

International

China demands US cancel arms sale to Taiwan

Proposed sale to improve Taiwan's air defense system

BEIJING: China demanded yesterday that the United States "immediately cancel" a potential sale of \$2.2 billion in arms to self-ruled Taiwan, including battle tanks and anti-aircraft missiles, adding fuel to tensions between the two powers. It would be the first big-ticket US military sale to the democratically-governed island in decades, and comes as ties between Washington and Beijing are already strained by their trade war.

China has lodged formal complaints through diplomatic channels expressing "strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition" to the move, foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a regular press briefing. The deal includes 108 M1A2 Abrams tanks, 250 Stinger portable anti-aircraft missiles, related equipment and support at an estimated cost of just over \$2.2 billion, according to the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA).

The proposed sale "will contribute to the modernization of the recipient's main battle tank fleet",

improve its air defense system and "support the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security and defensive capability (of Taiwan)," DSCA said. It would not alter the "basic military balance in the region," the agency added, and Congress has been notified. US lawmakers have 30 days to object to the sale but are unlikely to do so.

Geng said the proposed deal "seriously violates the one-China principle" and "grossly interferes" in the country's internal affairs. "China urges the US to... immediately cancel the planned arms sale and stop military relations with Taipei to avoid damaging Sino-US relations and harming peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait," he said. Taiwan has been ruled separately from China since the end of a civil war in 1949, but Beijing considers it a part of its territory to be retaken-by force if necessary.

China has significantly stepped up diplomatic and military pressure on Taipei since the election

in 2016 of President Tsai Ing-wen, whose Democratic Progressive Party refuses to acknowledge that the island is part of "One China". It has staged military exercises near the island, and steadily reduced the already small number of nations that recognize Taiwan.

The United States switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 1979, but has remained an important ally-and arms supplier-to Taipei. Laws passed that year by Congress required Washington to provide the island with means of self-defense. But it has been wary of big-ticket military equipment sales to Taiwan in recent years, fearful of stoking anger in Beijing.

Obsolete equipment

President Donald Trump-whose administration is locked in a trade war with China-has however sought to strengthen ties with Taiwan and appears more willing to sell arms. Taiwan would be massively out-

gunned in terms of troop numbers and firepower in any conflict with China, and has sought to upgrade much of its increasingly obsolete military equipment, especially in its air force.

"Taiwan stands in the frontline of China's ambitious expansion and faces enormous threats and pressure from Beijing," the Taiwanese foreign ministry said in a statement. "This arms sale of M1A2 tanks and various missiles will help greatly to increase our defensive capabilities." Abrams tanks and Stinger missiles-which are portable and can be quickly moved by soldiers in the field-would significantly increase Taiwan's ability to counter Chinese armor and warplanes in the event of an invasion.

"The M1A2 tanks are very reliable and will become an essential part of our ground defense" because of their maneuverability, Lieutenant General Yang Haiming of the Taiwanese army told reporters. "Having the M1A2 to replace our older tanks will quickly and effectively boost our defense capability." —AFP

Amal Clooney to join legal team of Philippine journalist Ressa

MANILA: Prominent rights lawyer Amal Clooney says she will join the legal team defending Philippine journalist Maria Ressa, whose news site has repeatedly clashed with President Rodrigo Duterte.

Ressa, who was named a Time Magazine "Person of the Year" in 2018 for her journalism, faces several criminal charges along with her website Rappler, in what press freedom advocates have branded an act of "persecution".

"Maria Ressa is a courageous journalist who is being persecuted for reporting the news and standing up to human rights abuses," Clooney said in a statement issued Monday by London's Doughty Street Chambers, where she works. "We will pursue all available legal remedies to vindicate her rights and defend press freedom and the rule of law in the Philippines," added the British-Lebanese lawyer.

Clooney will work with a team of international lawyers based in the US and Britain as counsel to Ressa and coordinate with attorneys in Manila, the statement said. Ressa was arrested twice this year and has accused Duterte of using prosecutions against her-including ongoing cases of alleged tax evasion and libel-to silence critics and intimidate the press. Duterte has branded Rappler a "fake news outlet" and his government insists it is simply enforcing the law as cases pile up against the website, which frequently publishes reports critical of the president's deadly anti-drug crackdown.

"I am delighted that Amal Clooney and her team will be representing me at the international level to challenge the violations of my rights and those of the media organization I represent," Ressa said in the statement. Ressa said on Tuesday she faced at least 11 cases which required her to post bail eight times and pay a bond to travel overseas. "Rappler should not have to face tactics of harassment, intimidation. We are trying to find the best way forward to make sure our rights are protected," Ressa told AFP.

Responding to the announcement, Duterte's spokesman said Clooney could not practise law in the Philippines but added he was "excited" to debate with



MANILA: This file photo shows Philippine journalist Maria Ressa speaking to the media as she arrives at the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) headquarters after her arrest in Manila. —AFP

the lawyer whom he described as "beautiful and sexy". "Attorney Amal is misinformed. Maybe when we see each other, I can, to use the word of the president, educate her," Salvador Panelo told reporters.

Clooney, appointed special envoy for media freedom by the British govern-

ment, also defended two Reuters journalists jailed for more than 16 months in Myanmar and freed in May. Clooney's taking on Ressa's case will increase international attention on the journalist and her website, which have received a series of global awards from press freedom advocates. —AFP

India restaurant tycoon begins life term

NEW DELHI: The trailblazing Indian founder of a global restaurant chain surrendered to a court yesterday after losing a last-ditch bid to avoid a life sentence for murdering a love rival. P Rajagopal rose from rags to riches to create the Saravana Bhawan chain which has more than 80 eateries in India and around the world, from Leicester Square to Lexington Avenue via Singapore, Sydney and Stockholm. He had been battling for 15 years to avoid prison since being convicted over the killing of the husband of a woman he wanted to make his third wife, reportedly on the advice of his astrologer.

The 71-year-old, dubbed the "dosa king" after the famous South Indian food staple, was meant to have reported to prison on Sunday but made a final plea on medical grounds. The Supreme

Court in New Delhi turned him down yesterday and the judges ordered the tycoon to "surrender immediately". He later gave himself up at the Madras High Court in Chennai in his native southern state of Tamil Nadu, arriving in an ambulance with an oxygen mask strapped to his face.

Saravana Bhawan owes its success to catering to Indians and the large diaspora abroad with the winning formula of affordable South Indian delicacies like dosa pancakes, deep-fried vadas and idli rice cakes. But Rajagopal's world came crashing down when he made up his mind to pursue the daughter of one of his legions of adoring employees, believing that she would bring him even greater success. "He was obsessed with her," D. Suresh Kumar, a Chennai-based journalist told AFP.

The woman, then in her 20s, was already married and rejected Rajagopal's advances. He targeted the woman with threats, blackmail, and even exorcisms, but when they failed the businessman hired a gunman to kill the woman's husband. One attempt was unsuccessful, but the man's body was later found in a for-



CHENNAI: This file photo shows the image of P Rajagopal, founder of the Saravana Bhawan food chain, on a menu at one of the popular restaurants in Chennai. —AFP

est in Tamil Nadu. In 2004, Rajagopal was found guilty and sentenced to 10 years. When he appealed, the sentence

was increased to life and the punishment was upheld by the Supreme Court in March. —AFP

UK's Labor backs staying in EU in call for referendum

LONDON: Britain's main opposition Labor party yesterday for the first time conditionally backed holding another Brexit referendum, in which it would support remaining in the European Union. Labor will now challenge whoever wins the Conservative Party leadership race and becomes prime minister to put any deal they strike with the EU to a referendum, "with remain on the ballot, in which Labor would campaign for remain," the party said in a statement.

The issue has divided the party. Many of its voters in working-class areas voted to leave the EU in the Brexit referendum of 2016. But the majority of Labor MPs strongly support remaining in the EU. Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, a veteran eurosceptic, had resisted strong pressure to back another vote. But he relented after Labor-affiliated trade unions agreed on Monday to support the move. Labor will now back remaining in the EU over leaving without a deal or supporting a Conservative-brokered deal. Yet what it will do if it takes power before Britain has left is dependent on what type of deal it could agree with Brussels.

Fear over 'no deal' divorce

The party's previous policy was to respect the 2016 referendum, but the chaotic process of leaving the EU has emboldened those hoping to stay in. "As democrats, Labor accepted the result of the 2016 referendum," Corbyn



LONDON: An anti-Brexit activist secures an EU flag to a railing opposite the Houses of Parliament in Westminster, central London. —AFP

wrote in an email to party members. "In our 2017 manifesto, Labor also committed to oppose a No Deal Brexit and the Tories' Brexit plans," he added, calling on the incoming prime minister to hold a general election.

Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May is stepping down this month after failing to get her EU divorce plan through parliament. The two men vying to replace her, Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt, have both said they were

willing to take Britain out of the EU with no deal on October 31.

However, the majority of members of parliament-including Labor-are against a "no deal" option, fearing dire economic consequences. Neither Hunt nor Johnson supports the idea of a second referendum. If the political deadlock continues, many in Westminster believe a snap election is inevitable. —AFP

Ex-UN official jailed for child abuse in Nepal

KATHMANDU: A former UN official has been jailed for sexually abusing children in Nepal, officials said yesterday, following a trial underscoring the country's growing appeal for foreign pedophiles. Peter John Dalglis, 62, from Canada, a former high-profile humanitarian worker, was sentenced on Monday to terms of nine and seven years in two cases after being convicted last month. Thakur Trital, a district court official, said that Dalglis had been sentenced for nine years for abusing a 12-year-old boy and seven years for molesting another 14-year-old.

"The judge is yet to decide whether he should serve a total 16 years in jail or be released after nine years. In most cases of a similar nature, sentences get overlapped but it is upon the judge to decide," Trital said. Dalglis has also been told to pay compensation of 500,000 Nepali rupees to each of the victims. Dalglis was arrested in April last year in Kavrepalanchowk district, near Kathmandu, by Nepal's Central Bureau of Investigation.

The two boys were at the house where police detained Dalglis, investigators said. Dalglis denied the charges, and his lawyer could not be reached for comment. The aid worker, who in 2016 was awarded the Order of Canada-the country's second-highest civilian honor-made his name as a humanitarian worker advocating for street children, child laborers and those affected by war. He co-founded Street Kids International in the 1980s which merged with Save the Children. In the last decade, Dalglis held key positions in UN agencies, including a chief for UN Habitat in Afghanistan in 2015.

In Nepal, Dalglis was an advisor in a child program for the International Labor Organization in the early 2000s. Weak law enforcement has made Nepal notorious for sexual predators, with several arrests and convictions in recent years. In 2015 a Canadian orphanage volunteer, Ernest MacIntosh, 71, was sentenced to seven years in prison for sexually abusing a disabled 15-year-old boy, while in 2010 French charity worker Jean-Jacques Hays was convicted of raping 10 children at a Kathmandu orphanage. —AFP

US Dept requests 1,000 soldiers to manage migrant crisis

WASHINGTON: The US Department of Homeland Security requested 1,000 additional soldiers to help manage the migrant crisis in Texas, the Pentagon said Monday, amid growing outcry over conditions in migrant detention facilities. In a statement, the Pentagon said they had been asked to authorize the Texas National Guard to lend support to Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials, who say they are overwhelmed by the numbers of refugees crossing the southern US border.

Thousands of active duty and National Guard troops have already been deployed for months along the US-Mexico border to support immigration officials. "DHS requests authorization for 1,000 Texas National Guard members... to provide supplemental holding and Port of Entry (POE) enforcement support to CBP within the State of Texas," the statement said. The Guard members will help manage CBP-run holding facilities for single, adult migrants in the towns of Donna, on the eastern end of the border with Mexico, and Tornillo, which is in the middle of the border. They will also provide support at ports of entry and commercial airports in El Paso and Laredo, in order to improve border security and traffic flow.

While the Pentagon did not specify when they received the request or if they had made a decision, the statement did note that "Texas Governor (Greg) Abbott has consented to the use of the National Guard to support CBP." The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been criticized after a report from its inspector general, a watchdog, last week warned about "dangerous overcrowding" in migrant detention facilities in Texas. The report included images taken at several Texas sites, showing dozens of migrants including young children packed shoulder to shoulder into cage-like holding areas or cells. Most single adults had not had a shower in a month and were being given wet wipes. Some detainees were suffering from constipation after a diet consisting only of bologna sandwiches. The report came a day after a group of Democratic lawmakers toured the detention centers and denounced the conditions as "horrific." —AFP