



Female suicide bomber kills eight in Pakistan

Massive heat wave bakes central and eastern US



HONG KONG: A policeman fires tear gas at protesters to disperse them after a march against a controversial extradition bill in Hong Kong yesterday. —AFP

Protesters deface Beijing's Liaison Office

Hong Kong's black-clad activists defy police orders

HONG KONG: Thousands of protesters descended on China's representative office in Hong Kong yesterday, as anger over an extradition bill morphs into a fresh front against what many see as a broader erosion of freedoms by the city's political masters in Beijing. Millions have rallied over the past two months in an unprecedented show of force against Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam, triggering the worst social turmoil to rock the former British colony since it returned to Chinese rule 22 years ago.

Black-clad activists, many wearing masks, defied police orders and marched beyond the official endpoint of a rally that took place earlier in the day to make their way toward Beijing's Liaison Office, close to the heart of the financial centre. When asked if the protesters would attempt to force entry into the building, one 30-year-old man dressed head to toe in black, said, "No," as he mimicked a throat-slitting action.

"That would be the death of Hong Kong," he added. Some protesters pelted eggs at the walls of the Liaison Office, while others spray-painted graffiti in a direct challenge to the Communist Party in Beijing. Hundreds of riot police took up positions close to the Liaison Office. Nearby, activists daubed graffiti on massive concrete pillars leading up to it, with the words "Restore Hong Kong, Revolution of Time."

Yesterday's protest, which had proceeded peacefully along the police-mandated route, is the latest in a wave of unrest that has plunged the Asian financial hub

into political crisis. Some held up banners that said, "LIAR" and "No excuse Carrie Lam". A poster plastered on a lamppost called for an "Investigation on police brutality". Many ignored the official end-point of the rally as the demonstrations show no sign of let-up, posing the greatest popular challenge to Chinese leader Xi Jinping since he took power in 2012.

Authorities used blue and white water-filled barriers to barricade government and police headquarters, while global bank HSBC, in a rare move, pulled down large metal barriers on the street level of its gleaming skyscraper building. While most of the rallies have passed off peacefully, some have erupted into violence late at night when more radical protesters have clashed with police.

The city's police force has come under scrutiny after officers fired rubber bullets and tear gas last month to disperse demonstrators in some of the worst violence to roil Hong Kong in decades. The police are struggling to cope amid haphazard decision-making, worsening morale and anger among rank-and-file officers that they are taking the public heat for government unpopularity, serving and retired officers,

politicians and security analysts told Reuters.

'Kill bill' call

The latest protest comes a day after tens of thousands gathered to voice support for the police, whom some have accused of using excessive force against activists, and demand an end to the violence.

Yesterday's march focused on calls for the full withdrawal of the extradition bill, which would allow people to be extradited to mainland China for trial, and an independent investigation into complaints of police brutality. Other demands include charges against protesters to be dropped and universal suffrage.

"I came back to Hong Kong this summer because of the protests," said Mandy Ko, 27, who is originally from Hong Kong and now lives in Australia. "My spirit is still with Hong Kong people." Last weekend, two initially peaceful protests degenerated into running skirmishes between baton-wielding police and activists, resulting in scores of injuries and more than 40 arrests. Those fights followed larger outbreaks of violence in central Hong Kong last month, when police forced back activists

with tear gas, rubber bullets and bean-bag rounds.

Lam has apologized for the turmoil the extradition bill has caused and declared it "dead". Opponents of the bill, which they fear could be used to silence dissent, say nothing short of its withdrawal will do. Under the terms of the handover from Britain in 1997, Hong Kong was allowed to retain extensive freedoms under a "one country, two systems" formula, including an independent judiciary and the right to protest. But for many Hong Kong residents, the extradition bill is the latest step in a relentless march towards mainland control.

The protests have at times paralyzed parts of the financial district, shut government offices and disrupted business operations across the city. Officials have also warned about the impact of the unrest on the economy. A commentary published in the Chinese Communist Party's People's Daily newspaper yesterday said: "If violence continues, it will inevitably deal a greater blow to Hong Kong's prosperity and stability."

China has condemned the violent protests as an "undisguised challenge" to the one country, two systems formula. Police late on Friday seized explosives and weapons in an industrial building in the New Territories district of Tsuen Wan. Three people were arrested. Police described the seizure as the largest of its kind in Hong Kong. They said it was unclear whether the explosives were related to the protest. —Reuters



Extradition bill revives grievances

India villagers kill 4 over witchcraft

NEW DELHI: Four members of a family including two women were killed by fellow villagers in central India's tribal heartland over allegations of witchcraft, authorities said yesterday. Four elders of a tribal family, all aged in their 60s according to local media reports, were attacked by around a dozen stick-wielding villagers outside their home late Saturday.

"It is linked to some local occult practitioner(s) who blamed some negative development in the tribal village to the members of this family," Shashi Ranjan, deputy commissioner of Jharkhand state's Gumla district said. Gumla is a densely forested tribal-dominated region some 100 kilometers from the regional capital Ranchi.

"Additional forces have been at the Siskari village since authorities found out about the incident," he added. "It is peaceful but no one, not even survivors from the family, are saying anything, probably out of fear." The senior-most district official said no one had been arrested so far as investigations continue. Experts say belief in witchcraft and the occult remains widespread in impoverished rural communities across India, especially in isolated tribal communities.

In the past, women have often been branded witches and targeted by locals. Some believe in the occult, or have other motives including usurping their rights over land and property. More than 2,000 people - many of them women - were killed in India on suspicion of witchcraft between 2000 and 2012, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. Some states, including Jharkhand, have introduced special laws to try to curb crimes against people accused of witchcraft and superstition.

Mob kills three

In another development, a mob beat to death three men suspected of trying to steal cattle in India's eastern state of Bihar, police said, the latest in a spate of attacks that have provoked alarm among religious minorities. In recent years angry mobs have lynched many people from marginalized groups in India, especially Muslims and the Dalits who occupy the lowest rung of the ancient caste system, often over suspicions of cow slaughter.

The three men were caught by some villagers early on Friday while trying to load cattle on a pickup truck, police official Har Kishore Rai said. "They were trying to load a buffalo and a calf when some villagers woke up and took the three into their custody and beat them up," he said, adding that the men had died.

Police have arrested three people from the village of Pithauri and have filed a case of murder against four more from the village, administrative official Lokesh Mishra told Reuters. Police have filed a case of theft against the three men, and the villagers face a separate case of murder filed by the victims' families, naming three accused people, although more names are likely to be added, Mishra said.

Hinduism, India's dominant religion, considers cows sacred, and killing them is taboo. Activists have tracked a rise in the number of mob lynchings in the last five years that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government has been in power. Critics accuse it of not having done enough to rein in such violence. The Supreme Court last year recommended making mob lynching a separate offence. In July, opposition parties in Bihar demanded a separate law against mob lynching in the state, where they say the problem is growing. —Agencies

US congresswomen urged to 'apologize'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump renewed attacks yesterday on four Democratic congresswomen he launched xenophobic tweets against last week, demanding they apologize "for the horrible (hateful) things they have said." "I don't believe the four Congresswomen are capable of loving our Country," Trump tweeted of ethnic-minority first-term Democrats Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar and Ayanna Pressley.

"They should apologize to America (and Israel) for the horrible (hateful) things they have said. They are destroying the Democrat Party, but are weak & insecure people who can never destroy our great Nation!" the president tweeted. The comments came a week after Trump sparked a firestorm of outrage when he attacked the left-leaning lawmakers with a series of tweets, saying they should "go back" to their countries of origin. The group—three of whom were born in the United States—are of Hispanic, Arab, Somali and African-American descent.

In a rare move, Trump was rebuked by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives on Tuesday for "racist comments" against the women, who are known as the "Squad." The following day chants of "Send her back!" broke out at the president's "Make America Great Again" rally in Greenville, North Carolina, when he again attacked the women. To the delight of his thousands of supporters, Trump described Omar and the other Democrats as "left-wing ideologues (who) see our nation as a force of evil."

Trump later said there was "great energy" at the rally but claimed he was not pleased by the taunts. "I was not happy



WASHINGTON: US Representatives Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) speaks as, Ilhan Abdullahi Omar (D-MN) (left), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) (2nd right), and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) hold a press conference, to address remarks made by US President Donald Trump at the US Capitol. —AFP

when I heard that chant," he said. "I didn't like that they did it, and I started speaking quickly" to move on with his speech. Television footage showed, however, that Trump let the chant continue for more than 13 seconds, only resuming speaking as they died down. The president demonstrated in Greenville that without a Democratic presidential candidate to focus on yet, he plans to make inflammatory attacks on the Squad a centerpiece of his 2020 re-election strategy.

Several of the Democratic presidential hopefuls who plan to run against him and a few of the Republicans have urged Trump to tone down the rhetoric. But the president has made it clear despite the risk of inflaming racial tensions and widening the partisan divide—that he believes he has latched on to a winning strategy. Trump tapped into grievances among white blue-collar and rural Americans to eke out a narrow victory in 2016, winning 57 percent of white voters while his rival Hillary Clinton won 37 percent. —AFP