

# Independence 'means war'

China warns Taiwan as US pledges support, tightens supervision of HK as UK offers residents route to citizenship

REUTERS, Beijing

China toughened its language towards Taiwan yesterday, warning after recent stepped up military activities near the island that "independence means war" and that its armed forces were acting in response to provocation and foreign interference.

Taiwan, claimed by China as its own territory, reported multiple Chinese fighter jets and bombers entering its southwestern air defence identification zone last weekend, prompting Washington to urge Beijing to stop pressuring Taiwan.

China believes that Taiwan's democratically-elected government is moving the island towards a declaration of formal independence, though Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has repeatedly said it is already an independent country called the Republic of China, its formal name.

Asked at a monthly news briefing about the air force's recent activities, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Wu Qian said Taiwan is an inseparable part of China.

"The military activities carried out by the Chinese People's Liberation Army in the Taiwan Strait are necessary actions to address the current security situation in the Taiwan Strait and to safeguard national sovereignty and security," he said.

"They are a solemn response to external

interference and provocations by 'Taiwan independence' forces," he added.

Wu said a "handful" of people in Taiwan were sweeping the island's independence.

"We warn those 'Taiwan independence' elements: those who play with fire will burn themselves, and 'Taiwan independence' means war," he added.

Asked about the remarks, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said there was no reason that tensions between China and Taiwan "need to lead to anything like confrontation." He also reaffirmed longstanding US military support to Taiwan's self-defense.

Meanwhile, China yesterday said it will "no longer recognise" the British National (Overseas) passport for Hong Kongers, as Britain prepares to offer millions of former colonial subjects a way to escape Beijing's crackdown on dissent.

Beijing has imposed a tighter grip on the Asian financial hub in the past year, imposing new security laws and arresting political opponents.

The Post, citing unnamed sources, said the Hong Kong Liaison Office's expanded responsibilities included tighter supervision and policy implementation in the semiautonomous city.



A Nepalese police tries to detain anti-government demonstrators protesting against the dissolution of parliament, in front of the parliament building in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday. Nepal's Supreme Court has issued two contempt of court notices to caretaker Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, demanding he explain why he mocked lawyers challenging his decision to dissolve parliament and call early polls. PHOTO: REUTERS

## NEWSIN brief

### Google bombards Aussie search users

AFP, Sydney

US tech giant Google stepped up its public relations campaign against Australian regulation yesterday, presenting all search users Down Under with a "proposal" to water down planned rules. Australians searching for any term were presented with a pop-up setting out the company's opposition to proposed legislation that would force them to pay news companies for content. Google and Facebook have vehemently opposed the proposed rules, which are designed to rebalance the relationship between long-struggling news companies and tech giants that dominate the online advertising market.

### Covid infection may reduce fertility in men

AFP, Paris

Covid19 may damage sperm quality and reduce fertility in men, according to a new study based on experimental evidence. The viral disease -- which has swept the globe, claiming nearly 2.2 million lives -- can cause increased sperm cell death, inflammation and so-called oxidative stress, researchers reported yesterday in the journal Reproduction. "These findings provide the first direct experimental evidence that the male reproductive system could be targeted and damaged by Covid-19," the authors concluded. Experts commenting on the research, however, said the capacity of the virus to compromise fertility in men remains unproven.

# Undoing 'damage' Trump has done

Says Biden after signing healthcare executive orders

REUTERS, Washington

US President Joe Biden on Thursday reopened the nation's online health insurance marketplace for people who cannot obtain coverage through their employers, in a move he said was aimed at undoing "damage" done by his predecessor Donald Trump.

In an executive order, Biden restored access to healthcare.gov, allowing Americans to sign up for insurance through the government exchange from Feb. 15 to May 15, the White House said. The program is normally accessible for just six weeks in the fall.

Biden, who took office last week, also directed federal agencies to "re-examine" Trump-era policies like work requirements that made it more difficult for people to qualify for Medicaid,

the government-run health insurance program for the poor.

The actions were the latest in a blizzard of moves by the new Democratic president to reverse the policies of the Republican Trump.

"Today I'm about to sign two executive orders - basically the best way to describe them - to undo the damage Trump has done," Biden said in the Oval Office.

He also rescinded the "Mexico City Policy" that bans U.S. funding for international non-profit organizations that provide abortion counseling.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the decision as "a powerful message to women and girls around the world that their rights matter."

Biden has vowed to shore up

programs created under former President Barack Obama's sweeping 2010 Affordable Care Act, arguing that the changes are urgent because of the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed more than 430,000 Americans and thrown millions out of work.

Biden has made battling the virus a priority of his first days in office and proposed a new \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package for individuals and businesses on top of \$4 trillion in aid approved last year.

The US Senate and House will begin moving forward on the plan next week, but Republicans and some Democrats have balked at the cost.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said after Thursday's signing Biden has been having calls with lawmakers on the legislation.

# Small bomb goes off near Israeli embassy in Delhi

No injuries reported; terrorism suspected

REUTERS, New Delhi

A small blast near the Israeli embassy in New Delhi yesterday was caused by a "very low intensity improvised device" a police spokesman said, adding that there were no injuries.

The explosion damaged the window panes of three nearby parked cars, a Delhi police spokesman said in a statement.

"Initial impressions suggest a mischievous attempt to create a sensation," the statement said.

"An explosion occurred recently near the Israeli embassy in India. There were no casualties in the blast, and no damage to the building," Israel's foreign ministry said in a statement.

"The incident is under investigation by the authorities in India, who are in contact with the relevant Israeli authorities."

However, Israel is treating the blast as a terrorist incident, an Israeli official told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The blast occurred shortly after 1700 IST (1130 GMT), while India's President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were participating in a military ceremony a kilometer away from the site.

A Reuters eyewitness said the site of the blast was quickly cordoned off by police.

In 2012, a blast near the embassy in New Delhi injured an Israeli diplomat's wife, her driver and two others. It coincided with an attack on another Israeli diplomat in Tbilisi, Georgia.



Rescue workers are seen at the site of an explosion of a house in Langensdorf, Austria yesterday. The house caught fire and part of it collapsed after the explosion, but police had no immediate information on injuries or how many people were inside.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# UN, foreign embassies sound alarm over Myanmar coup fears

AFP, Yangon

More than a dozen embassies, including the US and EU delegation, yesterday urged Myanmar to "adhere to democratic norms", joining the UN in a chorus of international concern about a possible coup.

Myanmar is just a decade out of nearly 50 years of military rule, with a nascent democracy governed under a junta-authored constitution which dictates power-sharing between the civilian administration and the country's generals.

For weeks, the powerful military has alleged widespread voter irregularities in November's election, which Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) won in a landslide.

Their call for voter list verification ramped up this week, with an army spokesman on Tuesday refusing to rule out the possibility of a military takeover to deal with what he called a political crisis.

Fears grew after army chief General Min Aung Hlaing -- arguably Myanmar's most powerful individual -- appeared to echo the sentiment Wednesday when he said the country's constitution could be "revoked" under certain circumstances.

The newly elected MPs are expected to begin sitting in parliament on February 1. The US embassy -- along with 16 countries including former colonial power Britain and the EU delegation -- released a statement yesterday urging for the military "adhere to democratic norms".

# US 'bombarding civilians, houses' in violation of deal

Say Taliban, reject Washington's accusations of not meeting promises

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban yesterday rejected Washington's accusations that it had not lived up to its promises in Afghanistan, in turn claiming the US was 'bombarding civilians'.

The US signed a landmark deal with the insurgents last year, agreeing to withdraw all of its troops from the country in return for security guarantees after a stalemate on the battlefield.

"The other side have violated the agreement, almost every day they are violating it," Mohammad Naem, a Taliban spokesman in Qatar, told AFP.

"They are bombarding civilians, houses and villages, and we have informed them from time to time, these are not just violations of the agreement but violations of human rights."

The US military has in recent months carried out air strikes against the Taliban fighters in defence of Afghan forces in some provinces.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid added on Twitter that the allegations against the group were "unfounded" and that it was "fully committed" to the agreement.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Thursday that the Biden administration remains committed to the Taliban-US deal and ending the war "in a responsible way".

However, he said, "the Taliban are not meeting their commitments to reduce violence, and to renounce their ties to Al-Qaeda".

"We are still involved in trying to get a negotiated settlement," he added.

The agreement, signed in Doha last year, required the Taliban to halt attacks on US forces, sharply decrease the level of violence in the country, and advance peace talks with the government in Kabul.

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**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

Local Government Engineering Department  
Western Economic Corridor & Regional Enhancement Program (WeCARE) Phase-I:  
Rural Connectivity, Market and Logistic Infrastructure Improvement Project (RCMLIIP)  
LGED Bhaban, Level-10  
Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207

Memo No. 46.02.0000.824.14.010.20.38 Date: 28/01/2021

**Request for Expressions of Interest**  
Social, Gender and Prevention of GBV Expert  
(Consulting Services - Individual Consultant Selection)

**Western Economic Corridor & Regional Enhancement Program (WeCARE) Phase-I**  
Assignment Title: **Social Gender and Prevention of GBV Expert**  
Reference No. SP-06 (F)

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has received financing from the World Bank toward the cost of the Western Economic Corridor & Regional Enhancement Program (WeCARE) Phase-I and intends to apply part of the proceeds for Social Gender and Prevention of GBV Expert. The broad scope of consulting services ("the Services") includes carrying out the following in the project influence areas of Jashore, Jhenaidah, Magura, Chuadanga, Satkhira, and Meherpur.

1. Assess social risks that may arise due to the implementation of the project and suggest how the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) can avoid or mitigate such risks.
2. Ensure gender equity in managing the project.
3. Prevent gender-based violence of any form in implementing the project.
4. Provide necessary training on these relevant topics to project personnel.

The expected date for commencement of the services is February 2021 and the tentative duration of the entire assignment is about 24 (twenty-four) months. A draft TOR can be found at the following website: ([www.lged.gov.bd](http://www.lged.gov.bd)) or can be obtained at the address given below).

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) under the Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Government of Bangladesh now invites eligible individuals to indicate their interest in providing the Services. Interested individuals should provide information demonstrating that they have the required qualifications and relevant experience to perform the Services. The shortlisting criteria are:

1. Experience in managing social risks in preparation and implementation of development projects.
2. Experience as a gender expert with a special focus on Gender-Based Violence (GBV).
3. Experience in IDA funded similar projects.

The attention of interested Consultants is drawn to the Section III, Para 3.14, 3.16 and 3.17 of the World Bank's "Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers, July 2016 and updated in August 2018," setting forth the World Bank's policy on conflict of interest.

An individual will be selected in accordance with the Individual Consultants Selection (ICS) method set out in the Procurement Regulations.

Further information can be obtained at the address below during office hours (9:00am to 17:00pm BST). Expression of Interest must be delivered in a written form to the address below (in person, or by e-mail) by 17:00pm (BST), 25 February, 2021.

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