

Workers Take to Streets in Worldwide May Day Protests



Riot police subdue a demonstrator during the traditional May Day labor union march in Paris, France on May 1, 2024.

PARIS (AFP) - Workers, activists and others around the world took to the streets on Wednesday to mark May Day with protests over the pressure of rising prices and calls for greater labor rights. Pro-Palestinian sentiments were also on display.

In Paris, thousands of protesters marched through the French capital, seeking better pay and working conditions. Pro-Palestinian groups and anti-Olympics activists joined the rally, chanting slogans in support for people in Gaza. A group of protesters set a makeshift Olympic rings on fire to show discontent with the Summer Games that start in less than three months.

France's unions have warned of a strike during the Games if the government does not adequately compensate people forced to work during summer holidays.

Government officials have failed to meet with union leaders ahead of the Olympics, said Sophie Binet, the general secretary of the CGT union, one of France's largest. "How do you expect it to go well if the authorities don't respond to our simplest demand?" she said.

May Day, which falls on May 1, is observed to celebrate workers' rights. It's also an opportunity to air economic grievances or political demands. "Tax the rich," one banner in Germany read. "Don't touch the eight-hour workday!" another read in Sri Lanka.

In Athens, several thousand protesters joined marches as labor strikes disrupted public transport and national rail services across Greece. The country's largest union demands a return to collective bargaining after labor rights were scrapped during Greece's 2010-18 financial crisis.

Pro-Palestinian protesters joined the rallies, waving a giant Palestinian flag as they marched past the Greek parliament. Others displayed banners in support of pro-Palestinian protesting students in the United States.

"We want to express our solidarity with students in the United States, who are facing great repression of their rights and their just demands," said Nikos Mavrokefalos at the march. "We want to send a message that workers say no to exploitation, no to poverty, no to high prices," he added.

In South Africa, pro-Palestinian demonstrators joined May Day events. In Kenya, President William Ruto called for an increase in the country's minimum wage. In Iraq, protesters demanded better wages, the reopening of closed factories and the end to privatization of certain businesses.

In Lebanon, pro-Palestinian marchers mingled with workers demanding an end to a miserable economic crisis. "Politicians do not feel the pain of the worker or the economic conditions," said one demonstrator, Abed Tabbaa.

In Indonesia, workers demanded protections for migrant workers abroad and a minimum wage raise. They gathered amid a tight police presence, chanting slogans against the new Job Creation Law and loosened outsourcing rules during a march to Jakarta's main sports stadium.

In South Korea's capital, thousands of protesters shouted pro-labor slogans at a rally that organizers said was meant to step up criticism of what they call anti-labor policies pursued by President Yoon Suk Yeol's conservative government.

"In the past two years under the Yoon Suk Yeol government, the lives of our laborers have plunged into despair," Yang Kyung-soo, leader of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, said in a speech. Union members criticized Yoon's December veto of a bill aimed at limiting companies' rights to seek compensation for damages caused by union strikes. The government also has vowed to sternly deal with illegal strikes.

In Japan, more than 10,000 people gathered in Tokyo, demanding salary increases to set off price increases. Masako Obata, leader of the left-leaning National Confederation of Trade Unions, said dwindling wages have widened income disparities.

In the Philippines, hundreds of workers and left-wing activists marched to demand wage increases and job security amid soaring food and oil prices. Riot police stopped them from getting close to the presidential palace.

Police in Istanbul used tear gas and fired rubber bullets to disperse thousands of people who tried to break through a barricade and reach the main Taksim square in defiance of a ban on celebrating Labor Day there. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said on social platform X at least 210 people were detained.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government has long declared Taksim off-limits for demonstrations on security grounds, but the square holds symbolic value for labor unions. In 1977, unidentified gunmen opened fire on a May Day celebration at Taksim, causing a stampede and killing 34 people.

Russia Ramps Up Arms Production as U.S. Boosts Support for Ukraine



Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and armed forces chief Valery Gerasimov inspect new types of weapons in Rostov-on-Don, Russia, on May 1, 2024.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Wednesday ordered a hike in weapons production and said deliveries needed to be faster for the war in Ukraine, a week after U.S. President Joe Biden signed off on tens of billions of dollars of new military aid for Kyiv.

Russia, Ukraine cause touched off the worst breakdown in relations between Russia and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, according to Russian and U.S. diplomats.

Biden on April 24 signed a bill into law that provides \$61 billion in additional aid to Ukraine, including an array of artillery, rocket systems, anti-tank munitions and ammunition.

Russia is gradually advancing at key points along the 1,000-km (620 mile) front line and stated that U.S. arms will not prevent victory by Moscow, but some Russian officials warned that the U.S. support will escalate the conflict.

At a meeting with the top military brass in charge of what Moscow calls the "special military operation" in Ukraine, Shoigu said the volume, quality and speed of arms production needed to be increased.

"To maintain the required pace of the offensive ... it is necessary to increase the volume and quality of weapons and military equipment supplied to the troops, primarily weapons," Shoigu said in footage released by the defense ministry.

Shoigu, who was shown inspecting drones and other weapons and giving his own thoughts on improvements, said industrial enterprises had been ordered to reduce production time while repair units

at the front, in Ukraine's east and south, and at the rear had been told to improve their efficiency.

Russia now controls about 18% of Ukraine and has been gaining ground since the failure of Kyiv's 2023 counter-offensive to make any serious inroads against Russian troops dug in behind deep minefields.

U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns warned last month that without more U.S. military support Ukraine could lose on the battlefield, but that with support Kyiv's forces could hold their own this year.

Russia's ability to recruit hundreds of thousands of soldiers and ramp up weapons production has surprised the United States and its allies in the NATO military alliance.

Russia's army is now 15% larger than before the war, the command has adapted fast to the innovative challenges of the battlefield and Russia will manufacture more artillery this year than all of NATO's 32 members combined, General Christopher Cavoli, the head of U.S. European Command, said last month.

On Wednesday, an exhibition of Western military equipment captured from Kyiv forces during the fighting in Ukraine opened in the Russian capital.

The exhibit organized by the Russian Defense Ministry features more than 30 pieces of Western-made heavy equipment, including a U.S.-made M1 Abrams battle tank and a Bradley armored fighting vehicle, a Leopard 2 tank and a Marder armored infantry vehicle from Germany, and a French-made AMX-10RC armored vehicle.

News in Brief

OTTAWA (Reuters) - The leader of Canada's main opposition party was ejected from the House of Commons after he called Prime Minister Justin Trudeau "a wacko", in the latest clash between two men set to fight an election next year. The official opposition right-of-center Conservatives are well ahead in the polls. The incident started when party leader Pierre Poilievre criticized what he called Trudeau's refusal to crack down on drug overdoses. "When will we put an end to this wacko policy by this wacko prime minister?" he asked Trudeau in the House of Commons elected lower chamber. Speaker Greg Fergus, a Liberal, told Poilievre the comment was both unparliamentary and unacceptable and asked him four times to withdraw it. Poilievre declined on each occasion, saying instead he would use the word extremist or radical. Fergus told Poilievre he was disregarding the speaker's authority and, in an unusual move, said: "I order to you to withdraw from the House ... for the remainder of this day's sitting."

WESTMORELAND, Kan. (AP) — At least one person has died, three people have been injured and multiple structures have been damaged after a tornado swept through the small city of Westmoreland, Kansas, according to reports. Pottawatomie County officials said on Facebook that a tornado struck the city of about 700 people Tuesday evening, destroying 22 homes, three RVs and five outbuildings and damaging another 13 homes and one commercial building. First responders were conducting grid searches in Westmoreland to survey damage and to look for people who may have been injured. A Pottawatomie County spokesperson confirmed the single fatality in a news release sent to media. The name of the person who died was being withheld pending family notification.

DENVER (AP) — A former National Security Agency employee who sold classified information to an undercover FBI agent he believed to be a Russian official was sentenced to nearly 22 years in prison, the penalty requested by government prosecutors. U.S. District Judge Raymond Moore said he could have put Jareh Sebastian Dalke, 32, behind bars for even longer, calling the 262-month sentence "mercy" for what he saw as a calculated action to take the job at the NSA in order to be able to sell national security secrets. "This was blatant. It was brazen and, in my mind, it was deliberate. It was a betrayal, and it was as close to treasonous as you can get," Moore said. Dalke's attorneys had asked for the Army veteran, who pleaded guilty to espionage charges last fall in a deal with prosecutors, to be sentenced to 14 years in prison, in part because the information he sold in 2022 did not end up in enemy hands and cause damage.

BRASILIA (Reuters) - Eight people died and 21 are missing due to heavy rains this week in Brazil's southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, the civil defense service said on Wednesday. Authorities reported over 1,400 displaced individuals in the wake of storms that led to rising river levels and flooding in various parts of the state, affecting 104 municipalities. In a report on hydrological conditions on Tuesday, the state's government predicted a flood risk "across practically the entire state" given the prospect of continued "heavy precipitation" in the coming days. The bulletin also said flooding would be severe in the basins of many rivers, with the possibility of flash floods and mass movements of earth in regions with steep slopes. State Governor Eduardo Leite expressed condolences for the deaths caused by the storms on the social media platform X on Wednesday, adding that the government is working to locate the missing and ensure safety in areas at risk.

MEXICO CITY (Xinhua) - Haiti's transitional council has named ex-Sports Minister Fritz Belizaire as the country's new prime minister, local media have reported. Belizaire replaces Michel Patrick Boisvert, who temporarily held the premiership from April 25, when the transitional council was installed and the resignation of Ariel Henry was announced. The members of the council reached a majority agreement Tuesday on the appointments without requiring an election process in a bid to quickly restore constitutional order in the Caribbean country roiled by gang violence, and political and social upheaval, local media reported.

UK Begins Detaining Migrants Set to be Deported to Rwanda



A law to pave the way for sending asylum seekers to Rwanda if they arrived in Britain without permission was approved by parliament in April, and Sunak wants the first flights to take off in July. — Reuters file pic

LONDON (Reuters) - British authorities have started to detain migrants in preparation for them to be sent to Rwanda in the next nine to 11 weeks, the government said on Wednesday, laying the groundwork for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's flagship immigration policy.

A law to pave the way for sending asylum seekers to Rwanda if they arrived in Britain without permission was approved by parliament in April, and Sunak

wants the first flights to take off in July.

More than 7,500 migrants have arrived in England on small boats from France so far this year, and the government says the policy will deter people from making dangerous journey across the Channel. Five people died trying to make the crossing last week.

Human rights charities and unions opposed to the policy are expected to launch fresh legal challenges to stop the flights from taking off after the UK Supreme

Court declared the policy unlawful last year.

Images released by Britain's interior ministry on Wednesday showed a man being put in a van by immigration enforcement officials, and another being led out of his house in handcuffs.

"Our dedicated enforcement teams are working at pace to swiftly detain those who have no right to be here so we can get flights off the ground," interior minister James Cleverly said in a statement on Wednesday.

Care4Calais, a refugee charity, said the detentions had started on Monday.

A spokesperson said that the group's helpline had received calls from "tens of people", adding that they still did not know who would be earmarked for the first deportation flight, or when it would be attempted.

Britain sent its first asylum seeker to Rwanda under a voluntary scheme, The Sun Newspaper reported on Tuesday, a separate program to the deportation policy.

"People are very frightened," said Natasha Tsangarides, Associate Director of Advocacy at charity Freedom from Torture, saying the fear of being detained and sent to Rwanda would push some people to go underground and disengage with their support system.

Dozens of Schools in India's Capital Evacuated After Email Bomb Threat Hoax

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Dozens of schools in India's national capital region were evacuated on Wednesday after they received a bomb threat by email, police said, adding that "nothing objectionable" was found during searches of the schools.

More than 50 schools in Delhi and the adjoining suburb of Noida received the threatening email, officials said, triggering panic among parents and prompting schools to send students home.

Television visuals showed par-

ents standing outside the gates of schools across the region waiting to pick up children, as police teams, dog squads, and bomb disposal squads checked the premises.

The hoax affected thousands of school children from grades 1-12.

"Delhi Police has conducted thorough check of all such schools as per protocol...It appears that these calls seem to be hoax," Delhi Police said in a statement. Police did not release any further details about the threat.

Security agencies were taking "all

necessary steps", the home ministry said on X.

Delhi Education Minister Atishi, who uses only one name, appealed to people not to panic, adding that school authorities would be in touch with parents wherever needed.

Some schools that were not among the recipients of the email also sent messages to parents to reassure them about the safety of their children.

Similar threats have been sent to schools in New Delhi in the past, but turned out to be hoaxes.

Georgian Lawmakers Tussle in Parliament After Crackdown on Foreign Agent Protesters



Law enforcement officers stand guard near the parliament building during a rally to protest against a bill on "foreign agents" in Tbilisi, Georgia, May 1, 2024.

TBILISI (Reuters) - Georgian lawmakers tussled in parliament on Wednesday as lawmakers resumed debating the second reading of a bill on "foreign agents" that has sparked weeks of protest, and a violent police crackdown on Tuesday.

Georgian television showed commotion in the chamber. One pro-government deputy was seen throwing a book at opposition legislators, while others shouted and physically confronted opponents. The foreign agent bill has prompted an upsurge of violence in Georgia's often-rowdy parliament.

Georgian security forces used water cannon, tear gas and stun grenades against protesters outside parliament late on Tuesday, sharply escalating the crackdown after lawmakers debated the "foreign agents" bill viewed by the opposition and Western nations as authoritarian and Russian-inspired.

During the protests in Tbilisi on Tuesday, police detained 63 people and six police officers were injured, Deputy Interior Minister Aleksandre Darakh-

velidze said.

Levan Khabeshvili, leader of the United National Movement party, Georgia's largest opposition bloc, spoke in parliament on Wednesday with his face heavily bandaged. His party said he was badly beaten by police at the protest, leaving him with concussion, broken facial bones, and missing four teeth.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell wrote in a post on X on Wednesday: "I strongly condemn the violence against protesters in Georgia who were peacefully demonstrating against the law on foreign influence."

The EU, which gave Georgia candidate status in December, has said the bill could derail Tbilisi's hopes of European integration if passed.

Supporters of the bill, including Bidzina Ivanishvili, the billionaire founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party and former prime minister, say the foreign agent law would bolster national sovereignty amid what he said were Western attempts to lead Georgia into a confrontation with Russia.