

Thousands March in France in Pre-Election Protest Against Far Right



Demonstrators march during an anti far-right rally in the city of Nantes on Saturday.

PARIS (Reuters) – Demonstrations were under way in Paris and cities across France on Saturday to protest against the far-right National Rally (RN) ahead of upcoming elections to the French parliament.

Following the RN's surge in last Sunday's European elections, police said 350,000 people marched and 21,000 officers had been mobilized after labor unions, student groups and rights groups called for rallies to oppose the anti-immigration, eurosceptic party.

At least 150 marches were held in cities including Marseille, Toulouse, Lyon and Lille.

In Paris, where up to 100,000 people turned out, a march set off at 1200 GMT from Place de La Republique, in the east, going through the Bastille

square to Nation. Speaking at Place de La Republique, hard-left CGT union leader Sophie Binet told reporters: "We are marching because we are extremely worried that (the RN's head) Jordan Bardella could become the next Prime Minister ... We want to prevent this disaster."

Carol-Ann Juste, a 22 year-old student taking part in the Paris march, said it was the first time she had taken part in a protest. She said she was "worried because people believe the lies of this party that has a truly racist heritage," a reference to the National Front, a forerunner to the RN, whose leader Jean-Marie Le Pen was fined for remarks.

Juste said she wanted to "fight to preserve a country of human rights,

freedom, and tolerance".

On the same march, Cecilia Lormeau, a 34-year old teacher who said she plans to vote for the Popular Front, an alliance of left-wing parties, said: "It is important to show we are mobilized and that the RN is not the majority of the people."

President Emmanuel Macron called a snap legislative election, to be held in two rounds on June 30 and July 7, after his centrist alliance was trounced by the RN in last Sunday's European Parliament ballot.

A first series of opinion polls have projected that the RN could win the election and be in a position to form the next government.

A poll conducted for Le Point magazine published on Friday forecast RN would lead in the first round of the parliamentary election with 29.5% of votes, narrowly ahead of the Popular Front on 28.5%.

Macron's centrist camp was on 18%.

At least two polls have put the left not far behind the RN and ahead of Macron's group.

In Tours, western France, where hundreds of protesters were taking part in a march, a banner read: "For liberties, for rights, for a social and democratic republic, against far-right ideas and against racism".

Several banners read: "young people hate the FN (the RN's former name), while a pensioner carried a banner that read: "Old people also hate the RN".

Report: U.S. Ran Secret Anti-Vax Campaign to Undermine China's COVID Efforts



Reuters news agency investigation reveals how U.S. military launched a clandestine programme during the pandemic to discredit China's medical efforts.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – The U.S. military ran a secret psychological operation to undermine China during the COVID-19 pandemic, an investigation has found.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the U.S. military launched a secret operation to manipulate and neutralize what it deemed to be a Chinese threat posed by Beijing's growing clout in the Philippines, Reuters reported Saturday.

The Philippines was among the worst-hit nations affected by the deadly virus.

To undermine China, the Americans launched a disinformation campaign in the Philippines, claiming the Chinese had not only developed and spread the virus but were providing cheap masks and fake vaccines to other nations to gain geopolitical influence.

According to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the U.S. military had launched its anti-Beijing campaign via fake online accounts meant to impersonate real Filipinos.

"COVID came from China and the VACCINE also came from China, don't trust China!" one typical anti-Beijing post on Twitter from July 2020 read. Another post read, "From China – PPE, Face Mask, Vaccine: FAKE. But the Coronavirus is real!"

Reuters said it had reportedly found hundreds of accounts on X, formerly Twitter, that matched descriptions shared by former U.S. military officials familiar with the Philippines

operation.

Its investigations found at least 300 accounts were created in the summer of 2020 and centered on the slogan #Chinaangvirus — Tagalog for China is the virus.

Reuters said approached X and asked the company about these accounts.

The social media company, now owned by billionaire Elon Musk, removed the profiles, determining they were part of a coordinated bot campaign based on activity patterns and internal data.

Health experts believe the anti-China campaign persuaded people to avoid vaccines, causing more COVID-19-related deaths.

A spokesperson for the Philippines Department of Health said the "findings by Reuters deserve to be investigated and heard by the appropriate authorities of the involved countries."

Some public health experts in the United States have also condemned the U.S. military campaign, saying it put civilians in jeopardy for potential geopolitical gain. An operation meant to win hearts and minds endangered lives, they said.

"I don't think it's defensible," said Daniel Lucey, an infectious disease specialist at Dartmouth's Geisel School of Medicine.

"I'm extremely dismayed, disappointed and disillusioned to hear that the U.S. government would do that," Lucey added.

New China Rules Allow Detention of Foreigners in South China Sea

BEIJING (Dispatches) – New maritime rules issued by China that allow its coastguard to detain foreigners for trespassing in the disputed South China Sea have taken effect.

China claims almost the entirety of the South China Sea, brushing aside competing claims from several Southeast Asian countries including the Philippines and a 2016 ruling by an arbitration tribunal in The Hague, which declared that its stance had no legal basis.

The Chinese government has been deploying the country's coastguard and other boats to patrol the waters it claims as its own, and has turned several reefs into militarized artificial islands. In recent years, Chinese and Philippine vessels have had a series of confrontations in disputed areas that have raised fears of a wider conflict.

From Saturday, China's coastguard can detain foreigners "suspected of violating management of border entry and exit", according to the new regulations published online.

Detention is allowed for up to 60 days in "complicated cases", they say. "Foreign ships that have illegally entered China's territorial waters and the adjacent waters may be detained."

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr last month called the new rules a "very worrisome" escalation. And on Saturday, the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs announced that it has submitted to the United Nations in New York legal

filings asserting its own "maritime entitlement" under the UN maritime rules to an extended continental shelf on parts of the South China Sea, which it refers to as the West Philippine Sea.

Philippine fishermen were also told "not to be afraid, but just to go ahead with their normal activities to fish there in our Exclusive Economic Zone", ignoring Beijing's new rules, Brawner said.

Trillions of dollars in ship-borne trade passes through the South China Sea annually, and huge unexploited oil and gas deposits are believed to lie under its seabed, though estimates vary greatly.

The sea is also important as a source of fish for growing populations.

China has defended its new coastguard rules. A foreign ministry spokesman said last month that they were intended to "better uphold order at sea" while the Chinese defence minister warned this month that there were "limits" to Beijing's restraint in the South China Sea.

China has also been angered in the past by United States and other Western warships sailing through the South China Sea.

The U.S. Navy and others undertake such voyages to assert the freedom of navigation in international waters, but Beijing considers them violations of its sovereignty.

Chinese and U.S. forces have had a series of close encounters in the South China Sea.

EU Divided on New Sanctions Against Russia

BRUSSELS (RT/Reuters) – The EU has failed to agree on a new round of sanctions against Russia due to Germany's opposition to the proposed plan to punish companies doing business with Moscow, EU diplomats said.

According to Reuters, bloc members were scheduled to discuss the sanctions on Friday evening, but the issue was "withdrawn from the meeting agenda at the last moment," RT reported.

The restrictions would have included a ban on the transit of Russian liquefied natural gas and a plan to crack down on sanctions evasion by holding EU operators liable for violations by subsidiaries and partners in third countries.

According to Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Berlin fears that German companies could be hit by the proposed regulations and wants to limit the responsibility of subsidiaries to certain goods or remove it altogether.

EU members reportedly hoped to approve the sanctions before the Ukraine peace conference in Switzerland, which is planned for June 15-16, where delegates from around 90 countries are expected.

'Test of Ukraine's Diplomatic Clout'

Western leaders gathered at a Swiss mountain resort on Saturday to try to build support for Ukraine's peace proposals at a summit skipped by U.S. President Joe Biden, shunned by China and dismissed as a waste of time by Moscow.

More than 90 countries were



U.S. President Joe Biden appeared to wander off in the midst of a photo moments with world leaders at the G7 summit in Italy, prompting Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni to guide him back into frame.

expected to take part, but China's absence in particular has dimmed hopes the summit would show Russia as globally isolated, while recent military reverses have put Kyiv on the back foot. The war in Gaza by the Zionist regime also diverted the world's attention from Ukraine.

The talks are expected to focus on broader concerns triggered by the war, such as food and nuclear security, sources said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has trumpeted the summit's wide attendance as a success and said agreements from it would be part of the peacemaking process.

Biden has sent U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris to represent him - riling Kyiv - while Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman will be represented by his foreign minister and India dispatched a lower level delegation.

Beijing is staying away after Russia was frozen out of proceedings.

Harris announced more than \$1.5 billion in energy and humanitarian aid for Ukraine, where infrastructure has been pounded by Russian airstrikes since 2022.

A military helicopter hovered over the luxury Buergenstock resort overlooking Lake Lucerne on Saturday as leaders arrived by helicopter on a patch of grassland fenced off with razor wire while cows grazed nearby.

On the eve of the summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Russia would end the war only if Kyiv agreed to drop its NATO ambitions and hand over four provinces claimed by Moscow - demands Kyiv swiftly rejected as tantamount to surrender.

Putin's conditions apparently reflected Moscow's growing confidence that its forces have the upper hand in the war.

Cuba Condemns U.S. Naval Presence in Its Territory

HAVANA (Xinhua) – Cuba has strongly condemned the presence of a U.S. nuclear submarine at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, located in the southeastern part of the island, which Cuba considers illegally occupied territory.

Cuban Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos Fernandez de Cosio Dominguez told local media that, although his country was informed of the presence of the U.S. ship in accordance with procedures established some years ago between

Havana and Washington, Cuba does not approve the naval presence in its territory without invitation.

"We do not like the presence in our territory of this nature," he said, stressing that visits by foreign naval ships to a country are usually the result of an invitation and "this is not the case."

The Southern Command of the United States said the USS Helena, a nuclear-powered fast attack submarine, pulled into the waters near the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base on

Thursday, a day after four Russian naval vessels arrived at the port of Havana for a visit that will last until Monday.

The Cuban vice foreign minister also recalled the "illegal and unacceptable" nature of the U.S. occupation of a part of Cuban territory in the province of Guantanamo "against the will of the Cuban people."

"It is an illegitimate military occupation and that is what makes the difference," he denounced.

News in Brief

NEW YORK (Anadolu) – The world is losing almost four football fields worth of healthy land every second due to degradation from desertification, data by the United Nations suggests. At this rate, over 100 million hectares of healthy land are lost annually, according to data compiled by Anadolu ahead of June 17, marked as World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought since 1994. Anadolu gathered data from international organizations on drought, desertification, and their impacts. UN data reveals that since 1900, droughts have killed at least 11 million people while affecting over 2 billion people. The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought aims to raise public awareness about desertification, land degradation and drought. This year the day will be marked with the theme, "United for Land: Our Legacy. Our Future." It aims to mobilize all segments of society to support sustainable land stewardship.

FLORIDA (CBS News) – Police in Fort Lauderdale, U.S. state of Florida, said a man had died and 4 others remained hospitalized following what appeared to be a drive-by shooting on Friday evening. Authorities said officers responded to the 2300 block of NW 8th Street shortly after 7 p.m. about a shooting and when they got there, they found five people suffering from gunshot wounds. All victims were rushed to Broward Health Medical Center with life-threatening injuries. Investigators said all victims were adult males. They said one was pronounced dead at the hospital, one was in critical condition, and the other three were in stable condition and expected to survive. There was a heavy police presence, with at least 12 police cruisers, at the scene. Police had closed off several blocks while detectives continued to investigate.

SINGAPORE (AFP) – Beaches on Singapore's top resort island of Sentosa, which also house luxury waterfront homes, were shuttered on Saturday due to an oil spill at a nearby port, maritime authorities said. The oil spill resulted from an accident on Friday at the Pasir Panjang terminal between a Netherlands-flagged dredger and a stationary Singapore-flagged bunker vessel, Singapore's Maritime and Port Authority (MPA) said. Waters of three popular beaches on the island "are currently closed for beach clean-up works due to instances of oil spillage observed in the sea waters," the island said in a notice on its website. Black residue from the oil slick is visible on the beaches, an AFP photographer on the scene said. One sign put up on a cordoned off beach read "Oil slick spotted. Clean up in progress. Please stay clear of water." The MPA said patches of oil and light sheens have been observed off Pasir Panjang Terminal and along Tanjong, Palawan, and Siloso beaches. Sentosa is a popular tourist destination that hosts a casino, Southeast Asia's only Universal Studios attraction and luxury waterfront homes for expats and the ultra-rich.

SEOUL (AFP) – North Korea's military has been building roads and walls inside the Demilitarized Zone that separates it from the South, the Yonhap news agency reported Saturday. The construction activities are taking place north of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) that runs through the middle of the DMZ, the South Korean agency said, citing an unnamed military source. The report follows an incident last week when South Korean forces fired warning shots after North Korean soldiers briefly crossed the MDL. South Korean authorities said it was likely accidental, and Yonhap quoted a military spokesman as saying some of the North Koreans were carrying work tools. "Recently, the North Korean military has been erecting walls, digging the ground and constructing roads in some areas between the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) and the Northern Limit Line in the DMZ," the military source said, according to Yonhap on Saturday.

TEGUCIGALPA (AP) – Authorities in Honduras have announced a series of measures aimed at tackling organized crime, including the construction of a 20,000-capacity "megaprison", as well as "terrorist" designations and collective trials for members of gangs. In a late-night televised address to the nation, President Xiomara Castro said the "plan of solutions against crime" was in response to a "security emergency" and public complaints about increasing violence. Flanked by members of Honduras's National Defense and Security Council, Castro said the armed forces and police should be deployed to "urgently execute interventions across parts of the country with the highest incidences of gang crimes, such as murders for hire, drug and firearm trafficking, extortion, kidnapping and money laundering". The plan to build the 20,000-inmate "Emergency Reclusion Centre" in the sparsely populated area between the eastern departments of Olancha and Gracias a Dios will massively expand Honduras's current prison capacity.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – Former U.S. president Donald Trump said that Joe Biden has provided material support for terrorism, alluding to the recent arrest of eight migrants from suspected ties to Daesh. "So, in addition to all of his other well-documented offenses, crooked Joe Biden is now also guilty of providing material support for terrorism," the former president told a crowd gathered for an event in West Palm Beach, Florida, to celebrate his 78th birthday. Trump vowed the country is going to "pay a steep price for many, many years" over Biden's border policy. The Independent reported. The comments were in reference to a recent federal terrorism investigation, in which eight migrants were arrested over suspected links to the terror group, after previously crossing the U.S.-Mexico border last year and passing security screening. Federal officials have provided few details about the arrests, though they've described the group as containing "several non-citizens," according to the FBI and Department of Homeland Security.