

## HONG KONG 'UMBRELLA' LEADERS SEEK CLOSER TIES WITH TAIWAN

**TAIPEI:** Student leaders of Hong Kong's pro-democracy Umbrella Movement said yesterday they would seek closer ties with Taiwan after the island elected a new president who pledged to stand up to China. Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan's main opposition party won by a landslide Saturday as voters expressed their discontent over warmer relations with China under the ruling Kuomintang (KMT).

"Whether it is the issue of Taiwan's sovereignty or the future of Hong Kong, we both face the China factor," said Joshua Wong, the teenage face of the Umbrella Movement which brought parts of Hong Kong to a standstill in 2014 seeking fully free leadership elections. "I think more exchange is very much needed," Wong told a press conference in Taipei.

The 19-year-old was in Taiwan as part of a pro-democracy group observing Saturday's elections. Hong Kong is semi-autonomous since being returned to China by Britain in 1997 and enjoys freedoms

unseen on the mainland, but there are fears those freedoms are being lost. The pro-democracy rallies in Hong Kong were sparked when Beijing insisted on vetting candidates for the city's next leader.

Self-ruling Taiwan split from China in 1949 after a civil war on the mainland. But Beijing still sees it as part of its territory awaiting reunification, by force if necessary. The KMT's Beijing-friendly strategy brought trade deals and a tourist boom but sparked fears that China was trying to erode Taiwan's autonomy through economic ties.

### Own identity

Support for Tsai surged as Taiwanese sought to assert their own identity and reject China's influence. The island saw its own mass protests in 2014 when student-led demonstrators occupied parliament over a trade pact with China, in what became known as the Sunflower Movement. "We face the same threat, we have to guard our places, to own our des-

tiny. We need to have stronger alliances in all areas," said Alex Chow, another key Umbrella leader speaking in Taipei yesterday. He called for more dialogue, whether through civil groups or the new government. The calls for unity come in the wake of the disappearance of five Hong Kong booksellers from a publishing house known for titles critical of the Chinese government—the latest incident to exacerbate fears over the city's autonomy.

Sunflower activists gained seats in Taiwan's legislature in Saturday's parliamentary vote, standing for the New Power Party (NPP) which grew out of the protest movement. In Hong Kong, former Umbrella protesters also took seats in recent district elections. Wong said the NPP was an inspiration. "How they can turn street protests to power within the legislative system, I think that can serve as a very good reference for those in post-Umbrella student or civil movements in Hong Kong," he said. — AFP



**TAIPEI:** Joshua Wong (center), the teenage face of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement which brought parts of the city to a standstill in 2014, walks into a press conference. — AFP

## CHINA, ECONOMY TESTS AWAIT NEW TAIWAN PRESIDENT TSAI

MANAGING RELATIONS WITH CHINA WILL BE TRICKY

**TAIPEI:** Taiwan's presidential election victor Tsai Ing-wen will enjoy a broad mandate from her commanding victory and her independence-leaning party's new legislative majority, but managing the island's delicate relations with China will be tricky. Already, Beijing warned following her Saturday night victory that it will not budge on its bottom line that Taiwan's leader must agree that the communist mainland and self-governing island democracy are part of a single Chinese nation. The sides could be in for a lengthy wait as China assesses whether it feels it can trust Tsai.

"To handle cross-Taiwan Strait relations after Tsai's election will be difficult, not just for Taiwan but also for mainland China," said Huang Jing, a China expert at Singapore National University's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. Tsai, who will be Taiwan's first female president, won by 56 percent of the vote to 31 percent for her closest rival Eric Chu of the China-friendly Nationalist Party, which has held the presidency for the last eight years. Her Democratic Progressive Party won 68 of 113 parliamentary seats, giving it its first majority in the assembly long-dominated by the Nationalists.

"I wasn't surprised a bit by the outcome. The Nationalists had to go. Now Tsai just needs to focus on the economy so I don't expect she'll do anything to rile up China," Taipei tour bus driver Tan Kuang-jung said as a constant drizzle fell over the capital yesterday. The reasons for the massive win were many.

### Stagnate wages, jobs

Outgoing President Ma Ying-jeou had been growing increasingly unpopular among Taiwan's 23 million people, largely due to perceptions that his push for closer economic ties with China was benefiting just a few and the futures of young Taiwanese who have seen wages stagnate and good full-time jobs harder to find.

Fearful of their original candidate's poor reception among voters, the Nationalists dumped her in favor of Chu, but even he proved unable to raise their prospects. He resigned as party chairman immediately after Saturday's defeat. Newly politicized young people had coalesced in opposing yet another trade agreement with China and are believed to have voted heavily for the DPP. A further backlash against the party's pro-China stance was prompted by a viral video of 16-year-old Taiwanese entertainer Chou Tzu-yu bowing in apology for waiving the Taiwanese flag on television. Her apology was triggered by her South Korean management company's fears that China would cancel appearances and endorsement deals.

"What happened surrounding Chou Tzu-yu, that whole controversy, made it almost a given (Tsai) would get over the 50 percent mark," said Raymond Wu, managing director of Taipei-based political risk consultancy e-telligence. "It's an indication that someone would continue to bully Taiwan, at all different levels, even a 16-year-old who's trying to make a name for herself in



**BEIJING:** Visitors look at souvenir plates bearing images of Chinese President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan on display for sale at a shop near Tiananmen Square. — AP

the entertainment field. This is something most Taiwanese find unacceptable," Chou said. The size of the win could also put additional pressure on Tsai and the DPP, said Larry Diamond, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution who closely follows Taiwanese politics. "When you do as well, as decisively as the DPP has done, there are no excuses" for failure, Diamond said. While China had largely refrained from commenting about the election beforehand, its Taiwan Affairs Office responded swiftly to the result with a statement reiterating that it would deal only with those who agree that the "two sides of the strait belong to one China."

### Territorial integrity

That was followed by another statement from the Foreign Ministry stating that "China's sovereignty and territorial integrity brook no division. The result of the election in Taiwan will not change the basic fact and the consensus of the international community."

"On such a major issue as safeguarding state sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Chinese government has rock-solid determination and never tolerates any separatist activities aiming at Taiwan independence," said the statement, quoting ministry spokesman Hong Lei. Taiwan was a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945, and split from the mainland amid the Chinese civil war in 1949, when leader Chiang

Kai-shek moved his Nationalist government to the island.

Reflecting public opinion on Taiwan and mindful of US and other countries' concerns about cross-strait tensions, Tsai has pledged to maintain the status-quo of de-facto independence without taking steps that might provoke China. In her remarks Saturday, she referred to Taiwan by its formal name, the Republic of China. However, unlike Ma, she has refused to endorse Beijing's "one China principle" - although she hasn't publicly repudiated it either - and told supporters Saturday night that she would work to strengthen Taiwan's status abroad.

Deprived of formal diplomatic relations with the world's major nations, Taiwan relies on its stable of 22 allies, mostly small, poor states in the Pacific, Africa and Central America and the Caribbean. Chinese pressure has barred Taiwan from the United Nations and Beijing strictly limits the island's participation in other groups or requires it to participate only under the name Chinese Taipei. Depending on how it interprets Tsai's actions, Beijing could ratchet up the pressure by luring away Taiwan's remaining diplomatic allies or further shutting it out of international organizations. It could also seek to exact economic costs, possibly by limiting Chinese tourism to the island or reducing Taiwanese imports. — AP

## 'SUNFLOWER' ACTIVISTS TURN LAWMAKERS IN VOTE VICTORY

**TAIPEI:** Beijing not only has to contend with a new president in Taiwan who is wary of relations with China, but a fresh batch of activists-turned-lawmakers from the island's boisterous Sunflower Movement.

Protesters from the student-led movement that dramatically occupied the island's parliament in 2014 over a trade pact with Beijing took their first step into mainstream politics after winning seats in parliamentary elections Saturday. The activists' success came on the night Taiwan voted in its first female president, Tsai Ing-wen of the main opposition Democratic Progressive Party, which has traditionally campaigned for the island's independence.

Both Tsai and the protesters' victory is symbolic of growing public resistance to Beijing after a rapprochement under outgoing president Ma Ying-jeou of the China-friendly Kuomintang which has sparked fears Taiwan's sovereignty is being eroded. "It's our first election battle and we have a long way ahead of us," said Huang Kuo-chang, an academic and leader of the Sunflower Movement who became a lawmaker Saturday. His New Power Party grew out of the protests and won five seats in parliament-making it the third-largest in the legislature.

"The NPP will not forget the principles of the Sunflower Movement. We will never compromise," Huang, 42, said. Rock star Freddie Lim, 39, was also among the successful NPP candidates, unseating a veteran KMT lawmaker in Taipei. The tattooed death metal singer grabbed headlines with his screaming, head banging campaign concerts ahead of the vote.

### 'First rocker'

"I'm the first rocker in Asia to go to parliament," said Lim after the victory. "This election shows anyone has the right to go into parliament to promote a better Taiwan." Taiwan is a self-ruling democracy since splitting with China in 1949 after a civil war on the mainland, but has never formally declared independence. But Beijing still sees it as part of its territory awaiting unification,



**TAIPEI:** Huang Kuo-chang, an academic and leader of the Sunflower Movement, listens during a press conference. — AFP

by force if necessary.

Resentment towards the KMT over its China policy and Taiwan's economic woes saw it hemorrhage seats Saturday. The DPP gained a majority for the first time, surging from 40 to 68 seats out of a total 113. The KMT went from 64 to 35.

Among the beleaguered party's successful candidates was Chiang Wan-wan, great grandson of former KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek, who set up government in Taiwan after defeat by Mao Zedong's Communist troops. Chiang, 37, campaigned on a broad domestic platform promoting everything from care for the elderly to business start-ups.

For Huang, victory is a chance to stand up for Taiwan. "I call on China that if it wants to push forward ties with Taiwan ... they have to respect Taiwanese people who want to maintain their way of life, and respect Taiwan people's right to decide their future," he said. — AFP

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