

WORLD
world**Former Chinese premier Li Peng dies at 90: Xinhua**

Beijing, China

Former Chinese premier Li Peng -- known as the "Butcher of Beijing" for his role in the Tiananmen Square crackdown -- has died aged 90, state broadcaster Xinhua said yesterday.

The former chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee died of an unspecified illness in Beijing on Monday, Xinhua said.

The ex-premier had previously battled bladder cancer.

Li gained notoriety worldwide as one of the key architects of the brutal breakup of mass pro-democracy demonstrations in the capital on June 4, 1989, and stayed at the top of the Communist regime for more than a decade, while remaining a hated symbol of the repression until his death.

After vast crowds of students, workers and others had been encamped for weeks in Tiananmen Square to demand change, Li proclaimed martial law on May 20, 1989.

Two weeks later, on the night of June 3-4, the military put a bloody end to the protests, killing hundreds of unarmed civilians -- by some estimates more than 1,000.



National People's Congress (NPC) Chairman Li Peng making his final address at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing

Though the decision to send in the troops was a collective one, Li was widely held responsible for the bloody crackdown.

Li afterwards frequently defending the decision to fire on the demonstrators as a "necessary" step.

"Without these measures China would have faced a situation worse than in the former Soviet Union or Eastern Europe," he said on a tour of Austria in 1994 as his international pariah status started to wear off.

Sri Lanka orders return of smuggled British garbage

Customs officials inspect the load of a container at a port in Colombo.

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka customs yesterday ordered the return of container loads of hazardous mortuary and clinical waste illegally imported into the island from Britain under the cover of metal recycling.

Customs officials said the racket dating back to 2017 was uncovered after the Colombo port complained last week that an importer had abandoned 111 containers which were emanating a huge stink.

A total of 241 containers had been imported since 2017 and 130 of them had been taken to a free-trade zone ostensibly for recycling and re-export, customs spokesman Sunil Jayaratne said.

"We are taking immediate action to order the re-export of the 111 containers abandoned at the port," Jayaratne said.

"The other 130 which had already been cleared from the port will be dealt under environmental and other laws."

He said the 130 containers

were stuffed with used mattresses and plastic and clinical waste imported in violation of international laws governing the shipping of hazardous material.

A Sri Lankan businessman who imported the containers would be liable for criminal prosecution if he failed to re-export them to Britain, from where they originated, Jayaratne said.

An official at the finance ministry, which is responsible for the customs department, said it would take up the issue with British authorities for exporting hazardous cargo without first checking if Sri Lanka was willing to accept it.

The 111 containers are believed to contain mortuary waste including human organs and had been unloaded and exposed to the elements for the past two years.

The 130 containers taken to a free-trade zone near Colombo International Airport were contaminating water and polluting the air in the area.

US may have downed two Iranian drones: CENTCOM

Washington, United States

A US warship may have brought down two Iranian drones in a stand-off in the Gulf last week that Iran has disputed, the commander of regional forces said yesterday.

"We are confident we brought down one drone, we may have brought down a second," General Kenneth McKenzie, the CENTCOM commander, told CBS news in an interview aboard the USS Boxer, the vessel at the center of the incident.

"As always it was a complex tactical picture, we believe two drones were successfully -- there may have been more that we are not aware of -- those are the two that we engaged successfully," McKenzie said.

CBS said the drones were reportedly brought down by an electronic signal or pulse that disabled their flight controls. One drone disappeared from US military radars while the second was seen hitting the water.

Iran, which last month shot down a US Predator drone that it said had ventured into its airspace, has denied that it lost any of its own unmanned aerial vehicles, after President Donald Trump announced that the USS Boxer had downed one.

Amid soaring tensions in the region, Trump said he had called off strikes against Iran at the last minute in response to the destruction of the US drone.

A series of attacks on oil tankers in the strategically vital waterway, as well as Iran's seizure of a British-flagged tanker in retaliation for Britain impounding one of its own vessels in Gibraltar, have turned the Gulf into a powder keg.



US Marine Corps General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. (2nd-R), commander of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) is shown by coalition spokesman Colonel Turki bin Saleh al-Malki (C-R) reportedly Iranian weapons seized by Saudi forces from Yemen's Huthi rebels, during his visit to a military base in al-Kharj in central Saudi Arabia

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GENERAL KENNETH MCKENZIE, THE CENTCOM COMMANDER, TOLD CBS NEWS

Iranian envoy holds talks in Paris

Paris, France

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian yesterday held talks in Paris with a senior Iranian envoy, as France presses for diplomacy to overcome an upsurge in tensions with the Islamic Republic.

Le Drian told the French parliament he had met Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who Iranian media said brought an unspecified message from President Hassan Rouhani for French counterpart Emmanuel Macron.

"We are now pushing Iran to return to the Vienna agreement," Le Drian said. "I met earlier with President Rouhani's special envoy to tell him that."

Paris has engaged in intense diplomacy to seek to solve the current escalation diplomatically, with Macron's foreign policy advisor Emmanuel Bonne twice visiting Tehran.

In a ramping up of tensions, Iran seized the British-flagged tanker Stena Impero on Friday in the Gulf's strategic Strait of Hormuz.

"We need to put in place as process of de-escalation to reduce the tensions," said Le Drian.

He also said Britain, France and Germany were working on an observation mission for the Gulf. British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt on Monday said a European-led protection force was planned for shipping in the Gulf.

Cristiano Ronaldo will not face rape charges in Nevada

Los Angeles, United States

Juventus star Cristiano Ronaldo will not face any charges over an alleged rape in the US state of Nevada a decade ago, prosecutors said yesterday.

The Clark County District Attorney's Office said it had declined to prosecute the Portuguese star because it "cannot be proven beyond a reasonable doubt" that a sexual assault occurred.

Kathryn Mayorga, a former model, has claimed that Ronaldo raped her in a Las Vegas hotel in 2009.

The former Manchester United and Real Madrid star reached a financial settlement with her following the incident but has denied allegations of sexual assault.

The district attorney's office

said it had received a report from Mayorga -- who it identified only as "V" -- on June 13, 2009, reporting that she had been the victim of a sexual assault.

Police were unable to conduct an investigation at the time because she declined to say who assaulted her or where it occurred, the office said in a statement, but Mayorga contacted police in August of last year to ask that the case be reopened, at which point she named Ronaldo as the alleged assailant.

"Based upon a review of the information present-

ed at this time, the allegations of sexual assault against Cristiano Ronaldo cannot be proven beyond a reasonable doubt," prosecutors said. "Therefore, no charges will be forthcoming."

Ronaldo is widely considered one of the greatest footballers in the history of the game, having won the Champions League title five times -- once with Manchester United and four times with Real Madrid.

He also led Portugal to the Euro 2016 title in France.

