

# 15 held for Hong Kong mall protests

Sheung Shui mall is located near the China border and is popular with shoppers from the mainland

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
HONG KONG  
Hong Kong riot police arrested at least 15 people in clashes on Saturday with dozens of pro-democracy protesters, who targeted a mall near the border with China to demonstrate against mainland tourists and shoppers.

The fresh unrest ended a brief calm after protesters had battled riot police in shopping malls and streets of commercial districts across the city for three days over the Christmas period.

On Saturday afternoon, masked plain-clothed officers wielding batons arrested 14 people, including a 14-year-old girl, who were protesting inside the mall in Sheung Shui district, forcing shops to shut and harassing shoppers, a reporter at the scene said.

## Riot police in building

Riot police charged into the mall to reinforce the officers and used pepper spray to disperse a crowd of residents who gathered to protest



Upping the ante: Anti-government demonstrators walk with their hands raised past shops during a protest at the Sheung Shui shopping mall in Hong Kong on Saturday. • REUTERS

against the arrests.

After the police left, some protesters stayed on a footbridge linking the mall to a metro station and harassed passers-by they thought were mainland Chinese tourists. Another man was arrested by riot police in a later incident inside the mall, his

head covered in blood.

Similar protests and clashes also took place in a mall in Kowloon Bay district, where a number of people were arrested Saturday evening.

Blood and a black mask were seen by a reporter on the floor where plain-clothed police subdued protesters in the mall.

esters in the mall.

In recent years, Sheung Shui has been swamped by a huge influx of mainlanders and parallel traders seeking to circumvent Chinese taxes, angering many residents who have seen their local shops transformed to cater to the visitors.

Hong Kong's many malls have become regular protest venues as protesters try to cause economic disruption in their push for greater democratic freedoms and police accountability. The last month had seen a drop in violence and protests after pro-democracy candidates won a landslide at local elections.

But with Beijing and city leaders refusing further concessions, rallies and clashes reignited over the Christmas period.

The protests were initially sparked by a now-abandoned attempt to allow extradition to the authoritarian mainland.

They have since morphed into a popular revolt against Beijing's rule, with spiralling fears that the city is losing some of its unique liberties. Among the demands being made by protesters is an inquiry into the police, an amnesty for the more than 6,000 people arrested and the right to elect Hong Kong's leader.

# 10 Afghan soldiers killed in Taliban attack on base

Militants dug a tunnel and blew it up

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
KANDAHAR

Ten Afghan soldiers were killed in a Taliban attack on a military base in the southern province of Helmand on Saturday, officials said.

The Taliban dug a tunnel into the base in volatile Sangin district and then blew it up before their fighters could attack the compound, said Nawab Zadran a spokesman for 215 Maiwand Army Corps in southern Afghanistan.

"There were 18 soldiers in the base at the time of the attack providing security for the people of Sangin. Four soldiers were wounded and four repelled the Taliban attack bravely," he said.

Provincial spokesman Omar Zawak confirmed the attack and said the soldiers were killed by the powerful blast inside the base. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid in a statement sent to media claimed responsibility for the attack.

The attack in Helmand comes as local and international forces brace for another deadly winter amid U.S.-Taliban talks to end the violence in Afghanistan.

On Tuesday, seven Afghan soldiers were killed in a Taliban attack on a base in the northern province of Balkh.

## Attacks in winter

Winter once marked a slowdown in the so-called "fighting season", with Taliban fighters returning to their villages while snow and ice made attacks more difficult to pull off. But in recent years, the distinction between seasons has all but vanished.

Deadly violence continues to grip Afghanistan even as the U.S. and the Taliban negotiate on-off talks aimed at reducing America's military footprint in the country in return for the insurgents ensuring an improved security situation.

## ELSEWHERE



### Pompeo slams Iran for 'suppressing' events

WASHINGTON  
U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday slammed Iran for using "violence" and censorship to prevent memorials for those killed during the suppression of recent protests. "The Iranian people have the right to mourn 1,500 victims slaughtered by @khamenei\_ir during #IranProtests," Mr. Pompeo tweeted. AFP

### Human remains in boat possibly from N. Korea

TOKYO  
Japanese police found the remains of at least five people in a wooden boat suspected to be from North Korea on the coast of one of Japan's outlying islands on Saturday, a Coast Guard official said. Police made the discovery in the wooden boat's stem around 9:30 a.m. (0030 GMT) on Saturday on Sado island. REUTERS

# No legal basis for subpoena: Biden

Trump wants the former V-P to testify in impeachment trial

REUTERS  
WASHINGTON

U.S. Democratic presidential contender Joe Biden on Saturday said there would be "no legal basis" for Republicans to subpoena his testimony in President Donald Trump's impeachment trial, clarifying remarks from Friday that drew criticism.

"I want to clarify something I said yesterday. In my 40 years in public life, I have always complied with a lawful order and in my eight years as V-P, my office... cooperat-



Former Vice-President Joe Biden. • AP

ed with legitimate congressional oversight requests," Mr. Biden tweeted. "But I am just not going to pretend that there is any legal basis for Republican subpoenas for my testimony in the im-

peachment trial." The statement came one day after Mr. Biden said in an interview with the *Des Moines Register* that he would not comply with a Senate subpoena because it would be a tactic by Mr. Trump to distract from the President's wrongdoing.

Mr. Trump has raised unsubstantiated charges that Mr. Biden improperly tried to halt a Ukrainian probe of a company with ties to his son, and has said he wants Mr. Biden to testify in the impeachment trial.

# U.S. contractor in Iraq killed in rocket fire

Iraqi military base in Kirkuk targeted

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BAGHDAD

A rocket attack in Iraq killed a U.S. civilian contractor, raising fears on Saturday that violence could escalate in the protest-hit country already engulfed in its worst political crisis in decades.

Washington recently promised "a decisive U.S. response" to a growing number of unclaimed attacks on its interests in Iraq, which it blames on pro-Iran factions.

Baghdad – which is close to both countries – risks being caught in the middle.

A barrage of 30 rockets was fired at the KI Iraqi military base in Kirkuk, an oil-rich region north of Baghdad on Friday, said a U.S. official. "One U.S. civilian contractor was killed and several U.S. service members and Iraqi personnel were wounded," said the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State.

# Chile sees fresh round of clashes

President signs decree for plebiscite on Constitution

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
SANTIAGO

Thousands of protesters clashed with police on Friday in Santiago in a fresh round of anti-government demonstrations that erupted more than two months ago in Chile.

The rally took place in the Plaza Italia, which has since October 18 become the epicentre of massive citizen protests against President Sebastian Pinera's right-wing government.

Police entered the square in mid-afternoon and dispersed demonstrators with

water cannon and tear gas. But after almost two hours of confrontations, thousands of protesters finally occupied the plaza, according to reporters.

## Social unrest

Authorities have been trying to restore calm in downtown Santiago, which has been roiled by a crisis that initially erupted over metro fare hikes but quickly escalated into the most severe outbreak of social unrest since the end of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet nearly 30 years ago.

Chileans have taken to the streets to register their anger over inequality and particularly to vent at the elites that control much of the country's wealth.

Friday's demonstration occurred the same day Mr. Pinera signed a decree calling for a plebiscite on April 26 to decide whether to replace the current Constitution, which dates back to Pinochet's rule. Many in Chile see replacing the Constitution – which smacks of a dark, repressive chapter in the country's past – as a way to help end the crisis.

# Algerian President names ex-diplomat as PM

Abdelaziz Djerad is also an academic

REUTERS  
ALGIERS

Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune on Saturday named a university professor and former diplomat as Prime Minister as he builds a new government to handle political unrest and a looming economic challenge.

Abdelaziz Djerad, 65, served in the administration of a previous President in the 1990s, but was sidelined by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was ousted in April after two decades as head of state.

The massive street protest movement that prompted Mr. Bouteflika to step down regarded Mr. Tebboune's election this month



Abdelaziz Djerad, Algeria's new Prime Minister.

as illegitimate and it seems unlikely to accept any government he appoints.

The protesters rejected any election that took place while the military stayed involved in politics and Bouteflika-era figures retained powerful positions.

# Kazakh jet's black boxes sent to Moscow

Country in mourning a day after airliner slammed into a house

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ALMATY

Kazakhstan observed a national day of mourning on Saturday after 12 people died when an airliner crashed shortly after take-off and slammed into a house.

Witnesses spoke of the terrified screams of passengers as the plane came down on the edge of the country's biggest city Almaty on Friday, but many on board managed to walk away without serious injury. The jet carrying nearly 100 passengers operated by budget carrier Bek Air was torn apart and its nose crushed on impact with a two-storey building just minutes after taking off en route to the capital Nur-Sultan.

Kazakh authorities have launched an investigation to



Little hearts: Tributes were paid in the form of candles and paper aeroplanes near the Almaty Airport to those killed in Friday's crash. • AP

determine the cause of the disaster, and the plane's black boxes have been sent to Moscow for examination, according to Deputy Industry Minister Berik Kamilyev, cited by Russian news agencies.

In Nur-Sultan, Kazakh-

stan's largest flag was at half-mast for the day of mourning while officials made urgent appeals for blood donations to help the dozens of injured survivors. Neighbouring Russia and China were among the countries to join the Vatican and the Euro-

pean Union in expressing condolences to the former Soviet Central Asian republic. Officials say the Fokker 100 plane's tail hit the tarmac twice on Friday during take-off before it came down and crashed into the concrete building.

"Either this is a pilot error, or there were technical reasons," Deputy Prime Minister Roman Sklyar said at a press conference in Almaty on Friday. "The aircraft split into two parts. Most of the passengers who died were in the front part."

According to Kazakh emergency authorities, the 12 dead included the pilot. Another 47 passengers out of the 98 people on-board were still in hospital on Saturday. Nine of them were children, officials said.

# China bans 'labour camp' detention for sex workers

The system will cease from Dec. 29

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BEIJING

Chinese lawmakers on Saturday voted to abolish the "custody and education" punishment system, which allowed police to hold sex workers and their clients without charge for up to two years, state media reported.

Critics say the nearly three-decade-old system has little to do with education.

"Sex workers are subjected to police violence... forced labour, compulsory testing for sexually transmitted disease... humiliation and physical violence at these centres," said Shen Tingting, director of advocacy and policy at Asia Catalyst, an NGO working with

marginalised groups in the region. Abolishing this system is a "significant positive step," she said. The arbitrary detention system will cease from December 29, and those held at "education centers" should be released immediately, state news agency Xinhua reported.

There has been a public push to close the centres ever since China's top legislative committee abolished its system of "re-education through labour camps" in 2013.

Shutting the labour camps – introduced as a speedy way to handle petty offenders – ended a practice long criticised by human rights groups.

## SUDOKU

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								6
		2		5	1			4
			2			3		8
	2		1		5		6	
6		3			7			
5			3	2		1		
3								
	1					9	5	

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

### Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

7	8	6	4	2	9	1	5	3
4	2	3	8	5	1	9	6	7
9	5	1	3	7	6	8	2	4
3	7	9	1	6	8	2	4	5
8	6	4	2	9	5	7	3	1
5	1	2	7	3	4	6	9	8
2	3	5	6	8	7	4	1	9
1	9	7	5	4	2	3	8	6
6	4	8	9	1	3	5	7	2

# China targets another American product: books

There has been a near-freeze in regulatory approvals for books from the U.S., including bestsellers

LIN QIQING  
PAUL MOZUR  
SHANGHAI

China has taken aim at major American businesses as it looks for ways to retaliate against President Donald Trump's mounting tariffs. It has targeted cars, beef and soya beans – and, apparently, Bob Woodward's latest tale of Washington dysfunction and intrigue.

*Fear: Trump in the White House*, which Mr. Woodward wrote in 2018, is one of hundreds of American books held up by Chinese publishing regulators since the trade war intensified this year. Publishers inside and outside China say the release of American books has come to a virtual standstill, cutting them off from a big market of voracious readers.

"American writers and scholars are very important in every sector," said Sophie Lin, an editor at a private publishing company in Beijing. "It has had a tremendous impact on us and on the indus-

try." After new titles failed to gain approval, she said, her company stopped editing and translating about a dozen pending books to cut costs.

The Chinese book world is cautiously optimistic that the partial trade truce reached this month between Beijing and Washington will break the logjam, according to book editors and others in the publishing industry who spoke to *The New York Times*. Already, they said, some have won approvals after China celebrated its National Day on October 1, a politically perilous event that had Chinese officials on edge. But they also worry that American books could be targeted in future crackdowns.

A review of lists of books that had been set to be published this year shows a wide variety of bestsellers and academic titles alike that have failed to appear as promised. Besides Mr. Woodward's book, they include a



Hurting bibliophiles: A bookstore located near Peking University in Beijing. • NYT

translation of the 1973 novel *Child of God*, by Cormac McCarthy; *Asymmetry*, the first novel by Lisa Halliday; *Marriage: A History*, Stephanie Coontz's nonfiction look at humanity's most intimate partnership; *China and Japan*, about the turbulent history between the Asian giants by influential Sinologist Ezra Vogel; and a new

Chinese version of *Public Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics*, by Harvard professor Michael Sandel, whose online courses have been a hit with many young people in China.

## Risky business

The reasons for the delayed publication of each title are not clear. For example, some

people in the publishing industry wondered whether the political content of Mr. Woodward's book, rather than the trade war, stymied its release. The Communist Party's Central Publicity Department, which manages the book approval process, did not respond to faxed questions.

Still, publishing industry insiders describe a near-freeze of regulatory approvals, one that could make the publishing industry reluctant to buy the rights to sell American books in China.

"Chinese publishers will definitely change their focus," said Andy Liu, an editor at a Beijing publishing company, adding that the U.S. was one of China's most frequent and profitable sources of books.

"Publishing American books is now a risky business," he said. "It's shaking the very premise of trying to introduce foreign books" as a business. NY TIMES

# UAE denies spying using popular app

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
DUBAI

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Saturday denied reports that a popular mobile application developed in the country was used for government spying.

Apple and Google removed the ToTok app from their marketplaces last week following a report claiming it allowed the UAE government to track users' conversations and other details. But the country's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority said in a statement that UAE laws "prohibit any kind of data breach and unlawful interception".

ToTok became popular by offering free calling and messaging. But U.S. intelligence officials and a security researcher determined that the app was being used by the UAE government for surveillance, *The New York Times* reported on December 22.