

Don't 'play with fire'

China warns Philippines over president's Taiwan remarks

REUTERS, Beijing

China summoned the ambassador from the Philippines yesterday and warned the country "not to play with fire" after President Ferdinand Marcos Jr congratulated Taiwan's president-elect Lai Ching-te on his election victory.

China was "strongly dissatisfied with and resolutely opposes these remarks," its foreign ministry spokesperson said, referring to Marcos congratulating Lai on Monday for winning Taiwan's election and referring to him as its next president.

"The relevant remarks of President Marcos constitute a serious violation of the One China principle and ... a serious breach of the political commitments made by the Philippines to the Chinese side, and a gross interference in China's internal affairs," spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular briefing.

"China has lodged a strong protest with the Philippines at the earliest opportunity," and summoned its ambassador "to give China a responsible explanation," Mao said.

"We suggest that President Marcos read more books to properly understand the ins and outs of the Taiwan issue, so as to draw the right conclusions."

The Philippines' foreign ministry in a statement earlier yesterday reaffirmed the country's "One China policy" and said the message of Marcos intended to recognise the Philippines and Taiwan's "mutual interests", including 200,000 overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in the democratically governed island.

It said the message "was his way of thanking them for hosting our OFWs and holding a successful democratic process. Nevertheless, the Philippines reaffirms its One China Policy."

Asked by Reuters for comment on Beijing's summoning of the Philippine envoy and China's rebuke, the office of Marcos reiterated the earlier statement on the "One China policy".

Beijing's fury over the remarks is the latest in a succession of clashes between the Philippines and China, which come as Manila bolsters ties with former colonial ruler the United States, including expanding an agreement on Washington's use of its military bases.

Other leaders have also congratulated Lai on his victory, with many, including US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, calling for peaceful resolution of tensions in the Taiwan Strait.



A Palestinian man carries the body of his child killed in an Israeli strike at the European Hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Ex-Pak PM Imran sees 'nexus' between Nawaz, two umpires

DAWN ONLINE

Former Pakistan prime minister and PTI founder Imran Khan on Monday alleged that PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif was "playing with the support" of "two umpires" and one of them had recently given a "no ball" in his favour.

Speaking to reporters in Adiala Jail after the hearing of the Toshakhana case, he said recent events which had sidelined the PTI and provided relief to Nawaz Sharif were part of the so-called London Plan.

However, he hoped, the public through their power of ballot on February 8 would react against unjust treatment meted out to him and his party in the run-up to the elections.

The ex-premier said his political struggle spanned over 27 years and his party had an overwhelming support among the masses which would be manifested on February 8.

Khan claimed he was being victimised for exposing the alleged conspiracy of former army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa against his government.

He said that at least a five-member bench should have heard the case related to the PTI's electoral symbol.

Imran Khan said Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz also took vehicles from Toshakhana for paltry sums, but they seemed "immune" to legal proceedings whereas cases against him were being instituted one after another.

Speaking about the party tickets, Khan said his lawyers were not allowed to bring relevant documents inside the jail, due to which he could not deliberate on the candidature of aspirants.

'We're going to die from the cold'

Freezing in makeshift tents of cloth, internally displaced Gazans burn plastic to survive

AFP, Rafah

In a makeshift tent of cloth and plastic, Ismail Nabhan huddled by a fire with his children and grandchildren as his family, displaced by Israeli offensive in Gaza, struggled to stay warm.

"Two days ago there were strong winds, we tried all night to fasten the nylon. We're living in a desert and the sea is in front of us -- the cold has multiplied," said the 60-year-old, who has fled his home in central Gaza.

Thousands of tents have been erected by some of the 1.9 million people the United Nations estimates have been internally displaced in the Gaza Strip since the Israeli offensive began on October 7.

Nabhan and his family have pitched their tent at a precarious spot in a southwestern corner of Rafah, overlooking the Egyptian border and a few hundred metres (yards) from the Mediterranean Sea.

There are 28 people crammed into the flimsy shelter and, despite the risk from the flames and fumes, they keep a fire going inside as their only means of staying warm.

Even the fuel they use is improvised and harmful, but the family have little choice. "The smoke we inhale from burning plastic burns our lungs," said Nabhan's wife, Raidah Awad, as their grandson coughed.

Awad asked her son to get firewood but lamented that it would take four days to dry out after recent heavy winter rain.

"The children are sick from the smell and the cold. They don't stop coughing and having colds, their clothes aren't thick enough to warm them up," said the

50-year-old Awad.

One blanket is shared between three people, she added. "The situation's tragic." The health ministry in the Hamas-run territory says at least 24,285 Gazans have been killed in the war.

Haneen Adwan, who was forced to flee from central Nuseirat refugee camp due to heavy Israeli bombardment, said she and her family were struggling in the winter weather.

"At night, I feel like we're going to die from the cold," said the 31-year-old, who has six children. Adwan piled three thin mattresses on top of one another as a barrier from the cold ground.

Firewood, she said, was unaffordable, so like Nabhan and his family, she had turned to burning waste. "We light the fire with plastic, (and) choke on the fumes," she said.

Adwan's 14-year-old son's hands have been blackened by the constant search to scavenge enough plastic to keep the family warm.

The teenager explained how he worked the sewer at the border, digging up plastic buried in the sand and cutting it up with a knife.

"My brothers are dying from the cold at

night. We have to light something or we'll freeze," he said.

The UN humanitarian agency said on Monday that the makeshift shelters in which many Gazans now live "are inadequate to withstand current weather conditions," while many sites had been flooded by heavy rain.

Nearby, Khaled Faraj Allah was baking bread in the corner of his tent and passing pieces to his son.

His six children, one of whom has special needs, shared three mattresses. "After two in the morning, it's not possible for anyone to sleep because of the extreme cold," said Faraj Allah, who fled his home east of Gaza City.

"Even if you lay out a thousand blankets, the ground is cold and the earth transfers the damp and cold," added the 36-year-old.

Faraj Allah said his child with special needs lacked regular medication and had stopped laughing or interacting with the family.

"If there's heavy rain, people will die from the cold, and if the Israelis storm this area what can I do? I'll flee over there for my kids," he said, pointing to the Egyptian border.



A worker clears snow from a sidewalk in Manhattan, New York City, US yesterday. New York City issued a travel advisory and snow alert ahead of what is forecast to be the first measurable snow of the season Monday night into yesterday morning.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SHOPLIFTING ALLEGATIONS

NZ MP resigns after CCTV footage emerges

AFP, Wellington

The first refugee to be elected to New Zealand's parliament resigned yesterday over alleged shoplifting, which she said was related to personal stress and trauma.

Golriz Ghahraman, an MP for the centre-left Green Party and its justice spokesperson, is being investigated by police after three allegations of theft from boutique clothing shops.

The lawmaker, a former human rights lawyer, said her actions were "not a behaviour I can explain".

Ghahraman conceded she had fallen short of the standards expected of politicians and needed time to address her mental health.

Work-related stress led her to "act in ways that are completely out of character. I am not trying to excuse my actions, but I do want to explain them", she said in a statement.

"The mental health professional I see says my recent behaviour is consistent with recent events giving rise to extreme stress response..."

Iran-born Ghahraman, 42, moved to New Zealand as a child with her family when they were granted political asylum as refugees.

CENTURIES-OLD MOSQUE

India's SC halts plans for survey

REUTERS, Mumbai

India's Supreme Court yesterday halted plans for a survey of a centuries-old mosque to determine if it contained Hindu relics and symbols, just days before another key temple, built on a razed mosque, is set to be inaugurated. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will preside at Monday's event centred on a temple in the town of Ayodhya dedicated to Lord Ram, a deity worshipped by millions of Hindus, during his campaign to win a third term in general elections due by May. The Supreme Court stayed a lower court order allowing the setting up of a commission to survey the Shahi Eidgah mosque in the city of Mathura in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, said news agency ANI. Its panel of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta said the application filed for appointment of the local commission was very vague, the Bar and Bench news website reported.

Births in France fall to post-war low in 2023

AFP, Paris

Births in France fell last year to their lowest annual number since World War II, the national statistics bureau said yesterday. Around 678,000 babies were born in 2023, INSEE said, a drop of 6.6 percent from the previous year and the lowest number for any year since 1946. The numbers translated into an average birth rate of 1.68 children for each woman, against 1.79 in 2022. But fewer deaths over the same period translated into a 0.3-percent increase in the overall French population, which stood at 68.4 million on January 1. INSEE said 631,000 people died in France in 2023, a fall of 6.5 percent from the previous year, when Covid-19 and heatwaves had led to a higher than usual mortality rate. Migration flows added a net 183,000 people to the overall population last year, INSEE said. Life expectancy for people in France rose to a new record. It now stands at 85.7 years for women and 80 for men, it said.

Covid jabs saved 1.4m lives in Europe: WHO

AFP, Copenhagen

At least 1.4 million lives have been saved in Europe thanks to Covid vaccines, the World Health Organization said yesterday, recalling that the virus was "here to stay". The WHO European region -- which covers 53 countries including those of Central Asia -- has registered more than 277.7 million cases of Covid-19 and more than 2.2 million deaths, according to the organization's most recent data, from December 19, 2023. "Today, there are 1.4 million people in our region -- most of them elderly -- who are around to enjoy life with their loved ones because they took the vital decision to be vaccinated against Covid-19," WHO Europe regional director Hans Kluge told reporters. "The first booster doses alone saved an estimated 700,000 lives." Kluge said it was essential for people to protect themselves, especially those most vulnerable, during the winter. "As we learn to live with Covid-19 and other respiratory viruses, it's absolutely vital for vulnerable populations to stay up to date with their Covid-19 and influenza vaccinations as recommended." Europe must continue to invest in its healthcare systems, he said. "We may be unprepared for anything out-of-the-ordinary, such as the emergence of a new, more severe Covid-19 variant or a yet unknown pathogen." He called for more funding to resolve shortages of healthcare workers and basic medication.