

Okinawa in Emergency After Outbreak at U.S. Base



U.S. Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey aircrafts are seen at the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan on Japan's southernmost island of Okinawa March 24, 2018.

TOKYO (Dispatches) -- Japan's Okinawa region has declared a state of emergency and asked people to stay home for two weeks as the island which hosts the bulk of U.S. forces in Japan sees an "explosive spread" of coronavirus cases.

Governor Denny Tamaki on Friday asked residents to avoid non-essential outings following a record new daily addition to the southern island's total cases, the majority of which have been detected among U.S. forces based there.

"We're seeing an explosive spread of infections. We declare a state of emergency" through August 15, Tamaki told

reporters, adding hospitals were being overwhelmed by the surge.

The measures are non-compulsory and without the aggressive enforcement measures seen in Europe, but similar requests from authorities have been widely respected in Japan.

Okinawa reported 71 new coronavirus cases Friday, bringing its total to 395.

U.S. forces account for 248 of those cases, according to the local government, which has created tensions with local officials, including the governor who has said he was "shocked" by the high numbers.

There are approximately 20,000 U.S.

Marines in Okinawa, along with thousands more troops from other U.S. military services.

Their presence on the island is a long-standing sore spot, with many in the region arguing they bear a disproportionate share of the burden of hosting American forces.

Many Okinawa residents associate the U.S. military presence with crime, pollution, and accidents and want the entire six bases off the island altogether.

In a closely-watched referendum in Okinawa last year, more than 70 percent of Okinawan voters opposed the relocation and expansion of the U.S. Marines' Futenma air base to a remote part within the prefecture.

The central government's plan requires the U.S. air base — which is currently located in a busy and densely-populated part of Okinawa — to be moved to the remote coastal region of Henoko in Nago, some 50 km away.

Opponents of the move say the relocation of the base will not only threaten the area's delicate marine ecosystem but also endanger its 2,000 local residents.

Over the years, the U.S. bases in Okinawa have drawn countless protests and sit-ins. The election last year of Tamaki, who was born in 1959 to a U.S. Marine father he has never met and a Japanese mother, has injected passionate energy to the anti-American sentiments in Japan.

The U.S. relies on Japan and its other main regional ally South Korea to support efforts to challenge China.

Coronavirus-Inspired Racism Targets Blacks, Asians



Hundreds of people line up outside a Kentucky Career Center hoping to find assistance with their unemployment claim in Frankfort, Kentucky, U.S. June 18, 2020.

PARIS (AFP) -- Researchers raised fears that "systematic racism" in the provision of protective equipment was putting minority health workers at greater risk on Friday, as a study showed higher coronavirus infection rates among British and American medical staff.

The report, published in The Lancet Public Health journal, found that frontline healthcare workers were over three times more likely to test positive than the general population early in the pandemic, with the rate rising to five times for ethnic minority medical staff.

Researchers from the U.S. looked at data from almost 100,000

healthcare workers in Britain and the United States taken from self-reported information on the COVID Symptoms Study smartphone app between March 24 and April 23.

They found that the prevalence of infection among frontline care workers was 2,747 per 100,000 app users, compared with 242 per 100,000 in the general community.

When they took into account the health workers' greater access to testing, the researchers estimated that frontline medical workers were around 3.4 times more likely to test positive for COVID-19 than app users in the wider population.

After accounting for pre-existing

medical conditions, researchers estimated that healthcare workers from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds were almost five times more likely to report a positive COVID-19 result than somebody from the general community.

The study also found that frontline healthcare workers who said they did not have sufficient protective equipment -- like masks, gloves and gowns -- were 1.3 times more likely to test positive than those who said they had the proper equipment.

"Our results underscore the importance of providing adequate access to PPE and also suggest that systemic racism associated with inequalities to access PPE likely contribute to the disproportionate risk of infection among minority frontline healthcare workers," said senior author Andrew Chan, of Massachusetts General Hospital.

Minority healthcare workers were "more likely to work in high-risk clinical settings, with known or suspected COVID patients, and had less access to adequate PPE", said co-author Erica Warner of Harvard Medical School.

Around one in three BAME healthcare workers reported that they had needed to re-use protective equipment, or had been provided with inadequate PPE (36.7 percent), compared with around one in four non-Hispanic white care workers (27.7 percent).

People Angry After Soldier Kills 13 in DR Congo

BUKAVU, DR Congo (AFP) -- A drunken soldier in the Democratic Republic of Congo's troubled east opened fire on passers-by, killing at least 13 people including a two-year-old girl and seven women, sources said on Friday.

The murders incensed locals who laid out the victims' shrouded bodies.

Youths built a big fire nearby and a local leader vilified the army and demanded that its troops and a UN force stationed in the district pull out.

Shocked relatives of the victims drifted around as they tried to make sense of the tragedy.

The incident happened late Thursday at Sange, in the territory of Uvira in South Kivu province, the sources said. "The person responsible is a drunken member of the FARDC (DR Congo armed forces) who opened fire on at least 20 civilians who crossed his path," a prosecutor in Uvira said.

Captain Dieudonne Kasereka, an army spokesman, said the soldier was "in a state of drunkenness and shot 13 people who died, and wounded nine others".

The gunman was still armed and on the run, Kasereka added.

"An army delegation and a UN team is in the area to calm the population, which is demonstrating against the army,"

he said. Angry residents blocked Highway 5 which runs through the area, using branches, rocks and burning tires.

They also displayed the 12 bodies, wrapped in funeral shrouds, at a busy crossroads, blocking traffic, several witnesses told AFP, but removed them later following talks between district representatives and civilian and military officials.

Ndaburwa Rukalisa, a local leader in Sange, said the soldier was a member of the locally based 122nd Battalion of the FARDC.

A judicial source said that a two-year-old girl was among those who were shot dead.

Local leader Bernard Kadodo said "we can't understand the lax attitude of the army and (UN) Blue Helmets in Sange. "The battalion has to pull out of Sange quickly. We want the UN mission to leave the city too."

Sange lies 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province.

The highway connects Uvira, the province's second-largest town, with the border with Burundi.

It has been rocked by unrest for around 25 years and has recently seen an increase in ethnic violence.

In July 2010, an overturned tanker truck carrying petrol exploded in the city, killing almost 300 people.

Trump Steps Up China War With Bans on TikTok



TikTok logo is displayed on the smartphone while standing on the U.S. flag in this illustration picture taken, November 8, 2019.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- President Donald Trump said Friday he will bar fast-growing social media app TikTok from the United States as American authorities have raised the same claim against Huawei that the service could be a tool for Chinese intelligence.

U.S. officials and lawmakers in recent weeks have voiced fears of the wildly popular video platform being used by Beijing for what they characterize as nefarious purposes, but the company has denied any links to the Chinese government.

Media reports circulated earlier Friday saying that Trump would require the U.S. operations of the app be divested from its Chinese parent firm ByteDance, but the president announced a ban.

Speaking to reporters on Air Force One, Trump said: "As far as TikTok is concerned, we're banning them from the United States."

He added he would take action as soon as Saturday using emergency economic power or an executive order.

Trump's move comes following a review by the Committee on Foreign Investment (CFIUS) in the United States, which investigates deals affecting U.S. national security.

TikTok, especially popular with young audiences who create and

watch its short-form videos, has an estimated billion users worldwide.

Queried by AFP, TikTok declined to comment on the reports of the forced sales, saying only: "We are confident in the long-term success of TikTok."

"Hundreds of millions of people come to TikTok for entertainment and connection, including our community of creators and artists who are building livelihoods from the platform."

The firm this week pledged a high level of transparency, including allowing reviews of its algorithms, to assure users and regulators.

"We are not political, we do not accept political advertising and have no agenda -- our only objective is to remain a vibrant, dynamic platform for everyone to enjoy," TikTok CEO Kevin Mayer said in post this week.

"TikTok has become the latest target, but we are not the enemy."

The popularity of the platform surged after ByteDance acquired U.S.-based app Musical.ly in 2017 and merged it with its own video service.

James Lewis, head of the technology policy program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said he believes the sec CFIUS have the power to unwind an acquisition previously approved and that a similar action was taken in 2019 with the dating app Grindr after it was bought by a Chinese firm.

Murdoch Quits Media Empire After 'Disagreements'



James and Rupert Murdoch are pictured at the Wedding Blessing of Rupert Murdoch and Jerry Hall at St. Bride's Church on Fleet Street in London, March 5, 2016.

NEW YORK (AFP) -- Former 21st Century Fox chief executive James Murdoch, the son of media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, has resigned from News Corp's board citing clashes over editorial content.

The 47-year-old once seen as his father's successor has been openly critical of some media coverage from publishing empire News Corp's outlets in recent months.

According to a letter written by James Murdoch and released Friday by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), his resignation was due to "disagreements over certain editorial content published by the company's news outlets and certain other strategic decisions".

News Corp owns the Wall Street Journal, the New York Post, The Times and the Sun newspapers among others, but not Rupert Murdoch's Fox News network.

Its media operations have been hit by an advertising slump aggravated by the coronavirus pandemic in Australia.

In May, News Corp announced that it would stop printing more than 100 Australian regional and local newspapers, shifting to digital-only versions instead.

James Murdoch's decision hastens his disengagement from the family media empire, which grew from a newspaper group in Australia.

In January, he denounced the climate change skepticism of some Murdoch media, citing coverage of the fires which devastated large parts of Australia.

In a statement, widely reported by U.S. media at the time, Murdoch and his wife spoke of their "frustration" with some of the News Corp and Fox coverage, adding that they were "particularly disappointed with the ongoing denial among the news outlets in Australia given obvious evidence to the contrary."

Rupert Murdoch has said he does not employ climate change deniers, and has previously described himself as a climate "sceptic".

The pair have also diverged politically. While Rupert Murdoch has been a longtime supporter of Republican President Donald Trump, his son has reportedly donated hundreds of thousands to Democrat challenger Joe Biden's 2020 campaign.

James Murdoch, who headed 21st Century Fox until he stepped down last year when Disney acquired most of the group's assets, has launched his own private holding company called Lupa Systems, which has taken a stake in Vice Media.

News in Brief

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) -- Seven U.S. Marines and a Navy sailor were missing on Friday, a day after their amphibious assault vehicle (AAV) sank off the Southern California coast during a training mission, Marine Corps officials said. Seven other Marines were rescued and are alive while one was killed after their vehicle took on water and sank around 5:45 p.m. Pacific time on Thursday (0045 GMT Friday), U.S. military officials said during a news conference. "They signaled to the rest of the unit that they were in fact taking on water," Lt. Gen. Joseph Osterman said. "Immediate response was provided by two additional amphibious assault vehicles as well as a safety boat." Two of the rescued Marines were in critical condition at Scripps Memorial Hospital La Jolla while the other five are back aboard their assigned ships, Gen. David Berger said. A search and rescue mission involving a U.S. Navy destroyer and a Coast Guard cutter continued on Friday afternoon for the missing Marines and sailor. The Marines were wearing combat gear along with inflatable vests when the incident occurred, Osterman said. The incident occurred during what the Marine Corps said was a routine training exercise near San Clemente Island. Marines often practice beach assaults there using amphibious troop transport vehicles.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- America's top infectious diseases official has reportedly raised concerns over the safety of COVID-19 vaccines being developed by China and Russia as the world scrambles for answers to a pandemic the WHO warned will be felt for decades. Several Chinese companies are at the forefront of the race to develop an immunity to the disease and Russia has set a target date of September to roll out its own vaccine. But U.S. infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci said it was unlikely his country would use any vaccine developed in either country, claiming their regulatory systems are far more opaque than they are in the West. "I do hope that the Chinese and the Russians are actually testing the vaccine before they are administering the vaccine to anyone," he told a U.S. Congressional hearing on Friday. "Claims of having a vaccine ready to distribute before you do testing, I think, is problematic, at best."

SHANGHAI/BERLIN (Reuters) -- China's embassy in Germany condemned Berlin's suspension of its extradition treaty with Hong Kong, a move Germany said was a response to the postponement of an election in the Chinese city. In a statement on its website, dated Friday, China's embassy said the suspension violated international law and the basic norms of international relations, and "grossly interferes with China's internal affairs." The embassy expressed "strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition" to the minister's remarks, and said that China "reserves the right to respond further," without elaborating. Germany Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said on Friday that Berlin will suspend its extradition agreement with Hong Kong, after Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam postponed a Sept. 6 election to the city's legislature by a year.

KHABAROVSK, Russia (AFP) -- Thousands of people braved the rain in the far-eastern city of Khabarovsk on Saturday to attend another huge protest march against the arrest of the region's popular governor. For a fourth weekend, demonstrators marched through the streets chanting anti-Kremlin slogans and in support of ex-governor Sergei Furgal, who was arrested and taken to Moscow last month to face charges of masterminding murders 15 years ago. The arrest of the 50-year-old -- who was elected in 2018, beating a rival from the majority United Russia party -- has sparked unprecedented protests in the far eastern region. Locals see the move as politically motivated and question why he is being tried in the far-away capital.

N'DJAMENA (AFP) -- Boko Haram terrorists killed at least 10 civilians and kidnapped seven others in an attack on a village in the troubled Lake Chad region on Friday, an army officer and local official said. Lake Chad -- a marshy region dotted with islands near the border of Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon -- has been battered by attacks from jihadists crossing from Nigeria. Boko Haram's insurgency, launched in northeast Nigeria in 2009, has killed more than 36,000 people and displaced more than two million from their homes. The violence has since spread to Niger, Chad and Cameroon. In March, Chad's armed forces suffered their biggest single-day loss, when 98 soldiers were massacred in their base at Bohoma, on the banks of Lake Chad. In response, President Idriss Deby launched an offensive from March 31 to April 3, declaring at its end that there was "not a single jihadist left" in the Lake Chad region. But sporadic violence has continued, with an attack attributed to Boko Haram on an army vehicle earlier this month killing eight Chad soldiers.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Moscow has denied any links between the Belarus opposition and alleged Russian mercenaries detained this week in Belarus, a Russian diplomat in Minsk said, according to Russia's RIA news agency. RIA also reported that Russian diplomats met the 33 suspected mercenaries arrested in Belarus. The Belarusian authorities say they believe the husband of opposition presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhonouskaya may have ties to the detained group and have launched a criminal case against him on suspicion of inciting riots.