

China will 'never compromise' on Taiwan

Beijing tells Washington

AFP, Beijing

China vowed yesterday it will "never compromise" on Taiwan and told the United States to stop providing military aid, days ahead of a crucial election on the self-ruled island.

China claims Taiwan, which holds elections on Saturday, as part of its territory and has vowed to seize it one day.

The election is being closely watched – including by policymakers in Beijing and Washington – as its outcome will impact the future of Taiwan's relations with an increasingly assertive China.

In their first defence talks of the year, held at the Pentagon Monday and Tuesday, Chinese officials demanded that Washington "stop arming Taiwan, and oppose Taiwan's 'independence'", according to a Chinese defence ministry readout.

The officials said Beijing would "never compromise or back down" on the territory's status, the readout said yesterday.

According to the Pentagon's readout on Tuesday, the United States reaffirmed its calls for "peace and stability" across the Taiwan Strait that separates Taiwan from China.

Michael Chase, the Pentagon's deputy assistant secretary for China, Taiwan and Mongolia, restated the United States' commitment to its "One China" policy, which emphasises it does not support Taiwanese independence.

Washington has provided Taiwan with military aid under an assistance programme aimed at foreign governments, prompting frequent criticism from Beijing.

US President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping agreed in November 2023 to restart military talks between the two countries, after being put on hold for more than a year.

Relations between Beijing and Washington had nosedived in recent years on flashpoint issues from technology and trade to human rights, but the two presidents described their November meeting as a success.



People choosing warm clothes at makeshift shops on the pavement near Dhaka's New Market yesterday. The demand for winter clothes has grown recently as the city is experiencing a mild cold spell.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Extreme weather, misinfo top global risks

Says World Economic Forum survey

REUTERS

Risk specialists see extreme weather and misinformation as most likely to trigger a global crisis in the next couple of years, a World Economic Forum (WEF) survey released yesterday said.

While extreme weather was identified as the bigger risk in 2024, misinformation and disinformation came second and were found to be the most severe global risk over the next two years.

This could pose a particular threat as billions of people head to the polls in the biggest election year in history.

Major economies from the United States to India and Mexico will hold elections this year, leaving industry and political leaders reliant on polls and forecasts to assess what the policy environment will look like by 2025.

"The widespread use of misinformation

and disinformation, and tools to disseminate it, may undermine the legitimacy of newly elected governments," the report warned.

"Resulting unrest could range from violent protests and hate crimes to civil confrontation and terrorism," added the report, which was prepared in partnership with Zurich Insurance Group and Marsh McLennan ahead of next week's annual WEF meeting.

Over a 10-year horizon, environmental risks including biodiversity loss and critical change to the Earth's systems topped the rankings, with misinformation, disinformation and adverse outcomes of artificial intelligence (AI) just behind.

Meanwhile, two thirds of risk experts surveyed expect a multipolar or fragmented world order to emerge in the next decade, "in which middle and great

powers contest, set and enforce regional rules and norms", the survey said.

WEF President Borge Brende told a press conference on Tuesday that the 54th annual WEF gathering in the Swiss ski resort of Davos would occur against its most complicated geopolitical backdrop to date, ranging from wars in Gaza and Ukraine to rising debt and living costs.

The survey's pessimistic outlook was likely triggered by the series of risks unleashed in the past four years with knock-on effects on society, said John Scott, head of sustainability risk at Zurich Insurance Group, highlighting the Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"It's been one blow after the other to global supply chains," added Carolina Klint, Chief Commercial Officer for Europe at Marsh McLennan.

20 hurt in Sunamganj post-polls violence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

At least 20 people were injured in a clash between supporters of the Awami League candidate and the AL-backed independent candidate in Sunamganj's Dowerabazar upazila yesterday.

The clash began at noon and continued for several hours till the afternoon. Police fired tear shells and shot rubber bullets to control the situation.

The injured, whose identities could not be confirmed immediately, were admitted to hospitals in the Dowerabazar and Sadar upazilas.

For the last couple of days since the January 7 election, tension between supporters of AL candidate Muhibur Rahman Manik and independent candidate Shamim Ahmed Chowdhury has been rising, said locals.

After several attacks and counterattacks among the supporters in the upazila's Machampur village for the last couple of days, they logged into a clash with sharp and blunt weapons in the upazila sadar area yesterday.

Abu Sayeed, additional superintendent of police, said, "The situation is under control, and additional force has been deployed in the area to avoid further clashes."

COLLISION OF TRAWLERS

Missing man's body found after 11 hours

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police yesterday recovered the body of a man who went missing Tuesday night following a head-on collision between two trawlers on the Agunmukha river in Patuakhali's Galachipa upazila.

The deceased was identified as Abdus Salam, 40, a trader by profession. After being missing for 11 hours, fishermen found his body around 6:00am.

Confirming the matter, Galachipa Police Station Officer-in-Charge Ferdous Rahman told The Daily Star that the collision took place in the Agunmukha river Tuesday around 7:00pm.

Sayem Gazi, a member of Char Biswas Union Parishad, said two trawlers collided head-on in Agunmukha river near the Payra seaport of the upazila.

Six out of seven people travelling in the trawlers were able to swim to safety. However, Abdus Salam went missing.

His body was caught in a fisherman's net around 6:00am. Locals informed the police, and they recovered the body and took it to Galachipa Police Station.

OC Ferdous said that a case has been filed in this regard, and the body has been sent to Patuakhali Medical College Hospital for an autopsy.

Hasina springs cabinet surprises

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rest four were retained from the outgoing council of ministers.

Hasina did not include in the new cabinet anyone from her party's electoral allies.

The state ministers who have been left out include Kamal Ahmed Mojumder (industries), Zahid Ahsan Russel (youth and sports), Ashraf Ali Khan Khasru (social welfare), Begum Monnuzan Sufian (labour and employment), Zakir Hossain (primary and mass education), Shahriar Alam (foreign affairs), Shwapna Bhattacharjee (rural development and cooperative division), Sharif Ahmed (housing and public works), KM Khalid (cultural affairs), Md Enamur Rahman (disaster management and relief), Mahbub Ali (civil aviation and tourism), and Fazilatun Nessa (women and children affairs).

Deputy ministers Habibun Nahar (environment and forest) and AKM Enamul Haque Shamim (water resources) were also dropped.

Former commerce minister Muhammad Faruk Khan, former foreign minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, former chief whip Md Abdus Shahid, Brahmanbaria-3 MP

Obaidul Muktaadir Chowdhury, AL Presidium Member Abdur Rahman, former fisheries and livestock minister Narayan Chandra Chanda, Mymensingh-9 MP Abdus Salam, Rajbari-2 MP Md Zillul Hakim, former

members.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun,

in the cabinet.

Yeafesh, who was the technocrat minister for science and technology, resigned in November, two months before the national polls.

AL Presidium Member Simeen Hussain, central committee member Mohammad Ali Arafat, Patuakhali-4 MP Mohibur Rahman, Khagrachhari MP Kujendra Lal Tripura, first-time Gazipur-3 MP Rumana Ali, Sylhet district AL President Shofiqur Rahman Chowdhury, and Tangail-6 lawmaker Ahasanul Islam are the new members inducted as state ministers.

Nasrul Hamid, Junaid Ahmed Palak, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury and Zaheed Farooque retained their position as state ministers.

The new cabinet will have four women members including the prime minister. Two of them were brought in as state ministers. The cabinet will also have four members from minority communities – three of them as ministers.

In the cabinet formed after the 2018 election, Hasina dropped 34 of the 47 ministers, including AL bigwigs Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, and Matia Chowdhury.



deputy minister Saber Hossain Chowdhury, former state minister Jahangir Kabir Nanak, incumbent president of Bangladesh Cricket Board Nazmul Hassan, and renowned physician Samanta Lal Sen have been given berth in the cabinet as new

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Education Minister Dipu Moni, IGRD Minister Tazul Islam, Law Minister Anisul Huq, Information Minister Hasan Mahmud, Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder, and Yeafesh Osman have been retained

Nobody can say election was rigged

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"The voter turnout in this election is 41.8 percent which is a very big matter because attempts were made to prevent voters from casting votes."

Hasina said a particular party was trying to resist the polls when the AL and like-minded parties participated in it.

She said people's power is the greatest, which has been proved once again.

Coming down heavily on the critics of the government, the PM said they kept mum when the military dictators had assumed power by rigging votes. "But now they question our democracy and elections when

we have established democracy and the voting rights of the people."

The AL chief said her party has consolidated democracy, and the socioeconomic condition of the country has improved, poverty rate declined and per capita income went up as the democratic trend continued for a long time.

She expressed her gratitude to the people for voting her party spontaneously.

Referring to the BNP, Hasina said the party tried to keep the voters from casting ballots and the government did not obstruct their campaign.

"But the people of Bangladesh participated in the election and voted

for the Awami League overcoming obstructions and fears People cast ballots spontaneously also in rural areas."

Talking about Bangabandhu's homecoming day, the PM said his speech delivered on January 10, 1972, at the Suhrawardy Udyan (erstwhile Race Course ground) is a historic document.

"The father of the nation in his speech gave all the guidelines on how an independent Bangladesh would be run in future," she said.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, presidium members Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya and Qamrul Islam, among others,

questionable and to malign our image.

"What was done regarding participating in the polls was done through discussions with all leaders of the party. You know everything does not happen in the same way all the time."

During the demonstrations in the morning, JP leaders and activists demanded that Quader and Chunnun step down from their posts as they held them responsible for the party's polls debacle, Shafiqul Islam Sentu, a JP

presidium member, told The Daily Star. JP leaders chanted slogans demanding actions against the duo. Several top JP leaders and those from Dhaka South and North city units joined the protest.

As the situation became tense, police personnel were deployed in front of the JP chairman's office. They barred the party men from entering the office.

The JP won only 11 seats in Sunday's polls, the worst election results of the party since 1991.

Speaking to The Daily Star, JP presidium member Shafiqul Islam alleged that Quader and Chunnun defrauded most of the party candidates.

"They [Quader and Chunnun] compromised with the government over seat sharing to ensure victories for some party leaders of their choice, including the chairman's wife Sherifa Quader. They didn't think about the rest of the 240 Jatiyo Party candidates," he added.

MPs swear in

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leader of the ALPP for the fourth time in a row, which means she would be the prime minister for the fourth consecutive term.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader proposed the name of Hasina as the leader of the House which was seconded by Chief Whip Noore-Alam Chowdhury Liton, AL MP Tanvir Shakil Joy, who was present at the meeting, told The Daily Star.

AL presidium member Matia Chowdhury was re-elected deputy leader of the ALPP while Shirin was chosen as the Speaker of parliament again.

The meeting also decided to nominate Shamsul Haque Tuku as the deputy speaker of JS again.

Liton will retain the post of the chief whip in 12th parliament, the meeting decided.

Addressing the meeting, Hasina told her party's newly elected MPs that their highest priority should be the welfare of the people.

"Every MP will have to work

for the people in their respective constituencies. You [MPs] will have to ensure that balanced development is done in your areas," Tanvir quoted Hasina as saying.

She also warned MPs that conspiracies were still being hatched against the country.

Hasina called on President Mohammed Shahabuddin at the Bangabhaban in the evening and requested him to invite her to form a government as she gained the confidence of the majority of the members in parliament.

The AL won 222 seats while independents, mostly AL leaders, won 62. Jatiyo Party won 11 while the Workers Party, JSD and Bangladesh Kalyan Party got one seat each.

The election to Naogaon-2 has been rescheduled for February 12 after the death of an independent candidate.

The EC cancelled the polling at a station in Mymensingh-3 which left the seat too close to call.

Bail in 9 cases not enough

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Additional Public Prosecutor Tapash Kumar Pal told The Daily Star.

On January 9, the BNP leader was shown arrested in the nine cases, following petitions filed with the court by his lawyers.

The defence told the court that they cannot file bail petitions in the cases until police showed Fakhru arrested. They submitted petitions before the court so that they could proceed with the petitions. The court granted the petitions and fixed yesterday for the bail hearing.

Of the nine cases, six were lodged with Paltan Model Police Station and the rest with Ramna Model Police Station.

The charges in the cases include killing of a police constable, illegal gathering on the street, vandalism of vehicles, rioting, snatching a law enforcer's weapon, damaging properties, assaulting police personnel, and preventing them from discharging their duties.

Meanwhile, the High Court yesterday rejected Fakhru's bail petition in the case filed over the vandalism of the chief justice's residence on October 28.

The bench of Justice Md Salim and Justice Shahed Nuruddin, however, directed the jail authorities concerned to take necessary steps for providing proper treatment to Fakhru.

Delivering the verdict, the bench said there is a possibility of hampering of investigation of the case if they grant Fakhru bail.

This verdict means Fakhru cannot walk out of jail, Deputy Attorney General BM Rafael told this newspaper.

Fakhru's lawyer Zainul Abedin told reporters that there was a scope for this client to move an appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court against the HC judgment.

On December 7 last year, the HC bench refused to grant him bail but issued a rule asking the state to explain why Fakhru should not be granted bail in the case.

The BNP leader on December 3 filed the bail petition, saying that he was not involved in the vandalism of the chief justice's residence in any way.

He is an elderly person and he has been suffering from different diseases, including heart problems, he said in the petition.

On October 29, Fakhru was arrested in the case filed with Ramna Model Police Station. Later, he was shown arrested in another case filed with Paltan Model Police Station over vandalism and obstructing police on October 28. The BNP leader is in prison in the two cases.

Earlier, he was denied bail in the cases by Dhaka courts.