

WORLD
world

Hong Kong govt suspends divisive extradition bill

Hong Kong

Hong Kong's embattled leader yesterday said a divisive bill that would allow extraditions to China would be "suspended" in a major climbdown from her government after a week of unprecedented protests.

The city's pro-Beijing leader Carrie Lam has come under huge pressure to abandon the controversial legislation, including from her own political allies and advisers.

"The government has decided to suspend the legislative amendment exercise, restart our communication with all sectors of society, do more... work and listen to different views of society," Lam told reporters Saturday. "We have no intention to set a deadline for this work and promise to report to and consult members of the legislative council panel on security before we decide on the next step forward."

The international finance hub was rocked by the worst political violence since its 1997 handover to China on Wednesday as tens of thousands of protesters were dispersed by riot police firing tear gas and rubber bullets.

As criticism mounted, signs also emerged of a growing discomfort among Communist Party leaders in Beijing, and Lam held her press conference Saturday at the same government complex that was besieged by protesters earlier in the week. The South China Morning Post said Lam held an emergency meeting on Friday night with her advisers while Chinese officials were also meeting in the nearby city of Shenzhen to map a way out of the impasse.

Tensions were running high with protest organisers planning another mass rally on Sunday.

Lam, who is appointed by a committee stacked with Beijing loyalists, had previously refused



Wednesday's clashes were the worst political violence in Hong Kong since its 1997 handover to China



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CARRIE LAM
HONG KONG CHIEF EXECUTIVE

to consider abandoning the bill, despite months of criticism from

business and legal bodies -- and a record breaking rally on Sunday where organisers said more than one million protesters hit the streets.

"I feel deep sorrow and regret that the deficiencies in our work and various other factors have stirred up substantial controversies and disputes in society following the relatively calm periods of the past two years," Lam said.

'Lost credibility'

On Friday she found herself facing growing calls from within her own political camp to reverse course and tamp down spiralling public anger -- including from hardline pro-Beijing lawmakers.

"Shouldn't (we) cool the citizens down? I think to postpone it for a little bit is not a bad thing. At this moment, the government should self-examine," Ann Chiang, a hardcore pro-Beijing lawmaker, told i-Cable News.

But others have warned against Lam bending to the protesters.

"If the government caves in to violence and external influences, in the long run that would also make Hong Kong ungovernable," pro-Beijing lawmaker Regina Ip told reporters.

Opposition to the extradition bill has united an unusually wide cross section of Hong Kong.

Protest organisers had been calling for a full withdrawal of the bill, not a postponement.

James To, a lawmaker from the city's pan-democrat camp, called on Lam to step down.

"The credibility of our chief executive has already been written off, it's a kind of government that cannot have any credibility to rule anymore," he told reporters Friday.

Beijing has vocally supported the bill and earlier this week threw its full support behind the Lam administration, calling protesters "rioters".

2003: National security law

Some half a million people marched against a controversial attempt by the government to introduce a national security law that critics feared would hammer free speech.

The bill, which came after a deadly outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome, was the first mass demonstration movement the city's pro-Beijing leaders had faced since the 1997 handover.

It was eventually shelved and set in process the resignation of then chief executive Tung Chee-hwa.

2012: Education protests

Tens of thousands of predominantly young demonstrators, many of them school children, surrounded the city government's complex for 10 days. The target of their ire was a government order for schools to teach "Moral and National Education" classes that praised China's communist and nationalist history while criticising republicanism and democracy movements.

The government abandoned the curriculum and some of the protest leaders, such as then 15-year-old Joshua Wong, went on to become leading democracy advocates.

2014: Umbrella Movement

For two months in late 2014 tens of thousands of protesters paralysed parts of the city with mass student-led demonstrations and sit-ins to demand democratic reforms such as the right to elect the city's leader.

There were clashes and scenes of violence, until then rare in the semi-autonomous territory, as police used pepper spray and tear gas to break up the demonstrations.

It becomes known as the Umbrella Movement after some demonstrators used umbrellas to protect themselves.

Police dismantled the main pro-democracy site in December, hauling off a hard core of protesters who vowed that their struggle would live on.

But the movement failed to win any concessions and many of its leaders are now in prison.

China backs suspension of bill
Shanghai, China

China's government said yesterday it supported the decision of Hong Kong's leader to suspend an unpopular bill that would allow extraditions to China and which sparked a week of protests.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang called the decision an attempt to "listen more widely to the views of the community and restore calm to the community as soon as possible". "We support, respect and understand this decision," Geng Shuang said in a statement.

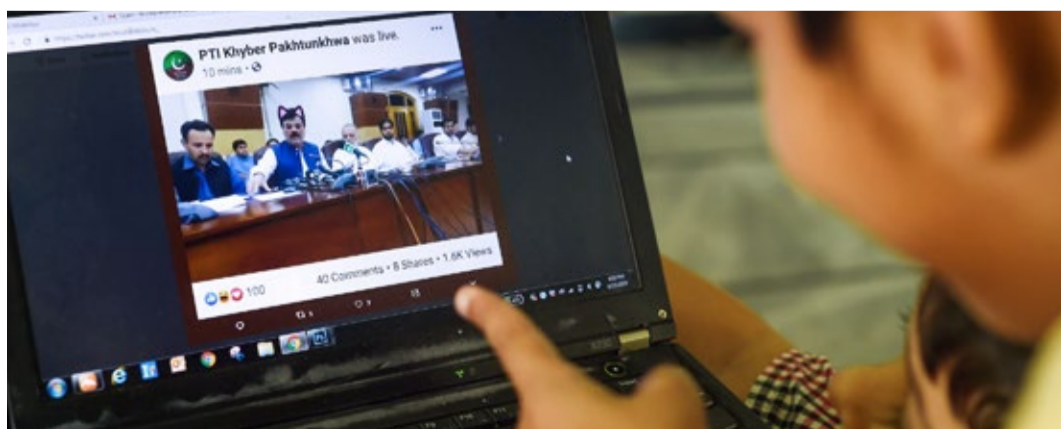
Pakistan politician does livestream with cat whiskers, ears

Peshawar, Pakistan

A politician in northwestern Pakistan was given paws for thought after his press conference was streamed live on Facebook with the "cat filter" turned on, giving him on-screen whiskers and ears.

The online stream of regional minister Shaukat Yousafzai speaking with journalists went viral on Friday after a member of his social media team accidentally activated the filter on the social network.

Comments started pouring in as Facebook users noticed pink cat-like ears and whiskers had appeared on the heads of the minister and two accompanying



Pakistani children point at a computer screen showing a screen grab of a press conference attended by provincial minister Shaukat Yousafzai and streamed live on social media, in Islamabad

There's "a cat in the cabinet" one said. Others were more lit-

eral: "Shaukat Yousafzai looks like a cat -- Meow meow meow," The video -- seen by a report-

er -- was deleted minutes after the press conference from the official Facebook page of Paki-

The cat filter was turned on by mistake. Let's not take everything so seriously

SHAUKAT YOUSAFZAI

stan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, which is in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Images from the press conference were still available on social media.

Yousafzai confirmed the incident and said it happened by

accident.

"The cat filter was turned on by mistake" Yousafzai said, adding "let's not take everything so seriously".

"I wasn't the only one -- two officials sitting along me were also hit by the cat filter," he joked.

The live stream continued with the whiskers and ears in place, even after the error was pointed out by users.

A press statement, issued by the PTI social media team said the incident happened because of "human error".

"All necessary actions have been taken to avoid such incidents in future," it said.