

# Six Killed in Hours-Long Shooting in New York



Swat teams, state police and federal agents respond, blocked off a neighborhood after six people were killed in Jersey City, New Jersey on Dec. 10, 2019.

NEW YORK (AFP) -- Six people including a police officer and two suspects were killed during an hours-long shootout across a New York suburb not far from the Statue of Liberty, local officials said.

“Our officers were under fire for hours,” Jersey City Police Chief Michael Kelly told reporters after the latest high-profile U.S. shooting.

In addition to the officer and the suspects, three civilians were killed in the incident that began around midday at a cemetery and ended in a store, Kelly said.

Bomb squad officers were examin-

ing a stolen U-Haul vehicle “that may contain an incendiary device,” he added.

No clear reason for the shooting has been given. Five of the dead were found inside a store, said Kelly.

“We believe that two of them are bad guys,” while the other three are civilians, he said, describing the crime scene as “very extensive, three locations at least.”

Two other officers were wounded, Kelly told reporters.

“I heard fighting outside, then ‘Boom! Boom! Boom!’” the New York Daily News quoted a food store

worker two blocks from the shooting as saying.

“I saw people running outside -- men, women, children in the street. These people were scared.”

Kelly said the suspects’ “movement was rapid and continuous for four hours” during the drama which saw the deployment of hundreds of police from New Jersey and New York, including tactical officers armed with rifles and wearing olive-green fatigues and helmets.

NBC television reported that hundreds of rounds were fired.

Media reports said the shooting began when an officer investigating a homicide approached the suspects in the cemetery.

Identified by media as Detective Joseph Seals, he was the first victim.

Asked to confirm whether the officer was indeed probing a murder, Kelly said it is “being looked into.”

The suspects then took refuge in a grocery store where firing continued and the five bodies were later found.

U.S. residents have become accustomed to shootings -- everywhere from churches to schools and cinemas -- and firearms were linked to nearly 40,000 deaths of various kinds in 2017, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

# French PM Vows to Push Ahead With Pension Plan



French CRS riot police face off with protesters during clashes at a demonstration against French government's pensions reform plans in Paris as part of a day of national strike and protests in France, December 5, 2019.

PARIS (AFP) -- France's Prime Minister insisted Wednesday that the government would push ahead with reforms to the country's fragmented pension system but offered concessions to unions as a crippling strike entered its seventh day.

Public transport networks in Paris and other main cities have been paralysed by the walkout, which began last Thursday and left shops, hotels and restaurants fearing for the impact on their bottom line.

In a televised address, Edouard Philippe said the highly-contested pension changes would be implemented in phases, “without brutality”, and would not affect workers born before 1975.

There would be a guaranteed minimum pension of 1,000 euros (\$1,100) for all who had worked their full quota of years, a higher amount than some -- including farmers -- currently receive. According to official statistics, the average pension in 2017 was just over 1,600 euros.

And the prime minister said the legal retirement age would remain 62, although an additional two years of work would be required from 2025 for people to leave with a full pension.

“The time has come to construct a universal retirement system,” said

the head of government, insisting the overhaul would be fairer and would better protect vulnerable workers.

“To guarantee our pension, to finance a higher level of solidarity, to benefit from a higher life expectancy without increasing taxes, the only solution is to work a bit longer, and progressively a bit longer, as is the case everywhere in Europe and everywhere in the world,” said Philippe, announcing the “incentive” for later retirement.

Philippe said the government's proposals would “justify” the end of labor action that has disrupted national rail services and grounded many planes. Hundreds of thousands of people have also taken to the streets in two mass protests since last Thursday.

French unions have vowed to resist until the plan is withdrawn, in the biggest show of union force since President Emmanuel Macron came to power in 2017 vowing to cut public spending and make the economy more competitive.

In anticipation of Philippe's announcement, unions kept up the pressure Wednesday with a seventh day of transport strike.

The proposed reform will unite into a single plan the current 42 pension regimes across the public and private sectors.

## News in Brief

NEW YORK (AFP) -- Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenager who became the voice of conscience for a generation facing the climate change emergency, was announced Wednesday as Time magazine's 2019 Person of the Year. The 16-year-old first hit the headlines for her solo strike against global warming outside Sweden's parliament last year. “We can't just continue living as if there was no tomorrow, because there is a tomorrow. That is all we are saying,” Thunberg told Time. The magazine interviewed Thunberg aboard the sailboat that took her from the United States to Europe after a hectic 11-week North American trip to several US cities and Canada. Thunberg has taken her disarmingly straightforward message -- “listen to the scientists” -- to global decision-makers, accusing them of inaction. The Swedish activist was in Madrid as the award was announced, at a UN climate forum tasked with saving the world from runaway global warming.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- The United States wants to work with Russia to end the conflict in Libya, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday, but he added that he reminded Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov a day ago of the arms embargo that is in place on the North African country. “We want to work with the Russians, to get to the negotiating table, have a series of conversations that ultimately lead to a disposition that creates what the United Nations has been trying to do,” Pompeo said at a news conference. Libya has been divided since 2014 into rival military and political camps based in the capital Tripoli and the east. Fayed al-Serraj's government is in conflict with forces led by Khalifa Haftar based in eastern Libya. Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) has been trying since April to take Tripoli. He is backed by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and most recently Russian mercenaries, according to diplomats and Tripoli officials. The LNA denies it has foreign backing.

LONDON (AFP) -- Prime Minister Boris Johnson vowed Wednesday to “fight for every vote” after polls predicted a close finish to Britain's general election aimed at settling the Brexit crisis. Britons head to the polls for the third time in four years on Thursday, against a backdrop of political deadlock since a 2016 referendum which saw a majority opt to leave the EU. Parliament repeatedly refused to accept divorce terms that former prime minister Theresa May agreed with Brussels, forcing her out and bringing Johnson into the fray with a vow to deliver. The former London mayor and foreign minister has been hammering home his “Get Brexit Done” message, to win a majority which would enable him to get the deal approved. “We will put money in your pocket because you deserve it. The richest and big business will pay for it,” Corbyn said He has vowed to take Britain out of the bloc by January 31.

WHAKATANE (AFP) -- Fears of another eruption at the New Zealand volcano believed to have killed 15 people made it too dangerous for emergency teams to recover bodies, police said Wednesday, as doctors fought to save survivors who suffered horrific burns. The official death toll after Monday's explosion on White Island stands at six, with police listing another nine as missing, up from the previous figure of eight. Their bodies are thought to be on the island, but it remains too hazardous for rescuers to travel there, and for forensic pathologists, odontologists and other victim identification experts to begin their work. “Every day that passes with those bodies unrecovered is a day of anguish for their loved ones... but right now, the science tells us that the risk is just too high,” Civil Defence emergency director Sarah Stuart-Black said. Health officials said 22 survivors still being treated in hospital burns units around the country remained in a critical condition requiring airway support.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Rising temperatures and shrinking snow and ice cover in the Arctic are endangering habitats, fisheries and local cultures, according to a report issued Tuesday by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. “A lot of people think of the Arctic as being a faraway place, but the loss of ice is affecting people now -- it's changing peoples' lives,” said Don Perovich, a Dartmouth College geophysicist who contributed to the report. “It isn't just a bunch of cold statistics.” The Bering Sea, which lies between Alaska and Russia, is one of the world's two most productive fisheries. But the Arctic region is warming more than twice as fast as the rest of the planet, the report found. The past two years saw record low levels of sea ice -- frozen seawater -- floating on the Bering Sea during winter, the report found. And the habitats of fish on which commercial fisheries and indigenous groups depend have shifted northward, according to the report released at the annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union.

# Thousands Rally as Toxic Smoke Chokes Sydney



Protesters rally during the climate rally in Sydney

SYDNEY (AFP) -- Up to 20,000 protesters rallied in Sydney on Wednesday demanding urgent climate action from Australia's government, as bushfire smoke choking the city caused health problems to spike.

Sydney has endured weeks bathed in toxic smoke as hundreds of blazes have raged across the countryside, with hospitals recording a 25 percent increase in the number of a people visiting emergency departments last week.

On Tuesday smoke alarms rang out across Australia's biggest city, with thick haze triggering smoke alarms and forcing buildings to be evacuated, school children to be kept indoors, and ferries to be cancelled.

The devastating fires have focused

attention on climate change, with scientists saying the blazes have come earlier and with more intensity than usual due to global warming and a prolonged drought.

Police estimated the crowd size at 15,000, organizers put the figure at 20,000. Many of the protesters voiced anger at the government's silence in the face of the crisis.

“The country is on fire,” said 26-year-old Samuel Wilkie attending his first climate protest. He described politicians' response as “pathetic”.

“Our government is not doing anything about it,” said 29-year-old landscape gardener Zara Zoe. “No one is listening, no one is doing anything.”

Prime Minister Scott Morrison -- a

staunch backer of Australia's vast coal industry -- has said little about the smoke since the crisis began, preferring to focus on fire-hit rural communities.

Organizer Chloe Rafferty said that had created anger at the conservative government's inaction.

“I think the wider public can see that we are not expecting the climate crisis in the future but we are facing the climate crisis now,” she told AFP. “People are experiencing it in their day-to-day lives.”

As well as a rise in people visiting hospitals with smoke-related health symptoms, the number of emergency calls for ambulances spiked 30 percent last week.

“For most people, smoke causes mild symptoms like sore eyes, nose and throat,” top health department official Richard Broome said.

“However, people with conditions like asthma, emphysema and angina are at greater risk because the smoke can trigger their symptoms.”

Smoke from bushfires is one of the biggest contributors to air pollution in Australia, releasing fine particles that can lodge deep within people's lungs and cause “severe” health impacts over time, according to scientist Mick Meyer from government-funded scientific research agency CSIRO.

Six people have been killed and more than 700 houses destroyed in bushfires this fire season.

# China: Taiwan Inciting Hostility, Intimidating Citizens



Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen is seeking re-election in January.

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- China said Wednesday a proposed bill in Taiwan purportedly aimed at combating Chinese influence is spreading alarm among the Taiwanese business community in China and inciting hostility.

Beijing views Taiwan as a renegade province and has grown increasingly suspicious that its authority led by U.S.-backed President Tsai Ing-wen wants to push for formal secession.

Ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections on Jan. 11, Taiwan's ruling party has begun a renewed push for passing a bill to combat what it claims as Chinese efforts to influence politics in the island.

The draft bill prohibits anyone donating to a political party, influencing elections or otherwise seeking sway in Taiwan's politics on the instructions of or with the financial support of “infiltration sources.”

Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for China's policy-making Taiwan Affairs Office, said Wednesday the ruling party has been using such “law revisions” to incite hostility and restrict normal exchanges across the Taiwan Strait.

“In fact for Taiwan's people, especially Taiwanese businessmen and students, it has already caused alarm

and panic that everyone is treated as an enemy,” she added, referring to Taiwanese in China.

The main opposition party in Taiwan, the Kuomintang, has also denounced the proposed bill, saying it is a “political tool” of Tsai and her party to gain votes.

China has pursued Taiwan's reunification ever since the island broke away from the mainland during a civil war in 1949. China claims full sovereignty over the island and almost all world countries, including the U.S., recognize that sovereignty.

China is Taiwan's favorite investment destination, with many Taiwanese firms investing over \$100 billion there in total, according to private estimates.

Relations between Beijing and Taipei have particularly been strained since Tsai came to power in 2016. She has strong anti-China inclinations and refuses to acknowledge that both sides are part of “one China.”

The United States has long courted Taipei in an attempt to counter Beijing. The U.S. -- which has no formal diplomatic relations with Taipei by law -- has extensive military ties with the island, selling it advanced military hardware.

# New Sex Charges Threaten Anwar's Premiership

KUALA LUMPUR (Reuters) -- Anwar Ibrahim, in line to take over Malaysia's premiership, will be called in for questioning over allegations that he had sexually assaulted a former aide, police said on Wednesday.

Anwar has denied the accusation by the aide, Muhammad Yusoff Rawther, describing it as “politics at its worst”.

Muhammad Yusoff is being represented by a lawyer who counts Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad among his clients. On Tuesday, Mahathir promised to hand over power to rival-turned-ally Anwar in spite of the latest allegations against him.

Muhammad Yusoff said last week that Anwar had attempted to force him to have sex in September 2018.

Police recorded Muhammad Yusoff's statement on Monday, criminal investigations department director Huzir Mohamed said in a statement.

“Statements from Anwar Ibrahim and several related witnesses will be taken as soon as appropriate appointment times are set,” Huzir said.

In a statement to media, Anwar said he was grateful to police for speeding up investigations into the “latest defamatory allegations” against him.

“I would like to stress that I am ready to give my statement to the police immediately to assist in the investigation.”

Anwar has spent nearly a decade in jail on two separate counts of sodomy and for corruption, charges that he and his supporters maintain were aimed at ending his political career.

Muhammad Yusoff's lawyer, Mohamed Haniff Khatri Abdulla, denied a conflict of interest in taking on a case against the prime minister's planned successor.

“The prime minister is still my client but that does not mean I should not take on cases just because they involve his ministers or people in his administration,” Mohamed Haniff told Reuters.

“I did not speak to (Mahathir) before taking on this case, but we did talk about it afterwards. He was surprised but he understood.”

Mahathir's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Mohamed Haniff denied charges of a political conspiracy in the allegations against Anwar, saying Muhammad Yusoff stood by his statement. “It's time to let the police investigate,” he said.

A former deputy premier, Anwar was first sacked and then jailed in 1999 during Mahathir's first 1981-2003 tenure as prime minister.

Mahathir and Anwar mended fences in 2016, joining forces to lead the opposition to an unexpected election victory last year.