

Taiwan Receives First Batch of U.S.-Made Tanks



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TAIPEI (Dispatches) -- Taiwan has received 38 advanced Abrams battle tanks from the United States, the defense ministry said Monday, as Washington boosts the island's military capabilities against China. Washington has long been Taipei's most important ally and biggest arms supplier -- angering Beijing, which claims Taiwan as part of its own territory. The M1A2 tanks -- the first batch of 108 ordered in 2019 -- arrived in Taiwan late Sunday and were transferred to an army training base in Hsinchu, south of the capital Taipei, the defense ministry said. The M1A2s are the first new tanks to be delivered to Taiwan in 30 years, the semi-official Central

News Agency said. Taiwan's current tank force consists of around 1,000 Taiwan-made CM 11 Brave Tiger and U.S.-made M60A3 tanks, technology that is increasingly obsolete. Abrams tanks, which are among the heaviest in the world, are a mainstay of the U.S. military. China has refused to rule out using force to bring the self-ruled island under its control. While it has a home-grown defense industry and has been upgrading its equipment, Taiwan relies heavily on U.S. arms sales to bolster its security capabilities. Taiwan requested the state-of-the-art M1A2 tanks in 2019, allocating the equivalent of more than \$1.2

billion for them. The rest of the order is expected to be delivered in 2025 and 2026, an army official told AFP. While U.S. arms supplies to Taiwan are enshrined into law, a massive backlog caused by Covid-19 supply chain disruptions and U.S. weapons shipments to Ukraine and Israel have slowed deliveries to Taiwan. The backlog now exceeds \$21 billion, according to Washington think tank Cato Institute. Taiwan would be massively outgunned in terms of troop numbers and firepower in any war with China and in recent years has increased spending on its military. Taipei allocated a record \$19 billion for 2024 and next year's budget is set to hit a new high as it seeks to bolster its defense approach. Taiwanese authorities said last week that China had held its biggest maritime drills in years, with around 90 ships deployed from near the southern islands of Japan to the South China Sea. The vessels simulated attacks on foreign ships and practised blockading sea routes, a Taiwan security official said previously. Beijing did not confirm the drills and its defense ministry did not say whether the maneuvers had taken place when asked at a press conference on Friday.

Algeria Summons French Envoy Over 'Hostile Acts'



This picture taken on August 25, 2022 shows the France flag and Algeria flag ahead of the arrival of the French president in Algiers for an official visit.

ALGIERS (Dispatches) -- Algeria's foreign ministry has summoned the French ambassador to reprimand him for what it said were efforts to destabilize the country, several Algerian media outlets reported. The ambassador, Stephane Romatet, was "informed of the firm disapproval of the highest Algerian authorities in the face of the numerous French provocations and hostile acts," the government-owned daily El Moudjahid reported. According to Le Soir d'Algerie,

the Algerian officials "made a point of clearly identifying the origin of these malicious acts, the French DGSE" intelligence service. El Moudjahid said the French spy services were seeking to recruit "former terrorists" to "destabilize" the North African country. Le Soir d'Algerie said French diplomats and agents had organized a series of meetings with people showing a "declared and permanent hostility towards Algerian institutions". The heightened tensions between Algiers and Paris come while French-

Algerian writer Boualem Sansal has been in detention for nearly a month in Algeria, accused of "attacking territorial integrity". According to Paris-based newspaper Le Monde, his November 16 arrest in Algiers could be due to his statements on a far-right French media outlet where he repeated Morocco's claims that its territory had been truncated in favor of Algeria under French colonial rule. Algeria had already withdrawn its ambassador to France over the summer after the French government supported a Moroccan plan for the Western Sahara that allows the contested region some autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty. After France's decision, Algeria recalled its ambassador to Paris and threatened to take further measures; including sanctions against France affecting trade between the two countries. French President Emmanuel Macron reaffirmed his country's position in a visit to the North African country in October, where he announced that the present and future of Western Sahara lies within Morocco's sovereignty over its southern provinces. Algeria has historically supported the region's Polisario separatist movement.

South Korean President Begins Yoon's Impeachment Trial

SEOUL (AFP) -- Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol resisted investigators' calls on Monday for him to answer questions over his failed bid to declare martial law this month. Yoon, suspended from office by parliament since Saturday, faces concurrent probes over alleged insurrection by both South Korean prosecutors and a joint team of police, defense ministry and anti-corruption investigators. South Korea's Constitutional Court began proceedings against Yoon on Monday and has around six months to determine whether to uphold the impeachment. Yoon and some of his inner circle face possible life imprisonment, or even the death penalty, if found guilty and he remains under a travel ban. Prosecutors issued Yoon with a second summons on Monday for questioning over insurrection and abuse of power allegations after he "refused to comply" with a similar

request a day earlier. The joint investigation unit also asked that the suspended president appear to answer questions on Wednesday but were rebuffed by his office, Yonhap news agency said. Investigators could seek a court-issued arrest warrant should he continue to refuse. Yoon was removed by South Korea's parliament on Saturday over his short-lived attempt to suspend civilian rule, which plunged the country into its worst political turmoil in years. Fresh elections must be held within two months if his removal is upheld by the Constitutional Court. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo is serving as interim leader in Yoon's stead. A spokeswoman for the court said on Monday judges had penciled in a preliminary hearing on December 27, which Yoon is not required to attend. "During the preparatory hearing, investigation records from the prosecution, police, and other relevant

authorities will be promptly secured," spokeswoman Lee Jean told journalists. "This case will be given top priority," she said. Vast protests against Yoon, with smaller rallies supporting him, have rocked the South Korean capital since his short-lived December 3 martial law decree. Demonstrators in both camps have vowed to keep up the pressure as the Constitutional Court considers Yoon's fate. Police arrested both the current and former heads of the Defense Intelligence Command on Sunday in connection to the insurrection allegations, Yonhap reported. Prosecutors also arrested the head of the Army Special Warfare Command Kwak Jong-keun, Yonhap said. Kwak is accused of sending special forces troops to parliament during the martial law bid, sparking a dramatic confrontation between soldiers and parliamentary staff.

China: U.S. Plans on Tariffs 'Pile Errors Onto Errors'



U.S. President Donald Trump takes part in a welcoming ceremony with China's President Xi Jinping in Beijing, Nov. 9, 2017.

BEIJING (AFP) -- Beijing said Monday that plans by the United States to hike tariffs on more Chinese imports "pile errors onto errors", after Washington homed in on products including crucial solar panel components. The moves announced Wednesday by the U.S. Trade Representative's office cap a review of tariffs imposed during President-elect Donald Trump's first administration. Rates for solar wafers and polysilicon are set to double to 50 percent next month, while those on certain tungsten products will rise from zero to 25 percent, in an effort to counter China's "harmful policies and practices", U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai said. China hit back on Monday, saying the hikes "pile errors onto errors" and would only "harm the interests of U.S. consumers". "The U.S. tariff measures will not only fail to resolve the U.S. trade deficit and industrial competitiveness issues, but will also push up domestic inflation in the United States," a spokesperson for Beijing's commerce ministry said in a statement. The moves "seriously undermine the global trade order and the security and stability of global industrial and supply chains", the statement said. It urged Washington to "immediately correct its wrong practices and cancel the

additional tariffs on China", adding that Beijing would "take necessary measures to defend its own rights and interests". The world's two largest economies have long tussled over trade policy. Trump, who will be inaugurated for a second term on January 20, engaged in an escalating tariff war with Beijing during his first stint as president and has threatened similar action this time around. Incumbent Joe Biden has taken a targeted approach when it comes to tariff hikes on Chinese goods, although he did not roll back increases imposed by his predecessor. Tai said last week that the latest rises would complement domestic investments made under Biden to boost the United States' clean energy economy. A notice by the USTR's office said Chinese tungsten imports have undercut US domestic production, and the tariff hikes would make domestic producers more competitive while also reducing national security risks from overreliance on China. It added that while the tariffs on solar wafers and polysilicon may trigger higher prices initially, in the longer run they would help domestic manufacturers compete against China's "massive excess capacity". China has consistently opposed what it calls unilateral tariffs by Washington and has rejected the overcapacity claims.

Trump Advisor: Mystery Drones Show Gaps in U.S. Security



Germany's Der Spiegel magazine reported drone sightings over the U.S. air base in Ramstein and other sites in Germany.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- A raft of drone sightings in New Jersey and other U.S. states has underscored gaps in U.S. airspace security that need to be closed, President-elect Donald Trump's pick for national security adviser Mike Waltz said. President Joe Biden's outgoing administration has played down concerns about a growing number of reported drone sightings, saying most of them involve manned aircraft and stressing that there is no evidence of any national security threat. But U.S. lawmakers, including some of Biden's fellow Democrats, have expressed frustration the government is not being more transparent and more aggressive in addressing public concerns. Waltz said the reports were growing frustrated with the failure of Biden's administration to clarify what information they have on the drone reports. "What the drone issue points out are kind of gaps in our agencies, gaps in our authorities between the Department of Homeland Security, local law enforcement, the Defense Department," Waltz told CBS News' Face the Nation. The spate of reported drone sightings began in New Jersey in mid-November but has spread in recent days to include Maryland, Massachusetts and other U.S. states. The sightings have garnered media attention and

prompted creation of a Facebook page called "New Jersey Mystery Drones - let's solve it" with nearly 70,000 online members. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas defended the U.S. response, saying his agency had deployed personnel and technology. "If there is any reason for concern, if we identify any foreign involvement or criminal activity, we will communicate with the American public accordingly. Right now we are not aware of any," Mayorkas told ABC News. Jim Himes, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, played down concerns that America's enemies would send drones over U.S. cities when they can use satellites to safely and easily surveil the U.S. He said the Federal Aviation Administration, which regulates civilian airspace, should do more to allay public concerns. "When people are anxious, when they're nervous...people will fill a vacuum with their fears and anxieties," Himes said. Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar urged the Biden administration to hold a briefing for senators to explain "what's going on here." "We need more transparency," Klobuchar said. She also called for a look at regulation. "Because this just can't be: 'No one knows why this huge drone is right over their house.'"

News in Brief

SIHANOUKVILLE, Cambodia (AFP) -- A U.S. ship docked in Cambodia on Monday, just kilometers away from a Chinese-renovated naval base, in the first American military port call to one of Beijing's closest regional allies in eight years. Washington's relationship with Phnom Penh has been deteriorating for years, with China pouring billions of dollars into infrastructure investment under Cambodia's former leader Hun Sen. AFP reporters saw Cambodian navy personnel welcoming the USS Savannah's arrival to the southern port city of Sihanoukville on Monday. Cambodia's defense ministry said on Friday that the five-day visit aims to "strengthen and expand friendship" and "promote bilateral cooperation". Since 2022, China has been funding the renovation of the Ream naval base, some 30 kilometers (20 miles) from Sihanoukville, which was originally built partly using US funds. Washington has said the Ream base could give Beijing a key strategic position in the Gulf of Thailand near the disputed South China Sea, which China claims almost in its entirety. ***

DHAKA (AFP) -- Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus, who heads the caretaker government installed after an August revolution, said Monday that general elections would be held late next year or in early 2026. Pressure has been growing on Nobel Peace Prize winner Yunus -- appointed the country's "chief adviser" after the student-led uprising that toppled ex-premier Sheikh Hasina -- to set a date. The 84-year-old microfinance pioneer is leading a temporary administration to tackle what he has called the "extremely tough" challenge of restoring democratic institutions in the South Asian nation of about 170 million people. "Election dates could be fixed by the end of 2025 or the first half of 2026," he said in a broadcast on state television. Hasina, 77, fled by helicopter to neighboring India on August 5 as thousands of protesters stormed the prime minister's palace in Dhaka. ***

NAIROBI (AFP) -- Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Monday accused the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militias, at war with the army, of committing widespread sexual violence in southern Sudan. It is the latest such report by international monitors alleging sexual violence during Sudan's 20-month war which has led to what the United States called the world's worst humanitarian crisis. In its new report, HRW said it had documented dozens of cases since September 2023 involving women and girls aged between seven and 50 who were subjected to sexual violence, including gang rape and sexual slavery, in South Kordofan state. Parts of South Kordofan and parts of Blue Nile state are controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), a rebel group. The conflict has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people, internally displaced more than eight million, according to the UN, and forced more than three million others to seek safety in neighboring countries. ***

SEOUL (AFP) -- North Korean state media on Monday decried the South's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol as a "ringleader of rebellion", its first reaction to his removal from office over a short-lived martial law decree. Pyongyang's state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported Yoon had attempted to shift responsibility for the "foolish emergency martial law declaration" onto opposition parties. "The investigation into puppet Yoon Suk Yeol, the ringleader of the rebellion, and his accomplices is under way," KCNA said. "The puppet Constitutional Court will finally decide" on whether to remove Yoon, it added. North Korean state media often refers to the South's leaders and institutions as being a "puppet" of its treaty ally, the United States. KCNA previously described the South as being "in chaos" over the martial law order. Relations between the two Koreas have been at one of their lowest points in years, with the North launching a flurry of ballistic missiles in violation of UN sanctions. ***

SAINT-DENIS DE LA REUNION (AFP) -- Rescuers raced against time Monday to reach survivors after a devastating cyclone ripped through the French Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte, destroying homes across the islands, with hundreds feared dead. Images from Mayotte, which like other French overseas territories is an integral part of France and ruled from Paris, showed scenes of devastation, with homes reduced to piles of rubble. The crisis, which erupted at the weekend the day after President Emmanuel Macron appointed Francois Bayrou as the sixth prime minister of his mandate, poses a major challenge for a government still only operating in a caretaker capacity. The cyclone has left health services in tatters, with the hospital extremely damaged and health centres knocked out of operation, Health Minister Genevieve Darrieussecq told France 2. ***

KUALA LUMPUR (Reuters) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on Monday appointed Thailand's billionaire political heavyweight and former premier Thaksin Shinawatra as his personal adviser for when he becomes chair of Southeast Asia's regional bloc next year. Anwar said Thaksin's role during his leadership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations will be in an informal capacity, alongside advisors from several of the bloc's 10 member states. Anwar made the announcement during a visit to Malaysia by Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, Thaksin's youngest daughter and fourth member of their family to hold Thailand's top political post. Thaksin is barred from office after being found guilty of abuse of power and conflicts of interest, charges that he evaded for 15 years while in self-imposed exile, from which he remained a central player in intermittent turmoil back home.