

U.S. flag lowered as consulate in Chengdu shuts down



Beijing, July 27 (RHC)-- The flag of the United States outside its consulate in China's southwestern city of Chengdu was lowered early on Monday, state media reported, after China gave the country three days to leave the building in response to a U.S. order for Beijing to close its Houston consulate.

Chinese state broadcaster CGTN said the flag was lowered on the building in Sichuan province at about 6:18 a.m. local time on Monday (22:48 GMT on Sunday). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the consulate was closed as of 10 a.m. (02:00 GMT).

The consulate closures are a sharp escalation of the disputes between the two countries, already damaged by disagreements over China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, its new security law in Hong Kong, the situation in Xinjiang, and trade and technology.

The deadline for the Americans to exit Chengdu has been unclear, but the Chinese consulate in Houston in the U.S. state of Texas was given 72 hours to close after the original order was made.

Al Jazeera's Katrina Yu, who is in Chengdu, said police closed the street to the consulate and erected barricades shortly after the flag was lowered. The embassy had about 200 staff and Yu said that China had said some were working "inconsistent with their capacity."

The consulate worked closely with businesses in Chongqing and is also a gateway to the far western regions of Tibet and Xinjiang, where the UN estimates about a million ethnic Uighurs are being held in what Chinese says are vocational skills training camps.

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