

BRIEFLY

Mexico sees 2,020 killings in March, worst since 2011

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico has surpassed 2,000 homicides in a month for the first time since the summer of 2011 and had more killings in the first quarter of 2017 than in the start of any year in at least two decades, according to data released Friday.

Unlike 2011, when bloody cartel clashes in Ciudad Juarez drove the national toll to new heights, the killings pushing the 2017 total have been spread across a number of states. Authorities attribute them to vicious turf battles resulting from breakdowns in the leadership of some cartels and the splintering of others into smaller gangs.

The southern state of Guerrero, where Acapulco is located, continues to be the homicide leader, with 550 during the first three months of the year.

Nationally, there were 2,020 homicides in March, up about 11 percent from February. For January through March, the national total was 5,775 killings, up 29 percent from the same three months last year.

Canadian PM responds to Trump's criticism of dairy industry

TORONTO (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Friday that he plans to be respectful and engage the United States with a fact-based approach to solving problems a day after Donald Trump called Canada a “disgrace” for policies that hurt American farmers.

Trudeau said during a news conference he will stand up for Canada’s interests and people.

“The way to do that is to make arguments in a respectful fashion, based on facts, and work constructively and collaboratively with our neighbors,” said the Liberal leader.

The U.S. president took aim at Canada’s dairy industry this week for creating a new lower-priced

classification of milk product that he argues hurts U.S. producers.

Canada changed its policy on pricing domestic milk to cover more dairy ingredients, leading to lower prices for Canadian products including ultra-filtered milk that compete with U.S. milk. Canada’s dairy sector is protected by high tariffs on imported products and controls on domestic production as a means of supporting prices that farmers receive.

Trump said on Thursday “what they’ve done to our dairy farm workers is a disgrace.”

Trump also said this week he would make “some very big changes” to the NAFTA treaty with Canada and Mexico or “we are going to get rid of NAFTA for once and for all.”

Queen Elizabeth II turns 91 with day at the horse races

LONDON (AP) — Britain marked Queen Elizabeth II’s 91st birthday on Friday with gun salutes, as the monarch herself enjoyed a family day and a trip to the races.

The queen, who owns and breeds racehorses, was spotted smiling broadly and chatting animatedly Friday with jockeys and staff at Newbury Racecourse, near her Windsor Castle home.

She visited the racecourse with daughter Princess Anne and sat in the royal box to watch her thoroughbred Maths Prize run; it finished fifth.

There were also official celebrations in London, where a troop of the Royal Horse Artillery rode horse-and-gun carriages past Buckingham Palace before staging a 41-gun salute in Hyde Park at noon.

Outside the palace, a band of guardsmen in scarlet tunics and bearskin hats played “Happy Birthday” during the Changing of the Guard ceremony.

And at the centuries-old Tower of London, there was a second salute with 62 guns.

The queen is Britain’s oldest and longest-reigning monarch, having become queen on Feb. 6, 1952.



Opponents of President Nicolas Maduro march in Caracas, Venezuela on Thursday. Tens of thousands of protesters flooded the streets again Thursday, one day after three people were killed and hundreds arrested in the biggest anti-government demonstrations in years.

Venezuelan political crisis deepens

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — At least 12 people were killed overnight following looting and violence in Venezuela’s capital amid a spiraling political crisis, authorities said Friday.

Most of the deaths took place in El Valle, a working class neighborhood near Caracas’ biggest military base where opposition leaders say a group of people were hit with an electrical current while trying to loot a bakery protected by an electric fence.

Two days of massive protests on the streets of Caracas against the government of President Nicolas Maduro spilled into a violent night in several parts of the city, with residents in El Valle witnessing repetitive gunfire, street barricades set aflame and more than a dozen businesses looted. Amid the confusion, mothers and newborn children had to be evacuated from a maternity hospital named after the late leader Hugo Chavez when it was swamped with tear gas.

The Public Ministry said the violence left 11 people dead in El Valle, all men between the ages of 17

and 45. Another death was reported east of Caracas in El Sucre. Six others were injured.

Opposition leaders blamed the government for repressing protesters with tear gas but standing idly by as businesses were looted. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Delcy Rodriguez pointed the finger at the opposition, saying armed groups controlled by them were responsible for the attack at the hospital.

“We reject and do not accept those irresponsible declarations,” said Henrique Capriles, a former presidential candidate who the government recently barred from running for public office.

Earlier Friday, officials reported that one of the dead was Mervins Guitian. The young Venezuelan man was fatally shot when he was returning home late from work on Thursday and got caught in the middle of late-night street clashes. Vicente Paez, a local councilman, said Guitian was an employee of a Caracas-area city governed by an opposition mayor and didn’t join the protests. It wasn’t clear who shot him

and there was no immediate comment from authorities.

Venezuelan social media was ablaze late into the night with grainy cellphone videos of light-armored vehicles plowing down dark streets to control pockets of protesters who set up burning barricades in several neighborhoods.

Vice President Tareck El Aissami said Friday the country is facing an “unconventional war” led by opposition groups working in concert with criminal gangs. He said opposition claims government forces were responsible for launching tear gas at the maternity hospital were another attempt to demoralize a people who have “decided to break ties with the bourgeoisie forever.”

Overall, at least 20 people have been killed in the unrest generated after the government-stacked Supreme Court gutted Congress of its last vestiges of power three weeks ago — a move later reversed amid a storm of international criticism. Opposition members say they do not intend to ease up on protests demanding new elections as they decry

a government they deem a dictatorship responsible for triple-digit inflation, rising crime and food shortages.

“Twenty days of resistance and we feel newly born,” said opposition lawmaker Freddy Guevara during an evening, outdoor press conference as residents looking out from balconies in an eastern Caracas neighborhood at the heart of the protest movement cheered loudly in support.

The next planned protest is Saturday, when opponents are being asked to dress in white and march silently to commemorate the victims of the demonstration. There’s also a sit-in to block major highways planned for Monday.

General Motors announced early Thursday that it was closing its operations in Venezuela after authorities seized its factory in the industrial city of Valencia, a move that could draw the Trump administration into the escalating chaos engulfing the nation.

A number of major Latin American governments called on Venezuela to take steps to increase democratic order.

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