

Fresh Anti-Racism Protests Hit Portland for 70th Day



A federal law enforcement officer pushes a mother back during a demonstration against the presence of federal law enforcement officers and racial inequality in Portland, Oregon, July 21, 2020.

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A fire inside a police union building led authorities in Portland, Oregon, to declare a riot and force protesters away from the offices as violent demonstrations continue in the city that had hoped for calm after federal agents withdrew more than a week ago.

A group of demonstrators broke into the Portland Police Association building, set the fire and were adding to it when officers made the riot declaration late Saturday, police tweeted. Video shot by a journalist shows smoke and flames arising from inside the building.

Several hundred people had gathered outside the offices, which are located

about 5 miles (8 kilometers) north of the federal courthouse that had been the target of nightly violence earlier this summer. The Portland Police Association is a labor union that represents members of the Portland Police Bureau.

Live video had showed multiple dumpster fires had been set near the building, less than half an hour after police tweeted that “criminal activities including, but not limited to, vandalism, unlawful entry to the building, or fire starting,” could be subject to arrest, the use of tear gas and/or crowd-control munitions.

Once the riot was declared — just

after 11:30 p.m. — officers formed a line and used flash bangs and smoke canisters to force the crowd away from the area.

Rallies were also held earlier in the afternoon and evening throughout the city, including at Peninsula, Laurelhurst and Berrydale parks, local media reported.

The gatherings this week had been noticeably smaller than the crowds of thousands who turned out nightly for about two weeks in July to protest the presence of U.S. agents sent by the Trump administration to protect the federal courthouse downtown.

This week’s clashes have, however, amped up tensions after an agreement between state and federal officials seemed to offer a brief reprieve.

Police arrested 24 people during demonstrations overnight Friday after they said people defied orders to disperse and threw rocks, frozen or hard-boiled eggs and commercial-grade fireworks at officers. An unlawful assembly was declared outside the Penumbra Kelly public safety building.

Most of those arrested were from Portland, while one man was from Oakland, California, and another was Tulsa, Oklahoma. Most were in their 20s or 30s. The charges included assault on an officer, interfering with an officer, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest.

Since George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis, protests over racial injustice and police brutality have occurred nightly for more than 70 days.

Raising Ante in War With China: U.S. Sends Highest-Level Delegation to Taiwan



U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar wears a mask among other officials and media at the White House in Washington, May 11, 2020.

TAIPEI (Dispatches) — A senior member of U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration landed in Taiwan Sunday for Washington’s highest level visit since switching diplomatic recognition to China in 1979, a trip Beijing has condemned.

During the three-day visit Health Secretary Alex Azar will meet President Tsai Ing-wen, who advocates Taiwan’s secession from China.

Azar is the most senior U.S. cabinet member to visit Taiwan in decades and his visit comes as relations between the world’s two biggest economic powers plunge to historic lows.

In recent days, Trump has ordered sweeping restrictions on popular Chinese apps TikTok and WeChat and the U.S. Treasury Department slapped sanctions on Hong Kong’s leader over a tough law that curbs dissent.

Beijing balks at any recognition of self-ruled Taiwan, which it claims as its own territory and vows to one day seize, by force if necessary. It has described Azar’s visit as a threat to “peace and stability”, while China’s defense minister warned against Washington making any “dangerous moves”.

As well as meeting Tsai, Azar will hold talks with his counterpart Chen Shih-chung and Foreign Minister Joseph Wu.

The rapidly deteriorating relationship

between Beijing and Washington comes as Trump seeks re-election in November. He is trailing in the polls to rival Joe Biden and has begun campaigning hard on an increasingly strident anti-Beijing message.

As public disapproval has grown for his handling of the epidemic, Trump has pivoted from his previous focus on striking a trade deal with China to blaming the country for the coronavirus crisis.

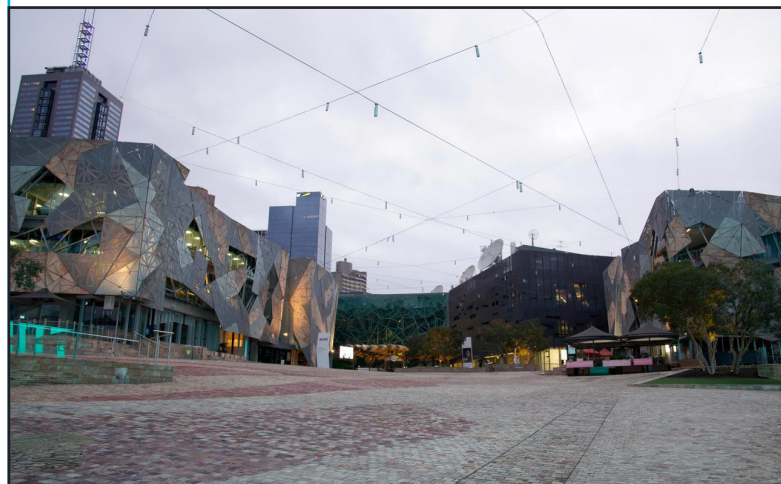
The two countries have clashed on a range of issues, from trade to espionage allegations and human rights such as the alleged incarceration of Uighur Muslims and the political crackdown in Hong Kong.

Washington remains the leading arms supplier to Taiwan but has historically been cautious in holding official contacts with it. Under Trump, relations with Taiwan have warmed dramatically and he has approved a number of major military sales, including F-16 fighter jets.

Douglas Paal, a former head of the American Institute in Taiwan, Washington’s de facto embassy, said the Trump administration was still paying heed to China’s red line — that no U.S. official handling national security visit Taiwan.

Throughout the 1990s the United States sent trade officials to Taiwan with regularity. The difference this time, he said, is the context, with Azar travelling at a time when relations between Washington and Beijing have hit a new low.

Brazil Passes Grim Milestone of 100,000 Deaths Australian State Reports Deadliest Day of Outbreak



Federation Square is seen devoid of people after Melbourne, Australia, returned to a stage-three lockdown as part of efforts to curb a resurgence of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), July 23, 2020.

SYDNEY (Dispatches) — Australia’s second-most populous state, Victoria, reported its deadliest day of the COVID-19 outbreak on Sunday, with 17 people dying, as police thwarted a planned anti-mask rally in the capital of Melbourne.

Victoria, at the center of a second wave of infections in Australia, reported 394 cases of the novel coronavirus in the past 24 hours, compared with a daily average of 400-500 over the past week. The new deaths bring the state’s total to 210.

The southeastern state, with infections concentrated in Melbourne, accounts for a lion’s share of the national tally of more than 21,000 and 295 deaths.

In an effort to slow the spread of coronavirus, Victoria has imposed

a night curfew, tightened restrictions on people’s daily movements and ordered large parts of the economy to close.

The state reported 174 such “mystery” cases in the past 24 hours, up from 130 on Saturday and bringing the total to 2,758.

Earlier in the day, Victorian police thwarted a planned anti-mask rally dubbed “Freedom Day Celebration” in Melbourne, arresting seven people and issuing 27 fines.

Neighboring New South Wales, Australia’s most populous state, recorded 10 infections on Sunday, with authorities ordering students at two state schools to self-isolate after reporting COVID-19 cases.

Brazil surpassed a grim milestone of 100,000 deaths from COVID-19

on Saturday night, and five months after the first reported case the country has not shown signs of crushing the disease.

The nation of 210 million people has been reporting an average of more than 1,000 daily deaths from the pandemic since late May and reported 905 for the latest 24-hour period.

The Health Ministry said there had been a total of 3,012,412 confirmed infections with the new coronavirus — death and infection tolls second only to the United States. And as in many nations, experts believe that both numbers are severe undercounts due to insufficient testing.

President Jair Bolsonaro — who himself reported being infected — has been a consistent skeptic about the impact of the disease and an advocate of lifting restrictions on the economy that had been imposed by state governors trying to combat it. He has frequently mingled in crowds, sometimes without a mask.

On the day that Brazil reached more than 100,000 deaths, the federal government’s communication secretariat confronted criticism from former Justice Minister Sergio Moro on social media for the management of the pandemic.

“There are many numbers that deserve to be disclosed: - ALMOST 3 MILLION LIVES SAVED OR IN RECOVERY - ONE OF THE LOWEST DEATHS PER MILLION AMONG LARGE NATIONS,” said the secretariat’s official account on Twitter, sharing Moro’s tweet. Bolsonaro answered the tweet with an emoji of shaking hands.

Belarus Votes in Test for Flip-Flopping Lukashenko



Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko chairs an urgent security council meeting following the detention of more than 30 alleged Russian mercenaries in Minsk, Belarus July 29, 2020.

MINSK (AFP) — Polls opened Sunday in Belarus as the ex-Soviet state holds a high-stakes presidential election with a female opposition candidate posing the greatest challenge yet to long-ruling strongman Alexander Lukashenko.

Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, a 37-year-old stay-at-home mother became an unlikely election candidate after authorities barred from running and jailed her husband, popular blogger Sergei Tikhanovsky.

She swiftly emerged as Lukashenko’s strongest rival and her rallies drew tens of thousands of supporters across the country.

Her presidential bid gave rise to an informal new protest movement, with many dreaming of change in the country of 9.5 million people led for the last 26 years by 65-year-old Lukashenko.

Political observers said there is little doubt that Lukashenko, who is seeking a sixth term, would rig Sunday’s vote in the absence of international observers.

Voters wearing facemasks began casting ballots at a Minsk polling station early Sunday, an AFP reporter saw. Some wore white bracelets after Tikhanovskaya urged her supporters to wear them.

There was a heavy police presence after detentions of protesters on Saturday eve-

ning and Prosecutor-General Alexander Konyuk urged voters to be “reasonable” and not take part in unsanctioned protests, Belta state news agency reported.

Tikhanovskaya, who joined forces for her campaign with the wife of one barred opposition chief and the campaign manager of another, said she would not call on her supporters to protest after the vote.

Tikhanovskaya, who is by far the strongest of Lukashenko’s four rivals in voter surveys, has also urged Belarusians to help ward off election fraud by voting late on the main polling day, Sunday.

Ahead of the vote Lukashenko warned that dissent would not be tolerated and that he would not give up his “beloved” Belarus.

“We will not give the country to you,” he warned his opponents as he addressed the nation this week.

Lukashenko has sought to galvanize support by warning of outside threats and raising the specter of violent mobs.

Belarus has detained over 30 Russians allegedly planning to destabilize the vote.

The detentions sparked a political crisis with ally Russia, with Moscow urging the men’s release and Putin telling Lukashenko that he wants Belarus to stay “stable.”

India to Ban Importing 101 Military Equipment Items

NEW DELHI (AP) — India said Sunday that it will ban the imports of 101 items of military equipment in an effort to boost local production and improve self-reliance in weapons manufacturing.

Defense Minister Rajnath Singh said the government is planning to progressively implement the embargo on select military imports between this year and 2024.

The military equipment includes some high technology weapon systems and range from assault rifles and artillery to transport aircraft and light combat helicopters, the Defense Ministry said in a statement.

“Our aim is to apprise the Indian defense industry about the anticipated requirements of the Armed Forces so that they are better prepared to realize the goal of indigenization,” Singh wrote on Twitter. “This is a big step towards self-reliance in defense.”

In May, India announced that global companies could invest up to 74% in the country’s defense manufacturing units, up from 49%, without requiring any government ap-

proval. It was hoped the new policy would attract foreign companies with high-end technologies to set up their bases in the country in collaboration with local industries.

The government then announced that India would stop importing weapons that can be made domestically, in line with the vision to make the Indian economy self-reliant amid the coronavirus crisis.

India, a major buyer of military equipment, had depended largely on the former Soviet Union during the Cold War. But it has been diversifying its purchases by opting for U.S. equipment as well.

During President Donald Trump’s visit in February, the two countries signed a deal for India to buy more than \$3 billion in advanced military equipment, including helicopters.

India was the third-biggest military spender in the world last year after the U.S. and China, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute said in a report released in April.

News in Brief

NEW DELHI (Reuters) — Indian investigators on Sunday began examining the black box of a Boeing-737 that overshot a runway on its second attempt, killing 18 people in the country’s worst aviation accident in a decade. The Air India Express plane, which was repatriating Indians stranded in Dubai due to the coronavirus pandemic, overshot the runway of the Calicut International Airport in heavy rain near the southern city of Kozhikode on Friday. The aircraft fell into a valley and broke in half. In an interview with Reuters partner ANI on Sunday, Anil Kumar, head of India’s Directorate General of Civil Aviation, said the country would open the recovered transcripts to international investigators, as well as manufacturer Boeing. The 2,700 meter runway at the airport is known as a “table-top”, an aviation term for runways with steep drops at one or both ends. They leave little room for error should a pilot overshoot the runway, either through human error or mechanical failure.

TOKYO (Reuters) — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will refrain from visiting the Yasukuni shrine for war dead on the 75th anniversary of Japan’s defeat in World War Two, Jiji news agency said on Sunday, but will make an offering on the emotive day, as he has done in the past. The shrine, dedicated to Japanese who have died during past wars including World War Two, is seen as a potent symbol of the controversy that persists over the conflict’s legacy in East Asia. Since 1978, the shrine has also honored leaders convicted as “Class A” war criminals at an allied tribunal in 1948, making it deeply controversial at home and abroad. Abe’s last visit to the shrine, shortly after he took office in December 2013, caused outrage in China and South Korea, who see the visits as a sign that Japan has not repented for its militarist past and war atrocities.

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says the government has a moral duty to ensure children return to school next month. Most pupils have been out of the classroom since the UK went into lockdown in March, though some primary-age children have returned. Writing in the Mail on Sunday newspaper, Johnson said “keeping our schools closed a moment longer than absolutely necessary is socially intolerable, economically unsustainable and morally indefensible.” Britain’s official death toll from the coronavirus is more than 46,500, the highest in Europe. Scientists say the UK may have reached the limit of how much it can relax lockdown restrictions without causing a new surge in coronavirus infections. They say some things may have to close — even the country’s beloved pubs — so that schools can reopen fully. Most UK schools start the new term in early September, but those in Scotland begin to reopen this week.

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka’s former President Mahinda Rajapaksa was sworn in as the prime minister for the fourth time Sunday after his party secured a landslide victory in parliamentary elections that cemented his family’s hold on power. Rajapaksa took oath before his younger brother, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, at a prominent Buddhist temple on the outskirts of the capital Colombo. Mahinda Rajapaksa served as the island nation’s president from 2005 to 2015 and is highly popular among the ethnic majority Sinhalese for ending the country’s 25-year civil war against Tamil rebels in 2009. He was first elected prime minister in 2004 and again appointed for brief periods in 2018 and 2019. Sri Lanka People’s Front — the party led by the Rajapaksa brothers — won 145 seats in the 225-member Parliament in the election last Wednesday. Its main opponent obtained only 54 seats. A party representing ethnic minority Tamils won 10 seats, and 16 others were split among 12 small parties.

TOKYO (Reuters) — The operator of a Japanese bulk carrier which ran aground off Mauritius in the Indian Ocean apologized on Sunday for a major oil spill which officials and environmentalists say is creating an ecological disaster. The MV Wakashio, operated by Mitsui OSK Lines, struck the reef on Mauritius’ southeast coast on July 25. Fuel started leaking from the cracked vessel on Thursday. “We apologize profusely and deeply for the great trouble we have caused,” Akihiko Ono, executive vice president of Mitsui OSK Lines said at a new conference in Tokyo. He added that the company would “do everything in their power to resolve the issue”. At least 1,000 tonnes of oil is estimated to have leaked from the ship onto the waters surrounding Mauritius. Some 500 tonnes of oil have been salvaged from the ship, but there are still 2,500 tonnes remaining on the ship.

LONDON (Reuters) — Britain appointed on Sunday a commander to lead its response to tackling illegal small boat crossings across the Channel, creating a new role after a spate of migrant arrivals on the southern English coast. Interior minister Priti Patel named Dan O’Mahoney, a former Royal Marine, as Britain’s new Channel Threat Commander, saying he would work with France to make the Channel route unviable for small boat crossings. Taking advantage of a spell of hot weather and calm sea conditions, hundreds of people including children and pregnant women have made the dangerous 33-km (21-mile) crossing in recent days in small vessels.