

## International

# Top US, China diplomats meet in Hawaii as tensions flare

## First known contact between Pompeo, Yang since April 15

**WASHINGTON/BEIJING:** US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met China's top diplomat, Yang Jiechi, in Hawaii on Wednesday, in high-level face-to-face talks that have become rare amid tensions between the two strategic rivals. The world's two largest economies have been at loggerheads over the handling of the coronavirus pandemic and China's move to impose security legislation on Hong Kong, among multiple points of friction that have worsened this year.

Yang told Pompeo that Washington needs to respect Beijing's positions on key issues, halt its interference on matters such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Xinjiang, and work to repair relations, China's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Pompeo, who has been singled out for scathing criticism by Chinese diplomats and state media, stressed "the need for fully-reciprocal dealings between the two nations," US State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortugus said in a statement.

"He also stressed the need for full transparency and information sharing to combat the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and prevent future outbreaks."

Hours after the meeting ended, China announced that its top parliamentary body will review draft Hong Kong national security legislation during a session that began yesterday. Earlier, foreign ministers of the G7 countries, including Pompeo, issued a statement calling on China not to follow through with the Hong Kong legislation, which critics call an as-

sault on the territory's democratic freedoms. As the meeting got under way, US President Donald Trump signed legislation calling for sanctions against those responsible for repression of Uighur Muslims in China's Xinjiang region, prompting a threat of retaliation from Beijing.

Wu Xinbo, dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, said that meeting could reduce "microphone diplomacy" between the two bickering sides, but said he was doubtful that it would stabilize relations. "Trump will continue to criticize China in the lead-up to the US elections," he said. Pompeo has been forceful in his criticism of Beijing. It was his first known contact with Yang since they discussed the coronavirus by phone on April 15, and their first face-to-face meeting since last year.

Neither side outlined an agenda for the Hawaii talks, but diplomats and other sources have said the meeting was requested by China.

### Low point

US-China relations have reached their lowest point in years. In mid-May Trump, who has pursued a deal to end a damaging trade war he launched with China, went so far as to suggest he could cut ties with Beijing. The bill Trump signed on Wednesday calls for sanctions on Chinese officials responsible for oppressing Uighur Muslims. Trump tempered that possibility by saying he regarded its sanctions requirements as advisory, not mandatory. While Trump and his administration have stepped up rhetoric

five people last year to get her elected in the 2019 upper house election, in which she won a seat.

Separately, Katsuyuki Kawai gave a total of 24 million yen to about 90 people, the statement said. Katsuyuki Kawai, who previously served as a foreign policy adviser to Abe, quit as minister last October after reports of election irregularities by his wife.

"I have never engaged in political activities that are shameful in the light of my conscience, nor against the law," Kyodo news agency quoted Katsuyuki Kawai as saying on Wednesday.

Anri has also denied vote-buying, media reports said. On Wednesday she told reporters her lawyer had advised her not to comment. Neither could be reached immediately for comment yesterday. Lawmakers cannot be arrested while parliament is in session. Parliament's session ended on Wednesday.

Abe returned to office in December 2012 and last November became Japan's longest serving prime minister. His term as ruling Lib-



In this file photo, US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis (second left) and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (third left) meet with Chinese politburo member Yang Jiechi (third right) and Defense Minister Wei Fenghe (second right) during the US-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue at the State Department in Washington, DC. — AFP

against China in the run-up to the November US election, his former national security adviser, John Bolton, said on Wednesday Trump had sought Chinese President Xi Jinping's help to win re-election. China said yesterday it has no interest in interfering with the election.

Bolton's accusations are part of a book the US government on Tuesday sued to block him from publishing. Trump hit back at Bolton, calling

him "a liar".

Among his criticisms of China, Pompeo has said it could have prevented hundreds of thousands of deaths from the global coronavirus pandemic by being more transparent. Trump has initiated a process of eliminating special US treatment for Hong Kong to punish China for curbing freedoms there, but has stopped short of immediately ending privileges. — Reuters

## Former Japanese Minister and wife arrested

**TOKYO:** A former Japanese justice minister and his lawmaker wife were arrested yesterday suspicion of vote-buying, prosecutors said, in a harsh blow to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as he struggles with falling voter support.

Support for Abe, who had close ties to the ex-justice minister, has declined over what critics say is his clumsy handling of the coronavirus outbreak, a furore over efforts to extend top prosecutors' retirement age, and questions about government programs to support tourism and smaller companies.

Tokyo prosecutors said in a statement that former justice minister Katsuyuki Kawai and his wife Anri paid 1.7 million yen (\$15,900) to

eral Democratic Party leader and hence, premier, ends in September 2021 but speculation is simmering that he may have to step down sooner given his sagging voter support, which fell below 30% in two opinion polls last month.

"Abe's responsibility for appointing Kawai as justice minister will be called into question," said Tomoaki Iwai, a political science professor at Nihon University. "His ratings could fall further."

Political sources and experts said Abe would be weakened but was unlikely to step down immediately as Japan contends with the coronavirus outbreak.

"The damage will be quite big," said University of Tokyo political science professor Yu Uchiyama. "He will be a lame duck."

Abe is struggling to ease the impact of the coronavirus on the world's third-largest economy. He has responded with two stimulus packages totalling \$2.2 trillion but over half of the respondents to a Reuters survey were critical of the response. — Reuters



In this file photo, Japan's then justice minister Katsuyuki Kawai speaks to journalists after submitting his resignation in Tokyo. — AFP