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'Evil clowns' stalk France

TV show blamed for string of attacks and chilling pranks that has also spread through US and Britain as Halloween approaches



People dressed as zombie clowns take part in the Zombie Walk in the eastern French city of Strasbourg last month Photo: AFP

By AFP

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A 14-year-old dressed as a clown was arrested on Monday near Paris for attempting to attack a woman, as a strange phenomenon of fake, evil clowns terrorising passers-by spreads in France.

Complaints have poured in recently over "armed clowns" wreaking havoc in various parts of the country, and police have detained several people dressed as the pranksters - some carrying pistols, knives and baseball bats.

The phenomenon has even prompted anti-clown vigilantism, forcing police to try to quell the

hysteria by saying there have only been a few sightings of the terrifying clowns.

On Monday, a woman who had just got out of her car in Chelles called the police, saying two clowns - one of whom was armed with a fake axe - had attacked her, a source said.

They escaped when a passer-by armed with a baseball bat tried to stop them, although one was later detained when police spotted him, white make-up still all over his face.

In a separate incident just half an hour afterwards, a dozen people wearing the smiling, white masks associated with the Anonymous hacktivist collective attacked three youths at a station in Melun, also in the Paris suburbs, stealing their mobile phones, the police source added.

The phenomenon of dressing up as an evil clown and terrifying passers-by - a trend which has also been seen in the United States and Britain - cropped up in the north of France in early October.

In the town of Bethune, a 19-year-old received a six-month suspended jail term last week for threatening passers-by while dressed as a clown.

These "clowns" have been "mostly spotted outside schools, but also on public roads, in bushes, in a square. Their targets are often young children or teenagers, but also adults," a police source in northern France told AFP.

And the phenomenon has spread to the south.

Police on Saturday night arrested 14 teenagers dressed as clowns and carrying weapons in the Mediterranean port town of Agde.

In the nearby city of Montpellier, a man disguised as a clown was arrested after beating up a pedestrian with an iron bar.

Theories abound as to the origin of the not-so-funny trend of violence in a country where Halloween has yet to take hold.

The suggestions include a challenge launched on social networks, a popular video on YouTube showing a terrifying clown pranking people or even a recent episode of the popular TV series American Horror Story featuring Twisty the killer clown.