

China

'Thanksgiving' rally staged

Beijing warns the US over Hong Kong law

HONG KONG/BEIJING, Nov 28, (RTRS): China warned the United States on Thursday that it would take "firm counter measures" in response to US legislation backing anti-government protesters in Hong Kong, and said attempts to interfere in the Chinese-ruled city were doomed to fail.



Le Yucheng

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday signed into law congressional legislation which supported the protesters, despite angry objections from Beijing, with which he is seeking a deal to end a damaging trade war.

Protesters in Hong Kong responded by staging a "Thanksgiving" rally, with hundreds of people, young and old, some draped in US flags, gathering in the heart of the city.

"I was confident Donald Trump would sign the law because we are fighting for universal freedom. Everyone globally should support that," said 25-year-old Jacky, who only gave his first name.

"But we do want to give thanks to those around the globe that support us, a small city like Hong Kong, we thank them for their attention."

The law requires the State Department to certify, at least annually, that Hong Kong is autonomous enough to justify favourable US trading terms that have helped it become a world financial centre.

It also threatens sanctions for human rights violations.

The Chinese foreign ministry said the United States would shoulder the consequences of China's countermeasures if it continued to "act arbitrarily" in regards to Hong Kong.

Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Le Yucheng summoned US Ambassador Terry Branstad on Thursday and demanded that Washington immediately stop interfering in China's domestic affairs.

Wrong

Hong Kong's Beijing-backed government said the legislation sent the wrong signal to demonstrators and "clearly interfered" with the city's internal affairs.

China is considering barring the drafters of the legislation, whose US Senate sponsor is Florida Republican Marco Rubio, from entering mainland China as well as Hong Kong and Macau, Xu Xijin, the editor of China's Global Times tabloid, said on Twitter.

Anti-government protests have roiled the former British colony for six months, at times forcing businesses, government, schools and even the international airport to close.

Hong Kong has enjoyed a rare lull in violence over the past week, with local elections on Sunday delivering a landslide victory to pro-democracy candidates.

Hong Kong police entered the Polytechnic University on Thursday after a nearly two-week siege that saw some of the worst clashes between protesters and security forces.

It was unclear whether any protesters remained on the campus as about 100 plainclothes police moved in to collect evidence and remove dangerous items such as petrol bombs. Police said any protesters found would receive medical treatment and arrests were not a priority, though they were seen brushing molotov cocktails for fingerprints.

The university became a battleground in mid-November, when protesters barricaded themselves in and clashed with riot police in a hail of petrol bombs, water cannon and tear-gas. About 1,100 people were arrested last week.

Reuters witnesses at the university said garbage and abandoned sleeping bags, helmets and gas masks were strewn everywhere, but no protesters could be seen.



A protester holds high a US flag in Hong Kong, Nov 28. China reacted furiously Thursday to President Donald Trump's signing of bills on Hong Kong human rights, summoning the US ambassador to strongly protest and warning the move would undermine cooperation with Washington. Hong Kong, a former British colony that was granted special autonomy when China took control in 1997, has been rocked by six months of sometimes violent pro-democracy demonstrations. (AP)

Britain

Johnson promises Jan 31 Brexit if he wins

Conservatives set for biggest win since '87

LONDON, Nov 28, (RTRS): Britain's Conservative Party is on course to win its biggest majority in parliament since 1987 at a Dec 12 election, according to a new poll, which would give Prime Minister Boris Johnson a mandate to take the country out of the European Union.

The model developed by pollsters YouGov that accurately predicted the 2017 election result, showed the Conservatives are set to win 359 seats out of 650, which would be their best result since Margaret Thatcher's victory in 1987.

Johnson has pledged to deliver Brexit by Jan 31 if he wins after nearly four years of political crisis that has shocked allies of a country once considered one of the pillars of Western economic and political stability.

Since Britain voted to leave the EU in a June 2016 referendum, Johnson and his predecessor Theresa May have both tried and failed to get deals to leave the 28-member bloc through parliament because they lacked a majority.

"Our first MRP model projection for the 2019 election suggests that this time round the Conservatives are set for a majority," said Anthony Wells, director of political and social research at YouGov, referring to its Multilevel Regression and Post-stratification (MRP) model.

"The swing to the Conservative party is bigger in areas that voted to Leave

in 2016, with the bulk of the projected Tory gains coming in the North and the urban West Midlands, as well as former mining seats in the East Midlands," said Wells.

The British pound, which rose when rumours of the poll results circulated, shot up when it was published, rising half a cent in minutes to hit a day's high of \$1.2948.

The main opposition Labour Party is on track to secure 211 seats, down from 262, according to the YouGov model. The Scottish National Party (SNP) was on 43, the Liberal Democrats on 13 and the Brexit Party was not expected to win any seats.

The YouGov model crunched data from more than 100,000 interviews over seven days along with demographics, specific constituency circumstances and national statistics to come up with a projection.

It shows the election is now Johnson's to lose.

According to the model, the Conservatives would gain 47 seats: 44 from Labour, two from the Lib Dems and the seat previously held by the Speaker of parliament. Labour are not on course to win any new seats.

"Most seats changing hands are ones that Labour won in 2017 that are now set to be taken by the Conservatives," YouGov said. "What happens in these

constituencies is the most important dynamic in deciding whether Boris Johnson has a majority, and how large it ends up being."

The Brexit Party is hurting the Conservatives more than Labour, while independents are finding it difficult to pick up seats, according to the model. It showed neither Johnson nor Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab are in danger of losing their seats.

Dominic Cummings, who is Johnson's senior adviser, cautioned before the YouGov results were released that a hung parliament was still a real possibility.

"You will see many polls in the coming days. Some will say Boris will win," he said. "Trust me, as someone who has worked on lots of campaigns, things are much tighter than they seem and there is a very real possibility of a hung parliament."

The margins of error in the model put the Conservatives seat projection between 328 and 385, YouGov said, adding that there was still plenty of time for people to change their minds before Dec 12 - the first Christmas election in nearly a century.

In late May 2017, just over a week before the June 8 election, YouGov's model projected Theresa May would lose her majority, even though she had been ahead in most polls.



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson delivers a speech during a visit to Healey's Cornish Cyder Farm during the General Election campaign, in Callestick, England, Nov 27. (AP)

Europe

**SPD to pick new leader:** Germany's Social Democrats (SPD) on Saturday choose a new leader whose first task will be to decide whether to quit their ruling coalition with Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives, possibly triggering a snap election.

Germany's oldest party is in turmoil after a run of dismal regional and European election results and a six-month long leadership race which has left them trailing in polls. Many members want to leave the government and rebuild in opposition. (RTRS)

**Coast guard launches search:** The Dutch coast guard launched a large-scale search operation Thursday, involving a naval minesweeper, helicopters and other vessels after a fishing boat went missing and very likely sank in the North Sea.

Two people were on board the UK-165 boat when its emergency beacon was activated early Thursday about seven kilometers (four miles) west of the island of Texel in the northern Netherlands, the coast guard said. (AP)

**Spain warns of 'terror attack':** Spanish authorities have issued a warning of the serious possibility of a terror attack against Spanish citizens visiting or working in the Saharawi refugee camps in the Western Sahara.

Defense Minister Margarita Robles told Cadena Ser radio Thursday that foreign intelligence services operating in the area have conveyed to Spain that the threat is "real" and "imminent," and the government is advising people against traveling to the zone.

Dozens of Spaniards work in the camps situated in southwestern Algeria, while many others travel each year to visit Saharawi families and friends. Islamic State group-linked extremists operate in

the region. (AP)

**Police start moving migrants:** French police started moving migrants from an illegal camp site in northern Paris on Thursday, as the government aims to show it is taking a tougher stance on illegal immigration.

Local police said in a statement they would be moving between 200-300 people from the site in northern Paris' Porte d'Aubervilliers, and put them up in shelters. Since the closure of a huge migrant camp in Calais in 2016, many refugees have moved to Paris. Authorities have repeatedly dismantled illegal campsites only to see them pop up again in different areas a few

months later. Earlier this month, President Emmanuel Macron's government pledged



Merkel



Macron

to clear out some migrant tent camps, impose quotas for migrant workers and deny newly-arrived asylum seekers access to non-urgent healthcare, in a response to voters' concerns about immigration. (RTRS)

**Remarks a wake-up call:** French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday said his remarks that NATO is "brain dead" had served as a useful wake-up call to alliance members. Macron's blunt verdict ahead of a Dec. 4 summit in Britain drew strong reaction from European peers who believe Europe needs still to rely heavily on the NATO alliance for its defense. (RTRS)

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