

INDONESIAN PILOT FIRED AFTER SLURRED ANNOUNCEMENT

JAKARTA: Indonesian authorities have issued a warning to airline PT Citilink Indonesia after videos circulated appearing to show an intoxicated pilot from the low-cost carrier going through security and then sounding incoherent on the aircraft's public address system. Citilink, which is a unit of national carrier PT Garuda Indonesia, said that the company had fired the pilot after a Dec 28 incident at Surabaya airport ahead of a flight to Jakarta and that two executives had offered to resign.

The pilot was replaced before the flight proceeded, according to a company statement. Fary Djemi Francis, who heads a parliamentary com-

mission overseeing transportation, said that the airline had been asked to investigate whether the pilot had been on drugs. "Second, we also ask Citilink's management to sanction the pilot who went on board the aircraft without going through the briefing room, missing checks on his fitness to fly," Francis said. The transportation ministry had sent a warning letter to Citilink and called for an internal investigation after finding that health checks and other procedures had not been followed according to regulations, said ministry spokesman Bambang S Ervan.

Citilink did not name the pilot but said in a statement that it had fired him after he had

"ignored the flight safety and security procedures which could potentially endanger the security and safety of passengers and other crew members." Chief Executive Albert Burhan and operations director, Hadinoto Soedigno, had also offered to resign over the incident, Citilink spokesman Benny Butarbutar said yesterday.

The spokesman said the resignations would require the approval of shareholders. "We would never mess around when it concerns the condition of a flight, let alone experiment with passenger safety," Butarbutar said. The widely circulated videos have caused alarm in Indonesia, which has had a patchy air safety record. One appears to be

CCTV footage of an unsteady pilot going through security, and the other appears to be shot on a phone and shows a pilot remonstrating in slurred speech with other staff members in the plane's cockpit that he was able to fly.

Reuters could not authenticate the videos and Citilink did not comment directly on them. Indonesia has been trying to improve safety in its airline sector after a series of accidents. For a while, some carriers were barred from flying to the European Union and some other markets over safety concerns. Citilink operates 34 aircraft, conducting 184 flights daily, the company's website said. — Reuters



BEIJING: In this photo released Saturday Dec 31, 2016 by Xinhua News Agency, Chinese President Xi Jinping speaks during a New Year greetings broadcast. — AP

XI OFFERS A POPULIST MESSAGE IN ADDRESS

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping said yesterday that his government would continue to focus on poverty alleviation at home and resolutely defending China's territorial rights on the foreign front. Xi made the televised remarks in his annual New Year's Eve address, in which he touted China's scientific accomplishments, highlighting its large new radio telescope and space missions, and the country's growing role as a leader in global affairs.

Standing before a mural of the Great Wall, Xi said his administration successfully hosted a G-20 summit, pushed forward with China's "One Belt One Road" pan-Eurasian infrastructure project and established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China has upheld its peaceful development while resolutely defending its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights, Xi said, making a reference to an international tribunal ruling last summer against China's claims in the contested South China Sea. "If anyone makes this an issue of question, the Chinese people will never agree!" he said, one of the few points in his 10-minute address when his voice rose noticeably.

For most of his address, Xi struck a pop-

ulist tone, saying he was above all concerned about the living conditions of the people and vowed that improving employment, education, housing and health care would be a responsibility that his ruling Communist Party would never shirk from. China lifted 10 million people out of poverty in 2016, Xi said.

"On this new year, I am most concerned about the difficulties of the masses: how they eat, how they live, whether they can have a good New Year, or a good Spring Festival," Xi said, as the television broadcast cut to footage of his visits this year to impoverished rural areas.

Xi also promised to shore up Communist Party discipline and "unwaveringly" maintain his anticorruption campaign against high- and low-ranking officials alike. He said that "supply-side" economic reforms were making progress and that the party would continue to push reform and rule by law during the 19th National Congress, scheduled for late 2017. "As long as the party forever stands with the people, we will be able to walk the long march of our generation," he said. — AP

TAIWAN LEADER URGES CHINA FOR 'CALM' TALKS AS PRESSURE GROWS

VOWS NOT TO GIVE IN TO BEIJING'S RECENT MOVES

TAIPEI: Taiwan's leader yesterday urged China to engage in "calm and rational" dialogue to maintain peace, vowing not to give in to Beijing's recent moves to "threaten and intimidate" the self-ruled island. "As long as we can be calm, rational, and maintain a flexible attitude, I believe we should be able to find a solution that allows both sides to maintain peaceful and stable relations," President Tsai Ing-wen said in a year-end news conference.

Tensions have grown since China suspended contacts with Tsai's administration in June over her refusal to endorse China's claim that Taiwan and the mainland are part of a single Chinese nation. They were further amplified earlier this month when President-elect Donald Trump broke protocol by speaking with Tsai on the phone and said later he did not feel "bound by a one-China policy."

Earlier this week, China's first aircraft carrier and five other warships held drills that passed by Taiwan and sailed through the contested South China Sea, prompting Taipei to deploy fighter jets to monitor the fleet. China maintains a standing threat to use force to achieve its goal of absorbing Taiwan. Referring to such recent actions, Tsai said Beijing has been "gradually returning to the old ways of dividing, suppressing and even threatening and intimidating Taiwan. We hope that this is not a policy decision of the Beijing authorities." "We will not yield to the pressure nor go back to the old ways of confrontation," Tsai told reporters.

Diplomatic relations

Beijing has ratcheted up efforts to diplomatically isolate Taiwan, intervening to prevent the island's participation in international forums and establishing diplomatic relations with former Taiwan allies Gambia and Sao Tome and Principe. The moves have been seen as effectively abandoning the unspoken diplomatic truce that lasted eight years under Tsai's China-friendly predecessor. Meanwhile, the number of Chinese tourists visiting the island has drastically fallen.

Tsai said her administration expected 2017 to bring uncertainties particularly in the first half, noting that the incoming US administration could potentially bring "changes in international affairs." Trump advisers have made conflicting statements about whether Trump's call with Tsai signaled a new policy toward China but some analysts read it and other remarks critical of China as signals of a willingness to increase ties with Taiwan, which would further anger Beijing.

But such a policy could bring economic advantages for Taiwan's export-dependent half trillion-dollar economy, long-term access to senior US officials and more sales of advanced US weapons to defend against China. Tsai's office said Friday she and a delegation of Taiwanese officials will make two stops in the US as part of a visit to diplomatic allies in Central America next month. China has repeatedly urged Washington to prevent Tsai from transiting. — AFP



TAIPEI: In this photo released by the Taiwan Presidential Office, President Tsai Ing-wen delivers a year-end speech during an international press conference at the presidential office. — AP

CHINA: NO SPACE FOR HK INDEPENDENCE

BEIJING: There is no space for Hong Kong independence in the "one country, two systems" agreement under which Beijing governs the former British colony, but there can be tolerance for differences in their systems, a senior Chinese official said. Chinese leaders are increasingly concerned about a fledgling independence movement in Hong Kong, which returned to mainland rule in 1997 with a promise of autonomy known as "one country, two systems", and recent protests in the city. The head of China's Hong Kong Macau Affairs Office, Wang Guangya, told pro-Beijing Hong Kong magazine The Bauhinia that "under 'one country, two systems' there is absolutely no space for 'Hong Kong independence'", in comments carried in the ruling Communist Party's People's Daily on Saturday.

"Hong Kong is an inseparable part of the country, and in no situation is 'Hong Kong independence' allowed. This is a bottom line that cannot be touched in 'one country, two systems'," Wang said. As "one country, two systems" is new, it has no ready-made experience to draw from, and it's normal that in this process "new

situations, new problems and new challenges" will arise, he added.

"You can't expect it to be all plain sailing," Wang said. "The central government has confidence in and patience with Hong Kong. As long as the 'one country' principle is not damaged, the differences in the 'two systems' absolutely can be tolerated and respected," he added. China's parliament last month staged a rare interpretation of the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution, to effectively bar pro-independence city lawmakers from taking office there.

In separate comments from the same interview reported by the official Xinhua news agency late Friday, Wang said the interpretation did not harm the independence of Hong Kong's legal system, but that that independence could not limit the Chinese parliament's ability to interpret the Basic Law. "It needs to be pointed out that the independence of the legal system is an important principle of the rule of law in Hong Kong, and the central government has always cherished and protected the independence of Hong Kong's legal system." — Reuters

SINGAPORE BLOGGER SEEKING US ASYLUM

CHICAGO: A Singaporean blogger who is seeking political asylum in the United States said on Friday he regretted inflammatory posts that landed him in jail twice in his home country. Amos Yee, 18, who is currently detained in Illinois, told Reuters that videos he filmed insulting Singapore's late prime minister and various religions were in bad taste. "I told you, it is hate speech, it is overly rude, it isn't good activism," Yee said by telephone from the McHenry County Adult Correctional Facility in Illinois. "I completely regret making those videos."

Yee's posts, and subsequent trials and convictions in Singapore, have stirred debate in the conservative city-state over censorship and free speech. His trials were watched closely by rights groups as well as the United Nations. Last year, Yee was convicted on charges of harassment and

insulting a religious group over comments he made about former Singaporean Premier Lee Kuan Yew and Christians soon after Lee's death. His sentence amounted to four weeks in jail. In September, Yee was sentenced to six weeks in jail after pleading guilty to posting comments on the internet critical of Christianity and Islam.

Yee arrived at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport on Dec. 16 and told US Customs officials he was seeking political asylum. The blogger said that he wanted to live in Illinois and has no plans to return to Singapore, a Southeast Asian city-state that has compulsory military service for males, which Yee said he would not take part in. Yee should have his first hearing in front of a judge within two weeks, according to his attorney, Sandra Grossman. Yee has had no contact with the Singaporean government since arriving, he said. — Reuters

WEDDING VOWS A BLESSING FOR CLEAN-UP OF INDONESIAN RIVER

JAKARTA: Only a year ago, this stretch of the Ciliwung River in Indonesia's capital was foul-smelling and clogged by a thick layer of floating plastic and other trash. Now, after a clean-up involving hundreds of volunteers, the river hosted a wedding ceremony for a young couple who grew up on its banks in a bid to inspire others to help preserve Indonesia's fragile environment.

"We have shown our love for our language, culture, now we should start to show our love for the environment," said the groom, Novanto Rahman. His bride, Sandra Fidelia Novianti, is a volunteer for the Depok Ciliwung Community that launched the clean-up with the local government in 2015. The couple made their wedding vows on an inflatable boat decorated with flowers that was paddled down the Ciliwung on Dec.

18, something that previously would have been impossible due to the piles of trash in the water.

The Ciliwung, which runs more than 100 km from its source in West Java to Jakarta bay, has played an important role in the livelihood of the city since the 17th century. Despite the dire water quality, poorer communities living by the river have used its water to wash clothes and shower. The Ciliwung, however, became a dumping ground for trash and barely able to flow into Jakarta bay. This contributed to flooding on the swampy plain of greater Jakarta, which has sunk 4 meters over the past three decades.

Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama has relocated some illegal settlements along its banks in a bid to allow the river to flow. The founder of the Depok Ciliwung Community,

Taufiq Deso, said he hoped community help in cleaning up the river would focus the city government's attention on the problem. About 4,000 city workers retrieve trash from 13 rivers and hundreds of canals zig-zagging through the city of 10 million people, according to Jakarta's Sanitation Department.

Even though there has been a reduction in surface trash on the Ciliwung, an environmentalist said better enforcement of existing laws against polluters was needed to improve water quality. "Despite evidence that showed a few companies are guilty of releasing waste into the river, these companies are still able to continue their operations," said Dwi Sawung of the Indonesian Forum for the Environment. — Reuters



DENPASAR: Balinese girls prepare to perform during a New Year celebration in Denpasar, on Indonesia's resort island of Bali on December 31, 2016. Various form of dances and music have made Bali's art and culture one of the most diverse in the world. — AFP