

DIPLOMATIC SWITCH

China’s Xi signals support for Honduras

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged economic and social backing for Honduras yesterday, state media reported, in his first remarks on the Central American country since it cut ties with Taiwan and recognised Beijing instead.

Beijing considers self-ruled Taiwan to be part of its territory and has vowed to seize the island one day.

It does not permit countries to recognise both Beijing and Taipei, and has used economic inducements in recent years to lure away Taiwan’s allies.

Xi’s remarks during a meeting with Honduran President Xiomara Castro in Beijing came after Tegucigalpa officially opened an embassy in the Chinese capital.

The switch of allegiances marked “a historic decision and demonstrated your firm political will”, Xi told Castro, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

“China will unwaveringly develop friendly China-Honduras relations and firmly support the economic and social development of Honduras,” Xi was quoted as saying.

He said China would seek to develop ties “from a strategic height and long-term

perspective, turning the beautiful vision of cooperation between the two countries into concrete results”.

Castro is expected to sign a host of agreements during her visit.

In March, Honduras cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favour of Beijing, reducing the number of countries that diplomatically recognise Taipei to just 13.

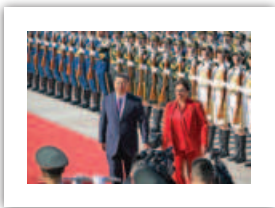
China opened an embassy in Tegucigalpa last week.

China also encourages Chinese enterprises to participate in Honduras’ projects in areas including energy, infrastructure and telecommunications, CCTV cited a joint declaration as saying.

The Chinese leader also emphasized that both sides should deepen political mutual trust, and uphold the “One-China” principle, reports Reuters.

“One-China principle is the primary premise and political foundation for the establishment of loyal diplomatic relations and the development of bilateral relations,” Xi said.

When Honduras ended its decades-long relationship with Taiwan, the island’s foreign minister accused it of demanding exorbitant sums before being lured away by Beijing.



An aerial view shows smoke from wildfires rising above a forest belt in the eastern Abai region, Kazakhstan yesterday. Flags were lowered across Kazakhstan yesterday as the country mourned 14 forestry workers killed in the wildfire in Abai region. Firefighters were still struggling to contain the blaze raging across 43,000 hectares of land in the Central Asian nation, the government said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

MEDIA ROW

China hopes India can meet it halfway

REUTERS, Beijing

China yesterday called on India to meet it halfway in a dispute over journalists working in each other’s countries after China said its reporters in India had been treated unfairly and an Indian journalist was asked to leave China.

The dispute over media staff is the latest episode to highlight tension between the Asian neighbours since a deterioration in ties in mid-2020 when their troops clashed on their disputed Himalayan frontier and 24 people were killed.

“In recent years, Chinese journalists in India have been accorded unfair and discriminatory arrangements,” Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told a briefing yesterday.

“We hope that India will continue to issue visas for Chinese journalists and remove the unreasonable restrictions and create favourable conditions for media exchanges.”

China has declined to renew the visas of the last two Indian journalists based there, citing India taking similar action this month against the two remaining Chinese state media journalists in India.

One of the two Indians, a reporter for the Hindustan Times, left China on Sunday as his visa expired, according to two sources.

The last Indian reporter in China, from the state news agency PTI, will leave this month when his visa expires, the sources said.

Global nuclear arsenal grew last year

Says SIPRI, warns world entering a dangerous phase as countries implemented long-term force modernisation plans

AGENCIES

The number of operational nuclear weapons rose slightly in 2022 as countries implemented long-term force modernisation and expansion plans, a leading conflict think-tank said yesterday, warning that the world was entering a dangerous phase.

The estimated number of warheads in military stockpiles for potential use rose by 86 to 9,576, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said in a statement, continuing a trend seen in the last couple of years.

“We are drifting into one of the most dangerous periods in human history,” said Dan Smith, SIPRI Director.

“It is imperative that the world’s governments find ways to cooperate in order to calm geopolitical tensions, slow arms races and deal with the worsening consequences of environmental breakdown and rising world hunger.”

The nine nuclear-armed states continued to modernize their nuclear arsenals and several deployed new nuclear-armed or nuclear-capable weapon systems in 2022, reports Reuters.

Pointing to the stockpile of usable nuclear warheads, Smith said that “those numbers are beginning to tick up”, while adding that they remain far below the more than 70,000 seen during the 1980s.

The bulk of the increase was in China, which increased its stockpile from 350 to 410 warheads, reports AFP.

India, Pakistan and North Korea also upped their stockpiles and Russia’s grew to a smaller extent, from 4,477 to 4,489, while the remaining

nuclear powers maintained the size of their arsenals.

Russia and the United States together have almost 90 percent of all nuclear weapons.

“The big picture is we’ve had over 30 years of the number of nuclear warheads coming down, and we see that process coming to an end now,” Smith said.

The higher spending reported by ICAN appeared to back that up. ICAN, which was awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, found that spending on nuclear weapons had risen three percent from 2021, marking the third consecutive annual increase.

The \$82.9 billion spent amounted to \$157,664 for every minute of 2022, it said in its report entitled “Wasted: 2022 Global Nuclear Weapons Spending”.

Washington spent \$43.7 billion, which was slightly less than a year earlier but was still far ahead of all other countries, the report showed.

China was next in line with \$11.7 billion spent, followed by Russia at \$9.6 billion – both marking an increase of around six percent from 2021.

India meanwhile showed the most drastic spending jump, dishing out \$2.7 billion – 21.8 percent more than a year earlier – while Britain raised its spending level by 11 percent to \$6.8 billion.

The report also highlighted how arms companies involved in the production of nuclear weapons received new contracts worth just under \$16 billion last year, and in turn spent \$113 million lobbying governments in the United States and France alone.



THAI ELECTION

Polls body to probe PM frontrunner Pita

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand’s prime ministerial frontrunner Pita Limjaroenrat will be investigated over whether he was qualified to run in last month’s election, a top official said yesterday, in another setback as he battles to win backing for his premiership.

Pita, the 42-year-old leader of the progressive Move Forward party whose election victory stunned Thailand’s military-backed establishment, has faced multiple complaints from rivals, three of which the polls body has dismissed for late submission, while four others against the party have been thrown out.

But Pita is by no means in the clear, with commission looking into whether he was knowingly unfit to register as a parliamentary candidate because of ownership of shares in a media firm, which is prohibited under election rules.

Pita has downplayed the issue, arguing the shares in firm, ITV, have since been transferred and the company was not an active media organisation.

EAST DR CONGO

41 people killed in attack on camp

AFP, Bunia

Militants have attacked a camp for displaced persons in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, killing at least 41 people, a local official said yesterday. CODECO militiamen attacked the camp in Ituri province in the early hours of yesterday, Richard Dheda, an official of the local administration for Bahema Badjere in Djugu territory, told AFP. The CODECO claims to protect the Lendu community from another ethnic group, the Hema, as well as the DR Congo army. “They began to fire shots, many people were burned to death in their homes, others were killed by machete,” a civil society representative said.

HONOURS FOR ALLIES

UK PM Sunak hits back at Johnson

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak yesterday lashed out at his predecessor Boris Johnson in a row over political honours for allies of the former premier. Outgoing British prime ministers routinely recommend aides and close political associates for honours or elevation to the unelected House of Lords. Johnson was forced out of office last year by a series of scandals including Covid lockdown-breaking parties at Downing Street dubbed “Partygate”. His long-awaited honours list was published Friday – but without several expected names.

AUSTRALIA BUS CRASH

10 people dead, more injured

AFP, Gretna

A bus carrying wedding guests overturned and killed 10 people in an “unimaginable” night-time crash as it travelled through a wine-growing area north of Sydney, police said yesterday, announcing a string of charges against the driver. The white Linq Bussines coach was ferrying 35 passengers from a wedding at a local winery when it flipped onto its left side late on Sunday, coming to rest on the pavement alongside roadside barriers at the entrance to a major roundabout. It was Australia’s deadliest road accident in 16 years. Police said they had charged a 58-year-old man with 10 offences relating to dangerous or negligent driving “occasioning death” and denied him bail ahead of a court hearing at nearby Cessnock today.

Seoul skyscraper scaling ends in arrest

AFP, Seoul

A British man was arrested in South Korea yesterday after he attempted to climb the country’s tallest skyscraper – the fifth highest in the world – without equipment, police said. The man was scaling the 123-storey Lotte World Tower in southern Seoul early yesterday when staff spotted him, forcing him to stop his ascent as he reached the 73rd floor. “Lotte staff had to go on a gondola lift to persuade him to stop when he was still climbing above the building’s 70th floor,” an official from the National Police Agency told AFP.



Villagers travel on a truck to government relief camps before the onset of cyclone, in Sujawal district, Sindh province, Pakistan yesterday. A cyclone is making its way across the Arabian Sea towards the coastlines of Pakistan and India, expected to make landfall on June 15.

PHOTO: AFP

‘Get out of here’

Mother’s last words after Colombia plane crash

AGENCIES

The injured mother of four Huitoto Indigenous children who survived a May 1 plane crash in Colombia told her kids to “get out of here” before she died four days after the crash.

The children’s father, Manuel Miller Ranoque, said his 13-year-old daughter told him the severely injured Magdalena Mucutuy died in the jungle with her children beside her.

“Before she died, their mom told them something like, ‘You guys get out of here. You guys are going to see the kind of man your dad is, and he’s going to show you the same kind of great love that I have shown you,’” Ranoque told media on Sunday outside a hospital in Bogota.

The children – aged 12, nine, five and one – had been travelling with their mother in a Cessna 206, a single-engine light aircraft, reports Al Jazeera Online. The pilot reported engine problems minutes after taking off from an area known as Araracuara, deep in the Amazon.