

ANTI-BEIJING PROTESTS IN HONG KONG

China slams UK FM for colonial fantasy

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday said it lodged an official protest with London over remarks by British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt about Hong Kong, accusing him of "fantasising in the faded glory of British colonialism".

It is the second day in a row Beijing has hit back at Hunt for remarks he made about the unprecedented anti-Beijing protests that have rocked the former British colony.

Under the terms of the 1997 handover deal 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 un-elected leaders.

While recognising that Hong Kong is part of China, Hunt on Tuesday warned of "serious consequences" if Beijing breaches the "legally binding agreement".

The comment infuriated Beijing, which had already scolded Hunt for a "gross interference" when he voiced support for the protesters.

"He seems to be fantasising in the faded glory of British colonialism and in the bad habit of gesticulating while looking down on other countries' affairs," foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a regular briefing.

"I need to re-emphasise that Hong Kong has now returned to its motherland," Geng said.

"The rights and obligations related to the British side under the declaration have all been fully implemented." He said China had made "stern representations" with Britain -- the term for an official protest.

"The UK at every turn considers itself as a guardian which is nothing but a delusion," Geng said.



Migrants carry the remains of their belongings from rubble at a detention centre for mainly African migrants that was hit by an airstrike in the Tajoura suburb of the Libyan capital of Tripoli, Libya, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN brief

200 corpses found in Syria mass grave

AFP, Beirut

Two hundred corpses, including those of people believed to have been executed by the Islamic State group, were found near the Syrian city of Raqa, a local official and a war monitor said yesterday. The mass grave contained the bodies of five middle-aged men in orange jumpsuits of the kind typically worn by IS hostages. Yasser al-Khamees and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. "They were shackled and shot in the head," said Khamees, who heads a team of first responders.

8 dead as dam bursts in India after rains

AFP, Mumbai

Eight people were killed and at least 15 were missing yesterday after the heaviest monsoon rains in a decade breached a dam in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, authorities said. In the state capital Mumbai, the death toll from a wall collapse in a slum on Tuesday following the torrential downpour reached 24, with more rain expected in coming days. Heavy rain continued to lash the coastal city of 20 million people yesterday, bringing it to a virtual standstill as flooding cut train lines, closed the airport's main runway.

Myanmar court drops case against journalist

AFP, Yangon

A prominent Myanmar journalist accused of defaming a hardline nationalist monk dubbed the "Buddhist Bin Laden" has had the case against him dropped, his lawyer said. Myanmar Now editor Swe Win had been on trial for two years after posting an article on Facebook criticising the preacher abbot Wirathu. The monk is notorious for spewing Islamophobic vitriol, in particular against the Rohingya minority, and is now himself on-the-run from the law.

Iran ignores world warnings

Rouhani says his country will boost uranium enrichment level from July 7 'as much as we need' amid tensions

AFP, Tehran

Iran ignored US and EU warnings yesterday and announced it will exceed the maximum enrichment level it agreed for uranium within days in response to the failure of the other parties to a 2015 nuclear deal to provide it with promised relief from sanctions.

Iran is acting on its May 8 threat to suspend parts of the agreement in response to US President Donald Trump's reimposition of crippling sanctions after withdrawing from it in May last year.

"On July 7, our enrichment level will no longer be 3.67 percent. We will put aside this commitment. We will increase (the enrichment level) beyond 3.67 percent to as much as we want, as much as is necessary, as much as we need," Rouhani said during a cabinet meeting.

The enrichment maximum set in the agreement is sufficient for power generation but far below the more than 90 percent level required for a nuclear warhead.

Rouhani stressed that Iran's action would be reversed if the other parties to the nuclear deal made good on their side of the bargain -- relief from sanctions.

Rouhani said Iran will also deliver on its threat to resume construction of a heavy water reactor after July 7 and will bring it to the condition that



"according to you, is dangerous and can produce plutonium."

He added the measures can be reversed in "hours" if the other parties "live up to their commitments."

US President Donald Trump warned Monday that Iran is "playing with fire" after Tehran said it had exceeded the limit set on its enriched

uranium stockpile.

Rouhani said it was the US that started the fire and Washington has to "put it out" by returning to the nuclear deal.

Israel urged European states to slap sanctions on Iran for abandoning its nuclear commitments.

Russia voiced regret but said the move was a consequence of US pressure, which has pushed the deal towards collapse. The diplomatic chiefs of Britain, France, Germany and the EU said they were "extremely concerned" and urged Iran to reverse its decision.

Europe has sought to save the nuclear deal by setting up a payment mechanism known as INSTEX which is meant to help Iran skirt the US sanctions. Rouhani dismissed the mechanism as "hollow", saying it was useless to Iran because it failed to provide for financing of purchases of Iranian oil.

He took issue with the EU for calling on Iran to stay committed to the deal, saying the deal "is either good or bad. If it's good, everyone should stay committed to it," not just Iran.

LIBYA MIGRANT CENTRE

Outcry as dozens killed in air strike; 130 injured

Haftar forces blamed; UN calls for war crime probe

AFP, Tripoli

International condemnation mounted yesterday after more than 40 migrants were killed in an air strike on a detention centre in Libya that the UN-recognised government blamed on rival strongman Khalifa Haftar.

The UN envoy to the North African nation said the raid was a possible war crime, while the European Union denounced the "horrific" attack.

Bodies were strewn on the floor of the hangar in a Tripoli suburb, mixed with the belongings and blood-soaked clothes of migrants, an AFP photographer said.

Tuesday night's strike left a hole around three metres (10 feet) in diameter at the centre of the hangar, surrounded by debris ripped from the metal structure by the force of the blast.

At least 44 people were killed and more than 130 severely injured, the UN said.

"This attack clearly could constitute a

war crime, as it killed by surprise innocent people whose dire conditions forced them to be in that shelter," UN envoy to Libya Ghassan Salame said.

He called for the international community to punish those who ordered, carried out and provided arms for the strike, noting it was the second time the facility has been attacked.

An emergency services spokesman Osama Ali told AFP 120 migrants were detained in the hangar which was directly hit by the strike.

In a statement, the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli denounced the attack as a "heinous crime" and blamed it on the "war criminal Khalifa Haftar".

Turkey, which backs the GNA, called for an international probe into what it called a "crime against humanity". The European Union called on the UN to launch an investigation.

TORRENTIAL RAINS IN JAPAN

More than 1m people ordered to evacuate

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan ordered more than one million people on the southernmost island of Kyushu to take shelter in evacuation centres and other safe areas yesterday as heavy rains triggered small landslides and threatened to cause widespread flooding.

Some parts of southern Kyushu have received over 1,000 mm (39.4 inches) of rain since Friday, about as much as usually falls in the whole month of July, broadcaster NHK said.

Forecasters expect as much as 300 mm more rainfall in some areas by yesterday evening.

Evacuation orders were issued for 1.1 million residents of Kagoshima and Miyazaki prefectures at the southern tip of Kyushu, NHK said. Some 930,000 more were advised to leave.

Only some 3,500 people had evacuated as of 4:00 pm, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

"I live alone next to a river, and it's scary to think of water rising," one woman in an evacuation centre told NHK. Another person said the volume of rainfall was "terrible".

Television footage showed rivers filled with fast-moving brown water, but none had overflowed their banks as of yesterday evening, although one low dike had broken and efforts were being made to repair it with sandbags.



Hundreds fall sick at Imelda Marcos party

Over 200 guests fell ill with suspected food poisoning yesterday after a meal at a birthday party for 90-year-old Imelda Marcos, the notorious former first lady of the Philippines. Ambulances rushed vomiting friends and supporters from a sports stadium in Manila where around 2,500 people gathered to honour the widow of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Although Marcos was chased from power by a 1986 peaceful uprising, the family is still revered by many in the Philippines and has made a political comeback in recent years. "Our ambulances took people to hospital after they complained of dizziness and vomiting," Philippine Red Cross chairman Richard Gordon told AFP.

Russia's Putin formally suspends INF treaty

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday signed into law a bill on the suspension of a crucial arms control treaty signed by US president Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty that limited medium-range missiles was concluded by Russia and the United States in 1987. Moscow suspended participation in the INF treaty in March after US President Donald Trump's White House announced it would ditch the agreement for alleged Russian violations of the terms. Yesterday, Putin formalised the suspension by signing the bill which says the decision to resume the agreement is to be made by the Russian president.

Trump admin abandons controversial census change

President Donald Trump's government on Tuesday gave up a controversial attempt to put a question about citizenship on next year's census, handing a victory to those who argued the new item would lead to discrimination against minority residents. The decision followed a Supreme Court ruling that the case for adding the citizenship question was not convincing. Trump's initial reaction to the ruling had been to call for a delay in the imminent printing of the 2020 census forms, holding up the census in order to allow time for a new appeal. That bid has now been dropped, ending any chance of changing the format of the massive, once-every-decade survey.

SOURCE: AFP

'Help, 40 days here'

US govt watchdog finds migrants crammed into Texas border facilities with no access to hot meals

REUTERS, Washington

Government investigators warned of dangerous overcrowding at more migrant facilities on the southwest US border, publishing photos on Tuesday of packed cells in Texas' Rio Grande Valley where some children have no access to showers or hot meals.

A report issued by investigators for the Department of Homeland Security said supervisors raised concerns for the health and safety of detainees and agents, warning that the overcrowding represented a "ticking time bomb."

The DHS watchdog issued the report after June visits to five US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency facilities in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) sector, the busiest area of the border for migrant arrests.

It came as President Donald Trump's administration pushed back against criticism of its migrant detention centers on the US-Mexico border.

Conditions at the centers have been a flashpoint

since May when the watchdog warned of similar conditions at facilities in the El Paso, Texas sector, west of the Rio Grande Valley, with migrants held for weeks instead of days, and adults kept in cells with standing room only.

Security incidents among men at RGV facilities included detainees clogging toilets in order to be released from cells, migrants refusing to return to cells, and special operations teams brought in to show that Border Patrol was prepared to use force, the report on Tuesday said.

Migrants banged on cell windows and shouted when investigators visited. Most single adults had not had a shower despite several being

held as long as a month. One photo showed a man in a cell with 88 men, that was built to hold 41, holding a message reading: "Help 40 Day(s) Here." The watchdog's report recommended CBP accelerate transfer of single adults to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the agency responsible for long-term migrant detention.



Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali shakes hands with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi as he arrives for a meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW

China missile test 'disturbing': US

REUTERS, Washington

The Pentagon said on Tuesday a recent Chinese missile launch in the disputed South China Sea was "disturbing" and contrary to Chinese pledges that it would not militarize the disputed waterway.

The South China Sea is one of a growing number of flashpoints in the US-China relationship, which include a trade war, US sanctions and Taiwan.

China and the United States have repeatedly traded barbs in the past over what Washington says is Beijing's militarization of the South China Sea by building military installations on artificial islands and reefs.

A US official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said China tested multiple anti-ship ballistic missiles over the weekend.

"Of course the Pentagon was aware of the Chinese missile launch from the man-made structures in the South China Sea near the Spratly Islands," Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Dave Eastburn said.

"I'm not going to speak on behalf of all the sovereign nations in the region, but I'm sure they agree that the PRC's behavior is contrary to its claim to want to bring peace to the region and obviously actions like this are coercive acts meant to intimidate other (South China Sea) claimants," Eastburn added. PRC is an acronym for the People's Republic of China.



EU elects new parliament president

AFP, Strasbourg

The European Parliament yesterday elected an Italian social democrat as its new president, filling the final top EU job a day after Brussels named two women to key posts for the first time.

Italy's David Sassoli, a 63-year-old former journalist, won the absolute majority of ballots he needed at the second round of voting, seeing off German Green Ska Keller, far-left Spaniard Sira Rego and Czech conservative Jan Zahradil.

The new MEPs elected in May's European polls took office on Tuesday during a brief inaugural session before voting by secret ballot to choose Sassoli as successor to Antonio Tajani, a conservative from Italy.

The 751-seat parliament is more fragmented than ever after the May election saw solid gains by the liberals and Greens as well as the far-right and eurosceptics.

The vote for president completes the roster of the EU's five most important jobs, with the others settled on Tuesday at the end of three days of negotiation among the EU's 28 national leaders in Brussels.

Sassoli's election to a two-and-a-half year term as parliament president -- effectively the speaker of the chamber -- is a sought-after post by the major European political families, though less coveted than that of president of the European Commission or European Central Bank.