

## International

# Hong Kong protesters clash with police; demonstrations target Chinese traders

## Unrest grips HK over now-suspended extradition bill

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong protesters clashed with police yesterday in a town near the boundary with mainland China where thousands rallied against the presence of Chinese traders, seizing on another grievance following major unrest over an extradition bill. The demonstration in the Hong Kong territorial town of Sheung Shui, not far from the Chinese city of Shenzhen, began peacefully but devolved into skirmishes and shouting. Protesters threw umbrellas and hardhats at police, who retaliated by swinging batons and firing pepper spray. Later in the day Hong Kong police urged protesters to refrain from violence and leave the area.

The protest was the latest in a series that have roiled the former British colony for more than a month, giving rise to its worst political crisis since its 1997 handover to China. Sometimes violent street protests have drawn in millions of people, with hundreds even storming the legislature on July 1 to oppose a now-suspended extradition bill that would have allowed criminal suspects in Hong Kong to be sent to China to face trial in courts under ruling Communist Party control.

Critics see the bill as a threat to Hong Kong's rule of law. Chief Executive Carrie Lam this week said the bill was "dead" after having suspended it last month, but opponents vow to settle for nothing short of its formal withdrawal. Protests against the bill had largely taken place in Hong Kong's main business district, but demonstrators have recently begun to look elsewhere to widen support by taking up narrower, more domestic issues.

In Sheung Shui, protesters rallied to oppose small-time Chinese traders who make short trips into the territory to buy goods that they then haul back to China to sell. The demonstrators chanted demands in Mandarin, China's official language, for the Chinese traders to go home. Many street-level shops were shuttered during the march.

The traders have long been a source of anger among those in Hong Kong who say they have fuelled inflation, driven up property prices, dodged taxes and diluted Sheung Shui's identity. "Our lovely town has become chaos," said Ryan Lai, 50, a resident of Sheung Shui, where so-called "parallel traders" buy bulk quantities of duty-free goods to be carried into mainland China and sold.

"We don't want to stop travel and buying, but please, just make it orderly and legal. The extradition bill was the tipping point for us to come out. We want Sheung Shui back." When Britain returned Hong Kong to China 22 years ago, Chinese Communist leaders promised the city a high degree of autonomy for 50 years. But many say China has progressively tightened its grip, putting Hong Kong's freedoms under threat through a range of measures such as the extradition bill.

### Democracy deficit

Hong Kong's lack of full democracy was behind the recent unrest, said Jimmy Sham of the Civil Human Rights Front, which organized protests against the extradition bill. "The government, Carrie Lam, some legislators in func-

tional constituencies are not elected by the people, so there are many escalating actions in different districts to reflect different social issues," he said. "If political problems are not solved, social well-being issues will continue to emerge endlessly."

One protester said yesterday's scuffles started when demonstrators charged the police after the latter came to the assistance of mainland traders who had assaulted demonstrators. "Some people were attacked and got injured in a stampede. I tried to save some girls so I was also attacked by pepper spray by police. Now I feel so bad. The cops are dogs," said the man, who would only give the name Ragnar. Protesters ripped up median barriers and fences to set up roadblocks and defenses.

A young man was treated for a bloody head wound meters from where surrounded police were hitting activists armed with umbrellas. A baton charge by police in riot gear cleared the street minutes later to free trapped officers. "We have no weapons and we were peaceful. When we saw them taking photos of us in the crowd we had to react," said another protester, surnamed Chan, who declined to give his full name. "We are all scared now. How can they hit us with batons?" he said, staring at a pool of blood where one of his peers was treated.

Last week nearly 2,000 people marched in the Tuen Mun residential district to protest against what they saw as the nuisance of brash singing and dancing to Mandarin pop songs by middle-aged mainland women. On Sunday,



**HONG KONG:** A photojournalist falls down during clashes between protesters and police at an anti parallel trading march in Sheung Shui district in Hong Kong yesterday. — AFP

tens of thousands marched in one of Kowloon's most popular tourist shopping areas, trying to persuade mainland Chinese tourists to back opposition to the extradition bill. "We want to raise awareness in Washington that the United States has to do more now to help Hong Kong become fully democratic," said a resident of the nearby town of Fanling, who was one of five people

in yesterday's crowd carrying US flags. "They are the most important power left that can stand up to China," added the 30-year-old man, who gave his name only as David. Anti-extradition protesters plan another demonstration on Sunday in the town of Sha Tin, in the so-called New Territories between Hong Kong island and the border with China. — Reuters

## S Korea, Japan hold talks as diplomatic row worsens

**TOKYO:** Japanese and South Korean officials held hours of talks Friday to discuss a worsening diplomatic row that has prompted Washington to offer to mediate between the US allies. The meeting between representatives from Japan's trade ministry and South Korea's foreign ministry ran hours longer than expected but there was no sign of a detente in the simmering dispute.

Japan last week ramped up long-running tensions over the use of forced labor during World War Two by announcing restrictions on exports used by South Korean chip and smartphone companies. The move sparked anger in Seoul, but also raised international concern about the effect on the global tech supply chain and the possibility of price hikes for consumers.

Tokyo says the constraints, which apply to three chemicals as well as technology transfers, were made necessary by

a "loss of trust" in relations with Seoul, but also accuses South Korea of improperly handling exports of sensitive materials from Japan. And Japanese officials said they defended their decision in Friday's talks. "We confirmed Japan's safety management system on exports," a spokesperson from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry told reporters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"We answered all their questions in a careful manner and explained that this is based on international rules. It is not a World Trade Organization violation, and it is not a countermeasure." But earlier in Seoul, President Moon Jae-in's office said South Korea had done nothing wrong and called for a third-party investigation into Japan's claims.

The brief glimpse given to media of the meeting suggested an environment that was anything but warm — the two Japanese officials remained stony-faced and sitting at a table when their South Korean counterparts arrived, offering no apparent greetings or handshakes before reporters were ushered out. The new restrictions, which significantly slow exports, took effect from July 4.

Japanese officials are weighing additional measures including removing South Korea from a "white list" of countries that face minimal constraints on technology transfers with national security implications. Seoul has threatened to take the issue to the World Trade

Organization and also urged Washington to intervene. US officials said they would "do everything we can" to ease tensions, without offering a specific opinion on Japan's measures. Relations between the American allies have long been strained over issues related to Tokyo's brutal 1910-45 colonial rule over the Korean peninsula.

But ties have been further hurt by a series of rulings from South Korean courts ordering Japanese firms that used wartime forced labor to compensate victims. Experts said there was little hope of either side backing down quickly, with both Moon and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe unlikely to offer concessions. "As the dispute deepens, it is increasingly difficult for either Moon or Abe to yield," wrote Tobias Harris, an analyst at the Teneo consultancy group, in a note. Any compromise by Moon "would likely be seen as capitulation to Japanese economic coercion and could trigger a backlash," Harris wrote. "Meanwhile, the South Korean reaction has likely convinced Abe that he has hit a pressure point... and could encourage his administration to intensify the pressure to goad Moon into surrendering." Japanese officials appeared to rule out further talks. "We think we fully answered all the questions," the spokesperson from Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said. "We will accept emails if they have technical questions." — AFP



**KARACHI:** Supporters of Home Based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF) shout slogans against the 2019 national budget and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during a protest in Karachi, after prices were hiked in the country. — AFP

## Pakistan's traders strike over the IMF austerity measures

**KARACHI:** Markets and wholesale merchants across Pakistan closed yesterday in a strike by businesses against measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund to crack down on tax evasion and bolster the country's depleted public finances. In Karachi, the country's main commercial city, around 80% of markets dealing in bulk goods were closed, said Atiq Mir, president of the All Karachi Traders Alliance, which represents hundreds of markets in the city.

"Government policies have created mistrust in trade and industry," said Mir, who added that traders were already struggling with corrupt tax officials demanding bribes. Similar strikes were called in other big business centers including the eastern city of Lahore, Rawalpindi, near the capital Islamabad, and Multan, home to a celebrated ceramics industry.

Not all business associations joined the strike but the move underlines the pressure facing Prime Minister Imran Khan's government, which came to power last year promising millions of new jobs and welfare measures to help the poor. Instead, like so many of its predecessors, it is having to impose tough austerity measures having been forced to turn to the IMF for Pakistan's 13th bailout since the late 1980s.

In Karachi, calm prevailed around the

main electronics market in the old city that would normally be bustling on a Saturday with traders selling everything from mobile phones to televisions, refrigerators and air conditioners. A popular textiles market on Tariq Road in another part of the city was also closed as traders, already struggling to attract customers hit by a sliding rupee and inflation running at around 9%, shut up shop for the day.

Under the IMF bailout, signed this month, Pakistan is under heavy pressure to boost its tax revenues to plug a fiscal deficit which has ballooned to around 7% of its gross domestic product, as well as avert a looming balance of payments crisis. The South Asian country has long suffered from a weak tax base, with only about 1% of its 208 million population filing income tax returns and key industrial sectors dominated by powerful lobbies that pay little or no tax.

Among the measures which have roused the anger of traders is a new rule that would require customers buying items worth 50,000 rupees (\$315) or over to produce identity documents, a move intended to help authorities to track tax evaders. "The new condition of the national identity card on purchases of 50,000 rupees or more has created harassment among the people," Mir said.

Under the measures agreed with the IMF, the government has also agreed to close loopholes and preferential rates in sales tax on sugar, steel, edible oils and medium and large retailers, hitting many businesses. "We want zero tax on small retailers. Sales tax should be limited to the manufacturing sector," Mir said. The strike, which follows isolated protests by traders this month, was called after the government refused to agree to the traders' demands to abandon its tax plans. — Reuters

## Lost lessons: North Koreans get 're-education' in South

**SEOUL:** One of the first things North Korean defector Ri Kwang-myong did after reaching the South was to go back to school - 12 years after finishing his education. North Korea claims a 100 percent literacy rate and boasts that its free compulsory education demonstrates the superiority of its socialist system. But those who escape from the impoverished country often struggle in the South from a lack of basic knowledge. Lessons at North Korean schools are peppered with praise for the leadership, defectors say, and for many, education is also disrupted by grinding poverty or their long journey to freedom.

Ri, 31, is among a handful of adult students at Wooridul School in Seoul, an educational haven for North Korean students too old, or lagging academically and so unable to go to appropriate state schools. "Although I studied in the North and graduated, I don't know much," said Ri, who went back to school last year, six months after arriving in South Korea. Much of what he was taught in the North was not applicable in his new home, he added: "Everything I learned is different."

### Revolutionary studies

One of the most important subjects in the North Korean education curriculum is revolutionary studies, which focuses on the ruling Kim family. It starts with two hours a

week at the age of six - when pupils are taught the official versions of the childhoods of the country's founder Kim Il Sung and his son and successor Kim Jong Il, grandfather and father of the current leader Kim Jong Un.

Soon afterwards Kim Jong Il's mother Kim Jong Suk joins the pantheon, and in secondary school six classes a week are devoted to the subject - a significant percentage of the total teaching. When AFP visited Manbok high school in Sonbong, North Korea, principal Ri Myong Guk said: "Our students grow up in the love and care of the party and the state. "We believe it's important to educate the students with political and revolutionary history so they appreciate the love and care of the great leaders," he explained.

The South Korean government describes the North's education system as designed to instil "unconditional loyalty to the party and the leader as the most important aspect of life". And Lee Mi-yeon, a former kindergarten teacher in the North who fled in 2010, added: "They are taught as mythical, God-like figures who created the country and made grenades out of pine cones." Teachings about the leaders seep into other subjects as well, she said. "If we are teaching about the construction of a building, we have to spend about five minutes to tell a related story about the leader for ideological education," Lee said.

According to defectors many young North Koreans were forced to abandon their schooling when the country's economy collapsed in the mid-1990s and a famine claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Lee Song-hee, a 27-year-old student at Wooridul School, said that after only four months of elementary school in the North she had to drop out to help her mother as they struggled to earn a living. — AFP



**SEOUL:** Adult students study at Wooridul School in Seoul - an educational haven for North Korean defectors too old to go to appropriate state schools. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Monsoon rains kill 28

**NEW DELHI:** At least 17 people have been killed across Nepal after torrential monsoon rains induced floods and landslides, officials said yesterday. In neighboring north-eastern India the death toll rose to 11, with six dead in Assam and another five in Arunachal Pradesh, officials said. Heavy rains since Thursday have hit several districts in Nepal, especially in the country's eastern region and the southern plains. According to figures released by Nepal's police, a further seven people have been injured and seven others reported missing. Three were killed when a wall collapsed in the capital Kathmandu. "Local authorities and our security officials are all working to rescue people and bring them to safety. Helicopters are on standby if needed," Home Ministry official Umakanta Adhikari said. Nepal's weather department warned Thursday that heavy rains were expected to continue for two days, and advised people to stay alert. — AFP

#### Duterte blasts 'idiot' critics

**MANILA:** Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday branded as "idiots" the governments behind a UN rights body investigation into his narcotics crackdown that has killed thousands and drawn international censure. Duterte's three-year drug war has unleashed a surge of bloodshed in the Asian nation, with reports of nightly slayings of suspects by police and masked gunmen. The UN Human Rights Council on Thursday narrowly passed a resolution spearheaded by Iceland which gives UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet a year to conduct a "comprehensive" international review of the campaign, a centerpiece of Duterte's presidency. "These sons of w\*\*\*\*\*s cannot understand that we have a problem," Duterte said in a speech to corrections officers, in his first comments on the resolution. "Iceland, what is Iceland's problem? Just ice. That's your problem. You have too much ice and there is no clear day or night there." — AFP

#### Over 100 fighters killed

**BEIRUT:** More than 100 fighters were killed in clashes between regime and jihadist-led forces in northwest Syria, a war monitor said yesterday, as violence raged on the edge of an opposition bastion despite a September truce deal. Eight civilians also died in the latest violence since Wednesday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Six of them, including a child, were killed in regime air strikes on the town of Jisr Al-Shughur. The UN said it had received reports that the strikes hit medical facilities and health care workers. Syria's civil war has killed more than 370,000 people and spiraled into a complex conflict since starting in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests. Russian and regime aircraft have since late April ramped up the deadly bombardment of the Idlib region of some three million people in northwest Syria. — AFP

#### Quake rocks Philippines

**MANILA:** Fifty-one people were injured and several homes, churches and other buildings damaged yesterday when an earthquake sent terrified residents of the southern Philippines fleeing their homes before dawn, police said. The 5.8-magnitude shallow quake struck the northeast coast of Mindanao island at 4:42 am, with the Philippine seismology office recording seven less intense aftershocks. Officers at the police station in Madrid town, near the epicenter, ducked beneath tables as the glass door of a filing cabinet splintered and a television set fell to the floor and shattered, police chief Lieutenant Wilson Unite said. "We saw people running out of their homes. A number of residences sustained minor damage like cracked walls," Unite told AFP by telephone. Patients were also evacuated briefly at the Madrid District Hospital, which sustained cracks on its concrete walls, he added. — AFP