

International

US, China trade warnings ahead of Biden-Xi summit

Tensions mount over Taiwan, human rights and trade

WASHINGTON: The top diplomats from China and the United States have exchanged stern warnings over the flashpoint issue of Taiwan, ahead of today's highly awaited summit between their leaders. The virtual meeting of presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping comes against a backdrop of rising tensions - in part over Taiwan, a self-ruling democracy claimed by Beijing, but also over trade, human rights and other issues. In a phone call Friday with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to discuss preparations for the summit, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken raised concerns over Beijing's "military, diplomatic, and economic pressure" on Taiwan.



WASHINGTON: This combination of file pictures shows Chinese President Xi Jinping (left) and US President Joe Biden. US President Joe Biden will hold a hotly anticipated virtual summit with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping today, the White House announced, as tensions mount over Taiwan, human rights and trade. — AFP

ties near Taiwan in recent years, with a record number of planes intruding into the island's air defense identification zone in early October. Washington has repeatedly signaled its support for Taiwan in the face of what it has described as Chinese aggression.

'Responsibly manage competition'

Biden has largely kept the tougher approach on Beijing of his predecessor Donald Trump, with both administrations seeing a rising China as the top challenge of the 21st century. And while the world's top two emitters of greenhouse gases unveiled a surprise agreement last week to work together on climate change, Washington and Beijing have indicated they will not give ground on flashpoint issues. US officials have framed today's summit as an opportunity to "responsibly manage competition" while trying to cooperate in areas where the two align.

Xi last week warned against the return of Cold War-era tensions in the Asia-Pacific region. Biden and the Chinese leader have talked by phone twice since the veteran Democrat moved into the White House. The pair also met extensively when Biden was Barack Obama's vice president and Xi was vice president to Hu Jintao. The US president had hoped to meet Xi at a recent G20 summit in Rome, but the Chinese leader has not traveled since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and instead agreed to virtual talks by the end of the year. — AFP



US concerned over 'diplomatic military pressures'

Wang warned of the dangers of US actions that might seem supportive of "Taiwan independence." Washington switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979, but an act of Congress passed that year requires the United States to provide weapons to Taiwan for self-defense. The US government is careful not to show it recognizes Taiwan but it

enjoys broad, bipartisan support in Congress, with a group of lawmakers visiting the island this month - angering Beijing.

"Any connivance of and support for the 'Taiwan independence' forces undermines peace across the Taiwan Strait and would only boomerang in the end," Wang told Blinken, according to a readout of the call released by China on Saturday. China has ramped up military activi-



THE HAGUE: Nobel Peace Prize winner 2014 Kailash Satyarthi (left) presents the International Children's Peace Prize 2021 to Vihaan and Nav Agarwal from India on November 13, 2021. — AFP

Indian trash-tackling brothers win award

THE HAGUE: Two teenage brothers from India urged world leaders to act against climate change after winning a prestigious global children's award on Saturday for tackling pollution from household waste in New Delhi. Vihaan and Nav Agarwal, aged 17 and 14, received the 2021 KidsRights International Children's Peace Prize for developing an initiative to segregate recyclables and organize pickups for trash from thousands of homes. The award cited their "courage and commitment to tackling pollution in their home city", ranked recently as the worst in the world for air quality due to a toxic mix caused partly by the burning of rubbish.

New Delhi authorities on Saturday announced a one-week closure of schools and said they would consider a "pollution lockdown" to protect citizens from toxic smog. The siblings follow in the footsteps of previous winners including environmental activist Greta Thunberg and Nobel laureate and Pakistani education campaigner Malala Yousafzai.

"Our message would be you guys need to act. So many children all around the world are acting," Vihaan told AFP in a remote interview when asked what he would say to leaders at the COP26 climate talks reaching their climax in Glasgow this weekend. "Another message would be: don't get in our way," Nav added. "To all the

young people... you should never fear climate change. You just have to take that one step, and when you do it's just amazing the amount of change you as a one person can actually create."

'Waste shouldn't go there'

Indian Nobel Peace laureate Kailash Satyarthi, a children's rights activist who won the 2014 Nobel jointly with Malala, presented the brothers with the prize run by the Dutch-based KidsRights foundation at a ceremony in The Hague on Saturday. The brothers said that growing up in Delhi affected the asthmatic Vihaan's health, and curtailed the boys' ability to play outdoors and indulge their love of nature.

The spark of inspiration for their "One Step Greener" initiative came after the collapse of the Ghazipur landfill site in 2017, which killed two people and led to a spike in pollution. One third of Delhi's air pollution is caused by burning waste in landfill sites. "The thought process in our mind was like, our waste shouldn't go there, our waste shouldn't become fodder for this fire," said Vihaan.

They also took inspiration from British naturalist David Attenborough and conservationist Jane Goodall, as well as their grandparents, they said. The brothers began at home, separating out recyclables from their rubbish until they had such a mountain of trash that their grandfather told them either they or the waste had to leave. But recyclers said they wouldn't pick up such a small quantity, so the boys used a WhatsApp group in their neighborhood to get enough together to make it worthwhile. — AFP

Journalist killed as minibus hit by bomb

KABUL: A well-known Afghan journalist was killed and at least four other people injured Saturday when a suspected bomb destroyed a minibus near a Taliban checkpoint in Kabul, a media watchdog and officials said. The incident happened in Dasht-e Barchi, a Kabul suburb dominated by members of the mostly Shiite Hazara community, who for years have been the target of violence by the Islamic State (IS) group. "Unfortunately we lost another reporter," the Afghan Journalists Center tweeted hours after the blast, saying Hamid Seighani, who worked for the Ariana television network, had died in the blast.

His wife, also a journalist, posted "I lost Hamid" on her Facebook page. Since the Taliban returned to power on August 15, dozens of bombs have been set off in eastern Nangarhar province - a hotbed of IS activity - but the capital Kabul has largely escaped such violence. "I was in my car and an explosion happened in the vehicle in front of us," a witness said. "It was completely burnt." He said the explosion occurred near a Taliban checkpoint, and that gunfire could be heard briefly immediately afterwards.

A nearby hospital posted a notice saying it had admitted one dead and four injured. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted that one person had been killed and two injured. The blast comes a day after at least three people were killed and 15 wounded by a bomb at a mosque in Nangarhar. That bombing - for which no group has yet claimed responsibility - underscores the many challenges facing the new Taliban regime in Afghanistan, with the UN warning the country is also on the brink of the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

In a statement, the Nangarhar governor's office said officials had arrested two "perpetrators" in connection with the mosque blast, but provided no other details. "Further investigation into the incident is ongoing and more actions will be taken," it said. While Kabul has largely been free of Islamic State activity since the Taliban takeover, IS fighters recently raided the city's National Military Hospital, killing at least 19 people and injuring more than 50 others. — AFP



SANAA: Yemenis inspect the site of reported Saudi-led airstrikes targeting the Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa. — AFP

Hodeida. The Hodeida ceasefire was agreed at Yemen's last peace talks in Sweden in 2018, but clashes have since broken out between the rebels and pro-government troops around the city. The Saudi-led coalition inter-

vened in Yemen in 2015 to shore up the government, a year after the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa. Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed and millions displaced, in what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. — AFP

News in brief

Fire ravages COVID ward

SOFIA: Three patients died in a fire that broke out yesterday on a coronavirus ward in a hospital in southeast Bulgaria, the rescue services said. The three male patients, aged 66, 70 and 81, were all ill with COVID-19 and died on the fourth floor of a hospital in the city of Sliven, the head of the local rescue services, Vladimir Demirev, told Bulgarian television. Six other patients on neighboring wards had to be evacuated. The incident occurred as the EU member headed to the polls for the third time this year yesterday amid the deadliest wave of COVID-19 yet in the country. "The most likely cause of the fire was a lit cigarette of one of the patients," the Bulgarian health ministry said in a statement. Bulgaria's hospitals, frequently run down, are currently overwhelmed by the number of coronavirus infections. — AFP

Qaeda suspects killed

DUBAI: A suspected US drone strike yesterday killed three people in central Yemen, including two alleged Al-Qaeda jihadists, local government officials said. "A drone that is believed to be American targeted a car carrying a man, who is likely an Al-Qaeda member, and his wife, resulting in the injury of both," a government official, who spoke on condition of anonymity said. "Three people, a civilian and two suspected Al-Qaeda gunmen, who were in a vehicle that was heading to the site to assist the wounded were targeted in another strike and killed." A second government official in the border region between the central provinces of Shabwa and Al-Bayda confirmed the two strikes and death toll. — AFP

Fake hacking warnings

WASHINGTON: Fake emails purportedly from the US Department of Homeland Security warning of cyberattacks were sent out Saturday from a secure FBI computer server, computer security experts said. The FBI confirmed independent security group Spamhaus's report that a large number of fake emails were sent in two waves early Saturday from an address on the government's Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal, which is used by multiple government agencies. Some of the emails, sent in the name of the Homeland Security cyber threat detection group, were headlined: "Urgent: threat actor in systems." They warned recipients that they were the target of a "sophisticated" hacking attack from a known extortion gang, according to Spamhaus. — AFP

IS ambush kills 13 fighters

BEIRUT: At least 13 fighters loyal to the Syrian government were killed Saturday in an Islamic State group ambush in the country's east, a war monitor said. The attack by the jihadist group killed "at least 13 members of a local pro-regime group and wounded others", the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. It took place in the Masrib area, in the west of Deir Ezzor province, while the fighters were conducting a sweep of the area, said the Observatory, which relies on a network of sources inside Syria. Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP it was the deadliest attack on pro-government forces in five months. The IS group's self-proclaimed caliphate was declared defeated in Syria in the riverside hamlet of Baghouz in March 2019 following a gruelling US-backed offensive. — AFP

Settlers attacking Palestinians

JERUSALEM: A Zionist rights group said yesterday that in 170 incidents of Jewish settler violence against Palestinians, troops did not intervene to protect Palestinians and at times actively joined the attacks. In the report, the B'tselem rights group said it documented a total of 451 settler attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank since early last year. "Settler attacks against Palestinians are a strategy employed by the apartheid regime, which seeks to advance and complete its misappropriation of more and more Palestinian land," it said. Zionist entity, which has occupied the West Bank since 1967, rejects claims that its treatment of the Palestinians amounts to apartheid. — AFP

Tunisian presidential 'coup'

TUNIS: More than 1,000 Tunisians gathered yesterday near the country's parliament to protest a presidential power grab they have deemed a "coup" It was the latest rally opposing President Kais Saied's July 25 decision to sack the government, suspend parliament and seize an array of powers, citing an "imminent threat" to the country-birthplace of the Arab Spring uprisings against autocracy. Protesters shouted, "The people want to bring down the coup d'etat" and branded the president an "agent of colonialism", AFP correspondents reported. Some carried signs reading "No to the intimidation of the media" and demanding "an independent judicial authority". On September 22, Saied suspended parts of the constitution and installed rule by decree, maintaining full control of the judiciary as well as powers to sack ministers and issue laws. — AFP

Yemen strikes kill 186 rebels

RIYADH: The Saudi-led coalition fighting rebels in Yemen said that its air strikes over the previous 24 hours killed 186 Houthi fighters in the battleground provinces of Marib and Al-Bayda. Later in the day, loyalist military officials said 32 rebels and nine loyalist soldiers had been killed in fighting south of the key Red Sea port city of Hodeida.

On the Marib front, the Saudi-led coalition has been reporting high death tolls in almost daily strikes since October aimed at repelling a rebel offensive on the city, the government's last stronghold in the north. A coalition statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency Saturday said that the latest strikes had focused on the front line west of Marib, near the ruins of ancient Sirwah, and on Al-Bayda province farther south. The Iran-backed Houthis rarely comment on the tolls, which have exceeded 3,000 in total. AFP cannot independently verify the coalition's figures.

On Friday, the rebels took control of a large area south of Hodeida, a lifeline port where the warring sides agreed a ceasefire in 2018, after loyalist forces withdrew. Two military officials told AFP that fighting erupted Saturday when the rebels tried to push farther south into government-controlled territory, but loyalist forces repelled the advance. One of the officials said that 32 rebels and nine loyalist soldiers were killed in the fighting around 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of