

OUTCRY OVER HK'S EXTRADITION BILL

FROM A GRISLY MURDER TO MASS PROTESTS

It's been a long, strange road for Hong Kong's legislation in allowing extraditions with China. What started with a gruesome murder during a local couple's Valentine's Day holiday in Taiwan has become the latest flash point in the clash of values between Beijing and the West. Besides the legal aspect of the issue, many protesters who took part in yesterday's protests say they feel this is their last chance to protect the city's freedoms after years of slow strangulation by Beijing. Hong Kong's leaders say it is needed to plug loopholes and to stop the city being a sanctuary for fugitives. But the inclusion of China in the bill, whose justice system remains separate from Hong Kong's under a 1984 handover agreement with Britain, prompted hundreds of thousands of opponents to protest and attempt to stop the bill's passage. Here's how events unfolded:

FEBRUARY 2018: THE CRIME: A local teenager is killed while vacationing with her boyfriend in Taiwan. She's beaten, strangled, stuffed in a suitcase and ultimately discarded near a train station. The boyfriend, a Hong Kong resident, admits to the murder after returning home. But the authorities can't extradite him to the island to stand trial, and instead prosecute him for the lesser charge of money laundering.

FEB 12, 2019: PROPOSAL FLOATED: Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam's government proposes legal changes that would ease the transfer of criminal suspects between jurisdictions with which it lacks formal extradition agreements, including mainland China. The move triggers concern among activists, lawyers and the business community, where many warn that exposing Hong Kong residents to China's legal system could risk the city's autonomy and status as a financial hub.

MARCH 18: AMERICAN DELEGATION: A delegation of US lawmakers, including co-chairmen of the US-China Working Group, Representatives Darin LaHood, an Illinois Republican, and Rick Larsen, a Washington Democrat, visits and meets pro-democracy lawmakers. US Consul-General Kurt Tong says the Bill could have "some impact" on Hong Kong's special trading status.

MARCH 27: SCALED BACK: Hong Kong scales back the proposal, removing nine categories of financial crimes, including bankruptcy, securities and futures, and intellectual property. But the concessions do little to silence outcry: The law still covers offences including murder, polygamy and robbery, which are all eligible for at least a three-year jail sentence under existing laws.

APRIL 3: LEGISLATION SUBMITTED: The government introduces its proposed Bill to the Legislative Council, with the goal of passing the proposal before the session ends in July.

APRIL 8: CHINA VOICES SUPPORT: Zhang Xiaoming, the director of the Chinese office responsible for Hong Kong, backs the legislation, saying it will prevent the city from becoming a haven for fugitives. The Chinese Foreign Ministry also says it's necessary. The support comes after Britain, which handed the territory back to China in 1997, formally expresses its concerns to Hong Kong's government. Others, including the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, also air reservations.

APRIL 28: ON THE DEFENSIVE: Lam pledges to press ahead after some of the city's largest mass protests since the 2014 pro-democracy Occupy movement. Organisers say as many as 130,000 demonstrators marched to the Legislative Council building, many of them calling for Mrs Lam's resignation. Police, however, say less than 23,000 attended.

APRIL 29: SUSPECT SENTENCED: A Hong Kong court convicts the Valentine's Day murder suspect of money laundering and sentences him to 29 months in prison, but his potential early release in October fuels government calls to pass the extradition Bill.

MAY 17: POMPEO WEIGHS IN: US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo speaks out against the Bill, saying its passage would threaten Hong Kong's rule of law. He also meets pro-democracy advocates from Hong Kong for a discussion on the state of its autonomy and Beijing's efforts to extend its reach.

MAY 31: FURTHER AMENDMENTS: Hong Kong announces further amendments, saying it will raise the proposed extradition limit to crimes that carry a maximum sentence of seven years in prison. Raising that threshold removes other categories of crime from the proposed law, including criminal intimidation, giving firearms to unlicensed persons and some sexual crimes.

JUNE 9: MASS PROTEST: Hundreds of thousands of people march through central Hong Kong in opposition to the Bill, many chanting for Lam to step down. Organisers say more than one million people, out of a population of 7.5 million, turned out at the demonstration's peak, while police estimate the crowd to be 240,000.

JUNE 11: PRESSING AHEAD: The Legislative Council schedules debates, amid calls for further protests and unprecedented strikes. Lam, with a fresh statement of support from Beijing, says the Bill provides enough human rights protections and warns that delaying its passage could be more divisive. Opponents urge a general strike next Monday, days before the legislature plans to finish debate on June 20. SOURCE: AFP, BLOOMBERG



Protesters are hit by water cannon during a demonstration against a proposed extradition bill in Hong Kong, China, yesterday. Inset, Police arrest a man during the clashes. Violent clashes broke out in Hong Kong yesterday as police tried to stop protesters storming the city's parliament to protest against a planned bill to allow extraditions to China. PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

CYCLONE VAYU

India evacuates hundreds of thousands

India evacuated hundreds of thousands of people to shelters along the coast in its western state of Gujarat as a cyclone gathering intensity over the Arabian Sea was expected to hit land today. Weather officials said Cyclone Vayu, with wind speeds equivalent to those of a Category 1 hurricane, is set to cross the coast with sustained wind speeds of 145 kph to 155 kph, and could gust as high as 170 kph. The state government said it had begun moving about 300,000 people from the most vulnerable areas into shelters. The India Meteorological Department warned the cyclone could hold up the progress of annual monsoon rains. The monsoon was already about a week late in arriving at Kerala on the southern coast this year, and much of the country has broiled in a summer heatwave in recent weeks.

Japan moves to defuse row

PM Abe arrives in Tehran to mediate over US sanctions as Yemen rebels strike Saudi airport; 26 injured; coalition vows action

AGENCIES

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday landed in Tehran on a mission to ease tensions between the US and Iran, just hours after Iranian-backed rebels in Yemen launched an attack on an airport in Saudi Arabia, wounding 26 people.

Abe's trip is the highest-level effort yet to de-escalate the crisis as Tehran appears poised to break the 2015 nuclear deal it struck with world powers, an accord that the Trump administration pulled out of last year and imposed oil sanctions on Iran. It's also the first visit of a sitting Japanese premier in the 40 years since the Islamic Revolution.

But success may prove difficult for Abe, as the Houthi rebel attack on Saudi's Abha regional airport underscored. Separately, the front page of the Iranian daily Farheekhtegan, or Educated, published yesterday morning a picture of a mushroom cloud from a nuclear blast — a reference to America's bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II.

"How Can You Trust A War Criminal, Mr. Abe?" the newspaper asked in dual English and Farsi headlines. Hard-line news outlets in Iran immediately picked up the front page from the paper, published by students of Islamic Azad University, which has campuses across the nation.

Abe's plane landed at Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport yesterday afternoon where he was greeted by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. He later met Iranian President Hassan Rouhani at the Sadabad presidential palace where they began a closed-door meeting. He is expected to meet Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei this morning.

Abe landed just hours after the attack in Abha. The Yemeni rebels, known as Houthis, said they launched a cruise missile at the Saudi airport while the kingdom said 26 people were hurt, reported AP.

The rebels' Al-Masirah satellite news channel said the missile hit its intended target, halting air traffic at the airport in the town of Abha in the kingdom's southwest, some 165 kilometres (100 miles) from the Saudi-Yemen border.

Saudi coalition spokesman Turki al-Maliki was quoted on the state-run Al-Ekhabiriya news channel as saying three women and two children were among those hurt and that eight people were hospitalized while 18 suffered minor injuries.

Malki also said the coalition would "take stern action" to deter the rebels and protect civilians, reported AFP.

Iran is threatening to resume enriching uranium closer to weapons-grade level on July 7 if European allies fail to offer new terms for the nuclear deal.

US-IRAN TENSIONS



Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei (left) and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (right) shake hands after a meeting in Tehran, Iran, on Tuesday. The Japanese leader is in the city on a mission to ease tensions between the US and Iran, just hours after Iranian-backed rebels in Yemen launched an attack on an airport in Saudi Arabia, wounding 26 people.

Sudan strike ends

Military, opposition groups agree to resume talks; UNSC strongly condemns violence

AFP, Khartoum

Shops began to reopen in Sudan's capital yesterday after demonstrators called off a nationwide civil disobedience campaign and agreed to new talks, though many residents remained indoors following last week's deadly crackdown.

The breakthrough in the standoff between the military rulers who toppled veteran leader Omar al-Bashir and protesters demanding civilian rule followed mediation led by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

The United Nations Security Council condemned violence and called on the generals and protest leaders to resolve the crisis triggered by the June 3 crackdown on a sit-in outside the military headquarters in Khartoum that killed dozens.

Global diplomatic efforts to resolve the standoff were expected to get a boost from a visit by a top US official who was due to meet with the two sides.

The slow return to normalcy came after an Ethiopian envoy of Abiy announced that the protest leaders and the ruling military council had agreed to resume talks and that a three-day civil disobedience campaign was ending.

The negotiations collapsed last month because the two sides disagreed about whether a civilian or soldier should head a new governing body.

Yesterday morning, an AFP correspondent who toured parts of the capital saw buses waiting for passengers at their stations, while shops in some districts opened.

The main gold market in central Khartoum remained shut, and many residents still preferred to remain indoors given the heavy deployment of security forces across the capital.



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) activists shelter on the back of a truck as police use a water canon to disperse demonstrators following clashes during a BJP rally in Kolkata yesterday, to protest against the recent killings of BJP workers. Inset, BJP workers affected by tear gas lie on the ground. At least 15 people have died in the political violence involving the BJP and the regional Trinamool Congress since election results were announced on May 23, police say.

KASHMIR SHOOTOUT

Five soldiers, one militant killed

NDTV ONLINE

Five Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel have been killed and two have sustained injuries after their patrol team was attacked by terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district yesterday. A police inspector and a civilian have also been injured in the firing.

According to the reports, out of the two terrorists who attacked the team, one has been killed by security forces while another is believed to have escaped.

The incident took place at KP Road in Anantnag. The terrorists fired at the team with automatic rifles and hurled grenades, news agency PTI reported.

Station House Officer of Anantnag Police Station, Arshad Ahmed, was injured in the attack and has been shifted to Srinagar for treatment, the agency added.

The attack comes as the state administration is preparing for the annual Amarnath Yatra that would begin next month. The 46-day pilgrimage is scheduled to start from two routes, one of which passes from Anantnag.

Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti has condemned the attack.

"Strongly condemn the barbarous attack on security personnel in Anantnag. My heart goes out to families of our martyred CRPF personnel. Prayers for speedy recovery of those injured," she tweeted.

Heatwave toll hits 36 in India

REUTERS, Mumbai/Chennai

A heatwave gripping India has killed 36 people with the poorest workers bearing the brunt, national disaster management officials said yesterday, warning that the record temperatures were impacting more states than in previous years.

India's capital Delhi recorded its highest-ever temperature of 48 degrees Celsius (118 Fahrenheit) on Tuesday, while Churu in the northwestern state of Rajasthan, temperatures reached as high as 51C.

"This is the worst heatwave ever. In 2015, the heatwave was recorded in nine states, this year the forecast is 23," said Anup Kumar Srivastava, drought and heatwave expert at the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

'I'm done with him'

Says Pelosi on Trump insults; House approves faster court enforcement of Trump admin subpoenas

AGENCIES

US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Tuesday she's "done" with talking about President Donald Trump and called him the "diverter in chief," saying he manufactured controversies to distract attention from more important issues.

"I'm done with him. I don't even want to talk about him," Pelosi, a Democrat, said at a Washington conference in reply to a question about Trump's latest barrage of personal insults.

Last week Trump called Pelosi, the most powerful US Democrat, "a disgrace ... a nasty, vindictive, horrible person."

At a US war cemetery in France, with the gravestones of fallen soldiers in the background, Trump said in a Fox News interview, "I call her Nervous Nancy ... Nancy Pelosi's a disaster, okay. She's a disaster."

Asked at the conference how she works with Republican Trump when he throws such insults her way, Pelosi said: "I just consider the source. My stock goes up every time he attacks me, so what can I say, but let's not spend too much time on that because that's his victory, the diverter-in-chief, the diverter-of-attention-in-chief."

For part of Trump's presidency, he generally refrained from trash-talking Pelosi as he does many others, but that ended in recent weeks as Democrats intensified their investigations of the president and discussed possibly impeaching him.

Pelosi declined to confirm recent media reports that she had told fellow Democrats that Trump should be in prison, rather than impeached, because of his behavior as outlined in US Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report on Russian interference in the 2016 election and Trump's efforts to impede that probe.

Meanwhile, Congressional Democrats on Tuesday rammed through a resolution that makes it easier to take legal recourse against Donald Trump's administration, intensifying their standoff with the president over subpoenas related to the Russia interference probe, reported AFP.

The Democratic-led House of Representatives voted along party lines to adopt what they are calling a "civil enforcement resolution."

It would allow them to bypass full House votes and more directly pursue cases in the courts, where the party has scored some victories against Trump.



Boris Johnson launches UK leadership bid

Boris Johnson launches his campaign yesterday to replace Theresa May as Britain's next leader, as lawmakers moved to stop her and other hardliners from delivering a "no deal" Brexit. The former foreign secretary is the favourite among 10 candidates to succeed May, who quit after failing to take Britain out of the European Union on schedule. Johnson, a leading figure in the 2016 referendum vote to leave, has said he will deliver on the result with or without a deal with Brussels. Meanwhile, the European Commission yesterday warned that Britain will have to pay its outstanding share of the existing EU budget even if it leaves the union without a withdrawal agreement.

Encephalitis from litchi kills 31 children in India

At least 31 children have died in northern India in the last 10 days from a deadly brain disease believed linked to a toxic substance found in lychee fruit, health officials said yesterday. The deaths were reported from two hospitals in Bihar state's Muzaffarpur district, famed for its lush lychee orchards, officials said. The children all showed symptoms of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES), senior health official Ashok Kumar Singh told AFP, adding most had suffered a sudden loss of glucose in their blood. At least 40 other children complaining of similar symptoms were being treated at intensive care units. The outbreaks of the disease have happened annually during summer months in Muzaffarpur and neighbouring districts since 1995, typically coinciding with the litchi season.

Ebola kills 1 in Uganda as virus spreads from DRC

A five-year-old boy who tested positive for Ebola in Uganda has died, a health ministry official told AFP yesterday as two of his family members also tested positive for the virus after a visit to neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. The World Health Organisation confirmed on Twitter that Uganda has now recorded three cases of Ebola, in the first spread across the country's porous western border with the DRC where more than 2,000 cases of the highly contagious virus have been registered. Uganda has experienced several outbreaks in the past, most recently in 2012, while in 2000 more than 200 people died in an outbreak in the north of the country. SOURCE: AFP