

'World facing changes never seen in a century'

China President Xi calls on army to be battle-ready

REUTERS, Shanghai

China's armed forces must strengthen their sense of urgency and do everything they can to prepare for battle, President Xi Jinping told a meeting of top brass on Friday.

China is keen to beef up its armed forces amid territorial disputes in the South China Sea and escalating tension with the United States over issues ranging from trade to the status of Taiwan.

The official Xinhua news agency said Xi told a meeting of the top military authority that China faced increasing risks and challenges, and the armed forces must work to secure its security and development needs.

Xi, who is also chairman of the Central Military Commission, said the armed forces must devise strategies for the new era and take on responsibilities for preparing and waging war.



"The world is facing a period of major changes never seen in a century, and China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for development," he was quoted as saying.

He said the armed forces needed to be able to respond quickly to emergencies, needed to upgrade their joint operations capabilities and nurture new types of combat forces.

Xi's comments followed his remarks on Wednesday that China still reserved the right to use force to achieve "reunification" with Taiwan and prevent the island's independence.

Xi's Taiwan speech came just days after US President Donald Trump signed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act into law, reaffirming the US commitment to the island's security.

China still sees Taiwan as part of its territory to be reunified, despite the two sides being ruled separately since they split in 1949 after a civil war.

Democratic allies should rally to protect Taiwan from China: Tsai

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's president yesterday called on allies to help defend its sovereignty, accusing China of waging a "deliberate campaign" to undermine the island's democracy by refusing to talk to her government.

Relations between Taiwan and China have been at a low since Tsai came to power in 2016, refusing to acknowledge that the self-ruled island is part of "one China".

Beijing unilaterally cut off communication with her administration and stepped up military drills around the island as well as poaching several of its dwindling diplomatic allies.

Tsai's comments capped a week of escalating rhetoric between the two neighbours, sparked by a landmark speech from Chinese president Xi Jinping on Wednesday.

Xi described Taiwan's unification with the mainland as "inevitable" and reiterated Beijing's willingness to use force if necessary, especially if Taiwan ever declares formal independence.

He also said Beijing was willing to talk to political parties and groups in Taiwan that recognise their "one China" principle -- a reference to the main opposition parties.

Tsai hit out at Beijing's willingness to bypass her elected government as "a continuation of its deliberate campaign to undermine and subvert our democratic process and create division in our society".

The schism is one of profound geopolitical importance. The United States diplomatically recognises China over Taiwan but it remains Taipei's staunchest political and military ally.

Tsai said China's increasingly muscular rhetoric towards Taiwan was a test of whether democratic allies would protect each other.

"If the international community fails to speak up for and assist Taiwan under the circumstances we face today, I have to ask which country will be next?" she asked.

Xi has been touting the "one country, two systems" model for Taiwan. A version was implemented in Hong Kong after Britain handed the city back to China in 1997 as a way to guarantee the kind of liberties and government unseen on the authoritarian mainland.

But sliding freedoms in Hong Kong in recent years have done little to endear the Taiwanese people to the idea of a similar deal for them from Beijing.

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"Yellow Vest" anti-government protesters run as teargas shells are launched by security personnel during clashes on a street in Rouen, north-western France yesterday, part of a day of national demonstrations. Inset, A protester is being arrested by security personnel in Rouen. France's "yellow vest" protesters were back on the streets as a government spokesman denounced those still protesting as hard-liners who wanted only to bring down the government.

PHOTO: AFP

CALIFORNIA BOWLING ALLEY SHOOTING

3 killed, 4 injured

CNN ONLINE

A shooting at a bowling alley late Friday left three men dead and four people injured in Southern California, authorities said.

Police said they were called to the Gable House Bowl in Torrance shortly before midnight. A witness said that gunshots rang out after a fight inside the building.

"Bowlers were diving under the benches," the witness, Dana Scott, told RMG News. "The people that were still bowling on the lanes were on the floors, underneath the seats, behind the benches."

No arrests were immediately reported. In a news release, Torrance police said they were "working to identify the suspect(s) involved."

"Upon arrival, officers discovered multiple subjects with gunshot wounds inside the location," the Torrance Police Department's news release reads.

The names of the slain and injured weren't immediately released.

Video from RMG News showed numerous firefighters or other first responders tending to people outside.

The Gable House Bowl is open until 3 a.m. on Saturday mornings. The complex also offers laser tag and a bar, its website says.

Torrance is about 20 miles from Los Angeles.

According to health authorities, nearly 40,000 people died in the United States as a result of firearms in 2017 -- a figure that includes suicides.



Syrians stand in a street next to debris and rubble from buildings which were damaged by reported air strikes in the rebel-held town of Orum al-Kubra, in the northern Syrian province of Aleppo, yesterday. Airstrikes by Syrian regime ally Russia hit the west of Aleppo province late on Friday, the first such raids in the area since a deal between Moscow and rebel backer Ankara to stave off a massive regime offensive on the wider Idlib region in September 2018.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump slams newly elected House Democrat's impeachment vow

AFP, Washington

A Democratic congresswoman kicked off her term with an expletive-laced vow to impeach Donald Trump, testing her party's discipline and earning a chiding Friday from the president.

As a clip of Michigan Democrat Rashida Tlaib's animated comments circulated widely on social media, Trump tartly dismissed the threat of impeachment, while the newly elected Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi appeared loath to reign in the congresswoman's language.

"How do you impeach a president who has won perhaps the greatest election of all time?" Trump said on Twitter, saying Democrats only consider impeachment "because they know they can't win in 2020."

At an event hours after her swearing-in on Thursday, Tlaib told supporters that "we are gonna go in there and we're gonna impeach the mother*****".

The crowd roared, and Tlaib hugged

supporters.

Salty language by US lawmakers -- or presidents, for that matter -- is nothing new. Trump, hardly the paradigm of verbal decency, last year derided African nations as "shithole" countries, after all.

But when Trump was asked about

Tlaib -- the first Palestinian-American elected to Congress -- tweeted Friday: "I will always speak truth to power. #unapologeticallyMe."

Tlaib found support on Twitter, where #ImpeachTheMF was a trending item in the United States on Friday night, with more than 110,000 tweets.

Republicans have bridled at Tlaib's comments, using them to portray Democrats as seeking politically-motivated retribution against Trump rather than common ground.

"We watched a new freshman stand up, use this language, get cheered by their base, and we watched a brand new speaker say nothing to her," top House Republican Kevin McCarthy said.

His critic's comments, he said they were "disgraceful," and "highly disrespectful" to the United States of America."

"I think she dishonored herself and I think she dishonored her family, using language like that," he added.

Doubling down on her outburst,

Bolton warns Syria against use of chemical arms

REUTERS, Tel Aviv

US National Security Advisor John Bolton yesterday warned the Syrian government that it should not see the impending US military withdrawal from the country as an invitation to use chemical weapons.

"There is absolutely no change in the US position against the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and absolutely no change in our position that any use of chemical weapons would be met by a very strong response, as we've done twice before," Bolton told reporters on his plane shortly before landing in Tel Aviv, Israel.

"So the regime, the Assad regime should be under no illusions on that question."

Bolton added: "As we elaborate how the withdrawal is going to occur and the circumstances, we don't want the Assad regime to see what we do as representing any diminution in our opposition to the use of weapons of mass destruction."

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