

XI-BIDEN PHONE CALL

Escalation avoided, for now

REUTERS, Washington

US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping managed largely to steer clear of escalatory rhetoric on Taiwan in a Thursday call, suggesting that neither side – preoccupied with economic woes at home – wants a fresh crisis across the Taiwan Strait.

Xi's warning to Biden against "playing with fire" over Taiwan, though vivid, largely mirrored his remarks from the two leaders' video meeting in November.

"The portion of the conversation on Taiwan was extremely similar to the last conversation. Xi's warnings did not escalate," said Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, referring to Beijing's readout of the call.

Taiwan comprised one of three parts of the more than two-hour discussion, according to a senior US official who briefed reporters. The others largely focused on Russia's war in Ukraine and areas of possible US-China cooperation, such as climate change.

The official declined to say if Biden and Xi directly broached the topic of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's yet-to-be confirmed visit to the island, instead highlighting that Biden had conveyed that Washington maintained its long-standing "one China policy" under which it recognizes Beijing, not Taipei, diplomatically.

"My sense is the two leaders talking directly probably lowered the temperature somewhat relative to what it would have been without the meeting," said Jacob Stokes, an Indo-Pacific security fellow at the Center for a New American Security.

Beijing has issued escalating warnings about repercussions should Pelosi visit Taiwan.

Some experts worry such a move at a time of fraught ties could spur a major crisis and even unintended clashes. But others have downplayed down the idea that China and the United States are on the cusp of calamity over Taiwan.

"There are nightmare fantasies out there. Maybe they'll shoot down Speaker Pelosi's plane. Maybe they'll invade the island while she's there. For crying out loud, we're not in a Tom Clancy novel," said Dean Cheng, a China expert at the conservative Heritage Foundation.

Cheng said China was more likely to increase military flights over the median line dividing the more than 100-mile (160 km) wide Taiwan Strait that separates China from Taiwan, or circumnavigate the island to send a message about the reach of its forces.

Craig Singleton, senior fellow at the Washington-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies' China Program, said in a note to media that as Washington and Beijing confront serious economic headwinds, both Biden and Xi will face intensifying domestic pressure to stabilize the bilateral relationship.

"So far, there are few indications in Chinese official statements, nor online or domestic media, which would suggest that China is considering more serious military action at this time, although that could change," he said.

No recruitment 1.5 crore more

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in Dhaka in February, Greece Migration and Asylum Minister Panagiotis A. Mitarachi expressed optimism that the new deal would effectively support legal migration.

"When I sit in the council of the European Union with the other colleagues of mine...it has been a joint position in the last few years that we would like to support legal migration.

"So, this is what we agreed today [February 9]," he had said.

Gorgosaurus

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Sotheby's did not reveal the buyer.

Unlike other countries, the United States does not restrict the sale or export of fossils, meaning the skeleton could end up overseas.

WB refuses

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Sri Lanka is currently in bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund but officials say the process could take months.

The island nation has run out of foreign exchange to finance even the most essential imports, and chronic shortages have inflamed public anger.

Motorists stay in long queues for days to get rationed petrol and government officials have been told to work from home to reduce commuting and save fuel.

Inflation rose to 60.8 percent in July for a tenth consecutive monthly record, according to data from the Colombo Consumer Price Index (CPI) released yesterday, while the Sri Lankan rupee has lost more than half its value against the US dollar this year.

The UN World Food Programme estimates five out of every six Sri Lankan families have been forced to buy lower-quality food, eat less or in some cases skip meals altogether.

is really worrisome and should be stopped immediately.

"The rivers should be connected with their branches. Rivers should be dredged and their floodplain areas must be protected," he suggested.

Researchers of Pennsylvania State University, Curtin University and the University of Chattogram jointly conducted the study based on satellite images of Nasa taken between 2000 and 2018.

They analysed multitemporal images to examine the spatial distribution and change in nighttime lights (NTL) to identify in which floodplains human settlements and infrastructural developments took place in 18 years.

The satellite images were from two times a day – 7:00pm to 8:00pm and 2pm to 3:00pm – of the entire study period.

Ashraf Dewan, an author of the study and also a professor at Curtin University in Australia, said since the late 1990s, NTL satellite imagery has been used as a proxy for a number of socio-economic parameters, including urbanisation, economic activity, and population.

Russia backs China on Taiwan

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Biden told Xi US policy on Taiwan had not changed and that Washington strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, the White House said.

On Thursday, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reaffirmed Moscow's support to Beijing's "One China" policy on the issue of Taiwan.

"Our position on the existence of only one China remains unchanged," Lavrov told reporters in Tashkent. "We have no



Some of the suspended Members of Parliament (MPs) sit during a protest against price hike and their suspension, at Parliament House in New Delhi, India, yesterday. The proceedings in the Lok Sabha, lower House of Indian parliament, were adjourned for the day yesterday amid uproar and rival protests by opposition and BJP members over senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury's controversial remark about India's President Droupadi Murmu.

PHOTO: AFP

ROW WITH INDIA OVER MILITARY SHIP'S VISIT TO LANKA

China defends move

REUTERS, Beijing/New Delhi

China yesterday said it hoped "relevant parties" would refrain from interfering with its legitimate maritime activities, after New Delhi voiced concern over a Chinese military ship's planned visit to a port in India's southern neighbour Sri Lanka.

India worries that the Chinese-built and leased port of Hambantota will be used by China as a military base in India's backyard. The \$1.5 billion port is near the main shipping route from Asia to Europe.

Shipping data from Refinitiv Eikon showed Chinese research and survey vessel Yuan Wang 5 was en

route to Hambantota and due to arrive on Aug 11, at a time when Sri Lanka is facing its worst economic crisis in seven decades. India has provided Sri Lanka with nearly \$4 billion in support this year alone.

Indian media have said that Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Chinese counterpart Wang Yi could hold a bilateral meeting in the Uzbek capital Tashkent on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) conference. India's foreign ministry said it had no information on that.

During a weekly briefing late on Thursday, an Indian foreign ministry spokesman said the government

was monitoring the planned visit of the Chinese ship, adding that New Delhi would protect its security and economic interests.

India has already lodged a verbal protest with the Sri Lankan government against the ship's visit, Reuters reported on Thursday.

Foreign security analysts describe the Yuan Wang 5 as one of China's latest generation space-tracking ships, used to monitor satellite, rocket and intercontinental ballistic missile launches.

Sri Lanka formally handed over commercial activities at Hambantota port to a Chinese company in 2017 on a 99-year lease after struggling to repay its debt.

PRINCE PHILIP'S WILL UK newspaper loses court challenge

AFP, LONDON

British newspaper The Guardian yesterday lost its legal challenge against a decision banning the media from a court case about Prince Philip's will.

A High Court judge in September 2021 ruled the will should remain sealed for 90 years, to protect the privacy of his widow, Queen Elizabeth II, and other royals.

The hearing was held in private and media organisations were not allowed to attend.

The newspaper took legal action against the attorney general, who is the government's chief law officer, and the Queen's private lawyers, saying the media should have been allowed access.

Dismissing the newspaper's appeal, senior judges Geoffrey Vos and Victoria Sharp ruled that notifying the media about the hearing would have risked a publicity storm.

"The hearing was at a hugely sensitive time for the sovereign and her family, and those interests would not have been protected if there had been protracted hearings reported in the press," the judges found.

Pranay Verma

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Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in September. The date of her visit is yet to be officially announced, but it is likely in the first week of September.

Verma has in the past held diplomatic assignments in Hong Kong, San Francisco, Beijing, Kathmandu and Washington.

Doraiswami, who served as the Indian ambassador to Uzbekistan and South Korea and as private secretary to the prime minister, is set to go to the UK in place of Gaitri Issar Kumar who retired on June 30.

Philippine quake death toll hits 10

AFP, Manila

The death toll from a major earthquake in the northern Philippines rose to 10 yesterday after another four bodies were found in rubble, authorities said, as aftershocks continued to rock the mountainous region. Wednesday's 7.0-magnitude quake rippled across the province of Abra, a hilly region, damaging thousands of homes as well as toppling buildings and shaking high-rise towers hundreds of kilometres away in the capital Manila. More than 150 people were injured.

Wallace backs Truss

REUTERS, London

British foreign minister Liz Truss received a boost for her campaign to become the country's next prime minister when Defence Secretary Ben Wallace gave her his support yesterday. He said Truss, who is on course to defeat former finance minister Rishi Sunak according to opinion polls of members of the ruling Conservative Party, was "authentic" and "straight". The winner of the tussle will become the fourth prime minister in 12 years of Conservative rule after Johnson was forced to resign following a series of scandals.

BID TO 'EASE' WAR EFFECTS Macron counts on Saudi prince

AFP, Paris



French leader Emmanuel Macron and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman agreed to work "to ease the effects" of the Ukraine war, Macron's office said yesterday, after talks

in Paris that marked the full diplomatic rehabilitation of the Saudi leader. Like US President Joe Biden who visited Riyadh earlier this month, Macron had been keen to secure extra oil production from the de facto Saudi leader who was a pariah in the West until recently. The meeting outraged rights groups because of bin Salman's suspected role in the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.

‘Miracle baby’ gets new home

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adopting the child, the decision of shifting her to the children's home came at a meeting of the District Child Welfare Board held on Wednesday.

"In the meeting, the baby's grandfather said that they do not have a suitable environment and necessary resources to raise the child. Given this situation, it was decided that she would be sent to Chotomoni Nibash with the consent of her grandfather," said Md Waliullah, deputy director of the district social services department.

Mostafizur Rahman, who is a grocer by profession, said, "We wanted to keep my granddaughter with us and take care of her. But as our home environment is not suitable enough and considering my financial condition, we decided to send her to the shelter home.

"I am happy with the decision... I can visit her any

time during her stay there," he added.

Mostafizur, however, hoped that he would bring her granddaughter back home in Mymensingh within a year or so, although they can keep the baby at the shelter home until she turns seven years old.

He also said the administration had assured them of a building with two rooms and financial support for the newborn's siblings Jannatul and Ibadat.

Mymensingh District Child Welfare Board President and Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Enamul Haque said this decision was taken based on the discussions in several meetings between the district administration and social services department, keeping the children's treatment and future in mind.

On July 16, Fatima's parents Jahangir Alam and nine-month pregnant Ratna Begum along with

her two-year-old sister were killed when a truck ran them over in the Court Building area on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway.

The family was headed to a diagnostic centre for Ratna's routine pregnancy check-up when an onion-laden truck hit them, leaving all three family members dead on the spot.

Ratna gave birth to the baby before succumbing to her injuries. The impact of the crash was so violent that Fatima came out of her mother's womb to land on the open road. The newborn survived miraculously.

Fatima was initially admitted to a private hospital after receiving primary treatment at Trishal Upazila Health Complex. She was later shifted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) of Mymensingh Medical College Hospital on July 19 as she started to have various physical problems including jaundice.

9 parties skip talks with EC

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Democratic Party (LDP), Islami Andolan Bangladesh and Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP).

As of Thursday, the EC has met delegates from 26 parties. The talks began on July 17.

The EC is scheduled to hold the dialogue with the ruling Awami League and oppositionin parliament, Jatiya Party, tomorrow.

Talking to The Daily Star, LDP President Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmad alleged that the current EC is "nominated and controlled" by the present government.

He said as long as this government, which came to power through "midnight voting", rules the country, no one could expect that the EC could conduct a free and fair election. "Joining such a dialogue is just time-wasting."

Bangladesh Kalyan Party Chairman Maj Gen (ret'd) Syed Muhammad Ibrahim said a political government would control the polls,

keeping own party interest in mind. So, a neutral caretaker government is mandatory, he added.

Sheikh Zulfikar Bulbul Chowdhury, secretary general of Bangladesh Muslim League, alleged that the current EC is "influenced" by the government. "We don't believe it would be able to conduct a free, fair and acceptable election."

Razequzzaman Ratan, assistant secretary of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, said, "The current Election Commission is frequently changing its stance and speeches that prove it doesn't have confidence in itself. So, it is obvious for us not to have confidence in the commission."

At a press conference on Thursday, CPB General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince said the EC invited political parties to talks without any specific agenda. Such a dialogue would not bring any special results, he said.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD Rab) in a statement alleged that the government made the EC its "subordinate" organisation. So, it is not possible for the EC to hold a credible election.

In a statement, Islami Andolan Bangladesh said they think the current EC is also on its way to conduct "another controversial and farcical election" under this government.

"We hoped that all political parties would join the talks. We still hope that they would take part in the process in the future," said Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) Ahsan Habib Khan.

Another Election Commissioner Md Alamgir said the commission would sit to review why the political parties have no confidence in them.

"We will also discuss what we can do regarding political parties' skipping of talks only after their completion."