



Advisory: Firearm violence is U.S. crisis

Surgeon general issues public health warning as mass shootings rise

BY SABRINA MALHI AND LIZETTE ORTEGA

U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy declared gun violence a public health crisis Tuesday and called on the nation to address it with the same vigor used to reduce deaths and injuries from tobacco and motor vehicle crashes.

The surgeon general's advisory marked the first time the nation's leading voice on public health — the same office that in the 1960s highlighted the lethal consequences of cigarette smoking — had issued an urgent pronouncement on deaths related to firearms. The 39-page advisory underscores the significant physical and mental toll of gun violence on communities nationwide.

Overall, deaths caused by guns rose to a three-decade high in 2021, driven by increases in homicides and suicides, the advisory says. In 2022, more than half of all gun deaths were from suicide, while 40 percent of firearms deaths were homicides.

Murthy, who has long sounded the alarm about the danger of firearms, said the impetus for Tuesday's advisory stems from the increase in gun violence, especially mass shootings since 2020, which he said exact a profound toll on the nation's well-being.

"I want people to understand the full impact of firearm violence in our country, and I want them to see it as a public health issue," Murthy said in an interview. SEE GUNS ON A5

ELECTION 2024

Candidates ratchet up pre-debate border talk

Biden and Trump offer divergent narratives ahead of Thursday's duel

BY TOLUSE OLORUNNIPA

President Biden and his presumptive opponent Donald Trump each amplified the case of a particular undocumented immigrant last week, using vastly divergent language in a preview of the sharp contrast they plan to draw on immigration during their debate Thursday.

At a June 18 rally in Racine, Wis., Trump railed against a man from El Salvador accused of killing a Maryland mother of five, calling him an "animal." About an hour earlier at the White House, Biden praised "angels" like Javier Quiroz Castro, a nurse who served patients suffering from covid-19 at the height of the pandemic.

"Thank you for what you did to help us get through the pandemic, pal, and for all you're doing for our country," Biden said while announcing a program to make it easier for Castro and other undocumented immigrants who are SEE DEBATE ON A4

Prolonged droughts are making it hard for Afghans to grow eggplants, pomegranates and apricots, but the forbidden poppy can still thrive



Taliban's opium ban could fall to climate change, with global effect

STORY BY RICK NOACK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAROLYN VAN HOUTEN
IN KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN

Taliban police destroy poppies in Parwan province. Before the Taliban took power, Afghanistan was the world's largest exporter of opium, the United Nations says, representing over 80 percent of global supply.

Two years after the Taliban banned opium, Afghan farmers turning to alternative crops are discovering that many no longer grow easily here because of the impact of climate change, imperiling poppy eradication efforts.

For decades, farmers in southern Afghanistan relied on opium poppies to make a living in their parched desert landscape. Even as prolonged drought dried out rivers and turned fields so salty that they glowed white in the sun, the hardy poppies flourished.

The Taliban ended that after seizing power in Afghanistan three years ago, banning opium on religious grounds. But farmers in the former poppy heartland say they can't make a living with typical alternatives like wheat and cotton, which have tumbled in price as they've flooded the market since the opium ban took effect. Some other field crops and fruits that once grew here — including eggplants, pomegranates and apricots —

have become difficult, and in some cases impossible, to cultivate because of the harsh conditions that Afghan researchers attribute to climate change.

Some farmers are abandoning their fields. Others are weighing a return to poppy cultivation or are refusing to comply with the ban.

"If they can't cover their expenses, they'll go back to growing poppies," said Shams-u-Rahman Musa, a top agriculture official in Kandahar for the Taliban-run government, adding that the government is aware of farmers' frustration. "We're trying our best to find solutions," he said.

If the Taliban fails to engineer a successful transition from poppies to other crops, the impact could be felt well beyond Afghanistan's borders. Afghanistan was the world's largest exporter of opium before the Taliban takeover, according to the United Nations, representing more than SEE OPIUM ON A10

Israeli court widens draft

ULTRA-ORTHODOX MEN MUST SERVE

Reaction could scuttle Netanyahu's coalition

BY SHIRA RUBIN, CLAIRE PARKER AND LIOR SOROKA

TEL AVIV — Israel's Supreme Court ruled unanimously Tuesday that ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students must be conscripted into the Israeli military and are no longer eligible for substantial government benefits, a decision that could lead to the collapse of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition.

The ruling follows decades of controversy over the role in Israeli society of the ultra-Orthodox, also known as the Haredim, which have mushroomed from a small minority into a million-strong community, making up more than 12 percent of the population. Ultra-Orthodox political parties have provided crucial backing to Netanyahu in exchange for the exemption from military service and hundreds of millions of dollars for their community's institutions.

But in a country where military service is mandatory and battlefields are expanding, Israelis from across the political spectrum have demanded a change to the status quo, and on Tuesday, the Supreme Court made it official.

SEE ULTRA-ORTHODOX ON A12

Hunger in Gaza: A new report says 500,000 are facing starvation. A12

WikiLeaks founder freed after guilty plea

Assange cuts deal to return home to Australia after five years in prison

BY KELLY KASULIS CHO AND ELLEN NAKASHIMA

SAIPAN, NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS — Julian Assange, the founder of the anti-secrecy site WikiLeaks, pleaded guilty Wednesday to one count of violating the Espionage Act in a U.S. federal court in the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. territory in the Pacific Ocean, bringing an end to a years-long legal saga that spanned five countries.

Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglo-na sentenced Assange, who had spent five years in a British prison before being released Monday, to time served after he cut a deal to admit to one felony count of violating the Espionage Act by publishing classified U.S. documents more than a decade ago.

He will now return to his native Australia, scheduled to arrive in the capital of Canberra on Wednesday night, with no conditions on his release.

The 52-year-old was wearing a dark suit and his wedding tie for SEE ASSANGE ON A20

First came the pope's trust. His foes followed.

Cardinal has channeled Francis's vision into church policy — stirring conservative opposition

BY ANTHONY FAIOLA AND STEFANO PITRELLI

VATICAN CITY — When Pope Francis first asked if he would be willing to take one of the loftiest jobs at the Vatican, heading the office that sets the policies of the Roman Catholic Church, Victor Manuel Fernández said no. The liberal Argentine archbishop worried his appointment might make things worse for a pope facing historic internal dissent.

"I knew that there were groups that did not love me, some willing to do anything — judging by the expressions they used on social networks and even in messages they wrote on my Facebook page — and I was afraid of causing problems for Francis," Fernández said in an interview with The Washington Post.

When the pope called again last June, from a hospital where he'd just undergone intestinal surgery, Fernández relented. He moved to Vatican City, was named a cardinal and became the pope's SEE POPE ON A9



ANTONIO MASIELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, seen Sept. 30 at the Vatican, penned a document that authorizes priests to bless people in same-sex relationships, prompting church pushback on three continents.

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