

World News Roundup

Hong Kong

Police criticised

Beijing slams protest targeting office in HK

HONG KONG, July 22, (Agencies): China on Monday harshly criticized a weekend demonstration in which eggs were thrown at its office in Hong Kong, accusing the demonstrators of violence without mentioning a violent attack against protesters and civilians the same night.

The official People's Daily newspaper, in a front-page commentary headlined "Central Authority Cannot Be Challenged," called the protesters' actions "intolerable."

One group of protesters targeted China's liaison office on Sunday night after more than 100,000 people marched through the city to demand democracy and an investigation into the use of force by police to disperse crowds at earlier protests.

Later, protesters trying to return home were attacked inside a train station by assailants who appeared to target the pro-democracy demonstrators.



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At least 45 people were injured, of whom 22 remained hospitalized Monday morning, including one man in critical condition, the Hospital Authority said.

Another 14 people were injured as police used tear gas to clear protesters in central Hong Kong. Police said on their official social media accounts that protesters threw bricks and petrol bombs at them and attacked the police headquarters.

The attack on the liaison office touched a raw nerve in China. China's national emblem, which hangs on the front of the building, was splattered with black ink. It was replaced by a new one within hours.

"These acts openly challenged the authority of the central government and touched the bottom line of the 'one country, two systems' principle," the government's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office said in a statement issued Sunday.

The "one country, two systems" framework, under which the former British colony was returned to China in 1997, allows Hong Kong to maintain a fair degree of autonomy in local affairs. Demonstrators fear the pro-Beijing government in Hong Kong is chipping away at their rights and freedoms.

Appealing

A group of pro-China lawmakers held a news conference Monday appealing for a halt to the violence, saying it was a blow to Hong Kong's reputation and is scaring away tourists and investors.

They also urged police to tighten enforcement against the protesters, whom **Regina Ip**, a former security secretary, labeled as "rebels."

"The violent attack on the Liaison Office ... is a direct affront to the sovereignty of our country," Ip said.

She said the police were "overstretched" when asked why it took at least a half-hour for police to arrive at the suburban train station where protesters were attacked.

"The police have been under extreme pressure," she said.

Pro-democracy lawmaker Claudia Mo said there was "more than apparent" involvement from the triad, a branch of organized crime in Hong Kong.

"What happened last night doesn't seem accidental in any way," Mo said. "It's all organized."

Video of the attacks in Hong Kong's Yuen Long neighborhood showed protesters in black shirts being beaten by men in white shirts wielding steel pipes and wooden poles. Those under attack retreated into the trains, intimidated by the gangs of men waiting for them outside the turnstiles. The attackers then entered the trains and beat the people inside as they tried to defend themselves with umbrellas. They eventually retreated.

One of the men in white held up a sign saying "Protect Yuen Long, protect our homes."

Subway passengers filmed by Stand News and iCABLE angrily accused police officers of not intervening in the attack. Stand News reporter Gwyneth Ho said on Facebook that she suffered minor injuries to her hands and shoulder, and was dizzy from a head injury. Hong Kong's South China Morning Post reported that several people were bleeding following the attacks, with seven sent to the hospital.

Hong Kong police faced criticism on Monday for an apparent failure to protect anti-government protesters and passersby from attack by what opposition politicians suspected were gang members at a train station on the weekend.

The attack on Sunday came during a night of escalating violence that opened new fronts in Hong Kong's widening political crisis over an extradition bill, that could see people sent to China for trial.

Surrounded

Protesters had earlier on Sunday surrounded China's main representative office in the city and defaced walls and signs and clashed with police.

The city's Beijing-backed leader, Carrie Lam, condemned the attack on China's main office in the city, the Central Government Liaison Office, saying it was a "challenge" to national sovereignty.

She condemned violent behaviour of any kind and said she had been shocked by the clashes at the station, adding police would investigate fully.

"Violence will only breed more violence," Lam said while flanked by senior city officials.

Some politicians and activists have linked Hong Kong's shadowy network of triad criminal gangs to political intimidation and violence in recent years, sometimes against pro-democracy activists and critics of Beijing. On Sunday night, scores of men in white T-shirts, some armed with clubs, flooded into the rural Yuen Long station, and stormed a train, attacking passengers with pipes, poles and other objects, according to video footage.

Witnesses, including Democratic lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting, said the men appeared to target black-shirted passengers who had been at an anti-government march.

Lawmaker Lam, who was wounded in the face and hospitalised, said the police ignored calls he made, pleading with them to intervene to prevent bloodshed.

"They deliberately turned a blind eye to these attacks by triads on regular citizens," he told Reuters, saying the floors of the station were streaked with blood.

"I won't speculate on why they didn't help immediately," he said.

Forty-five people were injured in the violence at the station, with one in critical condition, according to hospital authorities.

Hong Kong's police chief Stephen Lo, asked about concern police had been slow to respond to the clash at the station, said there had been a need to "redeploy manpower from other districts".

Police stations nearby had closed given the risk of unrest, and a patrol on the scene needed to wait for reinforcements, he said.

"We will pursue at all costs to bring the offenders to justice," he told reporters, while pledging to restore public confidence in the police force.



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (center), delivers his 4th State of the Nation Address as Senate President Vicente Sotto III (left), and House Speaker Allan Peter Cayetano listen at the 18th Congress at the House of Representatives in Quezon city, Metropolitan Manila, Philippines on July 22. (AP)



South Korean police officers detain protesters in front of the Japanese consulate in Busan, South Korea on July 22. South Korean police say they've detained six people for allegedly illegally entering a Japanese diplomatic facility in South Korea. (AP)



Trump

Khan

Subcontinent

US to press Pakistan: US President Donald Trump is likely to press Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan for help on ending the war in Afghanistan and fighting militants when the two leaders meet at the White House on Monday amid their countries' strained relations.

Last year, Trump cut off hundreds of millions of dollars in security assistance to Pakistan, accusing Islamabad of offering "nothing but lies and deceit" while giving safe haven to terrorists, a charge angrily rejected by Islamabad.

Khan, who arrived in Washington on Saturday, is expected to try to mend fences and attract much-needed US investment, hoping the arrest last week of a militant leader with a \$10 million US bounty on his head will lead to a warmer reception.

"The purpose of the visit is to press for concrete cooperation from Pakistan to advance the Afghanistan peace process and to encourage Pakistan to deepen and sustain its recent effort to crackdown on militants and terrorists within its territory," a senior US administration official said.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the United States wants to make clear to Pakistan that it is open to repairing relations if Pakistan changes how it handles "terrorists and militants."

In Afghanistan, the official said, the peace process is at a critical point and Washington wants Pakistan "to pressure the Taliban into a permanent ceasefire and participation in inter-Afghan negotiations that would include the Afghan government."

Trump wants to end US military involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan's cooperation will be essential to any deal to end the war and ensure the country does not become a base for militant groups like Islamic State.

Khan's visit follows the arrest on Wednesday of Hafiz Saeed, the alleged mastermind of a four-day militant attack on the Indian city of Mumbai in 2008, news that Trump welcomed on Twitter.

However, Pakistan has yet to release Shakil Afridi, the jailed doctor believed to have helped the CIA hunt down Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the Sept 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

The imprisonment of Dr Shakil Afridi has long been a source of tension between Pakistan and the United States. Washington continues to call for his immediate release, the US official told reporters on Friday. (RTRS)

Dozens feared trapped: A fire officer says a big blaze has broken out in a high-rise building with offices of a state-run telephone company in Mumbai, India's financial capi-

Maritime

Cambodia denies deal with Beijing

US criticism over Sea 'slander': China

BEIJING, July 22, (RTRS): Remarks by US officials on China's role in the South China Sea are slanderous, its foreign ministry said on Monday, after the United States voiced concern over reports of Chinese interference with oil and gas activities in the disputed waters.

China's claims in the South China Sea, through which about \$5 trillion in shipborne trade passes each year, are contested, all or in part, by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

On Saturday, the US State Department said China's repeated provocative actions aimed at the offshore oil and gas development of other claimant states threatened regional energy security and undermined the free and open Indo-Pacific energy market.

US President Donald Trump's hawkish national security adviser John Bolton also said on Twitter that China's coercive behaviour towards its Southeast Asian neighbors was counterproductive and threatened regional peace and stability, echoing earlier comments by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said such comments by Bolton and Pompeo were baseless, adding that the United States and other "external forces" were stirring up trouble in the South China Sea.

"This is slander against Chinese and Southeast Asian countries' efforts to uphold peace and stability in the South China Sea and properly manage differences," Geng told a news briefing on Monday. "Countries and people in the region will not believe their words."

He added, "We urge the United States to stop such irresponsible behaviour and respect the efforts of China and ASEAN countries to resolve differences through dialogue and work

for peace and stability in the South China Sea."

US-based think tanks have reported that Chinese and Vietnamese vessels have engaged in a standoff for several weeks near an oil block in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone.

Vietnam, which for years has been embroiled in a dispute with China over the potentially energy-rich region, on Friday accused a Chinese oil survey vessel and its escorts of violating its sovereignty and demanded that China remove the ships from Vietnamese waters.

The busy waterway of the South China Sea is one of a growing number of flashpoints in the US-China relationship.

The two countries have repeatedly traded barbs over what Washington calls Beijing's militarisation of the waters by building military installations on artificial islands and reefs.

China says the United States is to blame for tension by repeatedly sending warships close to Chinese-held islands, and that China's sovereignty in the area is irrefutable.

ASEAN, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Also:

WASHINGTON: China will be able to place armed forces at a Cambodian naval base under a secret pact between the two nations, the Wall Street Journal said on Sunday, although Cambodian officials denied such a deal had been struck.

The agreement, reached this spring but not made public, gives China exclusive access to part of Cambodia's Ream Naval Base on the Gulf of Thai-

land, the Journal said, citing US and allied officials familiar with the matter.

Such an arrangement would boost China's ability to assert contested territorial claims and economic interests in the South China Sea, challenging US allies in Southeast Asia.

Chinese and Cambodian officials denied such a pact existed, the Journal said.

"This is the worst-ever made up news against Cambodia," Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen told the pro-government news site Fresh News on Monday.

"No such thing could happen because hosting foreign military bases is against the Cambodian constitution."

Cambodian defense ministry spokesman **Chhum Socheat** told Reuters the report was "made up and baseless".

In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesman **Geng Shuang** said, "As I understand it, the Cambodia side denied this."

But he declined to respond to repeated questions whether China also denied the report.

"China and Cambodia are traditionally friendly neighbors," Geng told a news briefing.

"We have cooperated in various areas. Our cooperation is open, transparent, and mutually beneficial and equal. I hope the relevant parties do not over interpret it."

Hun Sen's strongest regional ally, China has poured billions of dollars in development assistance and loans into Cambodia through two-way frameworks and its Belt and Road initiative.

The initiative, unveiled by Chinese President **Xi Jinping** in 2013, aims to bolster a sprawling network of land and sea links throughout Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

tal, and dozens of people are feared trapped.

The officer says 14 fire engines at the site are evacuating people using hydraulic platforms in the city's Bandra area.

Television images showed people breaking window panes and waving to fire officers to evacuate them. No casualties were immediately reported.

A woman rescued by fire services told the New Delhi Television news channel that 30 to 40 people were waiting to be evacuated from the building, with the third and fourth floors filled with smoke.

Fires are common in India, where building laws and safety norms are often flouted by builders and residents. (AP)

Floods toll jumps to over 300: The death toll from severe flooding in parts of

India, Nepal and Bangladesh rose to more than 300 on Monday, even as heavy rains are starting to ebb and water levels started to recede in some of the worst-affected areas.

Heavy rains and overflowing rivers swamped vast swathes of eastern India more than week ago, and officials on Monday said so far 102 people have died in Bihar state, 35 more than what the state government had estimated on Thursday.

Torrential rains in Bangladesh killed more than 47 people in the last two weeks and at least 120 are missing and feared dead following severe floods and landslides in mostly mountainous Nepal, authorities from the two countries said.

Parts of Pakistan have also been flooded. In Bangladesh, at least 700,000 people have been displaced.

Deaths due to flooding in the region more

than doubled in the last five days.

At least five districts in central Bangladesh are at the risk of being flooded, as water levels of two rivers are still rising, an official at the Bangladesh Water Development Board told Reuters.

Authorities are struggling to deliver relief supplies to marooned people.

"We have enough relief materials but the main problem is to reach out to the people," Foyez Ahmed, deputy commissioner of Bangladesh's Bogra district, said. "We don't have adequate transport facilities to move to the areas that are deep under water."

In India's tea-growing state of Assam, close to the border of Bangladesh, severe flooding has displaced millions of people and killed more than 60, officials have said. (RTRS)

Afghan forces kill 7 civilians: Afghan

government forces mistakenly killed seven civilians, including children, in an attack on militants south of the capital, a provincial official said on Monday, the latest victims of a war undiminished by peace talks.

Government forces, however, have been facing Taliban attacks across much of the country, and have responded with air strikes aimed at killing insurgent leaders, even as US and Afghan representatives have been negotiating with the militants in Qatar.

The seven civilians, including women and children, were killed in Logar province, just south of Kabul, on Sunday night said Hasib Stanekzai, a member of Logar's provincial council. Six people were wounded, he said.

Provincial police confirmed the attack on militants by government forces but said they were investigating the casualties.

"According to our initial information a number of militants were killed or wounded, but local people gathered in the area, claiming that a house belonging to a Kuchi family had been bombed, causing civilian casualties," said Shahpor Ahmadzai, a spokesman for Logar police. (RTRS)



Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono (right), and US National Security Advisor John Bolton, shake hands prior to their meeting in Tokyo on July 22. (AP)