

WORLD

Protesters stay holed up on Hong Kong campus



Graffiti and debris are seen in Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) in Hong Kong, China

Reuters | Hong Kong

Fewer than 100 protesters remained holed up in a Hong Kong university yesterday as riot police encircled the campus, with some activists desperately searching for ways to escape while others hid.

Some protesters said they were holding out not for a showdown with police, but because they were innocent and looking for an escape route.

"I won't consider surrendering. Surrendering is for people who are guilty. None of us inside are guilty," Michelle, a 20-year-old student, said on the campus of Polytechnic University on the Kowloon peninsula.

Rubbish has piled up around the campus, with trash and debris from homemade petrol bombs littered across the grounds. Many protesters have abandoned their equipment, including gas masks and umbrellas.

Much of the campus is damaged, with rooms vandalised and windows shattered. Electricity and water are still functioning.

The Asian financial hub

has had a brief respite from months of often violent demonstrations, with relative calm across the city for the past two days and nights ahead of District Council elections set for Sunday.

The government said late on Wednesday it was closely monitoring the situation to see whether the elections could be held safely.

The university, in the centre of the bustling Kowloon peninsula, is the last campus still occupied by activists during a week that saw the most intense violence since the anti-government demonstrations escalated more than five months ago.

China has accused the United States and Britain of stirring up trouble in Hong Kong and it has criticised the US House of Representatives over its passing of two bills aimed at supporting the protesters and sending a warning to China about human rights.

China's state *Xinhua* news agency said a top Chinese official in Hong Kong, Xie Feng, had summoned the US consul-general to denounce the legislation as gross interference and violation of international law.

Sri Lanka's ruling siblings

New president swears in his brother as Prime Minister

- It is the first time in Sri Lankan history that two siblings have held the two top political positions

- Gotabaya, 70, had earlier served as defence chief under his brother Mahinda

- Mahinda, who had been Sri Lanka's opposition leader since January, has held the prime minister's post twice before

Reuters | Colombo



Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother and former leader Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was appointed as the new Prime Minister, are seen during the swearing in ceremony in Colombo, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's newly elected president Gotabaya Rajapaksa yesterday swore in his elder brother, former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, as prime minister, cementing the powerful family's political comeback.

The appointment of Mahinda Rajapaksa, 74, came hours after the former premier Ranil Wickremesinghe tendered his resignation following the defeat of his party's candidate in a presidential election to Gotabaya Rajapaksa over the weekend.

It is the first time in Sri Lankan history that two siblings have held the two top political positions, although Mahinda is only in charge of a caretaker government until parliamentary

elections next year.

In a ceremony in the capital Colombo on Thursday, Gotabaya swore in his brother as their respective wives, sons and daughters-in-law looked on.

"I wish to congratulate and extend my warmest wishes to Hon Mahinda Rajapaksa, Prime Minister of the Democratic, Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka," Gotabaya tweeted afterwards.

Gotabaya, 70, had earlier served as defence chief under his brother Mahinda, who himself served as president from 2005-2015.

Mahinda, who had been Sri Lanka's opposition leader since January, has held the prime

minister's post twice before.

He is set to be his party's candidate in a parliamentary election expected around April. The former president, popular with the Sinhalese majority for overseeing the end of a 26-year long civil war, is broadly seen as a shoo-in.

The siblings face a tall order to revive Sri Lanka's economy, which is in its deepest slump in nearly two decades following Easter Sunday Islamist attacks that killed over 250 people in churches and hotels. That hurt the rupee and the all-important tourism sector.

Gotabaya, who oversaw the defeat of Tamil separatists as his

brother's defence chief a decade ago, won the election after promising to secure the country against militant threats.

His economic manifesto targets average growth of at least 6.5%, compared with 3.2% in 2018, but economists are worried his plans may strain coffers. Managing a record \$3 billion in annual external debt repayments over the next five years will be another challenge.

Some investors see Rajapaksa as an experienced hand who will bring political stability to the island. Sri Lanka's stock index and rupee currency have gained 1.9% and 0.5% respectively since his election.

Australians shelter from bushfires

Reuters | Sydney

Firefighters battled hundreds of bushfires across Australia on Thursday as scores of blazes sprang up in new locations, triggering warnings that it was too late for some residents to evacuate.

As thick smoke blanketed the most populous city of Sydney for a third day, residents were urged to keep children indoors, stepping up pressure on Prime Minister Scott Morrison to tackle climate change.

By early afternoon, dozens of fires were burning across the southeastern state of Victoria and temperatures of 40.9 Celsius (105.6 F) in Melbourne, its capital, matched the hottest day on record in 1894, Australia's weather bureau said.

Authorities warned residents of towns about 50 km (31 miles) north of Ballarat, the state's third largest city, that it was too late for them to evacuate safely.

"You are in danger, act



Fort Denison is seen as haze from the ongoing bushfires covers the city skyline and the Sydney Opera House in the background, in Sydney, Australia

now to protect yourself," fire authorities said in an alert. "It is too late to leave. The safest option is to take shelter indoors immediately."

Blazes across several states have endangered thousands of people, killing at least four people this month, burning about 2.5 million acres (1 million hectares) of farmland and bush and destroying more than 400 homes.

The early arrival and

severity of the fires in the southern hemisphere spring follows three years of drought that experts have linked to climate change and which have left bushland tinder-dry.

With 10 days remaining to the official start of summer, extreme temperatures and high winds have sparked wildfires in new areas, even as firefighters tracked the crisis across the mainland, the Northern Territory and the island of Tasmania.

Aung San Suu Kyi to defend Myanmar at top UN court



Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi will defend her country over charges that it breached the 1948 UN Genocide Convention

The Telegraph

Myanmar's civilian leader and Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi will head up a delegation to the UN's top court to defend a case accusing the mainly Buddhist country of genocide against Rohingya Muslims, the government said Wednesday, a decision that blind-sided observers.

West African nation Gambia is due to open its case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December on behalf of the 57 member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

The complaint accuses Myanmar of breaching the 1948 UN Genocide Convention through its brutal military campaign in 2017, which targeted the Rohingya minority in Rakhine state.

In the opening hearings, the small, majority-Muslim African country is expected to ask the court to make an emergency injunction to protect the Rohingya, pending a decision on whether to deal with the wider case.

But Ms Suu Kyi will personally lead a team to The Hague to "defend the national interest of Myanmar," her office said.

IS claims attack in Egypt's Sinai that killed officer

AP | Cairo

The Islamic State group has claimed an attack this week in Egypt's restive Sinai Peninsula that killed an officer and wounded three others.

A statement by the extremist group released late on Wednesday on a militant-linked website says its fighters had targeted an armored vehicle carrying Egyptian forces with a roadside bombing the previous day in the town of Sheikh Zuweid.

Egyptian officials had said a captain was killed and four members of the security forces were wounded in a roadside bombing on Tuesday.

Egypt has been battling an Islamic insurgency in Sinai, led by the regional IS affiliate, that intensified after the overthrow of Mohammed Morsi, in 2013. The militants have carried out scores of attacks, mainly targeting security forces and minority Christians.