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Two Killed During Trinidad and Tobago Protests; Police Say They Have Foiled Plot to Destabilize Country

Race Relations / **Published On June 30, 2020 07:56 PM /**

Staff Consortium **June 30, 2020**

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Protesters in Trinidad and Tobago on Tuesday

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad, CMC — The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) Tuesday said that they had foiled a “well-orchestrated plan to destabilize the country” and had arrested 72 people as protesters blocked roads, fired gunshots demanding that the officers involved in the deaths of three men last weekend by police be brought to justice.

The police confirmed that one person has died as a result of the protest on Tuesday and said that “investigations are underway to determine the cause of her death.”

Media reports identified the woman as Ornella Greaves, 30, who died while being treated at the Port of Spain General Hospital for gunshot wounds. There were also unconfirmed reports that one man also died as a result of the protest.

The police said that “so far, 72 persons have been arrested, and others are expected to be charged when investigations are completed,” adding “intelligence has revealed that this was an orchestrated plan that was led by several gang members, whereby the intention was to use the shooting of the three young men a few days ago, as a front to cover the planned plot to shut down the country”.

Police Commissioner Gary Griffith is quoted in the statement as wanting to remind the public that he was clear just a few days ago, when he stated that any police officer charged for a violent crime, should be removed from the Service, as we are expected to be at a higher standard.

“However, it is unacceptable that some, in their desire for justice, can expect any law-abiding citizen to justify this demand by condoning others to break the law, as was done today.

“This was a well-orchestrated plot by certain gang leaders in the hope to get national support, when they commenced their plan to cause mayhem, fear, and destruction throughout the country. This was wishful thinking, as it has only exposed who the real enemy is, when the nation saw it for themselves, via the plan to destabilize the country, and put law-abiding citizens in harm’s way<” the TTPS said in the statement.

It said that based on prior intelligence, mere hours before these criminal elements commenced their act, the TTPS was prepared.

“The plan to shut down the country involved setting fire to certain places, from along the Beetham to Port of Spain, and when police officers arrived, they would be fired upon. The plan was to kill police officers and to shoot up police stations. These same criminal elements used the opportunity yesterday and again this morning, to rob law-abiding citizens.”

The police said that this sort of illegal conduct “was to continue with wild random shots to be fired throughout the country to cause further havoc. This included shots being fired at the Office of the Attorney General, which was actually done.

“On several occasions, shots were also fired at police officers in different parts of the city. The plot was to also block roads in the hope that it would shut down the country.”

Griffith said that “their plan failed miserably and the TTPS is in full control”

He said with the immediate and strong assistance of the several arms of the security services, “we were able to quell any disturbance within minutes of the commencement of the plan”.

National Security Minister Stuart Young had earlier described as “carefully orchestrated and pre-palped” the protests that started in the eastern part of the capital and that he was “demanding that the criminal elements who are using the opportunity” to stir up the protest to end their actions.

“I understand people being emotionally upset about the incident that may have taken place on Saturday, but it has become very obvious very quickly as a result of human intelligence provided and other means of intelligence that many of these incidents...shooting in particular are being stirred by the criminal elements”.

Young also confirmed that the security forces had detained Fuad Abu Bakr, the son of the Muslim leader, Yasin Abu Bakr, who in 1990 had staged an unsuccessful coup here.

The elder Bakr, speaking at a news conference later demanded the “immediate release” of his son, and calling on the authorities to indicate what crime his son had committed.

Bakr told reporters that his son, as the leader of a political party, had every reason to be able to address supporters and that the video of his arrest “clearly shows he is not resisting.

“You can clearly see no violation of the law, they just come and take him away,” Bakr said, adding that the whereabouts of his son is ‘causing great concern’ to the family.

Attorney Christon Williams, said he plans to file a habeas corpus motion in the courts if Bakr, the leader of the New National Vision party is not released on Tuesday.

Bakr said he was urging persons to engage in peaceful protest, adding “I would urge all the protesters not to be drawn into a fire fight with the police.

“At the end of the day we will achieve some measure of justice,” Bakr said, referring to the deaths of Joel Jacob, Noel Diamond and Israel Clinton last weekend by police as “extra judicial justice”.

The police shootings came one day after an officer, Allen Moseley, 32, attached to the Guard and Emergency Branch (GEB) was shot dead in Morvant. But Police Commissioner Griffith has denied any link between the murder of the police officer and the deaths of the three men.

In its statement, the TTPS said that the CCTV footage was able to see in “real-time, every incident, of certain gang members lighting fire to tyres and throwing debris and even overturning vehicles to block roads throughout Port of Spain and environs”.

It said that the operation “is ongoing” and that Griffith has directed that “the Alert State for the TTPS remains at red, and the nation would be under heavy police surveillance for the next 48 hours.

“Police officers would be positioned at strategic locations, both overt and covert, to ensure that those few criminal elements cannot destabilize the country as was planned.

“CCTV footage at every site where fires were started and roads blocked, show clearly the faces of the perpetrators, some known to the police, and would be used to find them and have them arrested,” the statement said.

Griffith said that it is “hoped that this incident and plot by a few, to destabilize our great nation, clearly shows who the real enemy of the State is, and it is definitely not the dedicated men and women of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service”.

He has given the assurance that incident involving the deaths of three men “is being thoroughly investigated, both by the TTPS and also the independent body of the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) and when the findings are completed, the nation would be informed and the TTPS would act in accordance with what was revealed”.

Meantime, attorney Williams has sent a letter to Griffith demanding the immediate suspension of the police officers involved in the incident.

“The issue we pose is of great public concern. It was widely circulated in the daily newspaper and on social media that officers killed three in or around Second Caledonia, Morvant on the 27 June 2020,” he wrote, adding “forgive my curt tone but our clients were killed on the “police exercise” we term to be an extra-legal arbitrary and/or summary execution”.

He told reporters that Griffith has been given a Thursday deadline, following which he would be going to the courts to seek judicial reviews related to the matter.

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