



(From left, clockwise) Police fire tear gas at protesters near the government headquarters in Hong Kong early yesterday; police stand outside the Legislative Council building in Hong Kong after clashes; and a graffiti is seen inside the Legislative Council building.

Trump calls Afghanistan 'Harvard of terrorists'

President Donald Trump says he wants to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan but will leave a strong intelligence presence, branding the country the "Harvard of terrorists" in an interview broadcast Monday. "We will be leaving very strong intelligence, far more than you would normally think," Trump said told the Fox News Channel's "Tucker Carlson Tonight." "It just seems to be a lab for terrorists... I call it the Harvard of terrorists," he said. "I've wanted to pull them out," Trump said of US troops who have been fighting in the country since 2001. But he said he hesitates due what he described as advice from the military that it is preferable to fight militants there than at home.

Last month hottest June on record: data

Last month was the hottest June ever recorded with soaring temperatures worldwide capped off by a record-breaking heatwave across Western Europe, satellite data showed yesterday. Global readings taken by the EU-ran Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) showed European temperatures were around 2C hotter than normal, and globally Earth was 0.1C hotter than the previous June record. The heatwave last week was so intense that temperatures were as much as 10C higher than normal across France, Germany, northern Spain and Italy.



Antarctic sea ice in dizzying decline since 2014: study

After mysteriously expanding for decades, Antarctica's sea ice cover melted by an area four times greater than France in just a few years and now stands at a record low, according to a study published Monday. Scientists already knew Antarctica was thawing at an increasing rate because of accelerating discharge from glaciers. But between 1979 and 2014, they observed a phenomenon that was both intriguing and reassuring: the sea ice cover was expanding. From 2014 to 2017, however, the Antarctic's sea ice cover receded to two million square kilometers from a peak area of 12.8 million square kilometers. The reason behind the this remain unknown.

China demands criminal probe

Condemns violent protests as 'undisguised challenge' to its rule

AGENCIES

Hong Kong yesterday grappled with the aftermath of a night of unprecedented anti-government protests which saw parliament ransacked, as Beijing called for a criminal probe into the unparalleled challenge to its authority.

The semi-autonomous financial hub has been thrown into crisis by weeks of demonstrations over a bill that would allow extraditions to the Chinese mainland, with the issue becoming a lightning rod for resentment towards Beijing.

On Monday -- the 22nd anniversary of the city's handover to China -- anger spilled over as groups of mostly young, hardline protesters, breached the legislative council.

They hung the city's colonial-era flag in the debating chamber, scrawled messages such as "Hong Kong is not China" on walls, and defaced the city's seal with spray-paint.

Police charged into the building shortly after midnight to retake control.

The events pose an unprecedented challenge to Chinese leader Xi Jinping, and yesterday, Beijing wasted no time in asking Hong Kong to investigate the "criminal responsibility of violent offenders" for "serious illegal actions".

It also slammed Donald Trump for interfering in the city's affairs, after the US president said that protesters are "looking for democracy" but "some governments don't want democracy" -- an apparent swipe at Beijing.

Hong Kong has been rocked by massive protests over the past three weeks. The rallies -- including a

while workers swept surrounding areas littered with shattered glass, broken umbrellas and hard hats.

Under the terms of the 1997 handover from British to Chinese rule, Hong Kong enjoys rights and liberties unseen on the mainland. But protesters accuse Beijing of renegeing on that deal with the help of unelected leaders.

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt warned China of "serious consequences" if it breaches that bilateral handover agreement, but did not offer any details.

Chinese state media have dismissed the protests as "mob violence". "A zero-tolerance policy is the only remedy for such destructive behaviour", the Global Times daily wrote in an editorial.

"[The violence] is an undisguised challenge to the bottom line of 'one country, two systems', Xinhua news agency quoted a Hong Kong affairs office spokesman as saying.

Analysts said the chaotic scenes showing demonstrators tearing down portraits and spraying graffiti signalled a dangerous turn.

"The gestures were meant to provoke the Chinese authorities", said political analyst Joseph Cheng.

"They are gestures of defiance rather than a genuine political action," he said, warning they would likely "be seized upon by Beijing and by the Carrie Lam administration as justification for a crackdown".

RANSACKING OF HONG KONG PARLIAMENT
UK warns Beijing of serious consequences if Sino-British declaration not honoured
China slams comment from Trump; analysts say protesters' hard line may backfire

huge pro-democracy march on Monday -- have been largely peaceful while calling on the city's Beijing-appointed chief executive Carrie Lam to resign.

But they have failed to win concessions, with Lam refusing to permanently shelve the extradition law or step down, and by Monday some hardline protesters appeared to have reached breaking point, and stormed the legislature.

The legislature was closed yesterday, as police collected evidence from the debris-strewn building,

NEWS IN brief

Nigeria fuel truck fire kills at least 50

REUTERS, Abuja

At least 50 people were killed in Nigeria when fuel from a crashed truck that they were siphoning up caught fire, a spokesman for the governor in central Benue state said yesterday. "A tanker loaded with fuel fell yesterday (Monday) and people were scooping its products when it caught fire, killing over 50 persons," the spokesman said. Others were badly injured and taken to hospital.

Gunmen kill 18 in Niger camp attack

AFP, Niamey

Eighteen soldiers were killed when "terrorists" struck an army camp in western Niger, the government said yesterday, adding the US and France had provided air support to help repel the assault. The attack took place on Monday afternoon at a camp at Inates on the border with Mali, the defence ministry said in a statement. Four soldiers were listed as missing.

9 hurt in Yemen rebel attack on Saudi airport

AFP, Riyadh

A Yemeni rebel attack on a civilian airport in southern Saudi Arabia wounded nine civilians yesterday, a Riyadh-led coalition said, the latest in a series of strikes on the site. "The terrorist attack on Abha airport... led to the injury of nine civilians, including eight Saudi citizens and one carrying an Indian passport," the military coalition said in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.



Members of the Brexit Party turn their back to the assembly as the European anthem is played during the first plenary session of the newly elected European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, yesterday.

EASTER ATTACKS FAILURES

Sri Lanka police chief arrested

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan police yesterday arrested their top commander and a former defence chief over alleged failures to prevent the Easter Sunday bombings that killed 258 people, spokesman Ruwan Gunasekera said.

The arrests came a day after the chief state prosecutor said the alleged negligence of the two senior officials amounted to "grave crimes against humanity", and they should also face murder charges.

Pujith Jayasundara is the most senior police official to be arrested in the 152-year history of the force, which was established by British colonial rulers in 1867.

Both Jayasundara and former defence secretary Hemasiri Fernando were undergoing treatment at two separate hospitals when they were taken into custody by plain-clothed officers of the Criminal Investigations Department, Gunasekera said. They will remain in hospital, but detectives will formally report their arrest to a magistrate to decide what further action should be taken.

Attorney General Dappula de Livera, the chief state prosecutor, said Monday that the two men failed to act on advance warnings of the deadly Easter Sunday attacks, which were blamed on a local jihadi group.

They should be brought before a magistrate for their "criminal negligence" de Livera said in a letter to the acting police chief Chandana Wickramaratne.



Ease sanctions in 'timely' fashion

Xi urged Trump during talks on N Korea

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping urged US President Donald Trump to "show flexibility" towards North Korea, including the "timely" easing of sanctions, at the G20 summit last week, China's foreign minister said yesterday.

Xi visited North Korea prior to meeting Trump at the G20 in Japan on Saturday, and analysts had said the Chinese leader could use the trip as leverage in his trade war talks with the US leader.

Trump met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un the next day at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) dividing North and South Korea.

China and North Korea have worked to improve relations in the past year after they deteriorated as Beijing backed a series of UN sanctions against its Cold War-era ally over its nuclear activities.

A week before the G20 summit in Osaka, Xi became the first Chinese leader to visit North Korea in 14 years in a trip analysts said was meant to showcase China's influence over the North prior to trade talks with the US.

Crisis in Congress deepens

Senior leaders fail to change Rahul's decision to quit as party president

REUTERS, New Delhi

Rahul Gandhi has spurned appeals to reconsider his resignation as leader of India's Congress Party after losing a second general election to BJP an aide said yesterday, as the party faces its worst crisis in a decade.

Stuck between a leader determined to quit and party officials unwilling to accept his leaving, Congress is effectively leaderless more than a month after its election drubbing and facing key state polls later this year.

Chief ministers from five Congress-ruled states went to New Delhi on Monday where they spent two hours trying to convince Gandhi to reverse his May 25 decision to resign.

"We told him our point of view, openly, in a long conversation," Ashok Gehlot, a senior Congress leader and chief minister of western Rajasthan state, told reporters.

"We hope he will consider our view and take the right decision," he said.

A close aide to Gandhi, speaking to Reuters after the meeting, said the 49-year-old was firm about stepping aside as Congress president, a position he held since succeeding his mother, Sonia Gandhi, in late 2017.

"He will never change his mind," the aide said, requesting anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media. "He feels that the way forward is not him continuing

as Congress president ... and let somebody outside the Gandhi family be Congress president," the aide said, adding the party cannot "just depend on one person, one family".

Gandhi will remain in politics to help rebuild Congress from the ground up, the aide said, rather than stay on as leader due to his family's political lineage.

The Nehru-Gandhi family has dominated the party, and through it Indian politics for decades, producing three prime ministers, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi have accused Congress of promoting "dynasty" politics.

The Modi-led BJP has trounced Congress in two successive general elections, winning 303 out of 542 parliament seats in 2019.

Despite the defeats, Congress officials say they want Gandhi to stay because they fear the party may splinter without him.

"There is nobody else aside from him who can keep the organisation together," said a member of the party's top decision-making body, the Congress Working Committee (CWC), who requested anonymity.

"He will have to lead. There's no option," he said. Congress does not have a clear succession plan. While the CWC has not begun the official process of finding the next leader, 68-year-old Gehlot is among the potential frontrunners, according to three other party officials.



CENSORSHIP FEARS IN PAKISTAN

Shock as former president's TV interview taken off air

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's largest private broadcaster abruptly took an interview with former president Asif Ali Zardari off air shortly after it began, deepening fears of increasing censorship in a country already among the most dangerous in the world for media.

Geo News did not give a reason for why it cut the interview -- mere minutes after it started -- with Zardari, who is also the widower of assassinated former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

There have been accusations in recent years of the country's powerful military putting pressure on the media to stop coverage critical of its policies -- allegations it denies. Zardari and his Pakistan Peoples Party

(PPP) have a tense relationship with the military, and he is currently facing corruption charges as part of a wider crackdown.

Hamid Mir, the interviewer, complained on Twitter about increasing censorship in Pakistan after the show was taken off the air on Monday night.

"Those who stopped it (the interview) have no courage to accept publically that they stopped it," he tweeted.

He apologised to viewers, adding: "it's easy to understand who stopped it? We are not living in a free country."

Mir made international headlines in 2014 after surviving multiple gunshot wounds in an attack he blamed on the shadowy Inter Services Intelligence agency (ISI), Pakistan's top spy organisation.

