

Hong Kong at 'Critical Juncture' as Riots Cripple City



Anti-extradition bill protesters rally at the departure hall of Hong Kong airport in Hong Kong, China August 12, 2019.

HONG KONG (Dispatches) -- China on Monday condemned violent protesters in Hong Kong where 5,000 people occupying the Hong Kong airport's arrivals hall for a fourth day went to the departure area Monday and caused disruptions.

"Airport operations at Hong Kong International Airport have been seriously disrupted ... all flights have been cancelled," the city's airport authority said in a statement.

With roads to the airport congested and car parks reported full, the authority advised all passengers to leave the terminal buildings as soon as possible.

Passengers, who gathered around flight displays, complained about the

inconvenience, expressing concern about what could happen at the airport later this evening.

Protests first rocked the streets ten weeks ago when people took to the streets to protest a proposed bill which would have allowed suspects to be extradited and stand trial in mainland China.

While the proposed bill has been suspended, protests have continued and morphed over time into unruly riots.

Spokesman for the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council Yang Guang said on Monday the violent behavior of a "tiny minority" of radical demonstrators is behind the problem.

"Hong Kong's radical demonstrators have repeatedly used extremely dangerous tools to attack police officers, which already constitutes a serious violent crime, and also shows the first signs of terrorism emerging," Yang said.

"This wantonly tramples on Hong Kong's rule of law and social order," he said at a press briefing in Beijing.

As he spoke, China's People's Armed Police assembled in the neighboring city of Shenzhen for exercises, the state-backed Global Times newspaper said.

Earlier Monday, police unveiled water cannon trucks as a new way to combat the riots, after tear gas and rubber bullets failed to stop more than two months of rallies.

"Don't ever misjudge the situation and mistake our restraint for weakness... Don't ever underestimate the firm resolve and immense strength of the central government," Yang told rioters in a statement.

"Those who play with fire will perish by it," he warned.

The increasingly violent protests have plunged the Chinese-ruled territory into its most serious crisis in decades.

China's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs office said Monday the city had reached a critical juncture.

On Sunday, China warned Britain to stay out of its internal affairs after British Foreign Minister Dominic Raab called for an independent investigation into the riots in its former colony.

South Korea to Drop Japan From Special Trade List



South Korean people chant slogans during an anti-Japan rally near the Japanese embassy in Seoul, South Korea, August 3, 2019.

SEOUL (Reuters) -- South Korea said on Monday it plans to drop Japan from its "white list" of countries with fast-track trade status from September, a tit-for-tat move that deepens a diplomatic and trade rift between the two countries.

The tighter trade regulations, including potential lengthy permit application processes, will apply to South Korea exports to Japan.

Industry Minister Sung Yun-mo said that Japan would be put in a newly-created trade category of countries that have not run their export control systems in line with "international export control principles".

Park Tae-sung, a senior South Korean trade ministry official, added that Japan had been designated the first country in the new group because of inappropriate trade practices, but did not provide details.

Relations between the two countries have soured since a ruling by South Korea's Supreme Court last year that Japanese companies should compensate South Koreans who were conscripted as forced laborers during World War Two.

The Japanese government did not immediately issue a public response to Monday's announcement, but a senior foreign ministry official told broadcaster NHK that a response would come after more analysis of the details of South Korea's decision.

Another foreign ministry official said that

Tokyo was not expecting an immediate impact, NHK reported.

Japan announced earlier this month that it was removing South Korea from its own "white list" of countries that have enjoyed minimum trade restrictions, citing an erosion of trust.

That followed Japan's imposition in July of tighter curbs on exports to South Korea of materials used to make smartphone chips, South Korea's top export item. Tokyo last week granted the first shipment of high-tech materials to South Korea since those restrictions were enforced.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Japan's economic retaliation is not only intrinsically unfair, but unjust because it stems from Japan's colonial-era abuses.

Still, South Koreans should not react emotionally and should maintain constructive ties with the Japanese people, Moon said at a meeting of senior aides on Monday.

"We should take deep breaths to consider a fundamental countermeasure in a vehement yet calm manner," he said.

In a bid to cut its reliance on Japanese imports, South Korea last week announced plans to invest about 7.8 trillion won (\$6.48 billion) in research and development for local materials, parts and equipment over seven years.

Sung said he was ready to talk with Japanese officials any time Tokyo requests a meeting.

News in Brief

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- U.S. President Donald Trump's administration unveiled a new rule on Monday that could deny visas and permanent residency to hundreds of thousands of people for being too poor. The long-anticipated rule, pushed by Trump's leading aide on immigration, Stephen Miller, takes effect Oct. 15 and would reject applicants for temporary or permanent visas for failing to meet income standards or for receiving public assistance such as welfare, food stamps, public housing or Medicaid. Such a change would ensure that immigrants "are self-sufficient," in that they "do not depend on public resources to meet their needs, but rather rely on their own capabilities, as well as the resources of family members, sponsors, and private organizations," a notice published in the Federal Register said. The overhaul is part of President Donald Trump's efforts to curb both legal and illegal immigration, an issue he has made a cornerstone of his presidency. He has pledged to build a wall along the U.S. southern border with Mexico - initially saying Mexico would pay for it - and has pressed for changes to immigration laws. Both efforts have made little progress with lawmakers.

MOSCOW (AP) -- Thousands of Russians attended the funerals Monday of five Russian nuclear engineers killed by an explosion as they tested a new rocket, a tragedy that fueled radiation fears and raised new questions about a secretive weapons program. The engineers, who died Thursday, were laid to rest in Sarov, which hosts Russia's main nuclear weapons research center, where they worked. Flares flew at half-staff in the closed city, located 370 kilometers (230 miles) east of Moscow, which has served as a base for Russia's nuclear weapons program since the late 1940s. The coffins were displayed at Sarov's main square before being driven to a cemetery. The Defense Ministry initially said the explosion at the navy's testing range in Nyonoksa in the northwestern Arkhangelsk region killed two people and injured six others, but the state-controlled Rosatom nuclear concern acknowledged over the weekend that the blast also killed five of its workers and injured three others.

BUENOS AIRES (AFP) -- President Mauricio Macri suffered a crushing defeat as Argentines voted in party primaries on Sunday ahead of October's general election. Given that all of the recession-hit South American country's major parties have already chosen their presidential candidates, the primaries effectively served as a nationwide pre-election opinion poll. Center-left nominee, Alberto Fernandez, led by around 15 points after partial results were revealed, as center-right pro-business Macri admitted, it had been "a bad election." The first round of the presidential election will be held on October 27th, with a run-off, if needed, set for November 24th. With 87 percent of polling station results counted, Fernandez had polled 47.5 per cent with Macri on a little more than 32 percent and centrist former Finance Minister, Roberto Lavagna, a distant third on just 8.3 percent.

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- Former U.S. vice president Joe Biden, the frontrunner for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination, called on Monday for reinstating a ban on assault weapons and including a buyback program to get them off the streets. In a column in The New York Times, Biden also called for stricter background checks for gun buyers and greater use of "smart-gun technology" that allows a weapon only to be fired by its authorized owner. "We have a huge problem with guns," Biden said in the article published about a week after mass shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, left 31 people dead. "Assault weapons - military-style firearms designed to fire rapidly - are a threat to our national security, and we should treat them as such," the former senator from Delaware said. "There's overwhelming data that shootings committed with assault weapons kill more people than shootings with other types of guns," he said.

GUATEMALA CITY (Reuters) -- The winner of Guatemala's presidential election, Alejandro Giammattei, said on Sunday he hoped he could make changes to a controversial migration deal the Central American country signed with the Trump administration last month. Speaking to Reuters shortly before being declared victor, the conservative Giammattei said he wanted to see what could be done to improve the deal that outgoing President Jimmy Morales agreed to stem U.S.-bound migration from Central America. Giammattei will not take office until January, by which time Guatemala may be under severe pressure from the deal that effectively turns the country into a buffer zone, by forcing migrants to seek refuge there rather than in the United States.

BEIJING (Reuters) -- The death toll from typhoon Lekima in eastern China rose to 44 people on Monday morning, according to official data, as the storm continued up the coast, racking up billions of dollars in economic losses and widely disrupting travel. An additional 12 people were recorded dead from the storm, including seven from Zhejiang province and five from Shandong, with 16 people missing, according to data from provincial emergency bureaus and state media. State broadcaster CCTV had put the death toll at 32 on Sunday. Typhoon Lekima made landfall early on Saturday in China's Zhejiang province, with winds gusting up to 187 kmh (116 mph). The center of the storm has since traveled north through Shandong and off the coast. Many of the earlier deaths occurred when a natural dam collapsed in Zhejiang after a deluge of 160 mm (6.2 inches) of rain within three hours.

Mosque Attack 'Attempted Act of Terror': Norway



A view of the al-Noor Islamic Centre mosque in Sandvika, Norway August 11, 2019.

OSLO (AFP) -- Norwegian police said Sunday that a shooting at a mosque near Oslo is being treated as an "attempted act of terror" and that the suspected gunman harbors far-right, anti-immigrant views.

The suspect entered the mosque in the affluent Oslo suburb of Baerum on Saturday armed with multiple weapons and opened fire before being overpowered by a 65-year-old man who suffered minor injuries.

Hours after the attack, the body of a young woman was found in a home in Baerum and police on Sunday con-

firmed that it was the suspect's 17-year-old stepsister. Investigators launched a murder investigation into the death.

Oslo's acting chief of the police operation Rune Skjold said the investigation into the shooting showed that the suspect, who has not been named, appeared to hold "far-right" and "anti-immigrant" views.

"We are looking at an attempted act of terror," Skjold told a press conference on Sunday.

Only three people were inside the al-Noor Islamic Centre at the time of the

attack, and police said they recovered two firearms from the scene but did not specify which type.

Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg called the shooting a "direct attack on Norwegian Muslims".

The country was the scene of one of the worst-ever attacks by a right-wing extremist in July 2011, when 77 people were killed by Anders Behring Breivik.

Police said they had tried to question the suspect -- described as a young man around 20 years old with a "Norwegian background" who was living in the vicinity of the attack -- but he did not want to "give an explanation or police".

The man had been known to police before the incident, but according to Skjold, he could not be described as someone with a "criminal background".

Unni Fries, the suspect's lawyer, declined to offer any further information and told AFP that she needed "much more time to get into the case".

There has been a recent spate of white nationalist attacks in the West, including in the United States and in New Zealand where 51 Muslim worshippers were killed in March at two mosques in the city of Christchurch.

Norway's al-Noor Islamic centre shares its name with the worst-affected mosque in the New Zealand attacks.

U.S. Must Remove Nuclear Warheads From Germany: MP



There are thought to be around 20 warheads at the German Büchel military base.

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- A German lawmaker says the United States has to remove its nuclear weapons -- presently kept in Germany -- and take them to its own soil, in the event of relocating American troops from Germany to Poland.

The chairman of the Left Party faction in the German Bundestag, Dietmar Bartsch, said on Sunday that if the U.S. decides to "withdraw their soldiers, then they should take their nuclear weapons with them."

He further said that "of course, they should take it home, not to Poland."

His remarks came in reaction to threats by the U.S. Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell who said the Pentagon will move U.S. troops stationed in Germany to Poland if German Chancellor Angela Merkel fails to boost military spending as part of its contribution to the NATO military alliance.

NATO President Donald Trump has long criticized NATO members that have failed to hit a target of spending 2 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defense.

He has been specifically calling on the U.S. ally, Germany, to boost its spending, but Berlin's military spending remains far short at just 1.3 percent of GDP this year

The U.S. currently has just over 35,000 troops stationed in Germany, together with 17,000 US civilian support staff.

The U.S. ambassador in Warsaw, Georgette Mosbacher, said previously that "Poland meets its 2 percent of GDP spending obligation towards NATO. Germany does not. We would welcome American troops in Germany to come to Poland," Mosbacher said in a Twitter message.

Trump also suggested the possibility of removing U.S. troops stationed in Germany back in June, when he told a press conference that 1,000 troops for a planned new deployment in Poland would be drawn from those stationed in Germany.

It has long been known that the U.S. stored some of its nuclear weapons in Europe, but the locations remained a secret.

Back in June, the secret was accidentally revealed by a NATO committee report -- which was subsequently deleted -- but hit the headlines across the continent.

The Belgian newspaper, De Morgen, cited the report as saying that the nuclear weapons -- roughly 150 U.S. nuclear bombs -- were being stored in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.

Australia Steps Up Military Spending Amid U.S. Pressure

SYDNEY (Dispatches) -- Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Monday his government will spend three billion dollars on new weapons and military equipment over the next two decades, in a move which is believed to be taken under US pressure.

The new funding "is one of the most important investments that I can make as a prime minister to ensure that our special forces are equipped to do the job that we require of them to protect Australia and keep Australians safe," Morrison said.

"This is about ensuring our special forces are on the leading edge of capability," he told reporters at the Holsworth Army base in Sydney.

"The threats are always there and the challenges are always there and we must always be prepared to face them -- not just now but for the next 20 years," Morrison added.

The prime minister also related the funding to his government's efforts in seeking a greater role in the Pacific with a view to countering China.

"This is going to be a very important part of our commitment, the biggest single commitment to upgrading the

capability of our defense forces since the Second World War," Morrison said.

The growth of China's military power throughout the region and across the world has long been a concern for the U.S. which is pressuring the regional countries to help it curb the rise.

The U.S. and Australia recently announced plans to build a joint military base on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island, northeast of Australia.

China, however, is Australia's major trading partner and while there are difficulties in bilateral ties, Australia is willing to strengthen dialogue and communication with China.

Morrison and his defense chiefs have already come under pressure by the U.S. to join a coalition in the Persian Gulf. The Australian premier has said he is yet to make a decision on joining the mission.

According to Professor Emeritus of Strategic Studies at the Australian National University Hugh White, the United States is no longer a reliable ally as he urged the government to increase its fleet of submarines and fighter aircraft.