

China says 'political manipulation' behind US arrests



A six-story glass facade building (2nd L) is believed to be the site of a foreign police outpost for China in New York City's Chinatown, April 17, 2023.
● BEBETO MATTHEW/AP

China said on Tuesday that "political manipulation" was behind the arrests of two men the United States accused of setting up an unauthorised Chinese police station in New York. Authorities in the city also

charged dozens of Chinese security officials over a campaign to monitor and harass US-based dissidents, AFP reported. "China firmly opposes the US side's slandering, smearing, engaging in po-

litical manipulation, and maliciously concocting the so-called transnational repression narrative," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters.

"We urge the US to immediately reflect on itself, abandon Cold War thinking and ideological biases, immediately stop related erroneous practices, stop political manipulation, and stop smear attacks against China," he added.

The arrests of Harry Lu Jianwang, 61, and Chen Jinping, 59, are the first anywhere over a suspected campaign by China to establish surreptitious police posts in countries around the world, said Breon Peace, the top federal prosecutor in Brooklyn.

The two men set up the office in Manhattan's Chinatown last year at the behest of the Fuzhou branch

of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), China's national police force, ostensibly to offer services like Chinese driver's licence renewal, according to Peace.

But in fact their main job was to help track down and harass fugitive dissidents from the People's Republic of China (PRC), US officials claimed.

"The MPS established a concrete outpost, an off-the-books police station right here in New York City, to monitor and intimidate dissidents and other critics of the PRC within one of the United States' most vibrant diaspora communities," said David Newman, the Justice Department's principal deputy assistant attorney general for national security.

Canada and several European governments have cracked down on similar unofficial police stations.

Last year the Spain-based human rights group Safeguard Defenders first revealed the existence of such outposts around the world.

They often operate with little or no indication they are there – though US officials said the Manhattan office had been visited by officials from the Chinese consulate in New York.

According to Safeguard Defenders, the "police stations" have been involved in pressuring Chinese nationals to return home to face criminal charges.

Canada has identified and closed several unofficial outposts in Montreal and elsewhere.

Lu and Chen were charged with acting as unregistered agents of a foreign government and obstruction for destroying evidence of their communications with Chinese officials.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Sudanese army, rival forces agree to 24-hour cease-fire



AP – The Sudanese army and a rival paramilitary force that have been battling the past four days for control of the country agreed on Tuesday to a 24-hour cease-fire, Arab media reports said.

Hopes for at least a pause in the violence came as intensified fighting threatened to spiral even further into chaos. On Monday, fighters in Khartoum attacked a U.S. Embassy convoy and stormed the home of the EU envoy to Sudan, though neither attack caused casualties.

Macron defends pension law, more protests planned



● STEPHANIE LECOCQ/REUTERS

French President Emmanuel Macron defended his controversial pension reform in a televised address on Monday, insisting that raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 was necessary to keep the country's pension system from collapsing. Macron acknowledged that the reform was unpopular, DW reported. "Is this reform accepted? Obviously not. Despite months of talks, a consensus wasn't found, and

I regret that. We must draw all the lessons from that," he said.

He gave himself 100 days to heal the country after weeks of protests and anger, asking his government to open talks with unions on a wide range of issues.

Trade unions, who have been leading protests against the reform, have, however, vowed to continue their efforts. As Macron delivered his speech, demonstrators banged pots and pans in front of town halls across the country, and in Paris, small groups of protesters set garbage bins on fire.

Police in the city of Lyon reported that protesters lit bins on fire and hurled projectiles at officers be-

fore being driven back by tear gas, with similar scenes in other major towns.

Macron signed the reform into law on Saturday, hours after France's top constitutional body cleared the change.

In the lead-up to the decision, France had been rocked by general strikes and saw citizens engaged in pitched street battles with police as many aspects of daily life continue to be affected by protests and strikes.

In many cities, opponents to the pension law took to the streets to bang pots and pans during Macron's televised address to the nation, with the rallying cry: 'Macron won't listen to us? We won't listen to him!'

Qatar and UAE in process of restoring diplomatic ties

Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are restoring diplomatic ties and reopening embassies, officials said on Tuesday.

The step comes more than two years after Arab states ended a boycott of Doha, Reuters reported.

"At present, the activation of diplomatic ties, which will include the reopening of embassies, is under process between both countries," a UAE official said in a statement in response to a question from Reuters. Qatar's international media office, in a statement, confirmed that "work is underway to reopen the respective embassies as soon as possible."

A Persian Gulf official said



embassies were expected to reopen with new ambassadors in their posts by mid-June. A fourth source said diplomatic relations would be fully restored within weeks.

The restoration of ties comes amid a broader regional push for reconciliation with Iran and Saudi Arabia agreeing last month to re-establish relations.



A sign indicating a route to Qatar embassy is seen in Manama, Bahrain.
● REUTERS

Moscow summons Western envoys over 'gross interference'

AFP – Moscow said on Tuesday it had summoned US, British and Canadian ambassadors for "gross interference" in Russia's domestic affairs.

The envoys, who on Monday denounced a 25-year-sentence against Kremlin critic Vladimir Kara-Murza, were summoned for "gross interference in Russia's internal affairs and activities that do not correspond to their diplomatic status," the foreign ministry said in a statement carried by Russian news agencies.

Will Erdogan sail to re-election in May?



Zohreh Qanadi
Staff Writer

EXCLUSIVE

Türkiye is gearing up for a critical election less than a month away. Election competitions are raging especially between the two main candidates President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), and the country's six-party opposition coalition candidate, Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

A survey puts Kilicdaroglu slightly ahead for the first round, at 42.6%, compared with 41.1% for Erdogan. Despite polls showing that the opposition candidates stood a better chance of beating the president, the election might be extended to the second round. A second round could be dangerous for the challenger, who will need support

from every corner.

This is not the first time that Erdogan risks defeat in Türkiye's knife-edge election. His ruling party, the AKP, has been in power for nearly two decades, and it has repeatedly sailed to re-election, but it faces mounting challenges from the opposition parties.

Türkiye's six-party opposition coalition challenges Erdoğan's two-decade rule. The inflation crisis is another major campaign theme for him. However, despite the widespread economic crisis and the February earthquake, Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) still has significant influence among its supporters.

The outcome of the May 14 election could be affected by several factors. One of the key challenges facing Erdogan is the country's economic situation. Türkiye has been facing several economic challenges in recent

years, including high inflation rates, a weak currency, and a growing external debt burden. Therefore, the economy tops Erdogan's manifesto for the May election. That's why he launched his re-election campaign last week, with a party pledge to slash inflation to single digits and boost economic growth.

Blaming the president's economic policies, the opposition has also promised the return of trust and normal conditions. But the problem is that they don't say that the return of trust and normal conditions requires a short period of pain. That's why they prefer to talk only about who brought the situation in the country to this point and turn the election into a referendum on Erdogan, without explaining what their own power will look like, Howard Eisenstadt, an expert on Turkey's affairs said.

Another significant challenge for Erdogan is the political opposi-

tion. The Turkish opposition has been growing in strength and influence in recent years, with a number of parties and movements emerging to challenge the ruling party's dominance. These opposition groups have been able to gain significant support from Turkish citizens.

The election presents a rare opportunity for the opposition to challenge Erdogan and his AKP amid the political fallout from the recent deadly earthquakes that killed more than 45,000 people and prompted accusations of a lackluster government response. Polling in the weeks after the earthquake showed a small dip in the AKP's popularity and an uptick in support for opposition parties, primarily the CHP and the Good Party.

In addition to these challenges, there are also some opportunities for Erdogan to secure his re-election. One of these opportunities is the strong support



that he enjoys among conservative and religious voters in Türkiye. Erdogan has been able to appeal to these voters by promoting conservative values and emphasizing the importance of Türkiye's Islamic heritage.

Another potential opportunity for Erdogan is the country's geopolitical position. Türkiye is strategically located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and has significant influence in the region. Erdogan has been able to use this influence to strengthen its position on the world stage. Due to these challenges and opportunities, the outcome of the election remains uncertain.

Tunisia shuts offices of opposition party Ennahdha: Official



AFP – Tunisian authorities closed the offices of opposition party Ennahdha on Tuesday, a day after arresting its leader Rached Ghannouchi, a senior party official, Riadh Chaibi, said. Ennahdha was the largest party in Tunisia's parliament before President Kais Saied dissolved the chamber in July 2021.