



Alan Kurdi rescue ship picks up another 44 migrants

China demands US cancel arms sale to Taiwan



HONG KONG: A protester holds up a mask of the anonymous group in Mong Kok district in Kowloon during a demonstration march to the West Kowloon rail terminus against the proposed extradition bill in Hong Kong. —AFP

HK leader says extradition bill 'dead'

Unmoved protesters threaten mass rallies

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's embattled pro-Beijing leader yesterday said a China extradition bill that sparked unprecedented political unrest "is dead"—but protesters immediately dismissed her comments, threatening more mass rallies. The international finance hub has been plunged into its worst crisis in recent history by a month of marches and sporadic violent confrontations between police and pockets of hardcore protesters.

The rallies were sparked by a draft law that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China, but they have morphed into a wider movement calling for democratic reforms and a halt to sliding freedoms in the semi-autonomous territory. In a city unaccustomed to such upheaval, police have fired tear gas and rubber bullets while the parliament has been trashed by protesters—as Beijing's authority faces its most serious challenge since Hong Kong was handed back to China in 1997.

Yesterday the city's chief executive Carrie Lam admitted her administration's attempt to introduce the bill was a "complete failure", saying that her government would not seek to reactivate it in parliament. "There is no such plan. The bill is dead," Lam said. But she once again refused to buckle to demands to completely

withdraw the bill from the legislative agenda, provoking outcry from the anti-government camp.

Lam's words about the bill are "another ridiculous lie" tweeted leading democracy activist Joshua Wong, who was recently released from jail for his role in protests in 2014. "The bill still exists in the 'legislative program' until July next year."

Claudia Mo, a pro-democracy lawmaker added: "A person cannot be resurrected. But then an object can always be remade... and it boils down to our complete lack of trust and confidence (in the government). The Civil Human Rights Front—which has organized some of the mass rallies—said it would announce fresh protests in coming days.

Challenge to Beijing

With calls mounting for her resignation, Lam has made few public appearances in recent weeks. But yesterday she resurfaced, agreeing to meet student protesters and adding that she recognized the swirling economic, political and social challenges facing the city. "I come to the conclusion that there are some fundamental and deep-seated problems in Hong Kong society," she

said. Analyst Dixon Sing said her words would do little to defang the protest movement.

"Trust in the government has sunk to such a record level that if there's not a clear fulfillment of the (key) demands, the majority of the Hong Kong public will still be very skeptical of the government's sincerity," he told AFP. Lam has been under pressure to appoint an independent judge as head of a public commission of inquiry into the police response to the protests. But she rejected those calls again yesterday, backing an existing police complaints body to investigate claims of excessive force.

Stress test bank

The anti-extradition movement has united an unlikely cross-section of Hong Kong society, including major business, legal bodies as well as religious leaders, activists and journalists. Protesters are becoming increasingly creative—chat forums and encrypted messenger apps are buzzing with calls for the mass withdrawal of funds from the Bank of China this Saturday to "stress test" the organization's liquidity.

Beijing has thrown its full support behind Lam, calling

on police to pursue anyone involved in the parliament storming and other clashes. "The central government expressed support, respect and understanding," foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told reporters in Beijing when asked about Lam's latest statement. Over the weekend, Beijing's ambassador to London said the extradition bill was needed to "plug loopholes", fuelling fears it still wants the legislation to pass.

The protests are also part of a longer battle for the soul of Hong Kong between those who see full integration with the autocratic mainland as an inevitability and others wishing to preserve the city's unique freedoms and culture. Under the 1997 handover deal with the British, China promised to allow Hong Kong to keep key liberties such as its independent judiciary and rights like freedom of speech.

But many say that 50-year deal is already being reneged on, citing the disappearance into mainland custody of dissident booksellers, the disqualification of prominent politicians and the jailing of democracy protest leaders. Authorities have also resisted calls for the city's leader to be directly elected by the people. —AFP

Billionaire Democrat launches 2020 White House bid

WASHINGTON: Billionaire environmental activist Tom Steyer launched an underdog 2020 presidential bid yesterday, reversing his decision from months ago to focus instead on pressing the case to impeach incumbent Donald Trump. "My name's Tom Steyer and I'm running for president," the Democratic philanthropist and former hedge fund manager said in a video announcing his candidacy.

Denouncing a "rigged system" that benefits Americans at the top, Steyer said his campaign was "trying to make democracy work by pushing power down to the people." Steyer's announcement makes the 62-year-old the 24th candidate pursuing the Democratic 2020 presidential nomination, a sprawling field that includes heavyweights like former US vice president Joe Biden and senators Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Kamala Harris.

His late entry likely puts him at a disadvantage: the party has already held its first debate, and Steyer will be hard pressed to meet the donor and polling criteria to make the stage for the next debate later this month. Steyer has been among the most unapologetic supporters of impeaching the president, donating millions of dollars of his own fortune to a television and online campaign. Need to Impeach.

But he steered clear of that message in his launch video,



SAN FRANCISCO: In this file photo US philanthropist Tom Steyer speaks on stage during the 2019 California Democratic Party State Convention at Moscone Center in San Francisco, California. —AFP

training his fire instead on powerful corporations that he said have "bought the democracy" and are putting profits ahead of everyday Americans and environmental stewardship.

"There's a breakdown in Washington DC, and I don't mean just Donald Trump," Steyer added on Twitter. "I'm talking about corporate money and our broken political system." Steyer recently has spoken critically of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the top Democrat in Congress, who is publicly opposed to launching impeachment proceedings against Trump but is facing mounting pressure from within her caucus to do so. —AFP

Trump 'dossier' author grilled by US Justice Dept

WASHINGTON: Federal lawyers probing the origins of the investigation of ties between Russia and President Donald Trump's campaign have interviewed the author of a "dossier" that alleged misconduct between Trump and Moscow, prompting the lawyers to extend their inquiry. Three attorneys from the Inspector General's office of the US Department of Justice met in person in early June with dossier author Christopher Steele in Britain, said two sources with direct knowledge of the lawyers' travels.

The interview with Steele, a former top spy on Russia for Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, or MI6, took place while Trump was in London for a formal state visit with Queen Elizabeth and a meeting with UK Prime Minister Theresa May. Steele's dossier, made public in 2017, alleged that Moscow attempted to interfere in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and that there was potential collusion between Russia and Trump's campaign, along with other unverified and salacious claims about the president.

The Justice Department's inspector general has been examining the earliest stages of an FBI investigation of Trump, his former 2016 presidential campaign rival Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, Russia and

former Trump adviser Carter Page. Inspector General Michael Horowitz, whose office is an internal Justice Department watchdog, launched his probe in March 2018 amid allegations by Republican lawmakers that the FBI erred in seeking a warrant to monitor Page.

Trump has described the Steele dossier as "bogus" and Republicans have long sought to discredit the FBI's investigation, which was later taken over by US Special Counsel Robert Mueller. His final report on Russia and the Trump campaign was released in redacted form in mid-April. In that same month, Attorney General William Barr, who now heads the Justice Department, told a congressional committee that the Horowitz probe would be completed by May or June.

One of the two sources said Horowitz's investigators appear to have found Steele's information sufficiently credible to have to extend the investigation. Its completion date is now unclear. A key focus of the Horowitz probe is whether the FBI followed proper procedures when it applied for a warrant with the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISA) to secretly conduct surveillance on Page and his ties to Russia.

Declassified documents show that the FBI cited information in Steele's dossier when it asked the secretive FISA court in late 2016 for a warrant to eavesdrop electronically on Page, a US businessman with interests in Russia. Horowitz's office in Washington declined to comment. A spokesman for Orbis Business Intelligence, Steele's London investigations firm, declined to comment. UK government agencies declined to disclose whether they were in contact with Horowitz's team in London. —Reuters