

FLASHMOB PROTESTS, CLASHES

HK police make dozens of arrests

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong pro-democracy activists and riot police clashed in chaotic scenes around the city yesterday with police in full riot gear chasing protesters through crowds of horrified lunchtime shoppers.

Several rallies in shopping mall started peacefully around midday with a few hundred people at each chanting slogans such as "Free Hong Kong", but by late afternoon hardcore black-clad activists trashed shops and metro stations and erected road blocks around the city.

Police made dozens of arrests and deployed tear gas to disperse protesters, saying they used "minimum force". Television footage showed shoppers screaming and some injured when police charged inside a mall.

The young protesters, many wearing face masks to shield their identity, were often supported by shoppers.

In one mall a group of riot police, shields out front and pepper spray canisters in, hand were forced to retreat backwards by chanting shoppers until they were outside of the mall.

In another incident, a group of 50 shoppers inside a mall faced off against riot police outside, chanting "Hong Kong police mafia". The shoppers cheered when police drove off.

Hong Kong's police, once praised as "Asia's finest", have been accused of using excessive force in dealing with protesters and have lost the confidence and respect of many Hong Kongers.

"Hong Kong used to be a prosperous city and now she has become a police state. Hong Kong is my home. We should protect her. We should resist," said a 70-year-old who only gave his last name, Hui.



An elderly woman is evacuated from a building in Akcakale, a town near the Turkish border with Syria yesterday, after it was hit by a rocket reported to be fired from within Syria. *Inset, A Turkish-backed Syrian fighter fires during clashes in the border town of Ras al-Ain as Turkey and its allies continue their assault on Kurdish-held border towns in northeastern Syria.*

PHOTO: AFP



NEWSIN brief

16 killed in Burkina Faso mosque attack

AFP, Ouagadougou

Armed men stormed a mosque in the volatile north of Burkina Faso as worshippers were at prayer, killing 16 people and sending residents fleeing, security sources and locals said Saturday. The attack on the Grand Mosque in the town of Salmossi on Friday evening underscores the difficulties faced by the country in its battle against jihadists. One source said 13 people died on the spot and three succumbed to their injuries later. Two of the wounded are in critical condition.

Ecuador president orders curfew in Quito

AFP, Quito

Ecuador President Lenin Moreno on Saturday ordered the capital Quito and surrounding areas placed under curfew and military control, as an 11th day of deadly protests against government austerity measures roiled the city. The order would "facilitate the work of public forces against intolerable outbreaks of violence," he announced on Twitter, as clouds of smoke hung over the city. Demonstrators on Saturday ransacked and set fire to the building housing the comptroller general's office.

Tunisians vote in presidential runoff

AFP, Tunis

Tunisians voted yesterday in a presidential runoff pitting a conservative academic against a media magnate fresh out of jail, reflecting a shift in the country's post-revolution political landscape. The political newcomers swept aside the old guard in the first round, highlighting voter anger over a stagnant economy, high unemployment and poor public services in the cradle of the Arab Spring. The vote, Tunisia's second free presidential election since the 2011 revolt, follows the death of president Beji Caid Essebsi in July.

China boosts Nepal ties

Xi, Oli sign deals for rail, tunnel linking Tibet, Kathmandu

AGENCIES

Chinese President Xi Jinping wound up two days of meetings in Nepal yesterday with separate deals for a rail link to Tibet and a tunnel, an official said, as the Himalayan nation seeks to end an Indian dominance over its trade routes by increasing connectivity with Beijing.

The 70-km (42-mile) rail link will connect Gyiron in Tibet with Nepal's capital city of Kathmandu, making it one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects in the country.

A Chinese team has already conducted a preliminary study for the project, which will be part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, Xi's signature diplomatic and trade push that is attempting to recreate the old Silk Road joining China with Asia and Europe.

Alongside, a proposed 28-km (17 mile) road tunnel will more than halve the distance from Kathmandu to the Chinese border, saving on time and cost.

"China will now conduct a feasibility study of the rail project and help construct the tunnel way," Rajeshor Gyawali, a spokesman for Nepal's Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, told Reuters.

Nepal has sought to increase connectivity with China since a blockade along its border with India resulted in several months of acute shortage of fuel and medicine in 2015 and 2016.

"These facilities will give us alternative trade routes when we face border blockades," Gyawali said.

China and India jostle for influence over Nepal, the natural buffer between them, and are investing in infrastructure. India accounts for nearly two thirds of Nepal's trade and is the sole supplier of fuel.

Officials from both sides also signed 20 deals covering trade, water supply and traditional medicines at the end of Xi's visit, the first by a Chinese president in 22 years.

During talks with Nepal's Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli yesterday, Xi warned that any attempt to divide China will be crushed, as Beijing faces political challenges in months-long protests in Hong Kong and US criticism over its treatment of Muslim minority groups. "And any external forces backing such attempts dividing the Chinese people as pipe-dreaming!" he was quoted as saying.

Oli told Xi that the country would oppose any "anti-China activities" on its soil, CCTV reported.

At a dinner on Saturday, Xi said, "We will help Nepal realise its dream of becoming a land-linked country from a land-locked one."

Xi arrived in Nepal from India where he had informal meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Pak PM arrives in Iran to defuse tensions in Gulf

AFP, Tehran

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan yesterday visited Iran on a mission to act as a "facilitator" between Tehran and Riyadh and try to defuse rising tensions in the Gulf.

Khan landed in Tehran around midday and met with President Hassan Rouhani at the presidential palace.

He was also scheduled to hold talks with Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, before travelling to Riyadh on Tuesday.

"The reason for this trip is that we do not want a conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran," Khan told reporters as he stood alongside Rouhani.

"Whatever it takes we must never allow this conflict to take place, because we know, Mr. President, that there is a vested interest that wants this to take place," he told Rouhani.

Noting that it was a "complex" issue that can be resolved through talks, Khan warned

that any conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia would "cause poverty in the world".

Pakistan has strong relations with Saudi Arabia, with more than 2.5 million of its nationals living and working in the kingdom, but it also maintains good relations with Iran and represents Tehran's consular interests in the United States.

This is Khan's second visit this year to Iran, which shares a border of about 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) with Pakistan.

Emphasising that the visits to Tehran and Riyadh were Pakistan's "initiative", Khan said he was also approached by US President Donald Trump to "facilitate some sort of dialogue between Iran and the United States".

Tehran and Washington have been at loggerheads since the US withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal in May last year and reimposed sanctions on the Islamic republic.



Algerian protesters face riot policemen during a protest near the parliament building in Algiers yesterday against military's role in politics as well as denouncing the draft plan for a law on hydrocarbons which is expected to be examined by the cabinet ahead of its adoption. PHOTO: AFP

Rakhine rebels abduct dozens in Myanmar

Suspected ethnic Rakhine rebels disguised as a sports team stormed a bus in rural Myanmar and took 31 hostages -- mostly off-duty firefighters and construction workers -- authorities said yesterday. The state-backed Global New Light of Myanmar said the bus -- travelling to the Rakhine state capital of Sittwe -- was flagged down by a man dressed in civilian attire before 18 rebels in sportswear emerged from the forest and ordered the passengers off at gunpoint. "We are still following them," Colonel Win Zaw Oo told AFP, adding the insurgents may have mistaken the firemen for members of the armed forces.

Muslims in India are happiest: RSS chief

Asserting that the Muslims in India are the "happiest", Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) supremo Mohan Bhagwat said that people of other faiths have sought refuge in India due to the "Hindu culture". Addressing a meeting of intellectuals on Saturday, Bhagwat said, "Muslims in India are the happiest. Why is that? It is because we are Hindus. Whenever a country in the world was confused and diverted from the right path, it came to India in search of the truth. When the Jews were being chased away, India is the only country which gave them shelter. The Parsis are also able to safely practise their religion here." He said that "Hindu" is not a name of a language, province or country but a culture, which is the legacy of all people living in India.

Trudeau wears bulletproof vest at Canada rally



Canadian leader Justin Trudeau wore a bulletproof vest and was surrounded by heavy security during an election campaign rally after receiving a security threat, sources told the national broadcaster. Trudeau had body armour under his shirt and jacket, photos from the event showed, when he appeared an hour and a half late at the 2,000-strong meeting in a suburb of the capital Toronto on Saturday. He doesn't normally wear a jacket while campaigning. As Trudeau left the stage to greet supporters he was surrounded by security officers, some with large backpacks on, footage showed.

SOURCE: AFP, ANI

IMPEACHMENT PROBE

Trump defends his lawyer Giuliani

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump defended his attorney Rudy Giuliani on Saturday as a "legendary crime buster" and "wonderful lawyer" after a media report that prosecutors are investigating whether the former New York mayor broke lobbying laws in his dealings in Ukraine.

"So now they are after the legendary 'crime buster' and greatest Mayor in the history of NYC, Rudy Giuliani," Trump said in a statement on Twitter.

"He may seem a little rough around the edges sometimes, but he is also a great guy and wonderful lawyer. Such a one sided Witch Hunt going on in USA. Deep State. Shameful!" he tweeted.

The New York Times reported late on Friday that federal prosecutors in Manhattan were investigating Giuliani's actions regarding Ukraine as part of a case involving two of his business associates, Ukraine-born Lev Parnas and Belarus-born Igor Fruman.

The two men, who helped Giuliani investigate former Democratic Vice President Joe Biden and his businessman son Hunter, were arrested on Thursday over what US prosecutors called a scheme to illegally funnel money to a pro-Trump election committee and other political candidates.

Asked about the Times report, Giuliani told Reuters: "I never did any lobbying for anyone. If they want to ask me I'm happy to prove it. But they haven't."

Brexit deal still possible

Johnson tells cabinet as EU leaders prepare to hold last-ditch talks before Oct 31 deadline

AGENCIES

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson told his cabinet yesterday that a Brexit deal was still possible but that there was significant work to be done to reach one, a spokeswoman from his office said in a statement.

"The Prime Minister updated Cabinet on the current progress being made in ongoing Brexit negotiations, reiterating that a pathway to a deal could be seen but that there is still a significant amount of work to get there and we must remain prepared to leave on October 31," the spokeswoman said.

EU leaders will meet in Brussels on Thursday and Friday for a summit held under the pressures of the October 31 Brexit deadline just two weeks away.

They would ideally like to have a full proposal to vote on by then.

But the sides are trying to achieve in a few days what they had failed to in the more than three years since Britons first

voted to leave the European Union after nearly 50 years.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was set to discuss the available options with French President Emmanuel Macron late yesterday.

European officials said the bloc's Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier will also brief EU ambassadors on the state of play, reported AFP.



The few details that have leaked out suggest a compromise around the contentious Irish border issue that keeps Britain's Northern Ireland partially aligned with EU customs rules.

Whether such a fudge suits both Brussels and the more ardent Brexit backers in parliament who must still approve a deal should become clearer in the coming days.

Johnson rose to power in July on a promise not to extend Brexit for a third time -- even for a few weeks.

Breaking that pledge could come back to haunt him in an early general election that most predict for the coming months.

Two men stabbed at London shop

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Two men have been stabbed in broad daylight and a third assaulted at a butcher's shop in north London.

Police were called to West Green Road, in Tottenham, at 9:35am yesterday, following reports of an incident at West Green Halal Meat and Groceries store.

Officers found two males, aged 40 and 29, suffering from stab injuries and a third male who had been assaulted.

The two stabbed men have been taken to hospital, but the third did not require medical attention.

Witnesses have suggested that two shopkeepers were attacked by two teenagers - although police are yet to confirm the rumour.

The man aged 40 is reportedly in a stable condition, but a full update on the second victim has not been revealed.

No-one has been arrested but police say they are still looking for any information regarding the incident.

A Metropolitan Police spokesman said: "No arrests have been made. Enquiries continue. A crime scene remains in place."