

## AIR CHINA MAGAZINE APOLOGIZES OVER 'RACIST' ARTICLE

**BEIJING:** The publisher of Chinese national carrier Air China's in-flight magazine apologized yesterday for allegedly "racist" travel advice offered to passengers visiting London, as mainland social media users rushed to defend the controversial tips.

The latest issue of "Wings of China" ran an article detailing safety tips to travelers based on the race and nationality of local residents. "London is generally a safe place to travel, however precautions are needed when entering areas mainly populated by Indians, Pakistanis and black people," the article said in English translation below a Chinese text, according to a photograph published by CNBC. "We advise tourists not to go out alone at night, and females always to be accompanied by another person when travelling," it added. The Chinese version was worded slightly differently, stating that such neigh-

borhoods were "comparatively more chaotic"—an adjective often used to describe dangerous areas.

### 'Blatantly untrue and racist statements'

The English translation prompted London MP Virendra Sharma, who emigrated from India to Britain in the 1960s, to complain to the Chinese government. "I am shocked and appalled that even today some people would see it as acceptable to write such blatantly untrue and racist statements," he said in an online statement. "I have raised this issue with the Chinese ambassador, and requested that he ensures an apology is swiftly forthcoming from Air China, and the magazine is removed from circulation immediately," Sharma said.

In a Chinese-language statement yesterday, the publisher attributed the "inappropriate descriptions" to editorial errors, stating

that they were at odds with the "original intention to actively promote the beautiful scenery of London". It described itself as a third-party organization, although Air China's own website describes the magazine as "an authoritative information resource of Air China Group and Air China".

The publisher apologized that the text had "misled" a number of media outlets and readers and damaged Air China's brand image. But on Chinese social media, most commenters expressed bafflement at the backlash.

In a common refrain, one user of China's Twitter-like Weibo platform asked: "This is just stating the truth—what is there to apologize about?" Another queried: "There are more rapists and robbers there anyway—why is saying this discriminatory?"

Many said they felt the advice was valuable. "We can't satisfy everyone, but we certainly

must put Chinese people's safety first," one user stated. Discussion and public awareness of racism in China is notoriously low—often resulting in viral scandals that spark global outrage beyond the Great Firewall but cause nary a whimper of concern within the mainland. In May, an ad by a Chinese detergent maker depicting a black man stuffed into a washing machine and transformed into a fair-skinned Asian stoked outcry abroad, initially dismissed by the company as overly sensitive. China often portrays itself as the victim of discrimination at the hands of foreign media, and many on Weibo expressed indignation at what they saw as hypocritical finger-pointing from those in the West. "We don't owe black people, Indians or Pakistanis anything; we never trafficked slaves or colonised India and Pakistan," wrote one user, adding: "So go die, all you politically correct people." —AFP

## JAPAN'S PROPOSED ANTI-CONSPIRACY LAW STIRS CIVIL RIGHTS CONCERNS

### COULD GIVE POLICE POWER TO TRAMPLE CIVIL LIBERTIES

**TOKYO:** More than a decade after an initial attempt failed, Japan wants to enact legislation to penalize conspiracies to commit crimes such as terrorism but critics say such changes would give police power to trample civil liberties.

Proponents say the steps are vital to fight terrorism in a climate where the risks have grown as Tokyo prepares to host the 2020 Olympics, and to ratify a UN Treaty aimed at battling international organized crime. "It's very important ... to fight organized crime by cooperating with international society," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters when asked about the proposals. Opponents see the proposals as part of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's broader agenda to tighten the government's grip at the expense of individual rights. Critics including the Japan Federation of Bar Associations also warn the changes—when combined with a recent expansion of the scope of legal wiretapping and the reluctance of courts to rein in police surveillance powers—could have a chilling effect on grassroots opposition to government policies.

### 'Limits the protection of individual right'

The federation also says Japanese law already prohibits preparing to commit certain serious crimes such as murder, arson and counterfeiting or plotting an insurgency or the use of explosives. "The ruling coalition is emboldened and, led by the prime minister, wants to push these kinds of laws," said Meiji University law professor Lawrence Repeta. "He's

pushing an agenda that grants the police and the government broader authority and limits the protection of individual rights."

Proposed changes floated in a document leaked to Japanese media and seen by Reuters would make it a crime for "organized crime groups" to conspire and prepare to commit serious crimes punishable by four or more years imprisonment. Examples included gangsters readying a plot to shoot a rival gang leader and terrorists preparing a chemical attack. Workers chatting over drinks and saying they want to kill their boss wouldn't qualify, the document says.

### 'Chilling effect'

Legal experts, however, say the vague phrasing suggests that civic groups opposed to government policies could be considered "organized crime groups" if they are found to be preparing for illegal actions, such as plans by activists opposed to US military bases blocking roads to construction sites. "There is no clause limiting this to a group like the Mafia," said lawyer Yuichi Kaido. "It could target a group that is opposed to the government in some way." If the revisions are enacted, "people will become afraid and it will have a chilling effect," he said.

Liberal Democratic Party-led governments have tried three times to enact such legislation since the United Nations adopted a Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime in 2000. But outcries from lawyers, activists and media scuppered the bills.

This time, though, Abe's ruling coalition has a two-thirds majority in both houses of parliament, and public worries about terrorism ahead of the Olympics have grown after deadly attacks overseas. "We are facing the Tokyo Olympics and once something happens, it will already be too late," LDP Secretary General Toshihiro Nikai was quoted by media saying on a radio program.

The justice ministry is taking pains to allay concerns ordinary people would be ensnared by the changes, stressing that's not true in a Q&A on its website. Critics see the push for legal changes as integral to Abe's efforts, reflected in LDP proposals to revise Japan's post-war constitution, to strengthen the authority of the state.

Other moves include the 2013 enactment of a states secrets law toughening penalties on leaks, and changes this year that widened the scope for wiretapping to include fraud and theft.

Some legal experts find the trend especially troubling given the judiciary's reluctance to restrict police powers. In a recent example, the Supreme Court this year declined to review a case concerning police surveillance of 17 Muslims who were monitored purely because of their religion, upholding a lower court ruling that the surveillance had been "necessary and unavoidable" to protect against terrorism.

"This would be added to an existing criminal justice system in which the courts do not serve as an effective check on police and prosecutors," Meiji University's Repeta said. —Reuters



**BEIJING:** Commemorative plates with images of late communist leader Mao Zedong sit behind transformer toys in a stall in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on the eve of the 40th anniversary of his death, on September 8, 2016. —AFP

## THAILAND, MALAYSIA PLAN BORDER WALL TO HALT ILLEGAL FLOW OF GOODS, PEOPLE

**VIENTIANE:** Thailand and Malaysia will discuss plans to build a wall along their shared border, Thai officials said on Thursday, a day before Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak is set to meet his counterpart in Bangkok.

People-trafficking and the smuggling of drugs and weapons are among the transnational crimes that have flourished along the 640-km (398-mile) Thai-Malay border, until a crackdown by Thailand last year disrupted regional trafficking routes.

Najib is to meet Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha on an official visit that will focus on security cooperation and investment. The wall is on the agenda for the meeting, said a Thai foreign ministry official. "It will be on the agenda during Najib's visit, but it will not be the biggest item on the agenda," foreign ministry spokesman Chinawut Setawat told Reuters at a regional meeting in the Laotian capital of Vientiane. "It is still at the memorandum of understanding phase," said Colonel Yutthanam Petchmuang, a spokesman for Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command.

### No response

Malaysia's foreign ministry did not respond to a request from Reuters for comment. Najib's visit follows three deadly bomb attacks in southern Thailand over the past month, including a wave of bombs in tourist towns in August that Thai police have linked to Muslim separatists operating in the country's south.

The porous Thai-Malay border has also been a site for the smuggling of weapons, drugs and illegal oil. After taking power in a May 2014 coup, Thailand's junta promised what it called a "zero tolerance" policy of human trafficking and launched a nationwide crackdown on vice and crime.

In January 2004, a shadowy separatist insurgency by ethnic Malays resurfaced in Thailand, after simmering for decades. Since then, 6,500 people have been killed, says Deep South Watch, a body that monitors the violence. — Reuters

## CHINA SHUNS SEOUL SECURITY DIALOGUE AMID MISSILE DEFENSE ROW

**BEIJING:** China is shunning a security dialogue in Seoul amid an ongoing row over South Korea's decision to deploy a powerful US missile defense system.

The official newspaper Global Times on yesterday quoted an unidentified Defense Ministry spokesman as saying China was not sending a delegation to this week's Seoul Defense Dialogue because of "reasons of work arrangement." It offered no other details. China has angrily denounced plans for the deployment of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD system, whose radars it says will allow the US mili-

tary to peer deep into northeastern China. Seoul and Washington say the system is intended solely to defend against North Korea's missile threat. China elevated the issue on Monday, with President Xi Jinping expressing China's opposition directly in a meeting with his South Korean counterpart Park Geun-hye. Xi said that "mishandling the issue is not conducive to strategic stability in the region, and could intensify disputes." Beijing's reaction has also stoked public outrage, threatening everything from tourism exchanges to appearances by K-pop stars in China. —AP