

China: Racism, a Chronic Disease of U.S. Society



A demonstrator protesting the death of George Floyd talks to a member of the Secret Service at Lafayette Square in Washington, DC on May 31, 2020.

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- China said Monday unrest in the United States highlighted its severe problems of racism and police violence, and exposed Washington's double standards in supporting Hong Kong's protesters.

"Black people's lives are also lives. Their human rights must also be guaranteed," foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhao Lijian told reporters in Beijing, referring to the death in custody of an unarmed black man in Minneapolis.

"Racism against ethnic minorities in the U.S. is a chronic disease of American society," Zhao added.

"The current situation reflects once more the severity of the problems of racism and police violence in the U.S."

Chinese diplomats and state media have pointed at the unrest sparked by the death of George Floyd to accuse the U.S. of hypocrisy and compare American protesters with violent demonstrators in Hong Kong.

Zhao said the U.S. government's response to protests at home was a "textbook example of its world-famous double standards."

"Why does the U.S. lionize the so-called Hong Kong independence and black violence elements as heroes and activists, while calling people who protest against racism 'rioters'?" Zhao asked.

China has said "foreign forces" are to blame for the turmoil in Hong Kong, where violent riots since June last year

have crippled the island.

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying took aim at Washington Monday.

"I can't breathe," she said on Twitter, with a screenshot of a tweet by U.S. State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortega that had criticized China's policy in Hong Kong.

Hua was quoting the words Floyd was heard saying repeatedly before his death -- after a police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

Beijing warned Washington Monday of retaliation after President Donald Trump announced restrictions on Chinese students in the U.S. in protest over a new national security law in Hong Kong.

Trump said Friday that the United States would ban some Chinese graduate students and start reversing Hong Kong's special status in customs and other areas, as Beijing moves ahead with a plan to impose a controversial security law.

"Any words and actions that harm the interests of China will be met with counter-attacks on the Chinese side," said Zhao at a regular briefing.

He said Washington's measures "seriously interfere in China's internal affairs and undermine US-China relations".

China's parliament on Thursday approved plans for the law, which would punish secession, subversion of state power, terrorism and acts that endanger national security, as well as allow Chinese security agencies to operate openly in Hong Kong.

Latin America Virus Cases Top One Million



Gravediggers bury the body of a person who died from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Sao Francisco Xavier cemetery, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, May 29, 2020.

BRASÍLIA (AFP) -- Confirmed coronavirus cases in Latin America have surged past one million, while hard-hit Britain and Russia eased lockdowns Monday.

Governments around the world are moving to ease restrictions that have wrecked their economies, even as the number of cases tops 6.1 million and virus deaths exceed 371,000.

With more than half a million known infections, Brazil now has the second-highest caseload in the world, but its anti-lockdown President Jair Bolsonaro again defied social distancing recommendations on Sunday.

Wearing no face mask, the far-right leader met a tightly packed group of supporters in the capital Brasilia as the crowd chanted "Myth! Myth! Myth!" -- echoing his dismissal of the virus threat.

Bolsonaro has been a staunch opponent of lockdowns as a tool for containing the coronavirus, saying they are unnecessary and harmful to the economy, but he has faced intense criticism from worried state authorities and angry citizens.

Despite his skepticism, the virus rages on in Brazil and other parts of South America, with the situation in Chile, Bolivia and Peru also worsening.

While South America and parts of Africa and Asia have only just started to

feel the full force of the pandemic, hard-hit European countries have cautiously begun easing lockdowns as they seek a return to some form of normality.

But experts have cautioned that moving too fast could spell disaster, with no vaccine or effective treatment yet for COVID-19.

In Britain, where schools were set to partially re-open on Monday, some senior government advisers warned things were happening too rapidly.

"COVID-19 spreading too fast to lift lockdown in England," tweeted Jeremy Farrar, a member of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies.

Hard-hit Russia, which saw an explosion of infections in recent weeks, was also set to re-open shopping malls and parks in Moscow.

The pandemic has devastated the global economy, which is facing its worst downturn since the Great Depression, and with businesses and citizens growing tired of confinement, there is pressure on many leaders to press on with re-openings -- especially in nations where outbreaks appear to be slowing.

In the United States -- the worst-affected nation in the world -- Washington and Los Angeles resumed outdoor dining, while New York City is on track to begin re-opening from June 8.

U.S. Lawmakers: Ban China-Linked Military Investment



Military vehicles carrying intercontinental ballistic missiles DF-31AG travel past Tiananmen Square during the military parade marking the 70th founding anniversary of People's Republic of China, on its National Day in Beijing, Oct. 1, 2019.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- A group of Republican lawmakers plans to unveil legislation this week to keep Americans from investing in foreign defense companies with ties to China's military, according to a document seen by Reuters, the latest in a string of measures aimed at curbing U.S. funding for China-based firms.

Representatives Mike Gallagher, Jim Banks and Doug LaMalfa plan to introduce the bill, which would require Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin to submit a report to Congress listing foreign defense companies that have "substantial contracts with, ties to, or support from" the Chinese military.

Six months after the report is

issued, American companies and citizens would be required to divest from those firms and would be banned from making new investments in them.

"On one hand, Congress is asking taxpayers to help grow our military so we can compete with China. On the other hand, large U.S. investment funds are dumping U.S. dollars into China's military industrial base," Banks said in a statement. "We need to end our cognitive dissonance and stop funding the rise of our chief global adversary."

The move comes as the U.S. government has begun extending its trade and technology battle with Beijing to capital markets, as ties between the rival nations have soured

over the origins of the deadly coronavirus.

While it was not immediately clear if Democrats or other Republicans would support the bill, anti-China sentiment is running high in the Capitol.

On Friday, President Donald Trump said his administration will study ways to safeguard Americans from the risks of investing in Chinese companies, ratcheting up pressure on the firms to comply with U.S. accounting and disclosure rules.

Earlier this month, an independent board tasked with administering federal worker and military pension funds halted plans to allow one of its funds to track an index that includes "controversial" Chinese companies, under pressure from the White House.

Those moves came after China's Luckin Coffee, which trades on the Nasdaq stock exchange, said in April that as much as 2.2 billion yuan (\$310 million) in sales last year had been fabricated.

The revelation strengthened the position of China hawks in the Trump administration who argue that investors in Chinese companies are vulnerable to unforeseen risks because they are not subject to the same auditing and disclosure rules as U.S. companies.

The Senate passed legislation earlier this month that could prevent some Chinese companies from listing their shares on U.S. exchanges unless they follow standards for U.S. audits and regulations.

Brazil Gets Unproven Malaria Drug for Coronavirus



Professor Adrian Hill holds a phial containing the Ebola vaccine at the Oxford Vaccine Group Center for Clinical Vaccinology and Tropical Medicine (CCVTM) in Oxford, southern England September 17, 2014.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The U.S. has sent to Brazil more than 2 million doses of a malaria drug touted by President Donald Trump as potentially protecting against and treating the coronavirus, even though scientific evidence has not backed up those uses.

No large, rigorous scientific studies have found the drug, hydroxychloroquine, safe or effective for preventing or treating COVID-19, and some smaller studies have indicated worse outcomes from those taking the drug.

Brazil, now Latin America's hardest-hit country, continues to see a surge in virus cases, and last week Trump announced that the U.S. was restricting travel from the country to prevent travelers from spreading the virus in the U.S.

In a joint statement with the Brazilian government on Sunday, the White House said the doses of hydroxychloroquine had been sent to Brazil as a prophylactic for front-line health workers and as a therapeutic for those who may come down with the virus. The White House said it was also delivering 1,000 ventilators to Brazil.

Trump revealed in May that he took a two-week course of the drug to protect against the coronavirus, despite warnings from his own government that it should

only be administered for COVID-19 in a hospital or research setting due to potentially fatal side effects.

Trump's announcement that he was taking the drug was criticized by medical experts who warned that his actions could encourage others to take the drug outside of a medical setting.

Trump said he decided to take hydroxychloroquine after two White House staffers tested positive for the disease.

Prominent figures from across Brazil's political spectrum on Saturday published a high-profile manifesto calling for a united front to protect Brazilian democracy and lives amid growing alarm over President Jair Bolsonaro's authoritarian outbursts and shambolic response to coronavirus.

The Movimento Estamos Juntos (We're In This Together Movement) was launched as Brazil overtook France to become the country with the fourth highest official death toll. About a thousand coronavirus deaths are being confirmed each day as Latin America's biggest economy cements itself as a major focus of the pandemic.

"Bolsonaro sometimes comes across as a caricature, something comical. But he's dangerous -- he and the followers of this fanatical far-right sect are dangerous," prominent leftist Flávio Dino said.

Pope Issues New Law as Vatican Corruption Abounds

ROME (AFP) -- Pope Francis stepped up his battle against corruption in the Vatican Monday with a new law aimed at boosting transparency in tenders and cutting costs as a post-coronavirus recession hits.

Convicted mobsters and those guilty of tax fraud are among a list of undesirables now unable to pocket contracts.

The Argentine pontiff was elected in 2013 to put the Vatican's finances in order, but has met resistance from certain ministries reluctant to relinquish control over funds or shine a light on internal workings.

The law, published Monday, is the first year of work and brings the Vatican into line with international standards.

It is "a not insignificant turn of events," Vatican expert Iacopo Scaramuzzi said on Twitter.

"It puts an end to the firmly established Vatican habit... of entrusting external contracts to relatives and friends of friends," he added.

The new standards of "transparency, control and competition in the procedures for awarding public contracts" will centralize expenditures, currently very fragmented, under

two administrative bodies.

The changes will "significantly reduce the danger of corruption," Francis said in his written introduction to the law.

While the days of suspected mafia involvement in the Vatican's finances are long gone, the seat of the Catholic Church has found it difficult to shake off scandals completely.

A recent investigation uncovered possible corruption linked to Vatican real estate investments in London.

As well as excluding people convicted of ties to organized crime groups from bids, the law says the Vatican's selection for tenders must comply with ethical principles and avoid conflicts of interest.

Giuseppe Pignatone, a leading Italian anti-mafia expert appointed by the Pope in October to head up the Vatican's court, said the law aimed to achieve "significant savings" through competitive bidding.

"The theme of cutting expenses is very topical and important at this time -- unfortunately destined to continue -- of serious economic difficulties for the whole world, but also for the Holy See and the Vatican City State," he said.



SAN SALVADOR (AFP) -- Tropical Storm Amanda, the first named storm of the season in the Pacific, killed at least 14 people as it lashed El Salvador and Guatemala on Sunday amid flooding and power outages. El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele declared a state of emergency for 15 days to cope with the effects of the storm, which weakened later in the day as it moved into Guatemala. The fatalities were all recorded in El Salvador, interior minister Mario Duran said, warning that the death toll could rise. Amanda knocked down trees, triggered flash floods and landslides, caused power outages, and damaged about 200 homes, the head of the Civil Protection Service William Hernandez said. One person is still missing, senior government official Carolina Recinos added. San Salvador Mayor Ernesto Muyschondt said half of those killed died in the capital. Nearly 90 percent of El Salvador, population 6.6 million, is considered vulnerable to flooding and landslides due to its geography.

YEREVAN (AFP) -- Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his family have tested positive for the coronavirus, he said Monday, as the rate of new infections soared in the Caucasus nation. "My coronavirus test was positive yesterday," Pashinyan said in a self-recorded video message on Facebook, adding that his family were also infected. He said he had no "visible symptoms" of the virus and would be working from home. The prime minister and his wife Anna Hakobyan, who is a journalist, have four children. The ex-Soviet republic of some three million has so far reported 9,492 cases of the coronavirus and 139 deaths. Coronavirus patients have overwhelmed Armenia's hospitals and last week health officials said that intensive care treatment could be soon restricted to patients with the best chance of survival.

NEW DELHI (AFP) -- Two Pakistan officials expelled by India over spying allegations returned home Monday, an embassy spokesman said, as the nuclear-armed rivals wrangled over the claims. The Indian government said Sunday that the two had been detained for "indulging in espionage activities", and given 24 hours to leave the country. The move came amid heightened tensions between the arch-rivals over the Himalayan region of Kashmir, which was split between them in 1947 when they gained independence from Britain. India media said the two officials -- both working in the embassy visa department -- had been detained Sunday while trying to obtain information on an Indian security establishment. Pakistan summoned India's charge d'affaires to express its "condemnation" of the expulsion order. The foreign ministry called the allegations "baseless" and said Delhi's action was a "clear violation" of the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations.

SEOUL (AFP) -- North Korea will reopen schools this month after shuttering them over the coronavirus pandemic, reports said Monday. Pyongyang has not confirmed a single infection but has imposed strict rules, including closing its borders and putting thousands of its people into isolation. The new school term -- initially scheduled to start early April -- has been repeatedly postponed, although some universities and high schools were allowed to resume classes in mid-April. "New semesters will begin at elementary, middle and high schools nationwide from early June, and quarantine measures have been put in place for the reopening of nurseries and kindergartens," Yonhap news agency reported, citing the North's state radio. "Education authorities have been asked to furnish thermometers and hand sanitizers at every gate of schools and classrooms and offices, while workers at schools and nurseries have been advised to stick to anti-virus principles," it added.

JAKARTA (AFP) -- Sword-wielding militants killed an Indonesian policeman and critically injured another on Monday in what authorities described as a terror attack by suspected Daesh-linked extremists. The early morning raid at a police post in South Daha district on Kalimantan -- Indonesia's portion of Borneo island -- also saw one of the militants shot, authorities said. Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, has long struggled with Takfiri militancy and is home to dozens of radical groups that have pledged loyalty to Daesh's violent ideology. Monday's violence happened on a public holiday that celebrates the Southeast Asian archipelago's pluralist democracy, and many past attacks have been against police and other state symbols. In April, a couple with links to Daesh went on trial for a failed assassination attempt on Indonesia's former chief security minister last year.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia will start giving its first drug approved to treat COVID-19 to patients next week, its state financial backer told Reuters, a move it hopes will ease strains on the health system and speed a return to normal economic life. Russian hospitals can begin giving the antiviral drug, which is registered under the name Avifavir, to patients from June 11, the head of Russia's RDIF sovereign wealth fund told Reuters in an interview. He said the company behind the drug would manufacture enough to treat around 60,000 people a month. There is currently no vaccine for COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, and human trials of several existing antiviral drugs have yet to show efficacy. A new antiviral drug from Gilead called remdesivir has shown some promise in small efficacy trials against COVID-19 and is being given to patients by some countries under compassionate or emergency use rules.