



TAIWAN

President protested

Tens of thousands of opposition protesters took to the streets of Taiwan's capital against President Lai Ching-te, accusing his administration of authoritarianism amid rising political tensions over a recall campaign targeting opposition lawmakers, the South China Morning Post reported.

On April 26, protesters waving the country's flags and banners marched in front of the president's office in Taipei, voicing frustration with Lai's administration.

The opposition Kuomintang party claimed more than 200,000 people attended, while police estimated the crowd at around 60,000.

KMT leaders accused the president of being a "dictator" who was attempting to "eliminate opposition parties," adding that he hasn't done "anything but fight" since taking office a year ago.

The opposition said the April 26 demonstrations were "just the beginning," hinting at further rallies.

The protest came amid rising political tensions on the island as the ruling Democratic Progressive Party – in power since 2016 – has supported a campaign that threatens to recall 34 KMT lawmakers.

Under Taiwan's electoral rules, recall initiatives require signatures from one percent of eligible voters to begin the process and 10% to force a vote, according to Turkey's state-affiliated Anadolu Agency.

In Taiwan, analysts say it has often been wielded in the service of "partisan revenge politics."

On April 27, Lai addressed the demonstrations, saying the rally showed Taiwan's democratic vibrancy, Taipei Times noted.

However, he urged opposition leaders to confront "real dictatorships" in Beijing instead of undermining Taiwan's democratic institutions.



IRAN

Port explosion sparks concern

An explosion killed at least 40 people and injured more than 1,000 others over the weekend in Iran's largest commercial port, in an incident authorities linked to improperly stored chemicals but which raised concerns about the possible presence of solid rocket fuel used in ballistic missiles, the BBC reported.

The explosion occurred the morning of April 26 at the southern port of Shahid Rajaei, near the city of Bandar Abbas.

The blast blew out windows and roofs, as well as destroying cars. Residents in the area said they could feel the impact of the explosion up to 31 miles away.

Video footage showed a fire breaking out among shipping containers before a large explosion engulfed the area, producing orange-brown smoke.

Observers told CNN that such a color would indicate a chemical such as sodium or ammonia being involved.

Fires were still burning April 27, but were reportedly 80% contained.

Iranian President Masoud Pezesh-

kian expressed "deep regret and sympathy" for the victims and traveled to Bandar Abbas on April 27 to lead an investigation and oversee relief efforts.

Officials have not officially confirmed the exact cause of the explosion, but said it involved hazardous and chemical materials stored improperly at the port's container areas.

However, maritime consultancy Ambrey Intelligence reported that the affected containers may have held solid rocket fuel, including sodium perchlorate, a chemical component of ballistic missile propellant.

Ambrey cited a March shipment of sodium perchlorate unloaded at Shahid Rajaei port by an Iran-flagged vessel, while CNN previously reported that the Golbon, a Chinese vessel, had delivered 1,000 tons of the chemical in February.

Iranian authorities have denied that any military material was stored at the port. They did not suggest the explosion occurred because of an attack.

The port explosion came as Iran and the United States met April 26 in the latest round of negotiations over Tehran's nuclear program. The high-level talks are the first since the Trump administration withdrew from the 2015 nuclear agreement.

DISCOVERIES

Doped Swimmers

Juvenile salmon in central Sweden are making faster progress toward the sea, thanks to a little assistance: A dose of human anti-anxiety medication.

In a new study, researchers found that clobazam – a sedative used to treat insomnia – has altered the fish's behavior, making them bolder and more independent during their migration.

"This study is unique because it investigates the effects of these contaminants on wildlife directly in the field," explained co-author Marcus Michelangeli in a statement, "(It's) allowing us to better understand how exposure impacts wildlife behavior and migration in a natural context."

Michelangeli and his colleagues implanted 279 juvenile Atlantic salmon with slow-release capsules containing clobazam, the opioid tramadol, both, or a placebo. They tagged the fish with acoustic transmitters and tracked their movements along a 17.5-mile stretch of the Dal River. This route included a large reservoir, two hydropower dams, and ended at the Baltic Sea.

The fish doped on clobazam moved through the dams up to three times faster than the others and were less likely to linger or wait for other salmon. But that didn't necessarily mean they fared better in the long run.

"They were just sort of beelining it through the dams," lead author Jack Brand told the Washington Post.

While the drugs pushed the salmon to be braver and complete their trips faster, researchers cautioned that separating from the group could expose them to predators or other unknown risks.

They also warned that deviation from any natural behavior could spell trouble for the fish and cause ripple effects across the ecosystem.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Automakers want California 2035 electric vehicle plan stopped

WASHINGTON – Major automakers want Congress to bar California's landmark plan to end the sale of gasoline-only vehicles by 2035 that has been adopted by 11 other states, warning the rules could begin impacting vehicle shipments in a few months.

The U.S. House will vote later this week on legislation to repeal a waiver granted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under former President Joe Biden in December allowing California to mandate at least 80% electric vehicles by 2035.

The Alliance for Automotive Innovation, which represents General Motors, Toyota, Volkswagen, Hyundai and other major automakers said in a letter released April 28 that car companies could soon be "forced to substantially reduce the number of overall vehicles for sale to inflate their proportion of electric vehicles sales."

The California Air Resources Board rules have been adopted by another 11 states, including New York, Massachusetts and Oregon accounting for about 40% of the U.S. auto market. The state did not immediately comment.

"Allowing these gas vehicle bans (something never attempted before in the United States) to proceed will increase automobile prices and reduce vehicle choices for consumers across the country at precisely the same time they are adjusting to the marketplace shock of 25% tariffs on imported vehicles and auto parts," the group added.

Conclave preparations pushes tourist from Sistine Chapel

VATICAN CITY – It is one of the wonders of the world, attracting millions of visitors every year. But those now in Rome hoping to admire the Sistine Chapel will not get their fix of its monumental Michelangelo frescoes.

"Notice is hereby given that the Sistine Chapel will be closed to the public from Monday 28 April 2025 for the requirements of the Conclave," reads a statement on the Vatican Museums' website.

The conclave, the secret meeting to elect a new leader of the Catholic Church after the death of Pope Francis,

starts on May 7, but preparations to host the more than 130 cardinals due to take part take several days.

"To come from so far, to not be able to go into one of the major sites is very disappointing," said Leonie Shannon, a 67-year-old tourist from Australia.

The chapel's ceilings are adorned with scenes painted between 1508 and 1512 from the Bible's Old and New Testaments. The most famous is "The Creation of Adam," in which God reaches with his finger to touch the outstretched hand of the first man.

Michelangelo also painted the awe-inspiring "Last Judgment" on the wall behind the altar, while other Renaissance artists such as Botticelli, Perugino and Ghirlandaio decorated its side walls.

"This is a truly great work of art that we've studied, so we hoped that we could witness it firsthand," said Guo Feng, one of a group of art students from China. "It's really unfortunate that we can't see it on this trip. It's a big regret for us."

Hong Kong democrats freed after 4 years' jail for subversion

HONG KONG – The first batch of individuals jailed in the landmark Hong Kong national security trial of "47 democrats" accused of conspiracy to commit subversion was freed on April 22 after being behind bars for over four years.

Four former pro-democracy lawmakers, including Claudia Mo, Kwok Ka-ki, Jeremy Tam and Gary Fan were driven away from three separate prisons across Hong Kong around dawn.

Since large and sustained pro-democracy protests erupted in Hong Kong for most of 2019, China has cracked down on the democratic opposition as well as liberal civil society and media outlets under sweeping national security laws.

Mo, Kwok and Tam were former members of the Civic Party, once one of Hong Kong's leading pro-democracy parties, which was disbanded in early 2024 amid the national security crackdown. Mo resigned from the Civic Party in 2016 and founded the localist group HK First with Fan of the Neo Democrats.

Reuters

FINANCIAL MARKETS

S&P 500 ekes out gain; earnings data awaited

Chuck Mikolajczak
REUTERS

NEW YORK – The S&P 500 closed a choppy session nearly unchanged on April 28, weighed down by megacaps as investors awaited several catalysts including key economic data and earnings from some of the largest U.S. companies.

Megacaps Nvidia, off 2.1%, and Amazon, down 0.7%, were the primary drags on the benchmark S&P 500 index and also kept the Nasdaq in negative territory.

The Wall Street Journal reported on April 27 that China's Huawei Technologies was preparing to test its artificial-intelligence processor, which it hopes can replace some of Nvidia's higher-end products.

Of the so-called Magnificent Seven heavyweight companies, Amazon is scheduled to report quarterly results later in the week, along with Apple, Meta Platforms and Microsoft. Apple, up 0.4%, and Meta, up 0.5%, both helped counter the declines in Nvidia and Amazon.

In all, 180 S&P 500 components are set to report earnings the week of April 27, and investors are likely to closely monitor how President Donald Trump's new tariffs could affect future profits.

"We're going to get four of the Mag 7 reporting this week, and so this is a very important earnings week," said Jack Ablin, chief investment officer at Cresset Capital in Chicago.

"I'd love to hear any kind of forward guidance, and it will be really interesting to hear some of these CEOs talk about how they're planning to navigate the potential trade war."

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 114.09 points, or 0.28%, to 40,227.59; the S&P 500 gained 3.54 points, or 0.06%, to 5,528.75; and the Nasdaq Composite lost 16.81 points, or 0.10%, to 17,366.13.

The slight gain for the S&P 500 marked its fifth straight daily advance,

its longest streak of gains since early November.

Though first-quarter earnings from S&P 500 companies are expected to climb 10.9% from a year ago, according to LSEG data, many firms have warned of the uncertainty caused by U.S. trade policy, with some cutting or completely pulling forecasts.

Of the 179 S&P companies that have reported, 78 had negative earnings outlooks and 32 had positive forecasts, for a 2.4 ratio, slightly below the 2.6 in the year-ago period, LSEG data showed.

Investors will also parse important economic data, including the personal consumption expenditures price index and a flurry of labor market data culminating in the monthly U.S. payrolls report on May 2.

A 2.4% gain in Boeing shares helped keep the Dow in positive territory after Bernstein raised the aircraft maker's stock rating and price target.

Trading was choppy after stocks opened firmer, with the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq briefly touching their highest levels since April 2 prior to Trump's tariff announcement.

Markets have stabilized somewhat in recent weeks on optimism over potential deals between the United States and its trading partners, especially China.

However, a lack of clarity on China-U.S. negotiations has kept the market sensitive to any developments. The S&P 500 remains about 10% below its February record high as investors look for clues on the extent of any tariff damage.

A majority of economists polled by Reuters said the risks of the global economy slipping into recession this year were high.

Spirit AeroSystems shares advanced 2.6% after Airbus reached a deal to take over some of the company's plants.

Advancing issues outnumbered decliners by a 2-to-1 ratio on the NYSE and by a 1.27-to-1 ratio on the Nasdaq.

The S&P 500 posted three new 52-week highs and two new lows, while the Nasdaq Composite recorded 47 new highs and 53 new lows.