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Election win for Lai is clear rejection of Beijing

For Taiwan, the choice was continuity

Analysis

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If there was ever a doubt as to what most Taiwanese think about Beijing's ambitions for unification, then the results of Saturday's pivotal presidential election made it crystal clear.

By choosing the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's Lai Ching-te as their next leader, Taiwanese voters not only reaffirmed their support for the DPP's handling of ties with China, but also shrugged off Beijing's warnings that returning the party to the pinnacle of power would increase the risk of conflict.

The 64-year-old Lai and his running mate, Hsiao Bi-khim — long the front-runners in an election framed as a choice between change and continuity — won more than 40% of the roughly 14 million votes cast in a poll that saw a turnout of 71.86%.

Lai's victory made the independence-

minded DPP the first party in the self-ruled island's history to win three-straight presidential terms, a vote of confidence for a party that has long emphasized that the island is already a de facto sovereign nation.

New Taipei City Mayor Hou Yu-ih, of the main opposition Kuomintang (KMT), received 33% of the vote, while Ko Wen-je, from the "middle-ground" Taiwan's People's Party (TPP) came in third with about 26%. Both parties had supported policies of re-engaging with Beijing to try and improve cross-strait relations.

In a victory speech in Taipei late Saturday, Lai said the results highlighted Taiwan's choice of "democracy over authoritarianism," with the president-elect vowing to continue to "walk side-by-side with democracies from around the world."

The DPP leader also pledged to follow the policies laid out by outgoing President Tsai Ing-wen, saying his government will "continue on the right path forward."

China avoided mentioning Lai's name in its initial responses Saturday, with Chen Bin-hua, the Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson,



Taiwan President-elect Lai Ching-te and his running mate, Hsiao Bi-khim, attend a rally outside the headquarters of the Democratic Progressive Party in Taipei on Saturday night after winning the presidential election. AFP-JIJI

claiming that the result shows that the DPP doesn't "represent mainstream public opinion on the island."

The Foreign Ministry in Beijing said that "whatever changes take place" in Taipei, the fact that Taiwan is part of China won't change and China will continue opposing Taiwan independence.

Taipei countered a day later, calling on Beijing authorities "to respect the election results, face reality and give up suppressing Taiwan in order for positive cross-strait interactions to return to the right track."

Experts said the opposition's ability to



COMMUNITY:
MONEY TROUBLES

Revamped ¥500 coin could go the way of ¥2000 bill | PAGE 9



SPORTS:
UP TO THE CHALLENGE

Shota Imanaga confident about jump to MLB | PAGE 10

IN TODAY'S NYT:
SEEKING JUSTICE IN INDIA'S OVERWHELMED COURTS
PAGE 1



Prosecutors may not build case against LDP bigwigs

KYODO, JIJI

Prosecutors are unlikely to build a criminal case against key members of the largest faction of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in connection with a political fundraising scandal that has rocked the LDP, sources close to the matter said.

The LDP has been under intense scrutiny as the faction, which was headed by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, is suspected of having failed to report hundreds of millions of yen in revenue from fundraising parties and accumulated slush funds over a five-year period through 2022.

The Tokyo prosecutors have been investigating whether lawmakers from the intra-party group colluded with the faction's accountant in violation of the political funds control law, and apparently see no objective evidence of such collusion, the sources said Saturday.

LDP factions have traditionally set quotas for lawmakers on the sale of party tickets, usually priced at ¥20,000. In some groups, if lawmakers surpass their targets, the extra funds are passed back to them as a type of commission.

The faction's key members include former LDP Diet affairs chief Tsuyoshi Takagi, who currently holds its secretary-general post, former Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno and former trade minister Yasutoshi Nishimura, who previously held the faction's top position.

The others include former LDP policy chief Koichi Hagiuda and Hiroshige Seko, former secretary-general for the party in the House of Councilors.

According to the sources, there was a proposal in the Abe faction to halt the practice of transferring the extra funds to its members in 2022. But this did not get approved due to opposition from faction members.

The prosecutors have questioned Nishimura and others who have served as the faction's secretary-general but could not find any documents to back up their involvement in the money scandal.

The prosecutors are also considering indicting officials in charge of accounting at two LDP factions without arrest, the sources said. The law requires an accountant to submit a report on income and expenditure.

Continued on page 2 →



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (center, right) speaks with Shigeru Sakaguchi, mayor of Wajima, Ishikawa Prefecture, and volunteers during his visit to an evacuation center in the city on Sunday. POOL/VIA KYODO

Kishida makes first visit to Noto Peninsula after quake

WAJIMA, ISHIKAWA PREF.
JIJI

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Ishikawa Prefecture on Sunday to inspect damage caused by the massive Noto Peninsula earthquake on New Year's Day.

The trip was the prime minister's first to areas affected by the 7.6 magnitude earthquake, which left 221 people dead in the central Japan prefecture, with 24 people still missing as of 2 p.m. Sunday.

Speaking to people at an evacuation cen-

ter set up at a junior high school in Wajima, Kishida encouraged them to keep their hearts strong amid difficult circumstances, while vowing that the government will make every effort to respond to the disaster.

At the Air Self-Defense Force's Wajima Air Station earlier in the day, the prime minister thanked SDF personnel for their disaster relief efforts and asked them to stand by affected people and address their concerns and hopes for the future.

During the visit, Kishida was accompanied by disaster management minister Yoshifumi

Matsumura and Ishikawa Gov. Hiroshi Hase.

The prime minister aims to assess the needs of the disaster-hit areas firsthand and use the information to support affected people and improve conditions in evacuation centers, as well as for restoration and reconstruction measures.

The visit was initially planned for Saturday, but was postponed due to poor weather.

Meanwhile, U.S. risk assessment firm Moody's RMS has said economic losses from the massive earthquake are estimated at ¥435 billion (about \$3 billion) to ¥870 billion.

The estimate reflects business interruption as well as physical damage from the quake, subsequent fires, landslides, tsunami and soil liquefaction.

Actual losses could be even larger, as the estimate does not include damage to transportation networks, public infrastructure and administrative organizations.

"This event highlights the importance of evaluating shallow crustal earthquakes within a comprehensive view of seismic risk," Moody's RMS Senior Director Chesley Williams said in a statement.

Continued on page 4 →

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INSIDE TODAY

NATIONAL	2	CLASSIFIED ADS	6
INSIGHTS	3	SUSTAINABLE JAPAN	7
WORLD	4, 5	OPINION	8
GI: TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	5	COMMUNITY	9
OUR PLANET	6	WEATHER	9
		SPORTS	10

A faster response to online abuse
Japan plans legal revision for quicker deletion of defamatory posts | **NATIONAL, PAGE 2**

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Japan's biomass push is harming Canada's forests

ANNELISE GISEBURT
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When you walk through a fresh clearcut in British Columbia, you are surrounded by a "one-dimensional, dead landscape," says Michelle Connolly of Conservation North, a volunteer conservation group based in the Canadian province.

The forest's soft, mossy ground, the bird-calls and the cool moisture in the air are gone. In their place, twigs and debris lay everywhere, occasionally interspersed with pieces of garbage. Sound and movement from plants or animals have almost ceased, except for the buzzing of insects. The smell of burned piles of slash — wood debris not profitable enough to bring to a mill — hangs in the air.

"That's the story of conventional forestry in BC," Connolly says.

Last month, Connolly visited Japan to share how such scenes are linked to the nation's "green" energy: A portion of BC's razed forests are being used to make wood pellets, a type of biofuel that Japan is importing and burning in increasing quan-



tities as an alternative to fossil fuels.

The Japanese government claims wood pellets are "carbon neutral" because trees absorb carbon dioxide throughout their lives and, therefore, do not result in a net increase of atmospheric carbon dioxide when burned. The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, which is in charge of Japan's biomass policy, did not respond to a request for comment.

Experts in the field, however, warn that

An old growth forest near Fort St. James, British Columbia, Canada, in an area where wood pellet producer Drax is permitted to cut.

CONSERVATION NORTH

this kind of carbon accounting is dangerously misguided.

Research by British think tank Chatham House details how woody biomass fuels like wood pellets release a large amount of carbon dioxide during combustion — even more than coal — due to having lower energy density. Burning trees for electricity increases atmospheric carbon dioxide in the near term, precisely when the world most needs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. And when forests are cut, their ability to absorb and sequester carbon is halted for decades.

The Japanese government plans to have biomass contribute 5% of Japan's power needs by 2030, putting it on par with wind. Hydrogen and ammonia, the government and industry's controversial long-term bet to decarbonize the power sector, are expected to only contribute 1% by that year.

Japan began seriously investing in woody biomass after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster triggered a sudden shortage of zero-emission energy, as the nation took all of its reactors offline. Beginning in 2012, generous government support for renewable energy

Continued on page 6 →

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