

Hong Kong

US bans anti-freedom activists

US sanctions chief of Hong Kong gov't

WASHINGTON, Aug 8, (AP) — The US on Friday imposed sanctions on Hong Kong officials, including the pro-China leader of the government, accusing them of cooperating with Beijing's effort to undermine autonomy and crack down on freedom in the former British colony.

The sanctions are the latest in a string of actions the Trump administration has taken targeting China as tensions between the two nations rise over trade, COVID-19 and other issues. President Donald Trump's offensive against China comes as he assigns full blame to Beijing for the coronavirus outbreak in the US, deflecting criticism of his own handling of the pandemic that threatens his re-election.

The Treasury Department announced sanctions on **Carrie Lam**, the leader of the government in Hong Kong, and 10 other officials. The sanctions were authorized by an executive order that Trump signed recently to levy penalties against China for its efforts to curtail anti-government protesters in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong has long enjoyed civil liberties not seen in mainland China because it is governed under a "one country, two systems" principle in place since it reverted to Chinese rule in 1997.

However, Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong earlier this year, raising widespread concerns about the Chinese government cracking down on the anti-government protests.

"The recent imposition of draconian national security legislation on Hong Kong has not only undermined Hong Kong's autonomy, it has also infringed on the rights of people in Hong Kong," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

Treasury said the new law has allowed authorities in mainland China to operate with impunity in Hong Kong, has mandated "national security education" in Hong Kong schools, undermined the rule of law and laid the groundwork to censor individuals and outlets "deemed unfriendly" to China.

The U.S. said Lam, the chief executive of Hong Kong, is "directly responsible for implementing Beijing's policies of suppression of freedom and democratic processes." Last year, Lam pushed to allow citizens to be extradited to the mainland, setting off massive opposition demonstrations in Hong Kong, according to Treasury.

Hong Kong Commerce Secretary Edward Yau called the sanctions "unreasonable and barbarous" and said they would harm U.S. interests in the city, an Asian financial and shipping hub.

One of the sanctioned officials, the head of the central government's liaison office in Hong Kong, said being included on the list shows that he has done what he should for his country.

"I don't have a penny of assets abroad. Isn't it in vain to impose 'sanctions'? Of course, I can also send 100 U.S. dollars to Mr. Trump for freezing," Luo Huining said in a statement on the office's website.

Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Nebr., a member of the Senate intelligence committee, called Lam "Beijing's hatchet woman."

He said she has worked with the Chinese Communist Party to kill Hong Kong's autonomy and gut the rule of law. "These cowards betrayed the freedom-loving people of Hong Kong and deserve to pay a steep price," he said.

Also sanctioned was Chris Tang, the commissioner of the Hong Kong Police Force, for allegedly "coercing, arresting, detaining, or imprisoning individuals" under the new security law, and the former police commissioner, Stephen Lo.

Friday's action blocks all property or other assets that the individuals have within US jurisdiction.

The remaining officials sanctioned were:

■ John Lee Ka-chiu, secretary for security in Hong Kong who has introduced a new police unit that will have intelligence gathering and investigative abilities, to enforce the new security law.

■ Teresa Cheng, secretary of justice.

■ Erick Tsang, secretary of constitutional and mainland affairs.

■ Xia Baolong, director of the Hong Kong and Macao affairs office; and deputy director Zhang Xiaoming.

■ Zheng Yanxiong, director of a new office for safeguarding national security in Hong Kong

■ Eric Chan, secretary-general of the committee for safeguarding national security

"The Chinese Communist Party has made clear that Hong Kong will never again enjoy the high degree of autonomy that Beijing itself promised to the Hong Kong people and the United Kingdom for 50 years," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement. "President Trump has made clear that the United States will therefore treat Hong Kong as 'one country, one system,' and take action against individuals who have crushed the Hong Kong people's freedoms."

On Thursday, Trump ordered a sweeping but unspecified ban on dealings with the Chinese owners of the consumer apps TikTok and WeChat. The Trump administration has expressed concern that Chinese social media services could provide American users' personal information to Chinese Communist authorities.

TikTok, a company owned by Beijing-headquartered ByteDance Ltd. that has 100 million users in the United States and hundreds of millions worldwide, said it doesn't store American user data in China, has not given information to Beijing or censored content at the Chinese government's request. WeChat denied comment.

The Trump administration already was embroiled in a tariff war with Beijing over China's technology ambitions. Washington has blocked acquisitions of some US assets by Chinese buyers and, due to security concerns, has cut off most access to American components and other technology for Huawei Technologies Ltd., a maker of smartphones and network equipment that is China's first global tech brand.

Meanwhile, the United States has designated individuals in Hong Kong for being active against freedoms. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement on Friday that the individuals were designated for curtailing promised freedoms.

"Today, the United States designates 11 individuals including seven for their roles in coercing, arresting, detaining, or imprisoning individuals under the authority of, or having been responsible for or involved in developing, adopting, or implementing, the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong," Pompeo said.

This law, purportedly enacted to "safeguard" the security of Hong Kong, is in fact a tool of CCP repression, he added.

Three of the individuals are leaders or officials of an entity engaged in actions or policies that threaten the peace, security, stability, or autonomy of Hong Kong.

One of them, foreign person, has been a leader or official of an entity, including any government entity, that has engaged in, or whose members have engaged in censorship or other activities with respect to Hong Kong that prohibit, limit, or penalize the exercise of freedom of expression or assembly by citizens of Hong Kong, or that limit access to free and independent print, online or broadcast media.

Today's actions send a clear message that the Hong Kong authorities' actions are unacceptable and in contravention of the PRC's commitments under "one country, two systems" and the Sino-British Joint Declaration, a UN-registered treaty.



Lam



A Border Force vessel brings a group of people thought to be migrants into the port city of Dover, England, from small boats, on Aug 8. The British government says it will strengthen border measures as calm summer weather seems to have prompted a record number of people to attempt the risky sea crossing in small vessels, from northern France to England. (AP)

Britain

Gov't vows action after record-high migrant crossing

UK to ease Brexit red tape for N. Ireland

LONDON, Aug 8, (AP) — The British government will spend up 355 million pounds (\$465 million) to help businesses in Northern Ireland deal with the red tape caused by Brexit, officials said Friday.

Brexit's supporters, including British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, say leaving the European Union will be a boon for UK businesses. Many economists are skeptical of that claim, and Brexit presents special challenges for Northern Ireland, which shares a border with EU member Ireland.

Britain left the 27-nation bloc on Jan. 31 but it remains bound by the EU's rules until the end of 2020, when a post-Brexit transition period expires. The two sides are trying to negotiate a new trade agreement before the deadline, but remain far apart on key issues including competition rules and fishing rights.

A withdrawal agreement between the two sides requires the all-but-invisible border between Ireland and Northern Ireland to remain free of customs posts and other barriers. That means there will be new checks on goods moving between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

The British government says these will be minimal, and is setting up a Trader Support Service to help Northern Ireland firms handle customs declarations and other paperwork involved in importing goods. The government says it will commit up to 200 million pounds (\$235 million) for the service over five years, and will also spend up to 155 million pounds (\$182 million) on new technology.

On a visit to Northern Ireland, Minister Michael Gove, who is in charge of UK Brexit preparations, denied there would be "a border down the Irish Sea."

"Northern Ireland businesses, Northern Ireland people will continue to have totally unfettered access to the rest of the U.K.," he said, though he acknowledged there would be some new "bureaucratic processes."

Friday's announcements also include 300 million pounds (\$353 million) for peace and reconciliation projects in Northern Ireland.

Many in Northern Ireland worry that Brexit could undermine the peace process, which ended three decades of vio-

lence, by hardening the border with the Irish Republic.

Supporters of Brexit say leaving the EU's single market for goods and services will let Britain strike new trade deals around the world. Talks are underway with major countries including the US — which have made slow progress — and Japan.

British and Japanese negotiators met this week in London and said Friday they were close to a deal but not quite there yet. Japan is Britain's fourth-largest trading partner outside the EU. Tricky topics in the trade talks include cars and agriculture.

Britain's International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss, said the two sides had "reached consensus on the major elements of a deal — including ambitious provisions in areas like digital, data and financial services." She said the two nations hoped to strike a deal this month.

Meanwhile, the British government vowed Friday to strengthen border measures after a record daily number of people crossed the English Channel to the UK in small boats.

Landed

At least 235 migrants in 17 boats landed or were picked up by British Coast Guard and Border Force boats on Thursday, surpassing last week's record of 202 arrivals in one day.

One group on a beach in southeast England included a woman who appeared to be heavily pregnant.

Boats continued to arrive on Friday. In the major Channel port of Dover, children in life jackets, some too young to walk, were lifted out of Border Force boats and taken ashore in England.

Migrants have long used northern France as a launching point to reach Britain, either in trucks through the Channel tunnel or on ferries. Before the coronavirus pandemic, the UK's strong economy and need for farm and restaurant labor drew migrants from around the world who could speak some English.

Some have turned to small boats organized by smugglers because lockdowns have reduced opportunities to stow away on ferries and trucks. Fine summer weather is also prompting more

people to make the risky sea crossing — about 20 miles (32 kilometers) at its narrowest point — in vessels as small as dinghies and kayaks.

Britain's Conservative government has called on French officials to do more to force boats in the Channel back to France. They say France is a safe country and there is no reason migrants should travel from there to the UK.

Just last month, British Home Secretary Priti Patel and French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin agreed to set up a French-British intelligence unit to crack down on what Patel called "gangs behind vile people smuggling."

Treasury chief Rishi Sunak said Britain's immigration minister will go to France next week for talks about "further measures and stronger measures as required to stop and reduce the tide of boats coming."

"I think people are absolutely right to be frustrated at the scenes they're seeing. I'm frustrated, everyone is, which is why we've been working much more closely with the French government in recent time to improve our cooperation and intelligence-sharing," Sunak told Sky News.

Sunak declined to comment on reports the UK could send Royal Navy ships to patrol the Channel. That has been suggested previously by British politicians.

Conservative lawmaker Natalie Elphicke, who represents Dover in Parliament, said "all options need to be on the table."

"What we must make sure is that boats are deployed not to bring people into this country but to return them to France, and for the French to do more to make sure that those boats don't leave in the first place," Elphicke said.

Bella Sankey of human rights charity Detention Action said many migrants had legitimate reasons to go to Britain, such as relatives in the country. She said the British government should offer safe and legal routes for them to come.

"This would end the crossings overnight and ensure we are standing by our age-old tradition of protecting those seeking sanctuary on our shores," she said.



Travelers wait for the coronavirus test at the test center at the airport in Frankfurt, Germany on Aug 8. As of today, testing is mandatory for returnees from risk areas. (AP)



Zaia



Veran

Europe

Big jump in new cases: The number of daily new coronavirus infections in Italy jumped 38% higher Friday, with 552 confirmed cases registered compared to the previous day.

Italy hadn't seen a such a high daily new caseload since late May. Barely two weeks ago, Italy had been registering roughly 200 new cases a day.

The northeastern region of Veneto, which performed nearly 16,500 swab tests in a day, registered roughly a third of those new cases — 183.

Venetian Gov. **Luca Zaia** said the new infections were found in residents who recently returned home from Spain, Peru, Malta, Croatia and Greece.

"Vacations are a risk," he said in his daily briefing. "Everyone must decide where they want to go on vacation, but it's also true, that by us, for a couple of weeks now, we're seeing a concentration of patients who were infected on vacation."

Northern Italy is where Italy's outbreak began in February, and which registered the highest number of cases and deaths throughout the pandemic. (AP)

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Protests to stop eviction: Hundreds of German police officers faced off against protesters trying to stop the eviction Friday of a left-wing bar in Berlin that has been the focus of an anti-gentrification campaign.

Police detained 44 people after protesters erected barricades and set several fires in an unsuccessful bid to stop bailiffs from entering the Syndikat bar in the German capital's Neukölln district.

A rally opposing the eviction last Saturday turned violent, with police and protesters clashing after officers were pelted with stones and fireworks.

The Syndikat bar, which opened 35 years ago when Neukölln was a largely working-class area, has become a symbol for activists who say rents in Berlin are becoming unaffordable.

Berlin's state government recently ordered a five-year rent freeze on 1.5 million apartments. A campaign is underway to have the state buy up properties owned by large landlords. (AP)

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Paris placed under 'Alert':

The French capital and its surrounding region has been placed under "Red Alert" status because of a persistent heat-wave that has pushed temperatures to record highs, nudging close to 40 degrees Celsius, weather services said on Friday.

On Thursday, the thermometer

rose above 37 degrees in Paris and is forecast to be above 39 degrees on Friday, Meteo France said.

Normandy Region is also on Red Alert and 53 of France's 96 districts are on Orange Alert for heat-wave risks.

The high temperatures come amid the COVID-19 crisis when



Poland's parliament guards salute as President Andrzej Duda arrives for a ceremony of his swearing in for a second term, in the company of First Lady Agata Kornhauser-Duda, (second left), at the parliament, in Warsaw, Poland on Aug 6. (AP)

the wearing of uncomfortable masks is required in many areas, both inside and outside.

Health Minister **Oliver Veran** earlier Thursday urged people to be disciplined and keep wearing masks to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

In the past week, infection rates increased here by 30 percent because of perceived lack of discipline. (KUNA)

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Nudist chases down boar:

A German nudist had the last laugh after giving chase to a wild boar that had run off with a bag containing his laptop.

Pictures posted on social media show the naked man running after a sow and her two piglets to the mirth of fellow bathers at Berlin's Teufelssee, or Devil's Lake.

Adele Landauer, an actor and coach who says she took the pictures, wrote that the man "gave his all."

German daily Bild reported Friday that the man, who wasn't identified, succeeded in recovering his pilfered laptop.

Landauer said she showed the man the pictures later on and "he laughed loudly and authorized

me to publish them."

Wild boars are common in the forests around Berlin and can occasionally be seen venturing through city parks in search of food. (AP)

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Court rejects move:

A Belgian court on Friday rejected Spain's demand to have a former high-ranking politician from the region of Catalonia extradited back to the country to be tried for his alleged role in an independence referendum that Madrid branded as illegal.

The Brussels prosecutor's office said the court had rejected enforcing the European arrest warrant for former Catalan culture minister Lluís Puig on the grounds that "the Spanish authorities who issued the warrant are not competent to do so."

Puig has been living in exile in Belgium since he, former Catalan president Carles Puigdemont and a number of their associates fled to Belgium in October 2017, fearing arrest over the secessionist push he led and the holding of an independence referendum that the Spanish government said was illegal. (AP)