

International

China media, Hong Kong bristle at Trump's pledge of curbs, sanctions

Protests planned against national security laws

HONG KONG: China's state media and the government of Hong Kong lashed out yesterday at US President Donald Trump's vow to end Hong Kong's special status if Beijing imposes new national security laws on the city, which is bracing for fresh protests. Trump on Friday pledged to "take action to revoke Hong Kong's preferential treatment as a separate customs and travel territory", and to impose sanctions on unspecified individuals over Beijing's new laws on the Asian financial center. But China's state media pushed back, saying this would hurt the United States more than China.

"The baton of sanctions that the United States is brandishing will not scare Hong Kong and will not bring China down," China's Communist Party mouthpiece, the People's Daily, wrote in a commentary. It used the pen name "Zhong Sheng", meaning "Voice of China", often used to give the paper's view on foreign policy issues. The Global Times wrote, "China has already prepared for the worst. No matter how far the US goes, China will keep its company."

A Hong Kong government spokesman expressed regret the United States continued to "smear and demonize the legitimate rights and duty of our sovereign" to safeguard national security. In a sign of diplomatic manoeuvring, the US government said it would put one of its prime Hong Kong properties up for sale - a luxury residential complex worth up to HK\$5 billion (\$650 million). A spokesman for the US

consulate in Hong Kong said this was part of a global program that "reinforces the US government's presence in Hong Kong" through reinvestment in other areas.

China and Hong Kong officials have justified the laws that will be directly imposed by China to restore order to a city that has been wracked by sometimes violent anti-China, anti-government protests over the past year. They said the laws will only apply to a small number of "troublemakers." Protesters, however, have said they are railing against China's deep encroachment on Hong Kong's autonomy and freedoms despite Beijing's promise to grant the city a high degree of autonomy under a so-called "one-country, two systems" formula since it reverted from British to Chinese rule in 1997.

More protests are planned in the coming weeks. Countries including the United States, Canada and Britain have expressed deep concerns about the law, with Britain saying it may grant expanded visa rights to large numbers of Hong Kongers. Demosisto, an advocacy group led by prominent young Hong Kong democracy activist Joshua Wong, said the security law will be "the death of freedom in Hong Kong".

A senior Hong Kong official, Erick Tsang, said he couldn't care less if he were sanctioned by the Washington. "I wouldn't even go to Canada, just in case they try to catch me" there, Tsang told local radio.



US govt to sell prime property site in Hong Kong



HONG KONG: A pro-China activist steps on an effigy of US President Donald Trump during a protest outside the US consulate in Hong Kong in response to US President Donald Trump saying he would strip several of Hong Kong's special privileges with the United States and bar some Chinese students from US universities in anger over Beijing's bid to exert control in the financial hub.— AFP

Details of the laws remain unclear, even to Hong Kong officials, but are expected to be enacted by China's parliament this summer. The laws will outlaw seces-

sion, subversion, terrorism and foreign interference in Hong Kong, and will be imposed without any local legislative scrutiny.— Reuters

Chinese media use race clashes to slam US over Hong Kong

BEIJING: Chinese state media took aim at the US government over the weekend as many American cities were gripped by raging protests and clashes, comparing the unrest with the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. Beijing has long been infuriated by criticism from Western capitals, especially Washington, over its handling of the pro-democracy protests that shook Hong Kong last year.

And as unrest erupted across the United States over racial inequality and police brutality after the death during arrest of an unarmed black man, Chinese government spokespeople and official media launched broadsides against American authorities. "US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi once called the violent protests in Hong Kong 'a beautiful sight to behold'... US politicians now can enjoy this sight from their own windows," Hu Xijin, editor-in-chief of nationalist tabloid Global Times, wrote Saturday. It was "as if the radical rioters in Hong Kong somehow snuck into the US and created a mess like they did last year", he added. China has insisted that "foreign forces" are to blame for the turmoil in Hong Kong, where pro-democracy protesters - described by Beijing as rioters - have marched in the millions since June last year and often clashed with the police.

Beijing sparked outrage and concern earlier this month with a plan to impose a law on Hong Kong that it said was needed to protect national security and curb "terrorism", but was condemned by pro-democracy activists and Western nations as another attempt to chip away at the city's unique freedoms. Following President Donald Trump's announcement that he would strip Hong Kong of its special privileges, a commentary published yesterday in China Daily - a mouthpiece of the ruling Communist Party - said US politicians dreamed of "victimizing" China. "Better give up that dream and come back to reality," it said. "Violence is spreading across the US... US politicians



MINNEAPOLIS: Demonstrators protest the killing of George Floyd near the city's 5th police precinct in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was taken into custody for Floyd's death. Chauvin has been accused of kneeling on Floyd's neck as he pleaded with him about not being able to breathe.— AFP

should do their jobs and help solve problems in the US, instead of trying to create new problems and troubles in other countries."

The back-and-forth over Hong Kong has exacerbated US-China tensions, which were already high over a number of issues - including trade and the coronavirus pandemic, over which Trump has accused Beijing of a lack of transparency. As violence broke out in the US over the weekend, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying also took aim at Washington on Saturday. "I can't breathe," she said on Twitter, with a screenshot of a tweet by US State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortugus that had criticized the Chinese government over its Hong Kong policy. Hua was quoting the words George Floyd was heard saying repeatedly before his death - after a police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes - which sparked the current unrest in the United States.

In another development, Turkish President Recep

Tayyip Erdogan has denounced the US police killing of an unarmed black man as "racist" and "fascist". Erdogan's comments are likely to irritate Turkey's NATO ally, with relations between the two countries already strained over their differing stances on the Syria conflict. George Floyd died on Monday night after being arrested on suspicion of using a counterfeit banknote, a video of the incident showing an officer kneeling on his neck as he is pinned to the ground. Rioting has broken out in several US cities over this incident and several others where police have killed black men. "The racist and fascist approach that led to the death of George Floyd in the US city of Minneapolis as a result of torture has not only deeply saddened all of us, but it has also become one of the most painful manifestations of the unjust order we stand against across the world," Erdogan tweeted in English. "I believe that the perpetrators of this inhumane act shall receive the punishment they deserve," said Erdogan. "We will be monitoring the issue."— Agencies

Growing US-China rivalry seen fueling paralysis at the UN

UNITED NATIONS: For nearly a decade, the UN Security Council has been frequently paralyzed by Russia's obstinacy over the Syrian crisis. Today, however, it is the US-China rivalry that has infected a growing array of issues, according to officials and diplomats. As recently as 2017, an understanding between Washington and Beijing allowed the United Nations on three occasions—involving separate sets of economic sanctions—to project international unity in the face of the North Korean nuclear threat.

Three years later, the COVID-19 pandemic has seen a ferocious competition erupt between the UN's two main contributors, prompting the organization's chief, Antonio Guterres, to bemoan a "lack of leadership" during the world's worst crisis since 1945. "Where we see power, we sometimes do not see the necessary leadership," he said recently.

Even after more than two months of negotiations, the 15 Security Council members were unable to reach agreement on a resolution supporting a call from the UN secretary-general for a global cease-fire while the world battles the novel coronavirus. The sole reason? US-Chinese differences over a passing mention in the draft resolution to the World Health Organization (WHO), with which President Donald Trump on Friday said he planned to sever ties. Both UN officials and diplomats say the US-Chinese conflict seems to be spreading, leaving them increasingly pessimistic.

"The Security Council has been frozen for 45 years between 1945 and 1990, because of the Cold War," one ambassador said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The last thing we need is another Cold War that would freeze again the Security Council." "Importing bilateral disputes in the Council would be a disaster," he said. Added another ambassador: "We really shouldn't enter in a new Cold War. But it doesn't look very good at the moment," whether regarding leadership, the pandemic or US-Chinese relations, three subjects "very closely tied to each other."

Fragility and humility

At the UN, there is a sense of a dangerous drift into new and dysfunctional territory. "In the past, when you had disagreements among members of the Council, it was compartmentalized," said a UN official, speaking on grounds of anonymity. "So your adversary one day on a particular issue was your best ally the next day on another issue. What we see now is everything spilling over."

"So there are camps, or there are disagreements which just spill over from one issue to another," the official said, clearly alluding to the situation in Hong Kong, where tough new Chinese security legislation has pitted the two leading permanent members of the UN against each other. "The tensions between the US and China are really problematic" for the world body, meaning the Security Council is "not able to move forward on a range of things," the official added.

Several ambassadors shared that view. "There is a huge fracture in the global multilateral architecture right now. And it's very serious," said Olof Skoog, the European Union ambassador to the UN. "We are witnessing a polarization in the Security Council," said Ambassador Christoph Heusgen of Germany, currently a non-permanent member of the council, alluding to an ever more bitter volley of tweets being exchanged by the US and Chinese missions. At a press conference Thursday, Guterres expressed his regret that the pandemic had not evoked a greater sense of humility from the big powers.

"If the present crisis shows something, it is our fragility. Collective fragility. When we are fragile, we should be humble. When we are humble, we should be united and in solidarity," he said, in remarks directed to members of the Security Council. He then made it abundantly clear that he had in mind the United States and China—which as permanent Security Council members enjoy the veto power that greatly magnifies their influence. "I have never seen the Council's work being paralyzed by (non-permanent) members," he said.— AFP

India extends lockdown in high-risk zones

NEW DELHI: India extended its coronavirus lockdown until June 30 in high-risk zones but permitted restaurants, malls and religious buildings to reopen elsewhere from June 8 despite a record high number of cases detected nationwide on Saturday. The home ministry ordered state governments and local authorities to identify "containment zones", or areas that should remain under lockdown, as they continue to report high number of infections. The government allowed hospitality and retail sectors and places of worship to open from June 8 and expected authorities to ensure physical distancing rules and staggered business hours.

India reported a record daily jump of 7,964 new COVID-19 infections on Saturday and has so far recorded 173,763 positive cases and 4,971 deaths, making the world's second-most populous country ninth on the list of most infections, Reuters data showed. Restrictions on international air travel and city train services have not been revoked but permission for intra-state travel was granted. The federal government expected states to make a call on reopening schools and colleges in July.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to address the nation on Sunday as his government wrestles to contain the pandemic despite imposing the world's longest lockdown.— Reuters

Walls close in on Thailand's poorest; virus hits economy

BANGKOK: Shuffling around their tiny slum home which is too small to stand up in, Thanapat Noidee and his wife Pappasorn share donated noodles with their sons and worry about bills, as the coronavirus pushes Thailand's poor deeper into penury. The wood and breeze-block hut which is their home stands in the heart of a Bangkok commercial district festooned with five-star hotels and upmarket restaurants.

They share the small space in the shadow of the nearby high-rise developments with their children Woraphat and Kittipat, aged six and seven respectively. Under the 1.2-metre-high (four feet) ceiling, the adults have to kneel to move around the single room which is the bedroom, living room and dining area.

Downstairs, a tap provides a shower and a flat concrete surface serves as a kitchen area, a space shared with rats which clamber over their washed dishes. Pappasorn lost her job as a messenger as Thailand locked down to control the coronavirus in late March. "I have to borrow money for the electricity from my father and grandfather," she says. "The school term opens again soon (July 1) and I have to find money for those expenses as well."

Thailand's parliament is due Sunday to vote on whether to approve a near-\$60 billion stimulus to revive an economy battered by the pandemic. If agreed, it will be the biggest state cash injection in Thai history. Thailand has long paraded low unemployment as a symbol of its economic success. But millions like



BANGKOK: Photo shows motorcycle taxi driver, Thanapat Noidee with son Kittipat looking from the window of their home in Bangkok.— AFP

the Noidee family rely on informal work or day wages for survival, jobs imperiled by a feared 6-7 percent contraction in the economy. Two months after the lockdown and with the outbreak under control, Bangkok is gradually creeping back to life.

But Pappasorn's work has not returned while her husband has seen the roughly 1,000 baht (\$31) he earns each day as a motorcycle taxi driver more than halved because of a fall in customers. The family have depended on the nearby Holy Redeemer Church for daily food handouts—a charity service which is being closed down as the city reopens. "Without food donations, I'll have to fight harder for my family to survive," said Thanapat as he moved on his knees inside his lodgings, occasionally knocking his head on the ceiling.— AFP