

By Andrew Anderson

What the new Chinese security law means for Hong Kong

"Hong Kong Will Become Xinjiang! Stanley Will Become Qincheng," read placards held by protesters in Hong Kong, after China's parliament moved to impose new national security legislation on the city, entirely bypassing Hong Kong's own legislative process.

Stanley and Qincheng are maximum-security prisons in Hong Kong and mainland China, respectively. Qincheng, located in northwest Beijing, is the infamous facility where numerous human rights defenders and political activists have been jailed, including the late Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo. Xinjiang is the site of an ongoing systematic campaign of mass arbitrary detention, political indoctrination, and invasive surveillance targeting Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities.

The spectre of being barred from overseas travel, forced to delete social media content, disappeared, detained and held in a secret location, tortured, prosecuted or jailed simply because of one's identity or exercise of human rights guaranteed under local laws is now looming over Hong Kong. Beijing's proposed legislation would also enable the mainland government's national security agencies, which are known perpetrators of these abuses, to set up branches and enforce related laws in Hong Kong.

Hong Kongers know all too well what China does to ethnic minorities, government critics, and democracy advocates in the mainland, who are painted by state media and authorities as "separatists", "terrorists", "extremists", "subversives", and "traitors who collude with foreign hostile forces", just to name a few of Beijing's favourite labels.

Tibetan human rights defender Tashi Wangchuk was detained in 2016 and

jailed for five years in 2018 for "inciting separatism". His so-called "crime"? Giving interviews to the New York Times and asking Chinese officials to comply with their own constitution and laws to preserve the use of the Tibetan language in schools in Tibetan populated areas.

Human rights defender Cao Shunli was taken by police at the Beijing airport in September 2013 as she was preparing to board a flight to Switzerland to take part in training on UN human rights mechanisms. She died of organ failure in a hospital in March 2014 after not receiving adequate medical care while in detention. Her "crime"? Organising sit-ins and campaigning for greater public participation in the drafting of China's human rights reports.

Cao Shunli's fellow human rights defender Chen Jianfang was detained by police in March 2019 and is now awaiting trial for "inciting subversion of state power". Her "crimes" have not been revealed by the authorities, but shortly before her detention, she published an article commemorating Cao's death. Chen has been denied access to her lawyer, a discretionary power granted to the police under Chinese law in cases involving "national security" crimes.

In April, Hong Kong authorities detained 15 pro-democracy activists and charged them with offences relating to "unlawful assemblies". The kinds of peaceful advocacy these 15 activists have engaged in would have long ago landed them in jail or worse if they had been subject to mainland China's jurisdiction.

Mainland China's national security, public order, and counterterrorism legal framework is infamous for vague and ill-defined provisions that are incon-

sistent with international human rights law. They are often used to criminalize peaceful and legitimate actions, including those in defence of human rights. Holding public protests, criticizing the government online, drawing political satire cartoons, archiving censored online content, organizing private meetings to discuss politics, cooperating with UN mechanisms, issuing open letters calling for democratic reforms - these legitimate actions have all been subject to reprisals under Chinese law.

China's use of national security legislation to silence and eliminate any form of dissent or opposition is well-documented. The decision adopted by China's rubber-stamp Parliament on May 28 by a vote of 2,878-1 provides an outline of the upcoming Hong Kong law, and it closely reflects the draconian provisions of the mainland government's current legal framework. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the eventual legislation will be compatible with international human rights obligations, including those that are binding on Hong Kong, where the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and other human rights treaties apply.

In fact, provisions related to anti-terrorism and sedition under existing laws in Hong Kong are already inconsistent with international standards. These serious flaws were highlighted in a letter in April to the Hong Kong authorities from six UN human rights experts. The experts warned that human rights defenders and civil society groups are "at particular risk of being silenced by counterterrorism legislation".

The mainland government's national security proposal for Hong Kong will

not only be a gross violation of Beijing's treaty obligations to ensure Hong Kong's "high-degree of autonomy" under the Sino-British Joint Declaration, but will also add another legal cudgel to the authorities' toolbox designed to bludgeon critics and activists into silence.

Over the years, people in Hong Kong, including human rights defenders, have shown remarkable courage and commitment to defend their rights in the face of government attempts to hollow out the rule of law and democratic traditions that have made Hong Kong an anathema to the authoritarians ruling mainland China.

They took to the streets in large numbers and deterred a proposed national security law in 2003. They built the Umbrella Movement in 2014 to demand the right to universal suffrage in free and fair elections. And they came out again, braving brutal police violence, to successfully oppose the controversial extradition bill amendments introduced last year.

They have also come out in the tens of thousands every year on June 4 to demand justice for the Tiananmen Square massacres in 1989, the public commemoration of which may very well be considered a "crime" once Beijing's national security law is formally enacted in Hong Kong.

Now, an existential threat is staring Hong Kong in the face. Even with a global pandemic hanging over their heads, Hong Kongers will no doubt be standing up again. From whom can they find support?

-Andrew Anderson is executive director of Front Line Defenders, an Ireland-based international human rights organization

By David M. Halbfinger and Adam Rasgon

Netanyahu's annexation plans meet surprise opponent: Israeli settlers

JERUSALEM — Having crushed his political opponents and won a new term, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has cleared a path to fulfilling his most polarizing campaign promise: annexing occupied West Bank territory, the long-held dream of right-wing Jewish settlers.

Yet with a month until he says he will apply Israeli sovereignty over large stretches of land the Palestinians have counted on for a future state, Netanyahu is suddenly facing stiff resistance, including a surprising rebellion in the ranks of the settler leaders who have been agitating for annexation for years.

Netanyahu's plan, they argue, would open the door for a Palestinian state while ending any expansion of Israeli settlements in much of the West Bank, killing the religious-Zionist project to achieve dominion over the entire biblical homeland of the Jews.

"It's either or," Bezalel Smotrich, a firebrand lawmaker who has led the push for annexation, said in an interview. "Either the settlements have a future, or the Palestinian state does — but not both."

The unexpectedly fierce opposition, coupled with mixed signals from the Trump administration, is raising questions about whether Netanyahu will follow through on his annexation pledges after all.

On the left, supporters of a two-state solution have been sounding the alarm for months, saying that unilateral annexation by Israel — which would be condemned by most of the world as a violation of international law — would break its commitments to the Palestinians under prior peace agreements and destroy any hope of a conflict-ending deal.

Current and former Israeli military officials have begun to weigh in, too, warning that annexation could ignite a new wave of violence in the West Bank and force King Abdullah II of Jordan to adopt a hard-line stance against Israel, endangering the two nations' peace treaty.

But it is the emerging opposition among settlers that potentially poses the most disruptive obstacle.

Netanyahu promised annexation in three successive election campaigns over the last year. In January, his promise won the backing of the Trump administration, whose peace plan allows Israel to keep up to 30% of the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley as well as all existing Jewish settlements, which most of the world considers illegal.

There is pressure on Netanyahu to act swiftly. The American presidential election in November could replace Trump with former Vice President Joe Biden, who has spoken out against unilateral annexation.

That makes the next several months a window of opportunity that could slam shut, said Oded Revivi, the mayor of the Efrat settlement. "Eat it now, before the ice cream melts," he said.

But the loudest voices in the settlements — including influential activists, mayors and community leaders — argue that Netanyahu's vision for annexation amounts to no less than the death knell for religious Zionism.

Citing a yet-to-be published map of the annexation plan Netanyahu is drafting with the Trump administration, these critics say it leaves too many Jewish settlements as disconnected enclaves that would be barred from expanding. And they say it would further isolate them from the rest of Israel, giving the Palestinians control of roads that could turn a 35-minute commute to Jerusalem into a roundabout desert trek of two hours or more.

The result will be the evisceration of the settlements, they argue. "No one will want to live in an enclave, no one will want to build a home in an enclave and no one will be able to sell their home in an enclave," said Yochai Damri, chairman of the South Hebron Hills Regional Council.

Netanyahu only began pushing annexation last year as a way to shore up right-wing support during three hard-fought re-election contests against Benny Gantz, a centrist former army chief who campaigned on a promise to oppose any unilateral moves.

But Netanyahu's continued push to expand Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank, even when he is on trial for corruption, has led to speculation that he wants to cement his legacy. Annexing the Jordan Valley, on the eastern edge of the West Bank abutting Jordan, would give Israel a permanent eastern border for the first time. In his coalition agreement for a unity government with Gantz, Netanyahu won the right to proceed with annexation as soon as July 1.

The Trump administration's peace plan envisions Israel retaining control over the Jordan Valley and existing settlements in the West Bank while allowing the Palestinians to work toward some form of limited sovereignty elsewhere. But the Palestinians could only achieve that provided they disarm Hamas, the militant group that controls Gaza, accept overriding Israeli security control, recognize Israel as a Jewish state, give up on the goal of having a capital in East Jerusalem and agree to a range of other conditions few believe they would ever accept.

Some annexation proponents argue that those conditions preclude the possibility of a Palestinian state, so settlers should not fear the Trump plan. Revivi, for one, said he did not believe the Palestinians would turn "from wolves into sheep." Still, he said he hoped they would meet the American conditions for statehood, "because I want to see a better reality."

But Smotrich and his fellow hard-liners believe that a new administration in the United States could abandon those requirements.

"Very quickly, all those conditions will be forgotten," Smotrich said. "You will quickly lose control, and what will basically happen is a state like Gaza will be established."

Smotrich said he would prefer the status quo over a plan that even contemplates allowing for a Palestinian state at the expense of expanding Jewish settlements.

"I don't want shortcuts that harm my ability to put facts on the ground and that weaken the settlements," he said. "If the sovereignty map is favourable, I will accept it with open arms. If not, I prefer to go without it. I will persevere, work hard, set up settlements and fight with the Palestinians for another 20 years."

-New York Times