

Ahead of Visit by President Trump:

Hundreds of Filipinos Protest U.S. 'State Terrorism'



Protesters shout slogans while displaying portraits of U.S. President Donald Trump outside the American embassy in Manila Nov. 10, 2017.

MANILA (Dispatches) -- **Hundreds of people have taken to the streets of Manila to protest against U.S. President Donald Trump, ahead of his visit to the Philippines.**

Activists from a loose coalition of left-wing groups held placards with signs including "Ban Trump - Fight U.S. Imperialist War and Plunder" as they marched to the U.S. Embassy. The activists were blocked by scores of the capital's police kitted out in anti-riot gear just yards from the building. Minor scuffles broke out when protesters tried to break through the cordon.

But during the largely peaceful demonstration, protestors chanted anti-U.S. slogans including, "Trump, not welcome" and "Fight U.S. imperialist war." Others carried out symbolic acts - such as splashing black paint across a poster of Trump which branded him a "fascist".

A separate protest was also held outside the city's Trump Towers skyscraper.

Members of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan - an alliance of left wing organizations - gathered there. They claimed the U.S. president wanted to

build more U.S. military bases in the Philippines.

They also believed his visit would move the country closer to the U.S. and form a relationship that could see the Philippines dragged into any conflict in the region such as with North Korea.

"Trump represents the worst aspects of U.S. imperialism," they told the Southeast Asia Globe. "He is right now the biggest threat to regional peace with his provocations against North Korea."

Some of the protesters accused the U.S. of sponsoring state terrorism and condemned Washington's military intervention in Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, where government troops fight Daesh-linked militants.

The protests came ahead of the U.S. president's visit to the Philippines over the weekend, when he will meet with his Filipino counterpart president Rodrigo Duterte.

The U.S. leader is also set to attend the regional ASEAN trade summit.

Trump is also expected to discuss the ongoing conflict with North Korea with Duterte, as he sounds out solutions and tactical responses to any further missile launches by the secretive communist state.

It follows earlier trips to China and Japan. He will then travel to Vietnam and later South Korea.

Catalan Speaker Granted Bail After Being Jailed



Former speaker of Catalonia's sacked parliament Carme Forcadell, center, arrives at Spain's supreme court in Madrid on Nov. 9, 2017.

MADRID (Dispatches) -- **The speaker of the Catalan parliament was granted bail Friday after telling a judge that last month's declaration of independence was only symbolic and promising to respect the Spanish constitution in the future.**

Carme Forcadell and five other parliamentary officials appeared at Spain's supreme court on Thursday to testify over the roles in the banned independence referendum and the subsequent vote on declaring independence.

Forcadell left the Alcalá Meco prison outside Madrid on Friday after paying €150,000 bail. Four of the other lawmakers were ordered to

pay bail of €25,000, while another member of the governing body was questioned and released without bail.

The six, who face possible charges of rebellion, sedition and misuse of public funds, were questioned by Judge Pablo Llarena and two prosecutors throughout the day.

Lawyers familiar with the proceedings said Forcadell had testified that the independence vote held in the Catalan parliament on 27 October was "declarative and symbolic," adding the move was intended to minimize her liability if she were charged.

Forcadell and other members of the deposed government had previously insisted that the referendum and its results would be legally binding.

Llarena wrote in his ruling: "All the accused ... have expressed that either they renounce future political activity or, those that remain active, will in future renounce any actions outside the constitutional framework."

The judge also said that while citizens could legitimately support "an idea of independence ... it can be excluded that the accused aspired to gain independence through legal means."

Eight former Catalan ministers are already in custody pending investigations by Spain's top criminal court, the Audiencia Nacional - as are the leaders of the two main grassroots pro-independence groups. On Thursday, the high court rejected an appeal presented by their lawyers for their release.

Forcadell and the others are being dealt with by the supreme court as they still have parliamentary immunity.

At the end of October, José Manuel Maza announced that he would ask the national court to bring the charges against 14 members of Puigdemont's administration for pushing ahead with independence in defiance of Spain's government, its constitution and its constitutional court.

On Monday, Puigdemont hit out at the Spanish authorities, accusing them of waging a "brutal judicial offensive" against members of his ousted government and saying he feared they would not receive an unbiased hearing in Spanish courts.

Russia Retaliates U.S. 'Foreign Agent' Branding



This file photo taken on July 31, 2017 shows a Russian flag flying next to the U.S. embassy building in Moscow.

MOSCOW (AFP) -- **Russian lawmakers raced Friday to draft measures requiring U.S. media outlets and possibly social media networks to register as foreign agents, saying they could be adopted as early as next week.**

The measures, which are being prepared ahead of Russia's presidential election in March, would be a huge blow to already tattered U.S.-Russia ties.

Vyacheslav Volodin, speaker of the lower house of Russia's parliament, the State Duma, charged deputies with updating existing legislation after state-controlled Russia Today (RT) television was ordered by Washington to register as a "foreign agent" by Monday.

Volodin told Russian reporters the new measures, which would affect dozens of U.S. news organizations operating in Russia including CNN and Voice of America, could be adopted at first reading on Wednesday and at a third and final reading next Friday.

Washington has been fighting what it calls a barrage of "fake news" from Russian media, including RT and the Sputnik news agency, which it says is aimed at interfering in U.S. domestic politics.

"What the U.S. authorities are doing today is an infringement on fundamental civil rights, on freedom of speech," Volodin said.

"The United States speaks beautifully

about the freedom of speech when it comes to other countries but acts dogmatically itself."

His deputy Pyotr Tolstoy called for the mobilization of all of the country's political forces, saying it was "an emergency situation."

Lawmakers said the measures targeting U.S. media would be "reciprocal" and would set the same limitations that U.S. authorities were seeking to impose on Russian media.

A senior lawmaker with the ruling United Russia party, Sergei Neverov, told reporters that the new measures could include social networks.

Russian telecoms watchdog Roskomnadzor, for its part, proposed blocking the websites of foreign media groups and non-governmental organizations, without any need of a court order.

Roskomnadzor has repeatedly threatened to block Facebook and Twitter if they do not comply with a government demand to store the personal data of Russian nationals on Russia-based servers.

The head of Russia Today, Margarita Simonyan, said the broadcaster was "suddenly" told by Washington it had until Monday to register as a "foreign agent" in the United States or face having its accounts frozen, among other measures.

She said RT would challenge the demand by the U.S. Department of Justice in court.

China, Russia Counter U.S. at APEC Summit



U.S. President Donald Trump (left) shakes hand with China's President Xi Jinping at the end of a press conference at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Nov 9, 2017.

DANANG, Vietnam (Dispatches) -- **Moscow said Friday it has been receiving contradictory signals from the United States on a possible meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump in Vietnam.**

This week's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit is seen as a rare venue to address a diplomatic standoff that has resulted in both Moscow and Washington reducing embassy staff and giving up diplomatic compounds.

But Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on the sidelines of the summit that the prospects of a meeting between the two leaders are unclear yet.

"We don't fully understand yet. But we are patiently continuing to work in order to come to an understanding. Both presidents are in town. One way or another they will cross paths," he said.

The White House, however, said Trump will not have a separate meeting with his Russian counterpart.

"Regarding a Putin meeting, there was never a meeting confirmed, and there will not be one that takes place due to scheduling conflicts on both sides," White House Press Secretary Sarah Huackabee Sanders said.

"Now, they're going to be in the same place," she added. "Are they going to bump into each other and say hello? Certainly possible and likely. But in terms of a scheduled, formal meeting, there's not one on the calendar and we don't anticipate that there will

be one."

Trump and Putin will both attend the APEC summit here along with the leaders of Japan, Russia, China, and South Korea.

Trump, who embarked on a tour of Asia this week, arrived in Vietnam on Friday for talks likely to be dominated by tensions over North Korea. He has already visited China and Japan as part of a five-nation Asia tour.

During talks with the Chinese leader in Beijing Thursday, Trump thanked Xi Jinping for supporting UN sanctions on North Korea and said the US and China had agreed on the need for Pyongyang to completely denuclearize.

The annual APEC summit is one of the largest gatherings on the annual diplomatic calendar, bringing together scores of world leaders and more than 2,000 CEOs.

APEC represents 21 Pacific Rim economies, the equivalent of 60% global GDP and covering nearly three billion people, and has pushed for freer trade since its inception in 1989.

Xi Counters Trump
In his speech to the summit, Xi said Asia-Pacific nations must "uphold multilateralism," countering Trump's message that the U.S. would stay out of trade deals that in his words surrender the country's sovereignty.

Trump has already withdrawn the U.S. from free trade agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), calling it one-sided against the U.S. and harmful to American workers and manufacturing.

News in Brief

PARIS (AP) -- France is still hunting for suspects in the 2015 attacks that killed 130 people around Paris and that "zones of mystery" remain about Daesh cell that carried them out, France's top counterterrorism prosecutor said Friday.

François Molins told broadcaster Franceinfo that in addition to the 13 dead attackers, 13 suspects have been identified in France, Belgium and Turkey.

Molins also warned of a surge in isolated attacks and said authorities were continuing to thwart attempted violence, including in an operation this week that led to 10 arrests in France and Switzerland. With Daesh extremists on the retreat in Syria and Iraq, Molins warned against "naivete" toward French fighters and their families hoping to return. He estimated 690 fighters remained abroad. Most of those trying to return are the wives or widows of fighters plus their children, but Molins was skeptical of their motives. "We are facing people who are more disappointed than repentant," he said.

SEOUL (AFP) -- South Korean warships will take part in upcoming joint drills involving three U.S. aircraft carriers in a fresh show of force against North Korea, a Seoul military official said Friday.

The U.S. Navy said yesterday that the three vessels -- the USS Ronald Reagan, USS Nimitz and USS Theodore Roosevelt -- will conduct "coordinated operations in international waters" in the western Pacific between Saturday and Tuesday. It is unusual for Washington to have three of its aircraft carriers in the same place at the same time, and U.S. Pacific Fleet commander Scott Swift said in a statement it was the first such triple-carrier drill in the region since 2007. Seven South Korean navy vessels -- three destroyers and four escort ships -- will take part in the exercises, the South Korean official said. Nuclear-armed North Korea regularly denounces such military drills as rehearsals for invasion and sometimes conducts its own military maneuvers or missile tests in response.

NAYPYITAW (Reuters) -- A Myanmar court jailed two journalists on assignment for Turkey's state broadcaster, along with their interpreter and driver, for two months on Friday for violating an aircraft law by filming with a drone.

Cameraman Lau Hon Meng from Singapore and reporter Mok Choy Lin from Malaysia, were detained on Oct. 27 along with their Myanmar interpreter, Aung Naing Soe, and driver, Hla Tin. The four had been working on a documentary for TRT World, the English-language subsidiary of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation, when they were detained for attempting to fly a drone near parliament in the capital, Naypyitaw. While none of the four detained is a Turkish national, the case has further strained diplomatic ties in the wake of President Tayyip Erdogan accusing Myanmar's military of carrying out a "genocide" against the Buddhist-majority country's Rohingya Muslim minority. Police initially began investigations into whether they had violated an import-export rule that carries a penalty of up to three years in jail, but the judge in the case opted to introduce a fresh charge of contravening the 1934 Burma Aircraft Act, which carries a maximum sentence of three months.

SYDNEY (AFP) -- Papua New Guinea authorities destroyed makeshift shelters and removed water stores in a shuttered Australia refugee camp Friday, just hours ahead of a deadline for the inmates to leave or be forced out, detainees said.

The Manus Island camp held asylum-seekers who tried to reach Australia by boat under Canberra's tough immigration policy, but was ruled unconstitutional by PNG's Supreme Court and closed on October 31. Some 600 men barricaded themselves in the camp despite water and electricity being cut off, citing fears of a hostile reception from locals near three new transition centers set up for them. Behrouz Boochani, an Iranian refugee on Manus, tweeted Friday that shelters were torn down, while rubbish bins used to collect rainwater had been destroyed. "Police and immigration destroyed our shelters. Inside the rooms is very hot without power for fans. We built these shelters to provide shade & cover from tropical sun & rain," he wrote.

JAKARTA (AP) -- A member of an armed separatist group in Indonesia's Papua region has disputed police claims that it is holding villagers hostage during a standoff with security forces.

The remote region's long-simmering insurgency has flared in the past month, with one paramilitary police officer killed and six others wounded in attacks by the National Liberation Army of West Papua. The two sides are also waging a PR war, with police calling the group an armed criminal gang and accusing it of attacks on civilians. Hendrik Wanmang, who described himself as a commander of the armed group that goes by the Indonesian acronym TNF, said in an interview on Friday that Banti and Kimbeli villagers cannot go to an area the separatists defined as a battlefield with security forces because it is unsafe. But otherwise villagers are free to go to their farms and move about as they please, he said.

On Thursday, police said a group of about 100, including 25 gunmen, were occupying the two villages and preventing 1,300 people from leaving. Several hundred of the people are migrant workers from the Indonesian island of Sulawesi.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- India plans to spray water over its capital, New Delhi, to combat toxic smog that has triggered a pollution emergency, officials said on Friday, with conditions expected to worsen over the weekend.

Illegal crop burning in farm states surrounding New Delhi, vehicle exhaust in a city with limited public transport and swirling construction dust have caused the crisis, as they do every year. "Sprinkling water is the only way to bring down the dangerous pollution levels," said Shruti Bhargava, an environmental official charged with monitoring air quality. The government was finalizing the plans to spray the water from a height of 100 meters, which would be unprecedented, she said, without saying how much of the city of 22 million people would be covered. The thick blanket of gray air and pollutants has enveloped Delhi for the past four days. A U.S. embassy measure of tiny particulate matter, called PM 2.5, showed a reading of 523 at 9 a.m. on Friday - the outer limit of "good" air is 50. PM 2.5 is about 30 times finer than a human hair. The particles can be inhaled deep into the lungs, causing heart attacks, strokes, cancer and respiratory diseases.

Spreading Radioactive Cloud Puzzles Europeans

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- **Most European countries have reportedly detected radioactive pollution in the air without being able to tell where exactly it has originated from.**

High levels of the radioactive isotope Ruthenium-106 have been measured in the air in "a majority of European countries" since October, according to the German media.

"Measurement results from European stations communicated to the Institute since October 3 have confirmed the presence of Ruthenium-106 in the atmosphere of the majority of European countries," the French nuclear safety institute IRSN said on Thursday. Ruthenium-106 is a radioactive nuclide that is the product of splitting atoms in a nuclear reactor.

Officials, who say there is no risk to human health, are puzzled over the source of the pollution.

The IRSN speculated that an accident may have happened in a nuclear facility in Russia or Kazakhstan, causing the radioactive cloud to spread over Europe. IRSN suggested the leak took place in the last week of

September, south of the Ural mountains near the Volga River, the longest river in Europe.

The group's director Jean-Marc Peres, however, told Reuters that, "Russian authorities have said they are not aware of an accident on their territory."

Peres said that in recent weeks, the IRSN and several other nuclear safety institutes in Europe had measured high levels of Ruthenium-106, which is the product of splitting atoms in a nuclear reactor and does not occur naturally.

He said the Ruthenium-106 was probably released in a nuclear fuel treatment site or at a center for radioactive medicine. He ruled out chances of an accident in a nuclear reactor, as that would have led to contamination with other substances aside from Ruthenium-106. Ruthenium-106 is used in nuclear medicine.

On September 12, 2011 an explosion at a French nuclear recycling plant in Marcoule left one person dead and four others injured.

French authorities reported at the time that there had been no indication of radiation leaks at the plant.