

China fumes as US lauds Taiwan's democracy

AFP, Taipei

A US cabinet member heaped praise on Taiwan's democracy and its success in battling the coronavirus as he met the island's leader yesterday during a historic visit that China has slammed as a threat to peace.

Health Secretary Alex Azar is in Taipei for a three-day visit billed as the highest level visit from the United States since it switched diplomatic recognition from the island to China in 1979.

China insists Taiwan is its own territory and vows to one day seize it.

Yesterday, Azar met President Tsai Ing-wen, who advocates the island being recognised as a sovereign nation and is loathed by China's leaders.

"Taiwan's response to COVID-19 has been among the most successful in the world, and that is a tribute to the open, transparent,



democratic nature of Taiwan's society and culture," Azar told Tsai.

Tsai thanked the US for supporting its bid to be part of the World Health Organization (WHO), a body Beijing keeps the island frozen out of.

Soon after the meeting Taipei's defence ministry said Chinese fighter jets had made a brief incursion across the median line in the Taiwan Strait that the two sides have long treated as a boundary.

Chinese warplanes routinely fly into Taiwan's defence zone to put pressure on the island but crossings of the median line are much rarer because it is such a sensitive area.

ROW OVER CONTROVERSIAL SECURITY LAW IN HONG KONG

China flexes muscles with raid, arrests

AGENCIES

Hong Kong pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai was arrested yesterday and led in handcuffs through his newspaper office as police raided the building, part of a sweeping crackdown on dissent since China imposed a security law on the city.

China also imposed sanctions on 11 US citizens including legislators in response to the US imposition of sanctions on 11 Hong Kong and Chinese officials accused of curtailing political freedoms in the former British colony. Among those targeted were Senators Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Tom Cotton, Josh Hawley and Pat Toomey and Representative Chris Smith, as well as individuals at non-profit and rights groups.

"In response to that wrong US behaviour, China has decided to impose sanctions on individuals who have behaved egregiously on Hong Kong-related issues," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a regular press briefing yesterday.

He did not specify what the sanctions entail.

Lai, 71, was among nine people detained on charges including colluding with foreign forces -- one of the new national security offences -- and fraud in an operation targeting his Next Digital publishing group.

It was the latest police operation against dissidents under the sweeping new law introduced at the end



Police arrest Hong Kong pro-democracy media mogul Jimmy Lai from his home under the new national security law in Hong Kong, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP of June.

Two of Lai's sons were among those detained, a police source told AFP as well as Wilson Li, a former pro-democracy activist who describes himself as a freelance videographer working for Britain's ITV News.

The most serious national security crimes carry up to life in jail.

Journalists working at Lai's Apple Daily broadcasted dramatic footage on Facebook of some 200 police officers conducting the raid, and the newspaper's chief editor Law Wai-kwong demanding a warrant from officers.

Apple's staff were ordered to leave their seats and line up so police could check their identities as officers conducted searches across the newsroom.

Police said the search was conducted with a court

warrant which was shown to staff.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club, Hong Kong said the raid signalled "a dark new phase" that "upended" previous assurances by China and Hong Kong's government that the national security law would not end press freedoms.

The security law was introduced in a bid to quell last year's huge and often violent pro-democracy protests, and authorities have since wielded their new powers to pursue the city's democracy camp, sparking criticism from Western nations.

Lai's Apple Daily and Next Magazine are unapologetically pro-democracy and critical of Beijing. China routinely calls Lai a "traitor" and a "black hand" behind last year's protests.

Critics, including many Western nations, believe the law has ended the key liberties and autonomy that Beijing promised Hong Kong could keep after its 1997 handover by Britain.

The United States on Friday imposed sanctions on Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam as well as the city's current and former police chiefs, under an executive order signed by President Donald Trump.

Last month, China announced sanctions against Cruz, Rubio, Smith and other U.S. officials after the United States penalized senior Chinese officials over the treatment of Uighur Muslims in its Xinjiang region.

Beijing's latest measure includes sanctions against the heads of five US-based, non-government organisations - the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the International Republican Institute, Freedom House and Human Rights Watch.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Taliban pledge Afghan peace talks after prisoner release

The Taliban yesterday said they were ready to hold peace talks with the Afghan government after a contentious prisoner exchange, which authorities said would begin in the next two days. "Our stance is clear, if the prisoner release is completed, then we are ready for the intra-Afghan talks within a week," Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen told AFP, adding that the first round of talks will be held in Doha, Qatar. Thousands of prominent Afghans on Sunday agreed to the release of hundreds of Taliban prisoners accused of serious offences, overcoming a key hurdle in starting negotiations. The prisoner exchange was a key part of the February deal, which saw Washington agree to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in return for a pledge from the Taliban to hold peace talks with Kabul.

Survey: 70% of Japanese find newspapers reliable

About 70% of people find newspapers to be a reliable source of information, according to a survey. The survey was conducted online by the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association on May 26 and 27 in light of the current flood of incorrect information regarding the novel coronavirus. The 1,243 respondents ranged from 15 to 79 years old and came from all across the nation. Of the questions included, one asked about the credibility of 13 categories of media, such as newspapers and television. The ratio of those who replied that newspapers are either "reliable" or "rather reliable" was 69.5%, followed closely by television at 66.8% and radio at 56.7%. The perceived reliability of social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, stood at 15.4%.

Rival Thai protests raise fears of return to violence



Rival protest groups rallied in and around the Thai capital yesterday, raising the political temperature amid almost daily anti-government student protests nationwide and stirring fears of a return to street violence. Thailand was roiled for more than a decade by sporadic street clashes between conservatives and those loyal to former populist prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. There have been two military coups in the past 15 years, the last led by current Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha Bangkok in 2014. Dozens of supporters rallied in front of Parliament House on Monday in support of Prayuth's government. Thousands later joined an anti-government demonstration at Thammasat University on the outskirts of Bangkok, the largest such protest by students, challenging the government and conservative royalist establishment.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS, ANN

J&K militants kill fifth BJP politician

AFP, Srinagar

A Kashmir politician who died of gunshot wounds yesterday has become the fifth member of India's ruling nationalist party to be killed by militants in the turbulent region since last month.

The string of attacks have sent panic through local ranks of the Bharatiya Janata Party, a year after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government roused anger in the Himalayan territory by abolishing its semi-autonomous status.

The elected village chief was shot near his home on the edge of the main city Srinagar.

"He was attacked while taking a morning walk," said a police official. His death followed a militant attack which killed a BJP leader, his brother and father -- also members of the party -- in the Bandipora area of Kashmir early last month.

Suspected rebels killed two other elected village officials affiliated with the party last week.

At least 16 BJP members have publicly quit the party since the attacks began last month -- eight of them in the last two days. They insisted they had "no contact" with Modi's party anymore. Authorities moved scores of BJP officials and activists from their homes to secure government facilities in the wake of the attacks.

Kashmir, where an armed uprising erupted in 1989, has been especially tense since Modi's decision to revoke the territory's constitutionally mandated local autonomy last August.

Belarus election 'rigged'

Lukashenko asked to step down after 'electoral farce'

REUTERS, Minsk

The opposition in Belarus rejected official election results handing President Alexander Lukashenko a landslide re-election victory yesterday, saying the poll was rigged and that talks needed to begin on a peaceful transfer of power.

Earlier, the central election commission said Lukashenko, in power for more than a quarter of a century, won 80% of the vote in Sunday's election, while Svetlana Tikhanouskaya, who emerged from obscurity to become his main rival, took just 9.9%.

"The authorities are not listening to us. The authorities need to think about peaceful ways to hand over power," said Tikhanouskaya, a former English teacher who entered the race after her blogger husband was jailed.

"Of course we do not recognise the results."

Foreign observers have not judged an election to be free and fair in Belarus since 1995, and the run-up to the vote saw authorities jail Lukashenko's rivals and open criminal investigations into others who voiced opposition.

Events are being closely watched by Russia, whose oil exports run through Belarus to the West

and which has long regarded the country as a buffer zone against Nato, and the West, which has tried to lure Minsk from Moscow's orbit.

The streets in the capital and other cities were quiet after violence on Sunday night, when riot police used force to disperse thousands of protesters who had gathered to denounce what they said was an electoral farce.

But Lukashenko signalled he would not step down. "The response will be appropriate. We won't allow the country to be torn apart," the 65-year-old leader was quoted by the Belta news agency as saying.

Lukashenko repeated allegations that shadowy forces abroad were trying to manipulate protesters. The European Union's foreign policy chief and its commissioner for enlargement said the election had been marred by "disproportionate and unacceptable state violence against peaceful protesters".

A spokesman for the German foreign ministry said there were numerous indications of electoral fraud and that the EU was discussing how to react. Neighbouring Poland said it wants a special EU summit on Belarus.



Tikhanouskaya



Relatives of Lebanese army corporal Estephan Rouhana mourns as she is lifted behind his coffin during a funerary procession for him at his hometown of Batroun in northern Lebanon on August 10, 2020, after he died in the August 4 massive blast at the port of Beirut.

PHOTO: AFP

Lebanon govt set to resign

Says minister as anger grows over blast; donors pledge \$298m

REUTERS, Beirut

Lebanon's prime minister was set to announce the resignation of his government yesterday, the health minister said, after a devastating explosion in Beirut that has stirred public outrage and spurred a string of ministers to step down.

The Aug. 4 port warehouse detonation of more than 2,000 tonnes of ammonium nitrate killed at least 163 people, injured over 6,000 and destroyed swathes of the bustling Mediterranean capital, compounding months of political and economic meltdown.

The cabinet, formed in January with the backing of the powerful Iranian-backed Hezbollah group and its allies, met yesterday, with many ministers wanting to resign, according to ministerial and political sources.



Health Minister Hamad Hasan told Reuters that Prime Minister Hassan Diab would soon announce the resignation of the entire cabinet. Diab was set to deliver an address to the nation at 7:30pm local time, his office said.

For many ordinary Lebanese, the explosion was the last straw in a protracted crisis over the collapse of the economy, endemic corruption, waste and dysfunctional governance, and they have taken to the streets demanding root-and-branch change.

The information and environment ministers quit on Sunday as well as several lawmakers, and the justice minister followed them yesterday.

Anti-government protests in the past two days have been the biggest since October, when angry demonstrations spread over an economic crisis rooted in pervasive graft, mismanagement and high-level unaccountability. Protesters accused the political elite of siphoning off state resources for their own benefit.

An emergency international donor conference on Sunday raised pledges worth nearly 253 million euros (\$298 million) for immediate humanitarian relief. But foreign countries demand transparency over how the aid is used, wary of writing blank cheques to a government perceived by its own people as deeply corrupt.

Advertisement for the Bangladesh government regarding the 2020-21 budget. It includes the text '(একই তারিখ ও স্মারকে প্রতিস্থাপিত) গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার' and details about the budget process, including dates and the website www.ictd.gov.bd.

Advertisement for 'Holy warrior! Pak teen feted for killing US blasphemy suspect'. It features a headline and a sub-headline, followed by text from Reuters, Peshawar, reporting on the case of Faisal Khan, a 15-year-old Pakistani, and the killing of Tahir Naseem, a US citizen.

Advertisement for an e-Tender Notice from the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. It details the tender for 'Upgrading Kamaphuli Tunnel Connecting Road (Shikolbaha-Anowara National Highway (N-115) to 4-Lane with slow moving vehicle lanes including widening road embankment and tree plantation at median under Dohazari Road Division during the year 2020-2021 (WP-01)'. It includes contact information for Subama Sarkar, Jamal Uddin, and Md. Haliur Rahman.