



MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia rejects protests from Japan over Russia's military deployments on a chain of disputed Pacific islands and reserves the right to bolster its security there as it sees fit, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Wednesday. Moscow and Tokyo both claim sovereignty over the Pacific islands, known in Russia as the Kurile islands and in Japan as the Northern Territories. Russian military deployments on the islands were not aimed against neighboring countries, the ministry said in a statement, in which it also accused Tokyo of unhelpful "megaphone" diplomacy. "We firmly reject such demarches since Russia has the sovereign right to (conduct) any activity on its territory, including measures to strengthen national defense," it said. Japan said in July it had asked Russia to reduce its military activity on the islands.

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PARIS (AFP) -- French lawmakers Wednesday adopted two bills to prevent the spread of false information during election campaigns following allegations of Russian meddling in the 2017 presidential vote. The "fake news" bills enable a candidate or political party to seek a court injunction preventing the publication of "false information" during the three months leading up to a national election. They also give France's broadcast authority the power to take any network that is "controlled by, or under the influence of a foreign power" off the air if it "deliberately spreads false information that could alter the integrity of the election." The measure is seen as aimed at Russia's state-backed RT network which began broadcasting in French late last year. Macron has had Russian media in his sights since his 2017 campaign when a state-backed Russian site ran allegations that he was gay and had a secret bank account in the Bahamas. France's opposition has criticized the bills as an attempt to create a "thought police", noting that a law dating to 1881 already protects politicians and other citizens against defamation.

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BEIJING (AP) -- China's far-northwestern region of Xinjiang has revised legislation to provide a legal basis for internment camps where up to 1 million Muslims are being held amid mounting international criticism. New clauses adopted by the regional government officially permit the use of "education and training centers" to reform "people influenced by extremism." Chinese authorities deny that the internment camps exist but say petty criminals are sent to vocational "training centers." Former detainees in the centers say they were forced to denounce Islam and profess loyalty to the Communist Party in what they describe as political indoctrination camps. "It's a retrospective justification for the mass detention of Uighurs, Kazakhs, and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang," said James Leibold, a scholar of Chinese ethnic policies at Melbourne's La Trobe University. "It's a new form of re-education that's unprecedented and doesn't really have a legal basis, and I see them scrambling to try to create a legal basis for this policy." The revisions, published Tuesday, say government agencies at the county level and above "may establish occupational skills education and training centers, education transformation organizations and management departments to transform people influenced by extremism through education."

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ISLAMABAD (AFP) -- Religious hardliners in Pakistan Wednesday threatened judges and announced protests as the country awaits a Supreme Court ruling on the fate of a Christian woman who faces becoming the first person to be executed for blasphemy. Asia Bibi, who has been on death row since 2010, is at the center of the high-profile case which has divided Pakistan and drawn prayers from the Vatican. Successive appeals against her conviction have failed. On Monday the Supreme Court heard her last appeal and said it had reached a judgment, but refused to announce it immediately "for reasons to be recorded later." On Wednesday Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), a hardline religious political party -- which had a strong showing in nationwide elections earlier this year -- said in a press conference aired via YouTube that if she was freed the justices responsible would meet a "horrible" end. The group's leaders also called for mass protests on Friday.

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MADRID (AFP) -- At least eight people including two Britons were killed as heavy rain and flash floods hit the Spanish island of Mallorca late Tuesday, authorities said. Torrents of brown water swept cars along narrow streets in the eastern town of Sant Llorenç. Rivers burst their banks and swamped roads and people's homes -- forcing some to take shelter in a sports center in the nearby town of Manacor. At least another nine people were still missing after the downpours, El Pais and other media reported, though emergency services said they could not confirm that figure. Two of the victims were British, a senior official from the San Llorenç mayor's office, Antonia Bauza, told radio station Cadena Ser.

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NAIROBI (Reuters) -- Fifty people were killed on Wednesday when a bus travelling between the Kenyan capital Nairobi and the western city of Kisumu swerved off the road coming down a slope and rolled repeatedly, police said. "The initial report we have is that the driver lost control of the vehicle," police officer James Mugeru told Reuters at the scene. Police and rescuers had counted 50 people dead, including seven children. "A few survivors" were taken to nearby hospitals, Mugeru said.

# Russia, China, North Korea Agree on 5-Way Talks



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov welcomes North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho for the talks during their meeting in Moscow in April.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Wednesday that Russia, China and North Korea had agreed on the need for five-way talks including the United States and South Korea to end tensions on the Korean peninsula. Deputy foreign ministers from Russia, North Korea and China had met in Moscow on Tuesday and expressed support for talks in such a format to normalize relations, the ministry said in a statement. South Korea said earlier Wednesday that it is considering removing its unilateral sanctions against the North and improving bilateral ties between the two countries.

Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha told legislators in Seoul that South Korea is weighing options on whether to lift sanctions it imposed on Pyongyang in 2010 following a deadly attack on a warship that killed 45 South Korean sailors. However, the likely lifting of the unilateral sanctions would be mostly a symbolic gesture since it is impossible for Seoul to resume joint economic projects with Pyongyang under the U.S.-led sanctions. South Korea's top diplomat called on Washington last week to declare an end to the Korean War -- a key demand of Pyongyang -- in exchange for a verified

closure of a major North Korean nuclear facility as the next step in the stalled negotiations. U.S. President Donald Trump asserted on Tuesday that he plans to hold a second meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un following his country's upcoming midterm elections in November. He did not identify the possible location of their next summit but also didn't discount the suggestion of his Mar-a-Lago golf estate in Palm Beach, Florida. Trump and Kim met in Singapore on June 12 for the first-ever summit between the leaders of the two countries. During the summit, Kim reportedly pledged to work toward denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. U.S. officials, however, insist that there have been no public signs of denuclearization in North Korea. Pyongyang, on the other hand, has emphasized that Washington has betrayed the spirit of the June summit by making unilateral demands for denuclearization without taking any reciprocal measures. North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho said during his address to the UN General Assembly on September 29 that continued sanctions against the North are just deepening the rift of mistrust in the U.S. He insisted that there is "no way" his country will abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons unilaterally as long as Washington sticks to sanctions against Pyongyang. "Without any trust in the U.S. there will be no confidence in our national security and under such circumstances there is no way we will unilaterally disarm ourselves first," Ri said.

## Council of Europe Postpones Vote on Russia's Return



General view of the Council of Europe parliamentary assembly in Strasbourg, eastern France, on Jan. 26, 2011.

STRASBURG (Dispatches) -- Council of Europe delegates have voted to delay action on a proposed rule change which could restore Russia's voting rights, stripped in 2014 after Moscow's seizure of Crimea from Ukraine. During a plenary session of the rights body's parliamentary assembly, delegates sent the proposal back for further committee study by a vote of 99 to 79, with 16 abstentions. Russia has denounced the council's decision. Last year it suspended part of its 33 million euro (\$38 million) annual contribution to the 47-member body, which promotes democracy and the rule of law across Europe.

The proposed rule change would have made it harder to sanction a country's delegates in case of "serious infringement of the Council of Europe's fundamental principles". The measures were seen as a way of placating Moscow by allowing it to present a new council delegation in January. "The debate is completely 'poisoned' by the Russia case, so putting off the problem is the right decision," German deputy Frank Schwabe said on Twitter after the vote. Key proponent of Russia's readmission is the council's Secretary General Thorbjorn Jagland. Other influential supporters of Moscow are important members such as Germany, France and Italy but Ukraine and Britain remain among firm opponents of

the move. Moscow has demanded to be readmitted without conditions and given guarantees that it will no longer be subjected to any future sanctions. Reacting to the postponement, chairman of the international committee of Russia's lower parliament house, State Duma, Leonid Slutsky said the Russian delegation is unlikely to return to the council in 2019. The council "once again did the bidding of the Russophobic minority," he said, adding the decision "demonstrated how strong destructive attitudes in Strasbourg are." Russia has become a litmus test of how Europe is becoming increasingly divided, with each European country having its interests determined by its own geographical realities. There is no longer a European approach to Russia like there was during the Cold War when a weak Europe dependent on the U.S. for its security acted as one to maintain the U.S. containment line. Hungary and Bulgaria, as historical battle grounds between the West and the East, have criticized EU policy toward Russia for being too harsh. Also, key European countries such as Germany have critical economic concerns because they receive a significant amount of oil and natural gas from Russia. German, Austrian, and French energy companies are engaged in a number of joint venture projects with Russian energy companies. However, Poland and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are inclined toward the U.S. and stand firm in favor of extending sanctions against Russia.

# France Faces ICC Over Nuclear Tests in Polynesia



A picture taken in 1971 showing a nuclear explosion in Mururoa atoll, French Polynesia

THE HAGUE (AFP) -- A complaint has been filed at the Hague-based International Criminal Court against France for alleged crimes against humanity over nuclear tests conducted in the South Pacific, a French Polynesian opposition leader said. "It's with a great sense of duty and determination that we filed a complaint at the International Criminal Court on October 2 for crimes against humanity," Oscar Temaru, who is also the French archipelago's former president, said at the United Nations. "This case aims to hold all the living French presidents accountable for the nuclear tests against our country." Speaking during a meeting about French Polynesia as part of a UN committee focused on decolonization, he said: "We owe it to all the people who died from the consequences of nuclear colonialism." The overseas French territory, with about 290,000 people, is best known nowadays for its tourist island of Tahiti. But its Mururoa and Fangataufa atolls saw 193 nuclear tests over three decades until then-president Jacques Chirac ended the program in

the 1990s. The French Polynesia tests were among a total of 210 carried out -- also in Africa's Sahara desert -- with about 150,000 civilian and military personnel between 1960 and 1996. Thousands of them later developed serious health problems. Only around 20 of approximately 1,000 people who filed complaints against France have received compensation. "We see French nuclear tests as no less than the direct result of colonization," Temaru said, adding the testing was imposed upon the islanders "with the direct threat of imposing military rule if we refused." Temaru, who favors independence, said France has "ignored and shown contempt" for repeated offers since 2013 to come to the table under UN supervision. France long denied its responsibility for the health and environmental impacts of its testing, out of fear the admission would weaken its nuclear program during the Cold War. Only in 2010 did France pass a law authorizing compensation for military veterans and civilians whose cancer could be attributed to the test program.

## Taiwan President Raises Ante in Standoff With China



Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen attends National Day celebrations in Taipei, Oct. 10, 2018.

TAIPEI (Dispatches) -- Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen accused China of "seriously challenging" peace and stability Wednesday, describing the island she leads as being on the frontline of tensions in the Pacific. It comes as Beijing pursues a multi-pronged attack on any claims to sovereignty by self-ruled democratic Taiwan, which it sees as part of its territory to be reunified, by force if necessary. Relations between Beijing and Taipei have deteriorated since Tsai took office two years ago, as she refuses to acknowledge that Taiwan is part of "one China". "As Taiwan is on the frontline of the Western Pacific, we are naturally subject to tremendous pressure," Tsai said in a televised speech to mark Taiwan's National Day. China has recently upped military drills around the island and has made a concerted effort to poach Taiwan's dwindling number of official allies -- only 17 countries still diplomatically recognize the island after five jumped ship since Tsai took power. Beijing has also successfully put pressure on international businesses to list Taiwan as part of China on their websites and ensured Taiwan is shut out of global forums. Tsai pledged not to escalate tensions but also said Taiwan would seek to fortify its

national security and diplomatic links, establishing its "irreplaceable strategic importance". Worsening ties with Beijing and unpopular domestic reforms policies are putting Tsai's government under pressure ahead of major local elections next month. Last month, the United States recalled its envoys to the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama after decisions by those nations to cut ties with Taipei in favor of diplomatic relations with Beijing. While Washington formally recognizes only Beijing, it remains a close Taiwanese ally and maintains a de facto embassy on the island. The U.S. in September approved a \$330 million arms sale to the self-ruled island. China strongly objected to the United States for the deal and called for its cancellation. On Tuesday, Tsai and Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benitez watched as ground and air forces conducted a drill in a further provocation of China. Taiwan and the mainland separated amid civil war in 1949. Beijing has vowed to bring the island under its control by force if deemed necessary. Chinese President Xi Jinping has declared that the issue of bringing Taiwan under Beijing's control cannot be postponed indefinitely and some analysts believe he is determined to accomplish that feat during his time in office.

## Bangladesh Gives Death to 19 Over 2004 Grenade Attack

DHAKA (AFP) -- A Bangladesh court Wednesday sentenced 19 people to death over a 2004 grenade attack on the current prime minister, although a top opposition leader escaped with a life sentence. The attack in Dhaka on a rally by Sheikh Hasina, at the time in the opposition and now prime minister, left her injured and killed 20 people. Tarique Rahman, son of then-premier and Hasina's ally-turned-archrival Khaleda Zia, was among 49 people on trial, with Rahman charged with criminal conspiracy and multiple counts of murder. Rahman, 50, was tried in absentia after he fled the country for London in 2008. He now leads the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

from exile after Zia was jailed in February for five years for corruption. "We thank God for the verdict," prosecutor Mosharraf Hussain told reporters amid tight security. "We hoped that Tarique Rahman would get the death sentence," he said, adding the court observed that Rahman played a key role in the attack. Hussain said two former ministers including a powerful ex-home minister and two former heads of the country's powerful intelligence agencies were among others handed the death sentence. A total of 15 Islamist extremists from the banned Harkat-ul Jihad al Islami (HuJI), whose leader was executed in April last year, were also sentenced to death for planning and carrying out the attack.

Prosecutors said former BNP minister Abdus Salam Pintu colluded with HuJI and handed over grenades for the attack. Hasina was addressing the rally when the grenades exploded and suffered severe injuries in one ear. Among the dead was the wife of a former president. Four years later, Hasina stormed back to power after leading a secular coalition to a landslide victory in elections in December 2008. Three extremists were also charged over the attack and later executed in a separate trial. Home Minister Asaduzzman Khan said he was satisfied with the verdict, saying they got justice. Rahman's lawyer Sanaulah Mia said the charges against his client were politically motivated.