

China Denies Arbitrary Detention of Foreign Nationals



U.S. and Chinese flags are seen before Defense Secretary James Mattis welcomes Chinese Minister of National Defense Gen. Wei Fenghe to the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, U.S., November 9, 2018.

BEIJING (Reuters) -- China denied on Monday that foreign nationals are under threat of arbitrary detention, following a newspaper report that Beijing had warned Washington it might arrest Americans in China.

The Chinese foreign ministry said it was Washington that was mistreating foreign citizens, accusing the United States of "outright political repression" of Chinese academics.

"The U.S. claim that foreign nationals in China are under threat of arbitrary detention is playing the victim and confusing black and white," Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a regular news briefing. China protects the safety and legitimate rights of foreigners, he said.

The Wall Street Journal claimed on Saturday that Chinese officials had is-

sued repeated warnings to U.S. government officials that China may detain Americans in response to the Justice Department's prosecution of Chinese scholars affiliated to the military.

In September, a State Department advisory warned against travel to China, saying the Chinese government used arbitrary detention and exit bans for U.S. citizens and others "to gain bargaining leverage over foreign governments".

The Trump administration has increasingly accused China of using cyber operations and espionage to steal U.S. technological, military and other know-how. Beijing denies this.

Earlier this year, Chinese prosecutors in June indicted two Canadian citizens on espionage charges, a move seen by Western governments as punishment for Canada's arrest of Huawei Technolo-

gies Co. Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou in late 2018.

Beijing has denied the indictment was related to Meng's case and has repeatedly called for the release of Meng. China hopes Canada can think more about the future of the two countries' relationship and settle Meng's case at an early date, said Zhao.

China welcomes U.S. companies to actively participate in its market and will strive to create a fair and just environment, the industry ministry said on Monday, citing a meeting it held with firms such as Qualcomm Inc and General Motors.

Xiao Yaqing, China's Minister of Industry and Information Technology, made the comments during a video meeting held with a delegation sent by the U.S.-China Business Council, the ministry said in a statement published on its website.

Executives from the headquarters of companies like General Motors and Qualcomm attended the meeting, alongside the heads of the U.S.-China Business Council, the statement said, adding that Xiao had also commented on how there were good market prospects in areas like 5G technology and new energy vehicles.

The meeting comes as tensions between Beijing and Washington have escalated in recent weeks particularly over issues like technology that have ensnared Chinese companies like Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp, TikTok owner ByteDance and Tencent Holdings

French Police Raid Homes of Muslims in New Crackdown



Police are seen at the scene of an incident near the former offices of French magazine Charlie Hebdo, in Paris, France September 25, 2020.

PARIS (Dispatches) -- French police on Monday raided the homes of dozens of what they called suspected takfiri militants three days after the beheading of a teacher who had shown his pupils insulting cartoons against Islam, the interior minister said.

Gerald Darmanin said the swoop on militant networks was designed to send a message that "enemies of the Republic" would not enjoy "a minute's respite".

He said over 80 investigations had been launched for online hate speech following the attack, which has drawn parallels with the 2015 massacre at Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine, where 12 people were gunned down for publishing insulting cartoons.

Samuel Paty, 47, was murdered on his way home from the school where he taught in a suburb northwest of Paris on Friday afternoon.

A photo of the teacher and a message confessing to his murder was found on the mobile phone of his killer, an 18-year-old Chechen man Abdullakh Anzorov, who was shot dead by police. Eleven people are being held over

the attack, including a known militant and the father of one of Paty's pupils who had railed against him online and called for his dismissal.

Anzorov's family arrived in France when he was six from the predominantly Muslim Russian republic of Chechnya.

Four members of his family, which sought asylum in France, are being held for questioning.

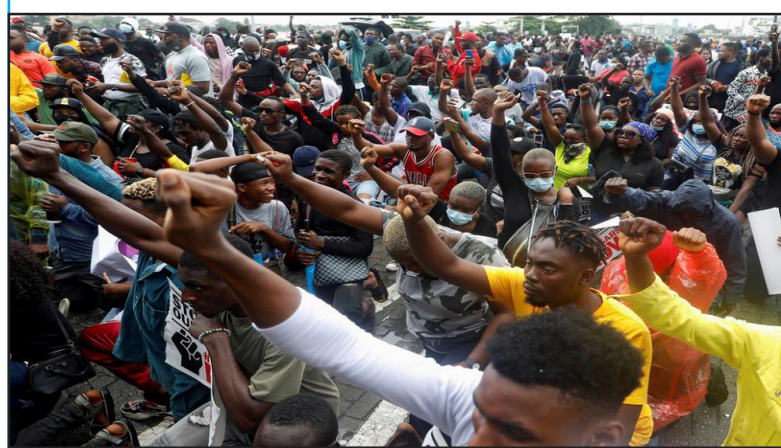
On Sunday, President Emmanuel Macron ordered swift action to counter what he called radical Islamist propaganda online.

French authorities have also said they would pursue the authors of some 80 online messages of sympathy for Anzorov, and step up security at schools when pupils return after half-term.

Friday's attack was the second of its kind since a trial started last month over the Charlie Hebdo killings.

The magazine republished the controversial cartoons in the run-up to the trial, and last month a young Pakistani man wounded two people with a meat cleaver outside Charlie Hebdo's former office.

Nigerians Continue March Against Police Brutality



Demonstrators gesture during a protest over alleged police brutality, in Lagos, Nigeria October 14, 2020.

LAGOS/YENAGOGA (Reuters) -- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will help train Nigeria's new tactical force as thousands nationwide continued to march against police brutality and in demand of further reforms, Nigeria's police inspector general said in a statement.

Protests began in roughly two weeks ago demanding the dissolution of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which was accused by Nigerians and groups such as Amnesty International of extortion, brutality and torture.

The police force has repeatedly denied the accusations against

SARS, though it said earlier this month that "unruly and unprofessional" officers had been arrested and were facing disciplinary actions

The new unit, the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team, was created to "fill the gaps" left when police disbanded SARS on Oct. 11.

SWAT training began on Monday in partnership with the ICRC and "other development partners", Muhammad Adamu, inspector general of police, said in a statement. Former SARS officers are not eligible to join SWAT, the statement said.

The ICRC did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Police said the ICRC would join training on humanitarian laws, police conduct in conflict, and human rights in the use of force, arrest and detention.

Senate President Ahmad Lawan, after meeting with President Muhammadu Buhari on Sunday, called on protesters to stand down in light of the steps leaders had taken.

But protesters are demanding further protections against the police, including independent oversight and psychological evaluation of officers.

Hundreds joined a prayer march on Saturday in Port Harcourt, and peaceful marches and demonstrations continued in Lagos, Abuja, Warri, Enugu and Makurdi. Supporters launched an online radio station to bolster the movement.

Most demonstrations are now peaceful, after authorities barred police from using force against protesters.

But at least two were killed around demonstrations on Saturday in Osogbo in southwestern Osun state, a spokesman for Governor Gboyega Oyetola told Reuters. The spokesman said an angry mob had attacked Oyetola's convoy, and that one person was killed before he arrived and the second after he had left.

Chileans Burn Churches Ahead of Referendum



The interior of San Francisco de Borja church in Santiago, Chile, is ablaze on Oct. 18, 2020.

SANTIAGO (Reuters) -- Tens of thousands of Chileans gathered in the central square of Santiago to mark the one-year anniversary of mass protests that left over 30 dead and thousands injured, with peaceful rallies on Sunday devolving by nightfall into riots and looting.

People gathered early in the day in demonstrations downtown and in cities throughout Chile that gained size and fervor through the evening. Many touted signs and rainbow colored homemade banners calling for a "yes" vote next Sunday in a referendum over whether to scrap the country's dictatorship-era Constitution, a key demand of the 2019 protests.

The demonstrations, while largely peaceful early on, were marred by increasing incidents of violence, looting of supermarkets and clashes with police across the capital later in the day. Fire truck sirens, burning barricades on roadways and fireworks on downtown streets added to a sense of chaos in some neighborhoods.

Interior Minister Victor Perez spoke late in the evening, praising the early, peaceful rallies while blasting the late-night mayhem. He called on Chileans to settle their differences by voting in the upcoming Oct. 25 constitutional referendum.

"Those who carry out these acts of violence do not want Chileans to solve our problems through democratic means," Perez told reporters, vowing to punish those who crossed the line Sunday.

Early in the day, an angry mob jeered and threatened a Communist Party mayor. Later, masked individuals firebombed a police headquarters and church. Vandals attacked another Santiago church in the early evening, setting its spire aflame and choking side streets with smoke.

More than 15 metro stations were temporarily closed amid the unrest. Police fired tear gas and water cannons in skirmishes with sometimes violent, hooded and masked people.

Last year's protests, which began Oct. 18, raged until mid-December as Chileans gathered nationwide to call for reforms to the pension, healthcare and education systems. Rioting and looting resulted in billions of dollars in damage and losses to the country's businesses and infrastructure. The unrest saw the military take to the streets for the first time since the rule of dictator Augusto Pinochet.

Police estimated that Sunday's rally in Santiago attracted around 25,000 people by 6 p.m., far smaller than the largest protests of 2019.

In the past few days, small-scale demonstrations and isolated incidents of violence have nonetheless resurfaced in Chile, as the capital's 6 million citizens emerge from months of confinement following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most demonstrators on Sunday wore masks, but many could be seen in tight groups, raising concerns about a potential health risk.

Taiwan, China Diplomats Engage in Physical Clash in Fiji

TAIPEI (Dispatches) -- A physical clash between Taiwan and Chinese officials at a diplomatic reception in Fiji left the rival powers trading allegations of assault Monday.

Taipei accused two Chinese officials of gatecrashing an event at the luxurious Grand Pacific Hotel in the Fijian capital Suva on October 8 and assaulting an employee.

Taiwan's foreign ministry said its trade office -- the equivalent of an embassy -- was hosting a party for 100 distinguished guests to celebrate Taiwan's National Day.

They claim the two Chinese officials began taking pictures of guests and when asked to leave assaulted an official, putting him in hospital. The Chinese embassy in Fiji confirmed its officials were in "public area outside the function venue" on "official duties" on the day of the incident. But the Chinese embassy said the Taiwanese mission's staff "acted provocatively" and caused "injuries and damage to one Chinese diplomat".

Both sides said they had asked the Fijian police and other island au-

thorities to investigate.

China regards democratic Taiwan as a rebel province and has vowed to one day seize the self-ruled island. The altercation in Fiji comes at a time of high tension between the two sides, which has escalated since the 2016 election of Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen.

Tsai hails from a party that sees Taiwan as a de facto sovereign nation and not part of "one China". A senior White House official last week urged her government to build up military capabilities to protect against a possible invasion by China, and the tempo of military activity in the area around Taiwan has increased markedly.

Taiwan's military depends on U.S. security guarantees, which have been called into question by U.S. President Donald Trump's "America First" doctrine.

Beijing has successfully poached seven of Taiwan's diplomatic allies since 2016, leaving only 15 countries in the world that officially recognize the island. Fiji has long been a staunch China ally and was the first Pacific island nation to forge diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1975.

News in Brief

SRIINAGAR, India (AFP) -- India said Monday that it had detained a Chinese soldier who strayed across the disputed frontier where the two countries are engaged in a months-long standoff after a series of clashes. The People's Liberation Army corporal was "apprehended" in the high altitude freezing desert area of Ladakh after crossing into Indian-controlled territory along their poorly demarcated border, an Indian army statement said. Both sides have poured tens of thousands of troops into the border zone since fighting a pitched battle in June in which 20 Indian troops and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers were killed. India named the Chinese soldier who "strayed" as Corporal Wang Ya Long and said he had been given medical treatment against the extreme climate. India said the PLA had already made an approach and the corporal would be returned "as per established protocols".

NICOSIA (AFP) -- Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades on Monday congratulated right-wing Turkish Cypriot nationalist Ersin Tatar on his election victory and called on him to back a new United Nations-led peace initiative. Turkish Cypriots in the breakaway north of the divided island on Sunday narrowly elected Tatar, who was backed by Ankara, at a time of heightened tensions in the eastern Mediterranean. "The verdict of our compatriots to elect Mr Ersin Tatar as the new leader of the Turkish Cypriot community is fully respected," said Greek Cypriot leader Anastasiades. "I congratulate Mr Tatar and look forward to a familiarity meeting as soon as possible," he added in a statement. Tatar, 60, clinched his surprise victory in a second round of presidential elections, winning 51.7 percent of the vote. He edged out incumbent Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci, 72, a supporter of reunification with the Greek Cypriot south of the divided island, leaving attempts to relaunch long-stalled UN-brokered talks hanging in the balance.

HANOI (AFP) -- Japan and Vietnam agreed to step up security and defense cooperation Monday, reaching an agreement in principle for Tokyo to export defense equipment and technology to the Southeast Asian nation. The pact would allow Japan to export equipment, likely including patrol planes and radar, to Vietnam, according to Japanese news agency Kyodo. The resource-rich South China Sea is claimed in its entirety by Beijing but is also contested by Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan. China has reinforced its claim to the waterway by building up small shoals and reefs into military bases with airstrips and port facilities, and it launched ballistic missiles in the flashpoint waters in August as part of live-fire exercises.

GENEVA (AFP) -- The rival sides in the Libya conflict sat down for fresh talks on Monday in another bid to try to end a decade of bloodshed, the United Nations said. Libya has been wracked by violence since a NATO-backed uprising in 2011 overthrew and killed veteran dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Since then, the North African country has been dominated by armed groups, riven by local conflicts and divided between two bitterly opposed administrations. But hopes for a solution have risen after the two warring factions in August separately announced they would cease hostilities. However, both sides continue to accuse each other of supporting "terrorist" groups. The UN-recognized Government of National Accord, which is based in Tripoli and led by Fayez al-Sarraj, has been challenged by its eastern-based rival, backed by strongman Khalifa Haftar.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- India announced on Monday that Australia will join annual naval exercises scheduled with the United States and Japan, in a move that could raise concerns in China which has previously criticized any joint drills as destabilizing. India is hosting the Malabar drills in the Bay of Bengal scheduled for later next month. "As India seeks to increase cooperation with other countries in the maritime security domain and in the light of increased defense cooperation with Australia, Malabar 2020 will see the participation of the Australian Navy," the defense ministry said in a statement. Australia will be returning to the joint maneuvers after its participation in 2007 that drew criticism from China.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- Thousands marched to the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington to commemorate the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and protest President Donald Trump's rush to push through Amy Coney Barrett as her replacement. The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee has scheduled an Oct. 22 vote on the nomination of Barrett, a conservative appellate judge, over objections from Democrats that the confirmation process comes too close to the Nov. 3 presidential election. More than 26 million Americans have already cast their ballots for who they want to sit in the White House for the next four years, Trump or his Democratic rival Joe Biden. Demonstrators at the Women's March said they were angry that Republicans appear ready to confirm Barrett's nomination so close to Election Day after refusing to move forward Merrick Garland, the pick of former President Barack Obama, a Democrat, more than six months ahead of the 2016 election.