

Taiwan 'already independent'

Taiwan president warns against invasion

AFP, Taipei

China must rethink its hardline stance towards Taiwan, President Tsai Ing-wen said yesterday, as she warned the island was already independent and that any invasion would be "very costly" for Beijing.

Tsai won a second term over the weekend with a record 8.2 million votes, an outcome that was seen as a forceful rebuke of China's ongoing campaign to isolate the self-ruled island.

China's leadership had made no secret of its desire to see Tsai turfed out because she and her party refuse to acknowledge their view that the island is part of a "one China".

Beijing regards Taiwan as its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary -- especially if it declares independence.

But in her first interview since Saturday's re-election, Tsai told the BBC there was no need to formally announce independence because the island already runs itself.

"We don't have a need to declare ourselves an independent state," she said in the interview, which aired yesterday.

"We are an independent country already and we call ourselves the Republic of China, Taiwan."

Modern Taiwan has been run separately from the mainland for the last 70 years.

For decades, it was a dictatorship under Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists following their 1949 defeat to the communists in China's civil war.

But since the 1980s, it has morphed into one of Asia's most progressive democracies, although it is only diplomatically recognised by a dwindling handful of countries.

Polls show growing numbers of Taiwanese reject the idea that the island should be part of the Chinese mainland.

"We have a separate identity and we're a country of our own," Tsai said. "We deserve respect from China".

China has greeted Tsai's re-election with anger, warning against any move to push the island closer towards independence.

"Splitting the country is doomed to leave a name that will stink for eternity," Foreign Minister Wang Yi said this week.

Chinese state media also accused Tsai of winning the election through cheating, without providing evidence.

Free speech

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Rumeen said the election had no credibility.

"This election has set a rare example in the world. There is instance of rigging in different countries. But there is no instance of gaining absolute majority through casting votes the night before the election day," she added.

She said although the government was claiming that the country's economy was progressing in large strides but economic indicators was showing a down trend.

"Export earnings last year decreased compared to those of the previous year. There is a negative impact on employment. Foreign exchange reserves have dropped. The private investment situation is bad. Share market has collapsed."

She alleged that the share market collapses whenever the Awami League comes to power. Millions of people were affected due to debacle in the share market.

Share market index is now the lowest in four years. Several hundred crores of taka have been looted from the market, she said.

67 inspectors

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"If necessary, the police inspectors will go to courts during trial as complainant or assist BGB force members, who lack knowledge as complainant, while the latter appear before court," he added.

The designation of the police officials will still be inspectors, he said replying to a query.

Lt Col Mohiuddin noted that at present, police inspectors provide training to BGB members on making seizure lists and preparing cases.

The BGB is entrusted with the responsibility to defend the 4,427 kilometres border of Bangladesh, prevent smuggling of narcotics and illegal goods, illegal trespassing, human trafficking and trans-border crimes, and respond to internal security duties, as and when needed.

From January till October last year, BGB filed 22,163 cases and arrested 2,851 people in connection with the seizure of narcotics, gold, and border crimes like human trafficking and trespassing.

A top official of BGB said many of his colleagues lack sufficient knowledge to deal with legal technicalities. They face problem regarding filing of cases, and usually seek help of concerned police stations.

They also need to appear in courts as complainant in many cases in spite of their dearth of knowledge of court proceedings.



Syrians gather at the site of a regime air strike in Ariha town in Syria's last major opposition bastion of Idlib yesterday. At least nine civilians were killed and 20 others injured in the raid that hit a vegetable market in the town, a war monitor said.

PHOTO: AFP

RHD to start infrastructure

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detailed guideline on it.

However, bus service operators and road-safety campaigners say the passengers will ultimately shoulder the burden as the transport companies would charge more from them once the decisions are implemented.

The government must keep the roads safe and ensure smooth journey before imposing tolls, they said on several occasions while talking to The Daily Star.

Under the Toll Policy-2014, the RHD is currently collecting tolls on the two-lane 50km Hatikumrul-Bonpara highway, 13.7km Chattogram Port Access Road, and 74km-long stretch of Dhaka-Sylhet highway between Jagadishpur and Sherpur.

The base toll is Tk 2 on each kilometre on important highways, Tk 1.5 on national highways, Tk 1 on regional highways and Tk 0.5 on district roads, according to the 2014 policy.

The RHD has 22,096km of national and regional highways and district roads. The Dhaka-Chattogram and Dhaka-Mymensingh highways are four-lane. Besides, construction of four-lane Dhaka-Tangail and Dhaka-Mawa highways is underway.

Following the PM's directives, the Road Transport and Highways Division on September 29 last year directed the RHD to take action in this regard.

Parveen Sultana, executive engineer (routine maintenance division) at RHD, said they were planning to collect tolls on Dhaka-Chattogram and Dhaka-Mymensingh.

But toll collection is not possible in the current condition of highways and an assessment of necessary infrastructure would be required for the proper functioning of toll collection, she told this newspaper yesterday.

Replying to another question, she said, "We may have to hire consultants for conducting such large-scale surveys. We will start our work upon receiving approval."

Talking to The Daily Star in October last year, eminent transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque said the highways were "not suitable" for collecting tolls.

What the government says about repairing roads seems "irrational" before quality roads are constructed, he said.

There should be a two-tier system. Access to the one where tolls are

collected would be controlled and there would be an alternative road for those who will not pay anything, he added.

"But our highways are not like that. Introducing tolls without having an alternative road is not rational," he said.

Prof Shamsul, also former director of Accident Research Institute at Buet, pointed out that both legal and illegal and speedy and slow-moving vehicles were operated on the highways.

"Imposition of tolls would be irrational keeping the inconstancy."

Overloaded vehicles and the poor quality of construction work are the main causes of the hefty maintenance costs, he said.

Shamsul said it is unethical to collect tolls from people while overloaded vehicles are allowed and the quality of roads is questionable.

About the money required for road maintenance, he said the authorities earn around Tk 2,500 to Tk 3,000 crore from vehicles' registration, fitness certificate and other charges and tolls from bridges every year.

The money can easily be deposited in a single fund and be used for road maintenance, he added.

2 missiles hit Ukraine plane

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Fars news agency reported.

Iran has struggled to contain the fallout over its handling of the air disaster and the tragedy has seen hundreds of angry protesters, most of them students, take to the streets.

New videos circulating on social media purported to show fresh protests on Tuesday evening at universities in Tehran, along with clashes between students and Basij militia loyal to the establishment.

It was not possible to immediately verify the videos.

Earlier, AFP correspondents said around 200 mainly masked students

gathered at Tehran University and were locked in a tense standoff with youths from the Basij.

Kept apart by security forces, the groups eventually parted ways.

Around 30 people have been arrested in the protests over the air disaster, according to judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili.

On Tuesday Tehran said it had made its first arrests over the shooting down of the plane, though it gave no details.

REAL RIFT
Recent protests have been much smaller than nationwide demonstrations against fuel price

hikes that turned deadly in November.

But one commentator said the latest rallies showed there was a "real rift between the people and the authorities".

"I hope that (police restraint) will continue and that no lives are lost, because this could be a catalyst for more protests," Mehdi Rahmani, director of reformist daily Shargh, told AFP.

In another sign of growing dissent, a group of artists cancelled their participation in the Fajr festival, held each year on the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, according to Hamshahri newspaper.

ICJ ruling on emergency measures

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to defend the bloody 2017 crackdown by her nation's army against the Rohingya.

Some 740,000 fled over the border into Bangladesh, carrying accounts of widespread rape, arson and mass killings, in violence UN investigators said amounted to genocide.

The Gambian Ministry of Justice announced on Twitter early yesterday the ICJ would deliver its decision on emergency measures on Thursday 23 January.

The West African nation had brought a case against Buddhist-majority Myanmar to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) with the backing of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation, Canada and the Netherlands.

At the December hearing, the Gambia alleged Myanmar had breached the 1948 UN Genocide Convention.

It also said there was a "serious and imminent risk of genocide recurring" and called for emergency measures to prevent Myanmar from committing any further atrocities or erasing any evidence.

It is not clear how specific the emergency measures would be, but enforcing them would likely prove difficult.

If the court rules in the Gambia's favour, this would be just the first step in a case likely to take years.

An estimated 600,000 Rohingya still live in Myanmar's western Rakhine state in what Amnesty International has branded "apartheid" conditions.

Suu Kyi admitted the army may have used excessive force against the Rohingya, but said the case was based on "misleading and incomplete" claims, calling for it to be dropped.

The 74-year-old, once regarded as a

rights icon in the West, also said the case risked reigniting the crisis.

ICJ judges have only once before ruled that genocide was committed, in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia.

Suu Kyi's defence of the generals was widely condemned in the West but proved popular at home with a public largely unsympathetic to the plight of the Rohingya.

Myanmar insists its own investigations will ensure accountability for any human rights violations but critics deride the domestic panels as toothless and partial.

Myanmar also faces other legal challenges over the Rohingya, including a probe by the International Criminal Court -- a separate war crimes tribunal -- and a lawsuit in Argentina which notably alleges Suu Kyi's complicity.

3 killed in 'gunfight'

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the criminals opened fire, which led to a gunfight, he claimed.

"Hasim and Ayub suffered bullet wounds in the gunfight," he said, adding that the two were taken to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared them dead.

Three Rab officials were also injured in the gunfight, the ASP claimed, adding that they recovered 10,000 yaba pills, two locally-made guns and five bullets from the spot.

A case will be filed in this regard, Alam said.

Meanwhile in Faridpur, Enayet Ullah, 40, was killed in a "gunfight" between police and his armed cohorts in Boalmari upazila.

The victim's family members, however, claimed he was picked up by police four days ago from Magura, reports our Faridpur correspondent.

Aminul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Boalmari police station said, "police arrested Enayet from Shilkupa upazila's Hatfajilpur bazar area in Jhenaidah around 8:45pm on Tuesday and brought him to our

station."

Based on information given by Enayet, police later conducted a drive in Boalmari upazila's Barankula village with him to recover hidden firearms around 2:30am, the OC said.

He added that as they reached there, Enayet's cohorts opened fire on the law enforcers, after which a gunfight ensued.

Enayet suffered bullet wounds and was taken to Boalmari Upazila Health Complex, where the on-duty doctor declared him death, said OC Aminul.

Police said that Enayet was wanted in 13 cases filed on charges of robbery, murder and theft with Bolamari, Kashiyan and Magura Sadar police stations.

They claimed to have recovered a gun, two bullets and some local weapons from the spot.

After the gunfight, Tania Mithu, niece of Enayet, claimed that police picked her uncle up from Magura four days ago and since then, the family could not trace his whereabouts.

Stop selling antibiotics

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antibiotics.

In its notice, DGDA issued a four-point directive: pharmacies must not sell or distribute antibiotics without prescription from a registered doctor; must provide cash memo to the buyers; must maintain a register; and advise patients to complete full doses.

If these directives are not followed, legal actions could be taken against the medicine sellers, the DGDA warned.

It also advised the users to take antibiotics as prescribed by registered doctors, preserve cash memo and complete full course even if they feel better physically.

Lauding the DGDA notice, Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology department at BSMMU, said, "The wordings they [DGDA] have used showing that the responsibility lies with both the buyers and the sellers are indeed good."

Talking to The Daily Star, he, however, suggested DGDA take some additional measures to increase antibiotics literacy.

"Problem is people don't know

which drugs are antibiotics. If the packets of the antibiotics are coloured red, then people would easily identify the drugs," he added.

The fight against growing ineffectiveness of antibiotics, which is called anti-microbial resistance (AMR), requires a multi-sectoral approach, he said. "There is a need for coordination between different elements of the health sector -- medical education, healthcare providers, and others."

If the DGDA could manage to have the doctors in upazilas do a two-hour campaign weekly, it would change the scenario rapidly, he added.

Bacteria-fighting drugs known as antibiotics help control and destroy many of the harmful organisms that make people sick. But overuse and misuse of antibiotics prompt some strains of bacteria to make a small change in their DNA and become antibiotic-resistant "superbugs", experts say.

Globally, superbugs are responsible for seven lakh deaths each year; the number could be more than 10 million by 2050 if things go unchecked, according to WHO.

Govt tightened grip

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Authorities also increased internet censorship, it said, adding that the government blocked nearly 20,000 websites in February last year in what was described as an "anti-pornography" sweep, but which included a number of popular blogging sites.

According to the HRW, the government continued to deny enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and other violations of the rights of child marriage in the world, the report mentioned.

The government is committed to end marriage of girls under 15 by 2021, but there was little meaningful progress during last year, it added.

Instead, a special provision remained in effect that allows for child marriage in "special cases," with permission of their parents and a court. The government failed to properly enforce policies protecting rights of hijras, the rights body said.

The HRW lauded that the government has kept its commitment under international law not to force returns of nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

It added that more women in Bangladesh entered the workforce and the country made another step towards gender equality when the High Court removed the requirement that Muslim women in Bangladesh declare whether they are virgins on their marriage certificate.

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the procedure, known as cryonics, when he dies.

The head of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Pseudoscience Commission, Evgeny Alexandrov, described cryonics as "an exclusively commercial undertaking that does not have any scientific basis", in comments to the Izvestia newspaper.

It is "a fantasy speculating on people's hopes of resurrection from the dead and dreams of eternal life", the newspaper quoted him as saying.

Valeriya Udalova, KrioRus's director who got her dog frozen when it died in 2008, said it is likely that humankind will develop the technology to revive dead people in the future, but that there is no guarantee of such technology.

KrioRus says hundreds of potential clients from nearly 20 countries have signed up for its after-death service.

It costs \$36,000 for a whole body and \$15,000 for the brain alone for Russians, who earn average monthly salaries of \$760, according to official statistics. Prices are slightly higher for non-Russians.

The company says it is the only one in Russia and the surrounding

region. Set up in 2005, it has at least two competitors in the United States, where the practice dates back further.

Voronenkov said he set his hopes on science. "I hope one day it reaches a level when we can produce artificial bodies and organs to create an artificial body where my mother's brain can be integrated."

KrioRus' director Udalova argues that those paying to have dying relatives' remains preserved are showing how much they love them.

IS claims deadly attack in Niger

AFP, Niamey

The Islamic State group on Tuesday claimed responsibility for an attack on an army base in western Niger on January 9 that killed scores of soldiers, the monitoring group SITE said.

"Clashes took place, lasting for several hours, with light, medium, and heavy weapons, which led to killing 100 elements and wounding others," according to a message by the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) translated by SITE.