

Welcome to As It Is from VOA Learning English! I'm Mario Ritter in Washington.

Today we hear what Chinese officials are doing after a shocking attack at a train station in Yunan Province. The government has blamed separatists for the violence. Officials have increased security in China's capital as two major meetings take place.

Then we turn to South Asia and the issue of public health. Vaccination efforts have almost ended the risk of polio infection in most countries. But the World Health Organization says the virus is still a problem in a major Pakistani city.

China's answer to a deadly attack and the fight against polio are next on As It Is.

China is increasing security in the capital, Beijing, at the same time its leaders gather for talks. The political meetings come just days after an attack at a train station in southwestern China. The violence left more than 30 dead. June Simms has more in this report from VOA's Bill Ide in Beijing.

Chinese officials say separatists from the Xinjiang area were to blame for carrying out what officials described as a highly organized terrorist attack. The incident took place Saturday in the southwestern city of Kunming. Chinese media say attackers used knives to kill 29 people. More than 140 others were injured. Officials say police killed four of the attackers.

State media have since reported that Chinese officials held an emergency meeting to increase safety and security in the capital. Some of the measures include increasing anti-terrorism and anti-explosives awareness. Officials also called for strengthening security on public transportation, such as buses and trains.

Security within China will be a subject for discussion for the Chinese officials meeting in Beijing. China's military spending continues to rise. But the country still spends more on security at home than it does on defense. Since 2009, the security budget in Xinjiang alone has grown from \$250,000 to \$1 billion.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang arrives at the opening session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

On Monday, top officials met in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing for the opening ceremony of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The conference is a government advisory body of 2,200 officials. Another meeting, called the National People's Congress, takes place at about the same time. Chinese call the gatherings the twin sessions. The two are marked by a huge increase in police on the streets.

After the attack last weekend, many people are demanding better security. Others are also saying the government should strengthen anti-terror laws.

James Leibold is a visiting professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University. He says the attacks surprised the government and raised the danger of ethnic tensions.

"I think they are particularly worried about the Han backlash. There are a lot of people talking about how this is reminiscent of 2009. When you had the Han riots in Shaoguang in Guangdong and how that spilled over into Urumqi and that terrible street violence. The government is worried to not let that get out to lose control of it."

In 2009, ethnic riots shook western China. The violence left about 200 people dead. They included both Han Chinese and members of Xinjiang's Uighur Muslim minority group.

Professor Leibold notes that in late December Chinese President Xi Jinping described his ideas for a new plan of action in Xinjiang. However, officials have yet to present the details of that program.

I'm June Simms.

The World Health Organization has declared the Pakistani city of Peshawar, the world's "largest reservoir" of endemic poliovirus. And WHO officials fear Pakistanis could face travel restrictions unless steps are taken immediately to stop the disease from spreading.

Christopher Cruise has more.

Researchers studied all the cases of poliomyelitis in Pakistan last year. The researchers found that almost every case could be linked genetically to the poliovirus often reported in Peshawar. They added that all test samples collected from different parts of the city have shown the presence of the highly infectious virus.

A Pakistani health worker gives a polio vaccine to a child in a poor area of Lahore.

Polio mainly affects children under five years of age. The virus is passed through food or water. The virus reproduces in the body, and later invades the nervous system. The disease can sometimes lead to paralysis, with loss of muscle control in part of the body.

The WHO study found that 90 percent of Pakistan's polio cases could be linked to the virus in Peshawar. In addition, 12 of the 13 polio cases in Afghanistan were also linked to the city.

Elias Durry serves as the WHO's emergency coordinator for polio in Pakistan. He says local officials need to take urgent action to strengthen vaccination campaigns. He says the situation in Peshawar not only threatens the gains Pakistan has made against polio, but could also harm international efforts to stop the disease.

"Unless the polio eradication program in Pakistan is able to curtail the transmission in Peshawar, the expansion of, of the viruses to other places will not stop, so it is critical that Peshawar, the way it is behaving now, really be able to find ways of interrupting these transmissions that have been consistent throughout the years."

He also noted an increase in deadly attacks on vaccination campaign workers in and around Peshawar, and in other areas.

Taliban militants often attack polio workers in Pakistan. The militants accuse them of being American spies or part of a plot to keep Muslims from having babies. Most of the attacks have taken place in Peshawar because the city is close to the country's tribal districts. Extremist groups have bases in those areas.

Elias Durry did not reject the possibility of other countries ordering travel and visa restrictions on Pakistan if there is no quick improvement in the situation. In neighboring India, no polio cases have been reported for the past three years. Starting this month, all visitors to India from Pakistan are required to show a record of their polio vaccination.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

And that is our program for today. Thank you for joining us.

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