

Polls a choice between democracy and autocracy

Says Taiwan VP amid China's military drills

REUTERS, Taipei

Taiwan's election next year is a choice between democracy and autocracy, Vice President William Lai said in comments broadcast after China carried out military drills around the island in anger at his visit this month to the United States.

Lai, the front-runner in polls to be Taiwan's next president at elections in January, made brief stopovers in the United States this month on his way to and from Paraguay, prompting fury in Beijing, which views him as a dangerous separatist given China's territorial claims over the island.

Taiwan's defence ministry said on Sunday morning that in the past 24 hours 25 Chinese air force planes had crossed the Taiwan Strait's median line, which had served as an unofficial barrier between the two sides until Chinese military aircraft began regularly crossing it a year ago.

That included Su 30 and J-11 fighter jets, according to a map the ministry published, though there was no immediate sign China was continuing its exercises on Sunday.

Taiwanese officials had said China was likely to conduct military exercises near the island, using Lai's U.S. stopovers as a pretext to intimidate voters ahead of next year's presidential election and make them "fear war".

In an interview broadcast late Saturday with a Taiwanese television station but conducted while he was in New York last weekend, Lai said it was not up to China to decide who wins the election.

"It's not who China likes today, and then they can assume the post. This goes against the spirit of Taiwan's democracy, and represents huge damage to Taiwan's democratic system," he said.

China should not "make a fuss over nothing" when it comes to foreign travel by Taiwanese leaders, Lai said.

"My position is that Taiwan is not a part of the People's Republic of China. We are willing to link up with the international community and talk to China under the guarantee of security."

China has for many years wanted to "annex" Taiwan and this is not something that started under the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government, he said, pointing to battles along the Chinese coast in the 1950s when China seized Taiwan-controlled islets.

"This election is not a choice between peace and war. We can't order off a menu, choosing peace and then there's peace, choosing war and then there's war. That's not the case. What it is is that we have the right to choose whether we want democracy or autocracy. This is the real choice we have to make in this election."



Christians hold the holy cross and a placard during a protest in Islamabad yesterday, to condemn the attacks on churches in Pakistan. More than 80 Christian homes and 19 churches were vandalised in an hours-long riot in Jaranwala in Punjab province on August 16, after allegations that a Quran had been desecrated spread through the city.

PHOTO: AFP



CANADA WILDFIRES

30,000 forced to flee homes

AFP, Kelowna

Officials in western Canada's British Columbia implored tens of thousands of residents to heed evacuation orders Saturday as "rapidly evolving" wildfires threatened large parts of the scenic Okanagan Valley, including the city of Kelowna.

The situation in the popular boating and hiking destination was "highly dynamic," said Bowinn Ma, the province's minister of emergency management.

Around 30,000 people were under evacuation orders while another 36,000 were under alert to be ready to flee, she said.

Kelowna, a city of 150,000, was choked with thick smoke as it became the latest population center hit by one of the many wildfires scorching Canada this summer.

British Columbia alone had 385 active wildfires by late Saturday night, according to government data.

Blazes in the neighboring Northwest Territories have meanwhile prompted the evacuation of regional capital Yellowknife, leaving the remote city of around 20,000 largely a ghost town.

The exodus from Yellowknife and elsewhere means two-thirds of the near-Arctic territory's population has been displaced, Thompson said.

'Strong enough now'

BRICS nations eye global geopolitical shift

AFP, Johannesburg

Leaders of the BRICS emerging economies, which account for about a quarter of the world's wealth, meet in Johannesburg this week looking to widen the bloc's influence and push for a shift in global geopolitics.

South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa is expected to host China's President Xi Jinping, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva for the annual three-day summit starting tomorrow.

Russian President Vladimir Putin also will join remotely.

Putin decided against attending in person as he is the target of an International Criminal Court arrest warrant that South Africa is in theory bound to enforce if he sets foot in the country.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will travel to Johannesburg instead.

Representing billions of people across three continents, with economies undergoing varying levels of growth, the BRICS share one thing in common -- disdain for a world order they see as serving the interests of rich Western powers.

"The traditional global governing system has become dysfunctional, deficient and missing in action," Chen Xiaodong, the Chinese ambassador to Pretoria said at a briefing on Friday, adding the BRICS are "increasingly becoming a staunch force in defending international justice".

There is growing interest in the bloc -- at least 40 countries have expressed interest in joining, and 23 of those have formally submitted applications to become BRICS members.

Anil Sooklal, South Africa's ambassador-at-large for Asia and the BRICS, told AFP on Friday that one of the reasons countries are lining up to join is "the very polarised world we live in, that has been further polarised by the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and where countries are being

forced to take sides".

"Countries in the South don't want to be told who to support, how to behave and how to conduct their sovereign affairs. They are strong enough now to assert their respective positions," added Sooklal.

The BRICS have raised hope for countries looking to restructure the global "architecture", he said.

"The major markets are now in the Global South... but we are still on the margins in terms of global decision-making."

Lebogang Legodi, international politics lecturer at the University of Limpopo, agrees that many states keen on joining the group "are seeing BRICS as an alternative to the current hegemony" in world affairs.

Around 50 other leaders will attend a "Friends of BRICS" programme during the summit.

This year's gathering is themed "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for mutually accelerated growth, sustainable development and inclusive multilateralism".

It comes at "a critical inflection point," said Steven Gruzd of the Africa Russia Africa project at the South African Institute of International Affairs.

"The current multilateral system is under strain," he said.

A decision on expanding the BRICS membership is expected at the end of the summit, according to Sooklal.

But experts closely watching the BRICS aren't very optimistic about the meeting's outcomes.

"I don't think this summit will yield those dramatic results because the power is still with Western countries. China is rising, but is not the dominant power yet," said SAAIA's Gruzd.

Formally launched in 2009, the BRICS now account for 23 percent of global GDP and 42 percent of the world's population.

The combined bloc represents more than 16 percent of the world's trade.



Should existing banks get digital licence?

FROM PAGE 1

"52 applications were received, which is more than our expectation," BB Spokesman Md Mezbaul Haque told The Daily Star yesterday.

The deadline for applying for the digital bank licence ended on August 17, after it was extended by 16 days.

The applications will now be scrutinised and those that meet the BB's 'fit and proper' criteria will be forwarded to the board for approval, he said.

BB will initially issue a letter of intent for the licence, said Haque, who is also an executive director of the central bank.

He, however, did not disclose the number of digital bank licences that would be issued.

One of the applications is from a consortium of 10 private banks called Digi10 Bank.

The ten banks are City, Eastern, Mutual Trust, Mercantile, NCC, Midland, Dutch-Bangla, Prime, Trust and Pubali.

Dutch-Bangla and Trust have MFS operations called Rocket and TAP respectively.

Another application is from a consortium of four state-owned commercial banks: Sonali, Agrani, Janata, and Rupali.

United Commercial Bank, which has an MFS arm called UPay, is leading another consortium that includes Genex Infosys, Navana Pharmaceuticals and Aramit for the UPAY Digital Bank.

Most of the private sector banks are owned by large business groups and they are serving large clients, said AKM Fahim Mashroor, chairman of BASIS standing committee on fintech and digital payment.

"Very few serve small entrepreneurs. If big corporations and business groups own digital banks

too, it is highly doubtful that anything will change," he added.

"Traditional banks would not be able to do good in digital banking -- they need to team up with a tech-based or fintech company," said Ahsan H Mansur, a former chairman of Brac Bank.

Brac Bank is investing in the proposed digital bank of its trailblazing MFS subsidiary bKash, which also counts the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Ant Group, Money in Motion LLC and SoftBank Vision Fund in its board.

"Our shareholders have a long and proven experience of working on financial inclusion as well as world-class digital banks. Their global experience along with 12 years of involvement in Bangladesh's financial inclusion through digital services has made us interested in a digital bank," Kamal Quadir, chief executive officer of bKash, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Along with the pilot, bKash has been practising Bangladesh's first-ever digital loan for the last three and half years under BB's supervision. It also rolled out digital savings schemes, according to Quadir.

"We believe our existing digital framework and experience can be utilised through a digital bank to ensure universal access to small credit, bring down the cost of collateral free borrowing and ensure 24/7 customers' access to funds. We would like to contribute to strengthening the digital financial ecosystem to achieve the government's vision of a Smart Bangladesh," Quadir added.

Its MFS competitor Nagad is also gunning for a digital bank licence.

"We brought the concept of the digital bank to the public discourse in 2020 -- only digital banks can make the government's financial inclusion agenda whole now," Tanvir A Mishuk, managing director of Nagad, told The Daily Star.

Nagad wants to take banking services to the grassroots level, which the legacy institutions have failed to reach for various reasons.


"As much as 52 percent of the economy is informal and we want to bring it under the banking umbrella. Nagad Digital Bank would be a comfortable, low-cost solution for the grassroots people," he added.

Pathao, the breakout star from Bangladesh's start-up scene, has also applied for a licence to set up a digital bank, which, its MD & CEO Fahim Ahmed says, is a "natural progression" for the company.

The company is a market leader in ride-hailing, food delivery and e-commerce services, with the majority of its 10 million customers being the youth, whose banking needs are unmet by traditional banks.

"The time is now to break the status quo, and to deliver the fintech products that the aspiring Bangladeshi youth truly deserve," said Ahmed, adding that the company has demonstrated its fintech capabilities through Pathao Pay Later, Bangladesh's first and largest Buy Now Pay Later solution.

Powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms, Pathao Pay Later has been offering flexible spending limits and a frictionless user experience to 100,000 of its most loyal and active customers since November 2021, with very low delinquency rates.



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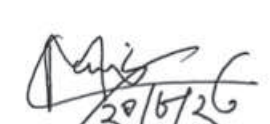
e-Tender Notice (Open Tendering Method)

Notice No:- EED/Manikganj/7016 /SHED/2023-24/04 Date: 20-08-2023

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for following procurement of the following works:


SL No.	Tender ID	Name of Works	Last date and time of selling documents	Tender Closing & Opening Date/Time
01	863417	Construction of Single Storied Academic Building With Four Storied Foundation including Sanitary, Water Supply & Electrification Works at Kanij Fatema Girls School and College, Sadar Upazila ,Manikganj District.	03-Sep.- 2023 16:00BST	04-Sep.- 2023 14:00BST

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP Portal have to be deposited online through any registered Banks branches up to **16.00 BST on 03-Sep-2023** and Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).



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Memo No.৩০-এসসি/বি/২০২৩/৬২৭ Date : 20.08.2023

e-Tender Notice 07/2023-2024

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following package:

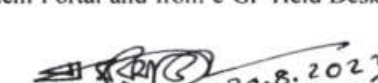
Sl. No.	Tender ID No.	Name of Supply	Last Date and Time of Tender Security Submission	Tender Closing Date & Time
1	861729	Establishment of Campus Networking for Murarichand College, Sylhet	05-Sep-2023 02:00pm	05-Sep-2023 02:30pm

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP System portal have to be deposited online through any registered Banks' Branches upto 04-Sep-2023.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP Held Desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).



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