

Snowden Case Tests US-China Relations

Welcome to As It Is, the daily magazine show from VOA Learning English.

I'm Mario Ritter. Today, we hear about huge protests in South America's largest nation and biggest economy, Brazil.

Demonstrations started when the government of President Dilma Rousseff announced plans to increase costs such as bus and train fares. At the same time, Brazil is spending large amounts of public money on sports stadiums and other projects in preparation for next year's World Cup.

But we start with the continuing case of Edward Snowden. The flight of the former intelligence analyst to Hong Kong has tested relations between the world's two largest economies.

The administration of President Barack Obama has strongly criticized Hong Kong and China for permitting Edward Snowden to leave its territory. This happened although there is an order, or warrant, for his arrest.

Administration spokesman Jay Carney said that all the legal requirements for having Edward Snowden returned to the United States had been fulfilled.

"The request that was made complied with all of the requirements of the US-Hong Kong surrender agreement. At no point in all of our discussions through Friday did the authorities in Hong Kong raise any issues regarding the sufficiency of the US's provisional arrest request. In light of this we find their position to be particularly troubling."

Jay Carney went on to say that the choice to permit Edward Snowden to leave Hong Kong would hurt ties between China and America.

"This was a deliberate choice by the government to release a fugitive despite a valid arrest warrant and that decision unquestionably has a negative impact on the US-China relationship."

Hong Kong's Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying offered a defense of his government's decision to let Edward Snowden leave. He said the rules of the territory, which Britain returned to China in 1997, were observed.

“The people of Hong Kong expect Hong Kong to uphold its own laws including the basic law which was promulgated to uphold the principle of ‘one country, two systems:’ Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong and [a] high degree of autonomy. We were asking the United States government for further important information on the case, and there was no legal basis to stop Mr. Snowden from leaving Hong Kong.”

Edward Snowden is accused of leaking documents showing that United States intelligence services have gathered telephone and Internet information about citizens for years. He said he believes the programs violate the rights of American citizens.



American officials say the surveillance programs were legal and prevented at least 50 terrorist attacks around the world since the attacks on the United States of September 11.

On Monday, Ecuador's foreign minister said Edward Snowden asked for asylum in his country. Ricardo Patiño said his government has been in contact with Russia, where Edward Snowden is believed to have traveled after he left Hong Kong.

Protests in Brazil

Large protests have taken place in many cities in Brazil recently. Last Friday, the President of South America's largest economy, Dilma Rousseff, spoke in an effort to end the unrest that has been spreading across the country. Jim Tedder tells us more.

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff promised to end huge street protests when she spoke on national television last week. She warned that continued unrest and violence could cause the country to lose a lot. She was talking about Brazil's role as host of the World Cup soccer championship next year, and two years later, the 2016 Olympic Games.

The protests began when the government announced it would raise prices for public transportation. The increase angered people. They have seen the government spend billions of dollars on remodeling sports centers or building new ones for the coming international athletic events. At the same time, inflation has increased

The protests are the largest in Brazil in 20 years.

Demonstrations have been held in more than 80 cities. An estimated 300,000 people protested in Rio de Janeiro. Most marches have been peaceful. But some violence and strong police reactions have been reported.

The government suspended its plan to increase bus, train and subway fares and costs of road use. But the protests continue anyway. Riordan Roett is with Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He says the middle class in Brazil is unhappy.

That middle class is growing, and they are mostly in southern Brazil where the population is centered. Riordan Roett says protesters are dissatisfied with the government of President Rousseff and her Workers Party, known as the PT.

“There has been a sense that the people who really run the country financially -- the south and southeast -- are getting the short end of the stick with lousy schools, terrible transportation, terrible medical care and a growing sense that Brasilia and the PT really don't care about Sao Paulo, the south and the southeast of the country.”

While Brazilians love soccer, many are critical of the spending for the upcoming World Cup. Protests have continued during the Confederation Cup, a smaller international soccer competition which ends on June 30.

The demonstrators are demanding better medical care, sanitation, and security. Many also are angered by high taxes and government corruption.

Inflation in Brazil has increased. The rate is now over six percent, about two percent higher than the government's target. At the same time, growth has slowed to less than three percent.



That puts pressure on President Rousseff's government. It must prove to the public that current spending will lead to the improved services demanded by the expanding middle class.

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