

China Warns U.S. Over Arrest Warrant for Huawei Official



Executive Board Director of the Chinese technology giant Huawei Meng Wanzhou attends a session of the VTB Capital Investment Forum “Russia Calling!” in Moscow, October 2, 2014.

BEIJING (Reuters) -- China's foreign ministry called in the U.S. ambassador on Sunday to lodge a “strong protest” over the arrest in Canada of Huawei Technologies Co Ltd’s chief financial officer, and said the United States should withdraw its arrest warrant.

Meng Wanzhou, Huawei’s global chief financial officer, was arrested in Canada on Dec. 1 and faces extradition to the United States, which alleges that she covered up her company’s links to a firm that tried to sell equipment to Iran despite sanctions.

The executive is also the daughter of the founder of Huawei.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng told U.S. ambassador Terry

Branstad that the United States had made an “unreasonable demand” on Canada to detain Meng while she was passing through Vancouver, China’s Foreign Ministry said.

“The actions of the U.S. seriously violated the lawful and legitimate rights of the Chinese citizen, and by their nature were extremely nasty,” Le told Branstad, comments similar to those he made to Canada’s ambassador the night before.

China strongly urges the United States to pay attention to China’s solemn and just position and withdraw the arrest warrant on Meng, Le added. “China will respond further depending on U.S. actions,” he said, without elaborating.

Le also told the Canadian ambassador on Saturday that there would be severe consequences if it did not immediately release Meng.

In a short statement, China’s Foreign Ministry said that Vice Foreign Minister Le had issued the warning to release Meng to Canada’s ambassador in Beijing, summoning him to lodge a “strong protest”.

“China strongly urges the Canadian side to immediately release the detained person, and earnestly protect their lawful, legitimate rights, otherwise Canada must accept full responsibility for the serious consequences caused,” Le said.

“There will probably be a deep freeze with the Chinese in high-level visits and exchanges,” David Mulroney, former Canadian ambassador to China, said on Friday.

On Sunday, the ruling Communist Party’s official People’s Daily said that while China would not “cause trouble”, it also did not fear trouble and that nobody should underestimate China’s determination on this case.

“Only if the Canadian side corrects its mistake and immediately stops infringing upon the lawful, legitimate rights of a Chinese citizen and gives a proper accounting to the Chinese people can it avoid paying a heavy price for this,” it said in an editorial.

Meng’s arrest was on the same day that U.S. President Donald Trump met in Argentina with China’s Xi Jinping to look for ways to resolve an escalating trade war between the world’s two largest economies.

New CDU Chief to Change Merkel’s Migration Policies



New CDU leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer delivers a closing speech during the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party congress in Hamburg, December 8, 2018.

BERLIN (Reuters) -- The new leader of Germany’s Christian Democrats (CDU) outlined plans on Sunday to change the party’s migrant policies before next year’s European election, signaling that she could break with her mentor Angela Merkel’s liberal approach.

The conservative party elected Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer to replace Merkel as their leader on Friday, making her frontrunner to become the next chancellor of Germany, which has Europe’s biggest economy.

However, the narrow win over

the more conservative Friedrich Merz exposed splits in Germany’s biggest party, which she must try to close before next May’s vote for the European Parliament and four state elections in 2019.

One of the deepest divisions is over migrant policy.

“I want to convene a ‘workshop discussion’ on migration and security with experts and critics of migrant and refugee policies to work on concrete improvements,” Kramp-Karrenbauer told Bild am Sonntag weekly.

“Our program for the European

election will build on these results.”

Merkel’s 2015 open-door approach eroded her popularity and led to losses in regional elections, culminating in her October decision to stand down as party leader. She aims to stay on as chancellor until the next federal vote in 2021.

By voting for Kramp-Karrenbauer, the CDU chose continuity but the new leader told German television this did not exclude some changes.

“You stand on the shoulders of your predecessor. What is good is continued and where there is room to change things, we will make changes,” she told broadcaster ARD.

While Kramp-Karrenbauer was less critical of Merkel’s migrant policy than her rivals in the leadership contest, she has argued that migrants must learn German and those with a criminal record cannot stay. But most of all, she has stressed that the CDU must not dwell too long on the damaging issue.

One of her main tasks in elections next year in three eastern states will be to win back voters who have turned to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has capitalized on fears about the integration of migrants.

Now represented in all 16 federal states and polling at around 14 percent, it is the main opposition in parliament to Merkel’s ‘grand coalition’ of the CDU, its conservative Bavarian allies and the Social Democrats (SPD).

Carolinas Face Widespread Power Cuts Amid Storm

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- A winter storm brought snowfall and freezing rain to North and South Carolina on Saturday, creating hazardous conditions on roads and threatening to leave hundreds of thousands of people without power, officials said.

The snowfall began on Saturday evening and was expected to last until early Monday in some areas, with up to 18 inches (46 cm) forecast for North Carolina’s Mount Mitchell, the National Weather Service said.

North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, who declared a state of emergency on Friday, told residents to finish stockpiling food and avoid unnecessary travel.

“This weekend isn’t the time to head out to see the winter

wonderland. Stay safe where you are,” Cooper said in a statement.

The effects of the storm, including power outages, could last for days in North Carolina, with the state’s mountainous western region expected to be particularly hard hit by snow, officials said.

About 500,000 electricity customers could lose power in North Carolina and South Carolina, a Duke Energy spokeswoman said on Twitter.

By Saturday evening, the storm had dumped 5 inches (13 cm) of snow on Hendersonville, a North Carolina city about 100 miles (160 km) west of Charlotte, meteorologist Zack Taylor of the federal Weather Prediction Center said by phone.

Charlotte, North Carolina’s most populous city, was expected to also

receive 5 inches (13 cm) of snow before the storm ends.

Snow was forecast for Virginia’s southern region beginning early on Sunday, including up to 6 inches (15 cm) in the Lynchburg area.

Virginia Governor Ralph Northam declared an emergency for the state on Saturday, warning of potential power outages and snarled transportation.

The storm could affect airports, including Asheville and Raleigh-Durham International in North Carolina, Lynchburg and Roanoke in Virginia and Greenville-Spartanburg International, South Carolina. American Airlines said it would waive change fees for people booked through Charlotte Douglas International, a major regional hub in North Carolina.

May: Brexit Deal Failure Could Topple Government



British Prime Minister Theresa May is leaving 10 Downing Street.

LONDON (AFP) -- Prime Minister Theresa May warned on Sunday that parliament’s rejection of her Brexit deal could leave Britain in the European Union and bring the opposition Labor Party to power.

The embattled leader’s message came with her government fearing a heavy defeat on Tuesday of the draft withdrawal agreement she signed with Brussels last month.

Media reports said May is under pressure from her cabinet to delay the vote and fly to Brussels to secure more concessions ahead of a planned summit with 27 fellow EU leaders on Thursday and Friday.

But Brexit Secretary Stephen Barclay told the BBC: “The vote is going ahead.”

May said Britain “would truly be in uncharted waters” if the draft struck after nearly two years of tough talks was voted down less than four months before the March 29 Brexit date.

“It would mean grave uncertainty for the nation with a very real risk of no Brexit,” she told the Mail on Sunday.

“We have a leader of the opposition who thinks of nothing but attempting to bring about a general election, no matter what the cost to the country...

I believe Jeremy Corbyn getting his hands on power is a risk we cannot afford to take.”

May is facing her biggest crisis since coming to power a month after the nation voted by a 52-48 margin in June 2016 to leave the world’s largest single market after 46 years.

She is under attack from more strident Brexit backers in her own party as well as europhiles who want either a second referendum or a pact that maintains stronger EU-UK ties than the one offered by May.

Her comments on Sunday are aimed at tamping down the headline Conservative Party revolt led by the likes of her former foreign minister Boris Johnson.

May’s team has been arguing for a number of days that her vision offers the cleanest break between the UK and EU that Brexit supporters can hope for at this late stage.

But Johnson used a column in the Sun on Sunday to argue that “the best way to get a great deal is to prepare for no deal” by rejecting May’s draft.

Corbyn’s party is hoping that failure in parliament on Tuesday will trigger a broader revolt that leads to early elections and returns Labor to power for the first time since 2010.

Armenians Vote in Parliamentary Elections



Nikol Pashinyan, the acting prime minister of Armenia, is casting his vote on Dec. 9, 2018.

YEREVAN (AFP) -- Armenians voted Sunday in parliamentary elections triggered years ahead of schedule by reformist leader Nikol Pashinyan, who is aiming to cement his political authority in the post-Soviet country.

The 43-year-old former journalist became prime minister in May after spearheading weeks of peaceful anti-government rallies that ousted veteran leader Serzh Sarkisian.

He has pledged to root out endemic corruption and address widespread poverty, earning him supporters in the impoverished landlocked nation of about three million people.

Pashinyan’s reform drive had been stalled for months by opposition from Sarkisian’s ruling party, which dominated the National Assembly until his calculated resignation triggered parliament’s dissolution last month.

At a polling station in central Yerevan voters expressed optimism about the political change promised by Pashinyan and vented their anger at former corrupt officials.

Voter 52-year-old painter Garnik Arakelyan said: “I want all those corrupt officials who for many years were robbing and humiliating people to be jailed.”

Pashinyan’s party is expected to get a

majority in the new legislature, allowing him to push ahead with his campaign to reshape the South Caucasus nation’s political landscape and spark an “economic revolution”.

Last week, Pashinyan -- who is acting prime minister -- promised “the best elections Armenia has ever seen,” without ballot stuffing or voter intimidation.

Analysts say Pashinyan sought new elections while he is at the peak of his popularity.

In September, his bloc had a landslide victory in municipal elections, winning more than 80 percent of the vote in the capital Yerevan, where nearly 40 percent of the former Soviet Republic’s population lives.

“The elections were called on the wave of a revolutionary euphoria,” Poghosyan told AFP. “But after the polls, that sentiment will inevitably weaken and Pashinyan and his team will face a reality check.”

On foreign policy, Pashinyan has said Armenia will “further strengthen (our) strategic alliance with Russia and, at the same time, step up cooperation with the United States and European Union”.

Nine political parties and two electoral blocs are competing for mandates in the 101-seat National Assembly.



ROME (AP) — Italian police investigating a deadly disco stampede said Sunday they found a pepper spray can and were questioning dozens of witnesses Sunday following accounts by concertgoers that a teenage boy had sprayed an irritating substance, triggering the mad rush by the crowd to flee. It wasn’t known if the can found was the one whose spray apparently set off the stampede about 1 a.m. Saturday in a crowd awaiting a rapper’s performance in the Lanterna Azzurra (Blue Lantern) disco in Corinaldo, a small town in the Marche region of east-central Italy, the Carabinieri paramilitary police commander of Ancona province, Col. Cristian Carrozza, told reporters. He also declined to confirm Italian media reports that a 16-year-old boy had been identified as the sprayer and would be questioned by juvenile court officials. Five teens, all juveniles, and a woman who had accompanied her 11-year-old daughter to the concert, died in the crush of fleeing concertgoers who toppled over a railing atop a cement ramp outside an exit. The railing gave way, sending young people tumbling over it and landing atop of each other in the area below the ramp, about 1.5 meters (feet) below.

DALLAS, Texas (AP) -- Police say a 31-year-old protester who told children Santa Claus is not real has been arrested for trespassing at a North Texas church. Aaron Urbanski was arrested Saturday after authorities were called to a church in Cleburne, which was hosting a breakfast with Santa event. Police say they found three people demonstrating outside the church after responding to a trespassing complaint. Authorities say Urbanski refused to leave and continued to cause a disturbance. Urbanski, who was charged with criminal trespass, has been booked into the Johnson County Law Enforcement Center. Cleburne Mayor Scott Cain weighed in on Facebook, saying, “Don’t Mess With Santa!” The mayor continued: “Guess they wanted coal in their stockings to go with a court appearance.”

OSLO, Norway (AP) — One of the winners of this year’s Nobel Peace Prize says the attention the prize has drawn to sexual violence against women in war zones must be followed by action against the abuses. Dr. Denis Mukwege spoke Sunday at a news conference with Nadia Murad of Iraq, with whom he shared the 9-million Swedish kronor (\$1 million) prize. Mukwege was honored for his work helping sexually abused women at the hospital he founded in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Murad, a Yazidi, won for her advocacy for sex abuse victims after being kidnapped and raped by Daesh militants. Mukwege says “what we see during armed conflicts is that women’s bodies become battlefields and this cannot be acceptable during our time.” He says “we cannot only denounce it, we now need to act.”

BELGRADE (Reuters) -- Thousands of people rallied peacefully in downtown Belgrade on Saturday to protest over an attack on an opposition politician and demand policy changes by President Aleksandar Vucic and his ruling Serbian Progressive party. Under the slogan “Stop the bloody shirts,” the demonstrators chanted as they marched through the city center to condemn the assault on Borko Stefanovic, leader of the small Serbian Left party. Stefanovic was attacked by a group of men wearing black clothing on Nov. 23 in the southern city of Krusevac and suffered minor injuries from being beaten with an iron rod. Vucic said Stefanovic’s assailants were arrested shortly after the incident, but opposition figures maintain that his party was involved — something vehemently denied by Progressive leaders.

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — Congo’s President Joseph Kabila is stepping down after this month’s election but he doesn’t rule out seeking the post again in the future. In an interview with The Associated Press, Kabila said he hopes to continue to be active in tackling the vast challenges in this mineral-rich but “complicated nation.” He said he has done what he could for Congo’s benefit since taking office in 2001 after the assassination of his father, Laurent Kabila. But he said there is more to be done. “Well, I am not going to rule out anything in life,” Joseph Kabila, relaxed and smiling, said. “As long as you are alive and you have ideas as strong as you have, a vision, you should never rule out anything.” That kind of talk has worried Congo’s opposition, which fears that Kabila will rule from the shadows if his preferred successor, ruling party candidate and former interior minister Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, wins on Dec. 23.

KHARTOUM (Reuters) -- At least seven local government officials were killed in a helicopter crash in Sudan’s eastern al-Qadiriya state on Sunday, state news agency SUNA reported. The state’s governor and three security officials were among the dead. A number of people were also injured in the incident, SUNA said. The officials had been carrying out a security tour of the province. It was not immediately clear what caused the crash.