

## AFTER TRUMP ROW, CHINA URGES US TO BLOCK TAIWAN PRESIDENT

**BEIJING:** China has urged Washington to block Taiwan's president from passing through the US, after reports said she

may stop in New York for talks with Donald Trump's team, following a protocol-smashing phone call between the

pair. The president-elect broke with decades of precedent last week to accept a congratulatory phone call from Tsai, angering Beijing which regards the island as a rogue province awaiting unification.

Taiwan's Liberty Times reported that President Tsai Ing-wen may seek to meet members of Trump's team while in New York on her way to Central America, though her office would not confirm the plan to AFP. The trip would take place before Trump's inauguration on January 20, the newspaper said. Taiwan has diplomatic relations with 22 states and the island's leaders make regular visits to its small group of allies in Central America and the Caribbean, often stopping in the US for meetings with sympathetic lawmakers.

China's foreign ministry called on Washington to block any stopover in the United States. Tsai's "true intention is self-evident", it told AFP yesterday. "We hope America abides by the principle of the One China policy and the three US-PRC Joint Communiqués and does not allow her transit." Countries that have formal diplomatic ties with

Beijing cannot enjoy such links with Taipei and vice versa. Both Beijing and Taipei in principle consider themselves the only legitimate power in charge of both China and Taiwan.

Beijing further warned against Washington giving an "erroneous signal to 'Taiwanese independence' forces". Trump's surprise call with Tsai and subsequent Twitter barrage criticizing Chinese military expansions and accusing it of manipulating its exchange rate seemed to have caught Beijing off-guard.

### 'Diplomatic rookie'

China's foreign ministry repeatedly deflected or downplayed reporters' questions Monday. But by Tuesday, state media were trotting out attacks on Trump as a "diplomatic rookie". Yesterday they emphasized the need for calm, with experts in the often shrill Global Times urging China to "watch and wait" until Trump takes office and not to "play his games". Reports suggest the call was long-planned by both sides, but whether Trump wants a wholesale change in US policy on Taiwan is still unclear.

Communist Party authorities will be

closely watching Trump's picks for secretary of state and ambassador to China as a sign of whether he truly intends to take a hard line on the world's second-largest economy. Although the United States is Taiwan's main ally and arms supplier, it has not had official diplomatic relations with Taiwan since 1979, when it switched recognition from Taipei to Beijing.

Asked about Tsai's visit, a US State Department spokesman said at a briefing on Monday that such transits were in keeping with "longstanding US practice" and noted the US "usually" allows Taiwan's leaders to pass through the country. It would be the second such trip for Tsai, who stopped over in Miami and Los Angeles on her way to Panama and Paraguay earlier this year during her first overseas trip as president.

Beijing protested to Washington over that trip as Tsai met with US politicians in Miami. Previous presidents of Taiwan have also transited the US, with Tsai's predecessor Ma Ying-jeou stopping in Hawaii in 2014 and Boston in 2015. Taiwan has hemorrhaged allies in recent decades as they jumped ship to align with an ascendant China. —AFP



**TAIPEI:** In this Friday, Dec 2, 2016, file photo, released by Taiwan Presidential Office, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen speaks with US President-elect Donald Trump through a speaker phone. —AP

## WOMAN AT HEART OF S KOREAN SCANDAL REFUSING TO TESTIFY

### FINAL DAYS IN POWER FOR PARK

**SEOUL:** Ahead of an impeachment vote later this week, lawmakers took turns grilling a K-pop music director, a fashion designer and nearly a dozen others said to be linked to a woman at the heart of a scandal that threatens to bring down South Korea's president.

Missing, however, was the woman, the jailed confidante of President Park Geun-hye, who cited a panic disorder for her refusal to attend the hearing yesterday, the latest step in what appears to be the final days in power for Park. Prosecutors say Park, who faces an impeachment vote Friday, let her friend of 40 years, Choi Soon-sil,

control government affairs and extort companies. Park denies it.

On live TV, lawmakers in a hearing room jammed with media sent away a squad of about 20 security officers with orders that Choi and 10 other witnesses attend the hearing. A niece of Choi later appeared at the hearing but others refused to attend, National Assembly officials said. They could face jail or fines, but witnesses who have refused to attend past hearings have mostly been fined.

Choi is being held at a detention center near Seoul. She and two of Park's former presidential advisers have been indicted. One of the two

ex-aides allegedly pressured big companies to donate millions of dollars to foundations controlled by Choi, while the other is accused of passing confidential government documents to Choi. The two men, both jailed at another detention center, also refused to testify yesterday.

### Key witness absent

Thirteen people caught up in the scandal were at the hearing, including two of Choi's former associates and former presidential chief of staff Kim Ki-choon. Choi's niece, Chang Si-ho, ran a sports foundation that allegedly received illicit state financial support and other favors.

With key witnesses absent, lawmakers questioned Kim about a 2014 ferry disaster that has long dogged Park's government because of what's widely believed to have been a botched rescue effort. The sinking killed more than 300 people, mostly high school students on a field trip.

Opposition lawmaker Kim Kyung-jin grilled Kim about an allegation that he told junior presidential secretaries that efforts to recover bodies from the wreckage should be stopped because it would be a burden to the government. The lawmaker cited what he called a memo left by a late Park secretary. Kim Ki-choon denied making such an instruction, causing Kim Kyung-jin to erupt. "It will be hard for you to go to heaven after you die. You need a lot of self-reflection," the lawmaker said.

Other witnesses included Cha Eun-taek, a music video director who has been charged with using his ties with Choi to win key culture-related projects from government agencies, and Ko Young-tae, who ran a company that made bags and clothes that Park used during overseas trips at the introduction of Choi.

If impeached, Park's presidential powers will be suspended and the country's Constitutional Court will have up to 180 days to rule on whether to formally unseat her. On Tuesday, Park told ruling party leaders that she is willing to accept the outcome if she's impeached and would make "every available effort" to prepare for a court process. The comments suggest Park is bracing for a Constitutional Court procedure that could determine her fate, according to South Korean media. —AP



**SEOUL:** A protester shouts slogans in front of a caricature of South Korea's President Park Geun-hye during a rally urging the impeachment of the president. —AFP

## BBC UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR PROFILE OF THAI KING

**BANGKOK:** Thai authorities are investigating the BBC over a Thai-language profile of the new king, officials said yesterday, after the article outraged ultra-royalists in a country where criticism of the monarchy is outlawed. A harsh royal defamation law has been used to jail scores of critics and spawned a culture of self-censorship across the kingdom's media, academia and the arts.

The BBC is now under scrutiny for the profile published out of its London offices of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, who ascended to the throne last week. The royal succession was Thailand's first in seven decades and is considered a delicate moment for the institution. Vajiralongkorn does not command the respect enjoyed by his late revered father.

The BBC profile included information about Vajiralongkorn's personal life that is well-known inside the kingdom but rarely printed by Thai media, such as details about his three marriages that ended in divorce. The article, which has since been blocked online in Thailand, quickly went viral on social media but attracted a torrent of criticism from royalists.

Any member of the public can allege royal defamation and authorities are duty bound to investigate. On Tuesday a team of police officers visited the BBC's Bangkok office but found it closed. "This case is in the process of investigation but I cannot disclose the details," Pornchai Chalordej, the commander of the Bangkok police station

responsible for the case, told AFP. Top leaders from Thailand's royalist junta, which has ramped up use of the lese majeste law since the 2014 coup, defended the probe on Wednesday.

"As they have an office in Thailand and Thai reporters work there they must be prosecuted when they violate Thai law," junta chief Prayut Chan-O-cha said of the BBC. The junta's number two, defence minister Prawit Wongsuwan, stressed the police's duty to investigate any wrongdoing. "If anything is illegal we must prosecute accordingly without exception," he told reporters.

The BBC defended the profile in a statement and said its Thai-language service was committed to bringing "impartial, independent and accurate news to a country where the media faces restrictions." "We are confident that this article adheres to the BBC's editorial principles," it added. On Saturday a prominent Thai dissident was arrested for sharing the BBC profile on Facebook. Jatupat "Pai" Boonpattararaksa, a leader of a small group of anti-junta students, was released on bail but faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted of lese majeste.

The BBC's Thai service is one of few platforms that publishes comparatively unfiltered reporting in the Thai language. Its articles are edited and published out of London, though the service employs a small number of local staff in Bangkok. The BBC's English-language bureau in Bangkok is an editorially separate entity. —AFP

## DUTERTE VOWS TO PROTECT POLICE

**MANILA:** Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday defended police officers who killed a detained mayor or on a list of top drug suspects even after another law enforcement agency concluded the death was an extrajudicial killing. The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) on Tuesday disputed a police account that the mayor from central Leyte Province, Rolando Espinosa, was killed in a shootout in a jail when police came to search for guns and drugs last month.

The bureau described Espinosa's killing as a "rub out." "I will have to defend them," Duterte said during a ceremony at the main army base in the capital, Manila, referring to the police officers. "I will listen to the story and I will take it as the true version ... because they are under me, I should believe them." Earlier, Duterte had put Espinosa's name on a list of top drug suspects. The mayor, who denied involvement in narcotics, was arrested on Oct 5 on drugs and firearms charges.

Police said Espinosa and a fellow prisoner, Raul Yap, fired at a police team that had come to search their cells. Police returned fire and killed them. Police say 2,004 people have been shot and killed by officers in self-defense during anti-drug operations since the president took office on July 1. Espinosa's killing was also investigated by senators, who doubted the police version of events because they said there were many inconsistencies in the official report and witness accounts. Duterte said he did not believe the investigation done by the NBI because they had no credible witnesses. "As a matter of fact, I'm ready to go to jail for them, no problem," he added. Investigators have filed murder cases against 21 police officers in connection with Espinosa's death. —Reuters



**PEARL HARBOR:** In this Dec 7, 1941 photo made available by the US Navy, a small boat rescues a seaman from the USS West Virginia burning in the foreground in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, after Japanese aircraft attacked the military installation. — AP

## SURVIVOR RECALLS FEAR, ANGER ON PEARL HARBOR ATTACK DAY

**PEARL HARBOR:** Surprise, fear, anger and pride overcame Jim Downing as Japanese planes bombed Pearl Harbor. Then a newly wed sailor, he recalled a Japanese plane flying low and slow in his direction as he rushed to his battleship from his home after hearing explosions and learning of the attack on the radio. "When he got the right angle, he banked over, turned his machine guns lose," Downing, now 103, said in an interview at a Waikiki hotel, "But fortunately he didn't bank far enough so it went right over my head."

The next aviator might have better aim, Downing remembers thinking. And with nowhere to hide, "I was afraid," he said. Downing plans to return to Pearl Harbor Wednesday with a few dozen other survivors to mark the 75th anniversary of the attack that plunged the United States into World War II and left more than 2,300 service people dead. Those who gather at the ceremony on a pier overlooking the harbor are expected to observe a moment of silence at 7:55 am - the same moment Japanese planes began their assault.

### Tales of war

Thousands of other servicemen and women and members of the public are expected to attend and watch via a livestream feed. Downing said he comes back to Hawaii for the anniversary commemorations to be with his shipmates. "We get together and have a great time and compare our stories," said Downing, a resident of Colorado Springs, Colorado. His ship, the USS West Virginia, was hit by nine torpedoes.

"We were sinking and everything

above the water line was on fire," he said. Downing said he felt proud while watching sailors balance the capsizing ship by allowing water to seep in. The tactic let the giant battleship slide into mud below. "They just instinctively did the right thing at the right time without any thought about their own lives or safety," he said.

The West Virginia lost 106 men. Downing spent two hours fighting fires and checking the name tags of the dead so he could write their families personal notes about how they died. "I thought that would give them more closure that just a cold note, 'your son was killed in action,'" said Downing, who also served as the ship's postmaster. Ray Chavez was out on a minesweeper, the USS Condor, in the early hours before the attack. He remembers noticing with his shipmates that a mysterious submarine was lurking off the harbor.

"At 3:45 am on Dec. 7, I look out and spotted a submarine that wasn't supposed to be in that area," the 104-year-old Chavez said. The sailors reported the sighting and Chavez went home to sleep. He told his wife not to wake him because he hadn't gotten any rest during the busy night. "It seemed like I only slept about 10 minutes when she called me and said 'we're being attacked.' And I said 'who is going to attack us?' She said 'the Japanese are here and they're attacking everything,'" Chavez said. These days, many people treat Chavez and other Pearl Harbor survivors like celebrities, asking them for autographs and photos. But Chavez said it's about the people who were lost. "I'm honoring them, not myself," he said. —AP

## TEEN JAILED FOR SEVEN YEARS FOR AUSTRALIA TERROR PLOT

**SYDNEY:** An 18-year-old was sentenced yesterday to seven years in prison for planning a Mother's Day attack in Melbourne, the latest of a series of plots in Australia involving teenagers. The young man, who was 17 when he was arrested by police last year, pleaded guilty to one charge of committing an act, or planning the preparation of an act, of terrorism.

He will be eligible for parole in five years and three months. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation said the teenager, who cannot be named, was making pipe and pressure cooker bombs for a May 10 Mother's Day attack last year when he was arrested. Police seized several items from his home, including a document entitled "Make a Bomb in Your Mom's Kitchen" on his computer, ABC

said. Canberra has become increasingly worried about homegrown extremism and the terror threat level was raised in September 2014.

Australian officials say they have now prevented 11 terror attacks on home soil in the past two years. But some have gone ahead, including the murder of a Sydney police employee last year by a 15-year-old boy. Counter-terror police have made a series of arrests since late 2014, with the youth and radicalization of many of those detained a growing concern for authorities. Parliament last month passed new legislation to lower from 16 to 14 the age at which people can be subject to a control order-which aims to prevent a terror attack by limiting a person's movements, communication and activity. —AFP