

Nancy Coune, administrator of the Lake Harriet Spiritual Community centre, places flowers and signs memorializing Justine Damond at a makeshift memorial



Murder of woman: Loud sound heard prior to shooting

Chicago

Police in Minnesota were startled by a loud sound prior to fatally shooting an unarmed Australian woman who had called them to report a possible assault, US investigators revealed Tuesday.

The state agency probing the killing of Justine Damond, also known by her maiden name Justine Ruszczyk, interviewed one of the two officers who responded to her emergency call on Saturday night in Minneapolis.

It was the first time since the incident that authorities offered more information about the circumstances, as community leaders and Damond's family complained they had few details over a killing that reverberated in her native Australia.

Damond had called Minneapolis police Saturday around 11:30 pm to report a possible assault occurring near her home. Two officers responded with their police car's emergency lights off.

Officer Matthew Harity told investigators Tuesday that he had been "startled by a loud sound" near the squad car just before Damond approached, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) said in a statement.

His partner, Officer Mohamed Noor, was in the passenger seat.

"Harity indicated that



Justine Damon

Officer Noor discharged his weapon, striking Ruszczyk through the open driver's side window," the agency said.

The BCA did not identify the startling sound, but an unidentified officer recorded on a police radio conversation published by the website Minnesota PoliceClips, speculated it may have been fireworks that sounded like gun shots.

After the shooting, the officers provided medical aid until paramedics arrived, but Damond died at the scene of a gunshot wound to the abdomen, authorities said.

The officers' body-worn

cameras were not on during the incident, and investigators appealed for witnesses to come forward.

Meanwhile, Minneapolis officials pressed for patience, saying the state investigation took precedence and city authorities therefore had little information of their own to share.

"We don't have all the answers," Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges said at a Tuesday night news conference.

"But, the information the BCA shared this evening gets us closer to having answers, closer to seeing justice done," she said.

Australia mourns

Damond, a 40-year-old meditation instructor and life coach, was an Australian national who had moved to the US to marry her fiance Don Damond -- who on Monday had criticized a lack of information from investigators.

Her death reverberated around the world, from a makeshift memorial at the Lake Harriet Spiritual Community centre where Damond worked, to her native Australia.

Hundreds of family and friends gathered for an emotional vigil at Sydney's Freshwater beach at daybreak on Wednesday, standing in silence and holding candles before casting pink flowers into the water.

In an interview with Australia's Channel Nine, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull on Wednesday expressed shock.

"It is inexplicable," he said. "We are demanding answers on behalf of her family. And our hearts go out to her family, and all of her friends and loved ones."

A day earlier, Damond's father John Ruszczyk addressed Australian media at a news conference, calling for justice.

"Justine was a beacon to all of us. We only ask that the light of justice shine down on the circumstances of her death," he said. (AFP)

Man pleads guilty to killing 19 in China

Beijing

A man admitted killing 19 people, including his parents and three children, when he went on trial in southwest China on Wednesday, the court said.

After returning to his home village in Yunnan province on September 28 last year, Yang Qingpei murdered his parents when they refused to give him money, the Qujing City Intermediate People's Court said on its official

microblog account.

Fearing he would be discovered, Yang then killed 17 of his neighbours and fled to Yunnan's provincial capital Kunming, it said, adding that the murder weapon was a pickaxe.

Yang, who was born in 1989, pleaded guilty to all charges and apologised to the relatives of the dead, it added.

The court adjourned Wednesday afternoon for sentencing.

Three Kenyans jailed for life for stripping woman

Nairobi

A Kenyan court yesterday sentenced three men to life for stripping and sexually assaulting a woman they believed was dressed too provocatively.

The verdict capped a case that prompted hundreds to march through the capital Nairobi in short, fitted clothing in 2014, calling for an end to violence against women after a video of the attack was made public.

"We are equal, but it is equally important to respect the dignity of a woman," chief magistrate Francis Andayi said as he handed out the sentences.

"This is what many uncultured men do out there," he added.

The assault at a petrol station on Nairobi's outskirts, in which the victim was stripped, sexually assaulted and had her phone and cash stolen by a violent mob, was captured on camera and widely circulated on social media.

It was part of a rash of assaults against women and led activists mobilised under the hash tag #MyDressMyChoice to demonstrate.

The three men, Edward Gitau, Nicholas Mwangi and Meshak Mwangi, were technically given the death sentence. However Kenya's ban on carrying out executions means the trio will spend the rest of their lives in jail.

Maldives President arrests nephew amid power struggle

Colombo

The nephew of Maldives president Abdulla Yameen has been arrested for allegedly bribing politicians to challenge the ruling regime, the opposition said Wednesday, warning of further reprisals in the troubled honeymoon islands.

Faris Maumoon, an MP and son of former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, was taken into custody after police searched his home in the capital Male on Tuesday.

The passport of another key opposition figure Qasim Ibrahim, a former ally of strongman Yameen, was also seized by authorities.

Opposition parties aligned against Yameen issued a joint statement condemning

the arrests.

Ibrahim had helped Yameen win a controversial 2013 run-off election against Mohamed Nasheed, the head of the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP).

But after a fallout, Ibrahim joined the growing ranks unifying behind Nasheed and the MDP to topple Yameen.

The opposition this month secured enough support from government defectors to begin impeachment proceedings against the speaker, in a bid to wrest control of parliament from Yameen before presidential elections next year.

The latest arrests come a week before parliament is due to vote on the impeachment proceedings.