

President Xi: There Is No Clash of Civilizations



Chinese President Xi Jinping attends the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations in Beijing, May 15, 2019.

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- Chinese President Xi Jinping declared Wednesday there was "no clash" of civilizations and denounced racial supremacy as "stupid" amid tensions with the United States and concerns over Beijing's rising global power.

His remarks came after a top-level U.S. official last month described the rivalry between China and the U.S. as "a fight with a really different civilization and a different ideology".

Kiron Skinner, the director of policy planning at the U.S. State Department, put it in racial terms, telling a security forum that China was the first U.S. "great power competitor that is not Cau-

casian". "Thinking that one's own race and culture are superior, and insisting on transforming or even replacing other civilizations is stupid in its understanding and disastrous in practice," Xi said at the opening ceremony of the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations in Beijing.

"There is no clash between different civilizations, (we) just need to have the eye to appreciate the beauty in all civilizations," he added, without mentioning the United States.

Xi's speech comes less than a week after trade negotiations between Washington and Beijing took a turn for the worse,

with the U.S. hiking tariffs on \$200 billion in Chinese merchandise and targeting duties on \$300 billion more.

On Monday, China retaliated with an announcement that it would raise tariffs on \$60 billion worth of U.S. goods from June 1.

President Donald Trump is expected to sign an executive order this week barring U.S. companies from using telecommunications equipment made by firms posing a national security risk, paving the way for a ban on doing business with China's Huawei, three U.S. officials familiar with the plan told Reuters.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said during a daily briefing in Beijing on Wednesday that the United States had been "abusing its national power" to "deliberately smear" and suppress certain Chinese companies. "This is not honorable, nor is it just," he said.

"We urge the United States to stop using the excuse of security issues to unreasonably suppress Chinese companies, and provide a fair, just, non-discriminatory environment for Chinese companies carrying out normal investments and operations in the United States."

The United States has been actively pushing other countries not to use Huawei's equipment in next-generation 5G networks that it calls "untrustworthy." In August, Trump signed a bill that barred the U.S. government itself from using equipment from Huawei and another Chinese provider, ZTE Corp.

Sri Lanka Says Probing Mob Attacks on Muslims



Sri Lankan soldiers patrol a road of Hettipola after a mob attack in a mosque in the nearby village of Kottampitiya, Sri Lanka May 14, 2019.

COLOMBO (Reuters) -- Sri Lanka's army said on Wednesday it was investigating a video posted on social media that showed a man dressed as a soldier walking away seconds before a mob attacked a building during anti-Muslim riots this week.

Mobs moved through towns in Sri Lanka's northwest, ransacking mosques, burning Qur'ans and attacking shops with petrol bombs, residents said, in apparent reprisal for Easter bombings by Takfiri militants.

The April 21 attacks, claimed by Daesh, targeted churches and hotels, killing more than 250 people and fuelling fears of a backlash against the island nation's minority Muslims.

In the video, a man wearing what appeared to be an army uniform stands outside a building and then walks away. Seconds later, about two dozen people, including young men wearing motorbike helmets, run over and throw stones at the building.

The video could not be independently verified by Reuters.

"The attention of the army has been drawn to a video clip where a

person dressed in uniform similar to that of the army was watching while a group of violent saboteurs were in action in the general area of Thunmodara," the army said in a statement announcing the investigation.

Two residents of Thunmodara told Reuters that a mosque and some Muslim-owned shops were attacked in the town in Kurunegala district that was hardest hit by the rioters.

Authorities said they have arrested more than 74 suspects in connection with the anti-Muslim attacks, including three Sinhala Buddhist extremists who had been investigated for similar actions in Kandy last year.

In recent years, Buddhist hardliners, led by the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) or "Buddhist Power Force" have stoked hostility against Islam, saying Middle Eastern influence has turned Sri Lankan Muslims more conservative and isolated.

More over a dozen interviews, Muslims in Kurunegala said the attacks took place despite the presence of security forces.

One police source who declined to be identified told Reuters they did not have enough officers to handle the rioters.

Facebook to Curb Livestreaming After Mosque Massacre



People comfort each other before the Friday prayers at Hagley Park outside Al-Noor mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand March 22, 2019.

PARIS (AFP) -- Facebook announced Wednesday it would tighten access to its livestreaming feature as New Zealand's premier Jacinda Ardern and French leader Emmanuel Macron prepared to launch the global "Christchurch Call" initiative to tackle the spread of extremism online.

Facebook boss Mark Zuckerberg has been under intense pressure since March when a white supremacist gunman used Facebook Live to stream his rampage at two mosques in the New Zealand city of Christchurch, which left 51 people dead.

The California-based platform said it would ban Facebook Live users who shared extremist content and seek to reinforce its own internal controls to stop the spread of offensive videos.

The largely symbolic initiative is intended to keep up the pressure on social media companies who face growing calls from politicians across the world to stop their platforms being abused.

"It's an action plan, it's the start of something," Ardern told CNN in an interview on Wednesday.

Many countries have already tightened legislation to introduce penalties for companies that fail to take down offensive content once it is flagged by authorities.

parallel to an initiative launched by Macron called "Tech for Good" which will bring together 80 tech chiefs to discuss how to harness technologies for the common good.

The heads of U.S. tech giants Wikipedia, Uber, Twitter, Microsoft and Google will attend, but not Zuckerberg who held private one-to-one talks with Macron last week.

The U.S. government has not endorsed the Christchurch Call and was only represented at a junior level at a meeting of G7 digital ministers which was also taking place on Wednesday in Paris.

In an opinion piece in The New York Times over the weekend, Ardern said the Christchurch massacre underlined "a horrifying new trend" in extremist atrocities.

"It was designed to be broadcast on the internet. The entire event was livestreamed... the scale of this horrific video's reach was staggering," she wrote.

Ardern said Facebook removed 1.5 million copies of the video within 24 hours of the attack, but she still found herself among those who inadvertently saw the footage when it auto-played on their social media feeds.

Around 8,000 New Zealanders called a mental health hotline after seeing the video, she told CNN.

News in Brief

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- U.S. media reports suggest President Donald Trump is considering replacing his hawkish National Security Adviser John Bolton over his plans to push the United States towards a military conflict with Iran, Venezuela and North Korea. Bolton "is headed for the exits, having flown too close to the sun on his regime change efforts for Iran, Venezuela and North Korea," The National Interest magazine reported, citing sources familiar with the matter. "Hearing that Trump wants him out," a former senior Trump administration official told the magazine. There is speculation in Washington "that there's now daylight between Trump and Bolton," the report added.

BRUSSELS (Reuters) -- A new European Union military pact risks shutting American companies out of defense contracts and undermining NATO, the United States has told the bloc, hinting at possible retaliation. In a May 1 letter, the U.S. government said limitations on the involvement of non-EU countries under consideration in the European pact amounted to "poison pills." "It is clear that similar reciprocity imposed U.S. restrictions would not be welcomed by our European partners and allies, and we would not relish having to consider them in the future," said the letter from two U.S. Department of Defense undersecretaries, Ellen Lord and Andrea Thompson, to the EU's foreign affairs chief, Federica Mogherini. Any rules limiting U.S. defense contractors' participation would also amount to "a dramatic reversal of the last three decades of increased integration of the transatlantic defense sector," said the letter, seen by Reuters.

CARACAS (Dispatches) -- Venezuela's top court accused four opposition lawmakers of treason on Tuesday, following similar accusations against 10 legislators this month. The Supreme Court accused lawmaker Carlos Paparoni, Miguel Pizarro, Franco Casella and Winston Flores of treason and inciting rebellion. Mexico's foreign ministry said later on Tuesday it had received opposition lawmaker Franco Manuel Casella Lovatin in its embassy in Caracas "to provide protection and shelter." One opposition lawmaker was arrested and several took refuge in foreign embassies in Caracas or fled the country last week after similar accusations from the court.

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) -- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Wednesday that he is traveling to three South Pacific island nations to see the effects of climate change firsthand. Speaking in Fiji, the UN leader said he wanted to learn about the work being undertaken by island communities to bolster resilience. He said the Pacific needs stronger international support because climate change is taking place faster than efforts to address it. "The last four years were the hottest on record. The loss of ice in Greenland and Antarctica is accelerating, meaning that sea levels will rise a full meter (over 3 feet) by 2100 if nothing is done to avoid it," Guterres said. "Here in the Pacific, sea-level rise in some countries is four times greater than the global average and is an existential threat to some island states." Guterres made the comments at a meeting with officials from the Pacific Islands Forum in Suva, Fiji's capital. He also plans to visit the island nations of Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

BRUSSELS (Reuters) -- The European Union should allow Britain as much time as needed to reconsider Brexit, Poland's Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz told Reuters. Three years after the referendum vote to quit the European Union, Britain is still struggling to agree on how and whether to leave the EU, which has recently agreed to put off the departure day to October to give London time to regroup. Poland's ruling eurosceptics have long argued the EU needs to be more accommodating to London, disagreeing with a more hawkish camp led by France, whose President Emmanuel Macron had sought to attach strict conditions to any delay. Czaputowicz said Britain should be given more leeway ahead. "From Poland's point of view, it would be good if Brexit would not happen," he said in comments cleared for release late on Tuesday. "It's a matter of changing the rhetoric to let the Brits rethink their decision."

BERLIN (AFP) -- Researchers in Germany have unearthed a new species of flying dinosaur that flapped its wings like a raven and could hold vital clues as to how modern-day birds evolved from their reptilian ancestors. For more than a century and a half since its discovery in 1861, Archaeopteryx -- a small feathered dinosaur around the size of a crow that lived in marshland around 150 million years ago -- was widely considered to be the oldest flying bird. Paleontologists from Ludwig-Maximilians University (LMU) in Munich and the University of Fribourg examined rock formations in the German region of Bavaria, home to nearly all known Archaeopteryx specimens. They came across a petrified wing, which the team initially assumed to be the same species. They soon found several differences, however. "There are similarities, but after detailed comparisons with Archaeopteryx and other, geologically younger birds, its fossil remains suggested that we were dealing with a somewhat more derived bird," said lead study author Oliver Rauhut from LMU's Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences. They called the new bird-like dinosaur Alconavis poeschli -- from the old Celtic word for a nearby river and the scientist who discovered the fossil, excavation leader Roland Poeschl.

Sudan Junta, Protesters Agree on 3-Year Transition



Sudanese demonstrators hold their national flag and chant slogans as they attend a mass anti-government protest outside Defense Ministry in Khartoum, April 29, 2019.

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) -- Sudan's ruling generals and opposition leaders behind the protests that drove President Omar al-Bashir from power last month said Wednesday they have made significant progress in negotiations and have agreed on the length of the country's transition period.

The two sides, which have been at odds over the transfer of power to civilian rule and the extent of the military's role in it, said the transition would last three years.

The military ousted al-Bashir on April 11, after nearly four months of mass protests against his 30-year rule.

But the demonstrators remained on the streets, demanding the military hand over power to civilian rule and have since been holding negotiations with the military council.

The agreement announced Wednesday marks a significant step toward resolving the standoff between the military and the protesters and could help the Sudanese return to some sort of normalcy.

In a joint press conference Wednesday, Lt. Gen. Yasser al-Atta, a member of the military council, said the two sides agreed a three-year transition period. The priority for the first six months will be to get the various armed rebel groups across the coun-

try to agree to peace talks, he said. Al-Atta said the two sides also agreed on the makeup of a 300-member, all-civilian transitional legislative body. He said two thirds of this interim parliament will be made up of representatives of the protesters while the remaining third will be made up of parties that were not part of al-Bashir's regime.

What's now left on the negotiating table is the makeup of the sovereign council, a deal al-Atta said he hoped would be reached by the next day.

"Within less than 24 hours, there will be a complete deal, and the Sudanese people will celebrate of achieving the goals of their peaceful revolution," he said.

The negotiations were disrupted by clashes with protesters on Monday that killed at least five people, including an army officer, and wounded more than 200. The violence erupted when some security forces, apparently loyal to al-Bashir, attacked the protesters' sit-ins overnight, including the one in Khartoum outside the military headquarters.

Madani Abbas, a negotiator for the protesters, said the military council would investigate the attacks.

For his part, al-Bashir remains jailed in Khartoum and was charged this week with involvement in the killing of protesters and incitement to kill protesters during the uprising against his rule.

Russia Protests Georgia's Extradition of Citizen to U.S.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- The Kremlin protested on Wednesday over the extradition from ex-Soviet Georgia to the United States of a Russian man accused of smuggling F-16 fighter jet manuals in breach of U.S. arms export law.

Oleg Tishchenko, a software developer, was earlier this year extradited to the United States from Georgia, where he was reported to have been arrested on a U.S. warrant while attending a dance festival.

Russian diplomats say he is now being held in a Utah jail ahead of his trial later this year.

Tishchenko, 42, says he bought the F-16 fighter jet manuals on eBay in order to help develop an ultra-realistic flight simulator. He has been charged with five offences, including smuggling, conspiring against the United States, and violating the U.S. Arms Export Control Act, Russian diplomats say.

He was also interested in obtaining manuals for other more advanced U.S. military aircraft such as the F-35 multi-role stealth fighter, according to an affidavit in support of the U.S. extradition request.

The case is likely to worsen already poor U.S.-Russia relations which both Washington and Moscow have spoken of wanting to improve despite sharp differences over everything

from Venezuela to Ukraine.

The Russian Embassy in Washington said on Wednesday it was possible that Tishchenko had been set up by U.S. authorities.

"There are signs in this case of a provocation by the U.S. intelligence services," it said in a statement.

Asked about the case on Wednesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Moscow was worried about the U.S. practice of having Russian nationals extradited from third countries like Georgia.

Russia itself does not extradite its own citizens, a practice that is banned under the Russian constitution.

"He's a Russian citizen," Peskov said of Tishchenko. "We are really worried and unhappy about the Americans carrying out such cross-border provocative actions towards Russian citizens. We are conveying our concerns and dissatisfaction to American colleagues at different levels."

Russia will watch closely to ensure the United States properly observes Tishchenko's rights, Peskov said.

Washington itself is unhappy about a number of U.S. citizens being detained in Russia. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo raised the issue on Tuesday during talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.