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DPP's Lai calls for dialogue with China after winning presidency

Taiwan's new leader gets 40% of votes but DPP loses majority in legislature

Yip Wai Yee
Taiwan Correspondent

TAIPEI - Taiwan's president-elect Lai Ching-te, of the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), called for dialogue with China "to replace confrontation", shortly after winning 40 per cent of the votes in a three-way race for president on Jan 13.

However, he warned that Taiwan must also be safeguarded against threats from China.

Addressing supporters following his declaration of victory at 8.30pm, Mr Lai pledged to maintain the "cross-strait status quo".

"We will use exchanges to replace obstructionism, dialogue to replace confrontation and confidently pursue exchanges and cooperation with China."

It remains to be seen how Mr Lai will approach dialogue with China, as he has not made clear the basis on which it can proceed. This is a sticking point with China, which insists that exchanges can happen only if both sides agree that there is one China.

Mr Lai, 64, headed into the race as the front runner, though recent polls had shown it too close to call, with many Taiwanese frustrated with economic issues including stagnant wages and housing affordability.

Mr Hou Yu-ih of the main opposition Kuomintang (KMT), as well as Dr Ko Wen-je of the smaller Taiwan People's Party (TPP), conceded defeat on Saturday night, four hours after vote counting had begun, and it became clear that Mr Lai's lead was too wide to overcome.

The candidates who lost were seen to be friendlier towards



Taiwan's president-elect Lai Ching-te with Ms Hsiao Bi-khim, who will be the vice-president, celebrating with other Democratic Progressive Party members in Taipei on Jan 13. Mr Lai pledged to maintain the "cross-strait status quo" and called for talks with China "to replace confrontation". ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Beijing. Both had blamed the DPP for deteriorating cross-strait ties, and had pledged to foster closer economic ties with China.

On the other hand, Mr Lai, whose party champions a distinct Taiwan identity, was repeatedly singled out by China as a dangerous separatist and "troublemaker".

Mr Lai said: "We are also determined to safeguard Taiwan from continuing threats and intimidation from China."

Results showed that he secured about 40 per cent of the votes, while Mr Hou gained around 33 per cent and Dr Ko, about 26 per cent. Voter turnout was nearly 70 per cent.

But Mr Lai's vote share was less than that of incumbent President Tsai Ing-wen, also of the DPP, in her first presidential contest in 2016, which was also a three-way race.

She garnered 56.1 per cent, as opposed to KMT's Eric Chu's 31 per cent, and 12.8 per cent for Mr James Soong of the People First Party.

Preliminary analysis suggests that Dr Ko had made some inroads with young Taiwanese weary of the two main parties.

Commenting on Mr Lai's electoral victory, China said that the result of the election shows that DPP cannot represent the mainstream sentiments of voters on the island. "Taiwan is China's Taiwan," it said.

The vote "will not impede the inevitable trend of China's reunification", Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson Chen Binhua said in a statement carried by state news agency Xinhua.

Beijing also said it would not tolerate "separatist activities" in Taiwan. "We will adhere to the 1992 Consensus that embodies the one-China principle and firmly oppose the separatist activities aimed at 'Taiwan independence' as well as foreign interference."

Conceding defeat at a KMT event to thank voters in New Taipei City, Mr Hou said: "I have let everybody down, I want to convey my apology."

He congratulated Mr Lai and Ms Hsiao Bi-khim, who will be vice-president. The latter was most recently Taipei's de facto ambassador to Washington.

On his part, Dr Ko thanked the youth voters who backed him.

"We have shown to the world that Taiwan is not just about the Green or Blue camp. Democracy is Taiwan's most valuable asset," he said, referring to the party colours of DPP and KMT respectively.

Mr Lai's win means that the DPP has secured an unprecedented third presidential term.

No political party has won more than two consecutive four-year terms since presidential elections

Presidential election results

Number of votes

Mr Lai Ching-te
(Democratic Progressive Party)
40.1% (5,586,019)

Mr Hou Yu-ih (Kuomintang)
33.5% (4,671,021)

Dr Ko Wen-je (Taiwan People's Party)
26.5% (3,690,466)

Source:
TAIWAN CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION
SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

were introduced in 1996.

However, the DPP failed to maintain its legislative majority in the parliamentary elections held at the same time, which will limit the president-elect's ability to pass major reforms.

In fact, none of the main parties secured a majority in the 113-seat legislature.

The KMT took 52 seats, the DPP 51, the TPP eight, while two went to independents.

In his post-victory speech, Mr Lai said he understood and respected the people's expectations of effective government with strong checks and balances.

He pledged to embrace talent from different political groups, prioritising issues that have consensus among the political parties, without providing specifics.

"We will work to set aside differences while maintaining clear lines of communication," he said.

At the DPP's victory rally held outside the party's headquarters in Taipei, thousands of euphoric supporters started chanting "Hello, president" when it became clear Mr Lai would win.

Restaurant manager Kuo Ying-kuei, 37, donning the campaign's official green baseball jacket, told The Sunday Times that she can now heave a sigh of relief.

"When I saw footage of the huge turnout at the TPP rally on the eve of the election, I was really worried for Lai's chances. I can rest easy now that we have a leader who will do his best to protect our precious freedoms."

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SEE THE BIG STORY • A8

US strikes at Houthi militia in Yemen for second straight day

WASHINGTON - The United States carried out another strike against the Houthi militia in Yemen, the US Central Command said, bombing a radar facility as part of an effort to further degrade the Iran-backed group's ability to attack ships transiting the Red Sea.

It was the second straight day that the US military fired on a

Houthi target, after a US-led barrage of military strikes that was aimed at securing critical shipping routes between Europe and Asia. The strikes come amid fears of a wider escalation of the conflict in the Middle East.

The strike, carried out at 3.45am local time on Jan 13 by the USS Carney using Tomahawk missiles, was

"a follow-on action on a specific military target", the Central Command said.

A Pentagon official said the strike was meant to further the job begun by the widespread coordinated air and naval assault by the US and Britain on a number of Houthi targets in Yemen the night before.

Lieutenant-General Douglas Sims, director of the US military's Joint Staff, told reporters on a conference call before the new strike that the Pentagon was more than ready for a response from the Houthis. "We simply are not going to be messed with here."

White House spokesman John Kirby said the strikes, ordered by

President Joe Biden, had not been intended to ignite a wider regional war.

"In fact, everything the President has been doing has been trying to prevent any escalation of conflict, including the strikes last night." NYTIMES

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life

RECIPES TO REPENT FOR SEASON OF EXCESS •
Soothing teas and vegetarian soups
| C10&11

EXPORTING SHIOK •
Singaporean eateries in London, Idaho and Dubai named ShioK
| C8&9



The number of women seeking medical help for perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms has surged. But most women cannot tell the symptoms, are afraid of treatment and suffer in silence. **Stephanie Yeo** finds out why.
C2&3

Menopausal hormone therapy has helped Ms Chen Xujin, 63, to continue living an active lifestyle.

Pause for MENOPAUSE

KL's indie art gems

Most Singaporeans head north for food and shopping, but **Ong Sor Fern** has a great artsy weekend in Kuala Lumpur.
C4&5

(From top) An R2-D2 wayang kulit puppet; an immersive artwork at the REXperience show featuring a live dancer; and a restored architectural gem at the Rimbun Dahan arts residency.

DESIGN: SALLY LAM | ST PHOTOS: JASON QUAH, ONG SOR FERN

THE STRAITS TIMES

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Could it be menopause? Don't dismiss the signs

Six in 10 women in an NUH study have moderate to severe menopause symptoms, but many suffer in silence



Stephanie Yeo
Senior Correspondent

Ms A was a high-achieving teacher in a tuition centre when she started experiencing hot flushes and night sweats in her late 40s.

It affected her sleep and concentration and she started making mistakes at work, which led to negative feedback from students and parents.

After a poor work appraisal, her self-identity crumbled and she entertained thoughts of suicide. She quit her job.

During mental health counselling, she was advised to seek a medical assessment at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), says Associate Professor Rukshini Puvandran, co-director of the KK Menopause Centre.

That was when Ms A found out she was in perimenopause.

This transition period before a woman's last period is a time when hormones fluctuate wildly and periods may become irregular.

Symptoms, which may seem unrelated, can range from the irritating (itchy skin, dry mouth) to the embarrassing (incontinence, the urge to pee often) to the debilitating (anxiety and depression).

Perimenopause symptoms can last up to 10 years before a woman hits menopause, which is defined as 12 months without a period.

In Singapore, menopause typically occurs from ages 45 to 55. The average age of menopause here is 49, earlier than the Western society average of 51.

While menopause has always been a part of a woman's life cycle, its social and economic repercussions are growing, thanks to rapidly ageing societies like Singapore and more women entering the workforce.

By 2025, an estimated 11 billion women worldwide will be post-menopausal, according to The Menopause Society (formerly known as The North American Menopause Society), a non-profit organisation of leading clinicians and other experts. That is about one in eight people in the world.

A staggering US\$25 billion (S\$33.3 billion) can be attributed to menopause-related medical costs in the United States alone, according to a study published in April 2023 in the journal Mayo Clinic Proceedings.

Last work productivity linked to menopause symptoms is estimated to cost about US\$1.8 billion a year in the US, the researchers said.

That figure does not include the cost of women scaling down their working hours, losing their jobs, retiring early or changing jobs because of symptoms, said the study, which surveyed some 5,000 women aged 45 to 60 who were patients at the Mayo Clinic.

SIX IN 10 HAVE MODERATE TO SEVERE SYMPTOMS

Menopause awareness has skyrocketed in Western countries since around 2019, thanks to celebrity advocates, including talk-show hosts Oprah Winfrey and Drew Barrymore, former US first lady Michelle Obama and British television presenter Davina McCall.

Some of it has trickled down to Singapore as well. Professor Tan Hak Koon, chairman of the division of obstetrics and gynaecology at KKH, notes: "While the number of women with perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms seen at KKH has almost tripled from 2009 to 2023, it is still a small proportion, given that Singapore is an ageing population. By 2030, one in four citizens will be aged 65 and above and women



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LEEANNE BEVERIDGE

LIFE AFTER MENOPAUSE

Ms Leeanne Beveridge, 58, developed irregular periods in her 50s which she thought could be fibroids. She also had hot flushes, insomnia and weight gain, as well as aches and pains.

"When you put them all together, it's like you don't know yourself any more," says Ms Beveridge, the former draughtsman who is an Australian citizen and a permanent resident here.

But it was when she became a "little volcano of rage" around her husband and daughter, who started to avoid her, that she knew she needed help.

"The mood swings and anger were my biggest problem. Things would come out of my mouth before they even crossed my mind. I would feel really bad and almost want to cry," says Ms Beveridge, who is a patient at the KK Menopause Centre.

Activities she used to enjoy, such as riding her motorbike, also became painful as her hands became inflamed, making it difficult for her to hold onto the clutch at traffic lights.

"Taking MHT helped to reduce those symptoms and enabled me to keep enjoying life the same way as before," says the keen outrigger ocean paddling enthusiast.

Ms Chen Xujin, 63, took a more proactive stance after seeing how her mother suffered from bone loss and "emotional issues" following the menopause transition. The latter developed a hunchback and was eventually bedridden.

"I was deeply affected and told myself that I needed to do something about it when I faced menopause, so that I don't follow in her footsteps. I want to lead a good-quality and healthy life and don't want to burden my loved ones," says Ms Chen, who used to work as a gynaecologist and obstetrician in China before moving to Singapore, where she is now a citizen.

So, when she started having irregular periods, heart palpitations and hot flushes so intense her T-shirt would be wet in seconds, she sought medical help.

Then 47, the single mother was having a particularly hard time juggling studying for a bachelor's degree and looking after her teenage daughter. She declined to reveal her occupation or degree details.

A patient of KKH, she was put on MHT, which relieved her symptoms.

Fast-forward 16 years later, Ms Chen now enjoys an active lifestyle that includes swimming, jogging, cycling and tennis as an antidote.

"It is important to be open to your loved ones and educate them on menopause and how it will affect them. We cannot assume and expect that they will understand what we are going through, but we still need to communicate with them," she says.

"When my daughter was in primary school, I went through the female reproductive system with her, from the first menses to menopause. When she saw me taking MHT, I explained it to her. She now helps support me by driving me to work or for my studies and is always the calm one."

Prof Rukshini adds that menopause is not a disease that women should be afraid or ashamed of.

"It marks the end of their reproductive phase, but it is also a new beginning for them to take charge of their life – emotionally, mentally and physically," she says.

Dr Chua adds: "I would love to see Singaporeans understand and be responsible for their health even more. They are the demand. If they need all our cost-effective food to be less sugary and less oily, then the supply will naturally move in that direction.

"Similarly, if women need to talk about their menopause and their symptoms or their mental health, then healthcare providers will need to get updated with these management options and counsel their patients accordingly."

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The mood swings and anger were my biggest problem. Things would come out of my mouth before they even crossed my mind.

MS LEEANNE BEVERIDGE (above), 58, recalling how she became a 'little volcano of rage' when her perimenopausal symptoms flared up. Going on menopausal hormone therapy has helped reduce those symptoms and enabled her to enjoy life the way she did before

It marks the end of their reproductive phase, but is also a new beginning for them to take charge of their life – emotionally, mentally and physically.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR RUKSHINI PUVANDRAN (right, in photo), co-director of the KK Menopause Centre, who says that menopause is not a disease that women should be afraid or ashamed of



PHOTO: KKH

Dr Chua is a past president of the Asia Pacific Menopause Federation and the Menopause Research Society (Singapore).

Besides the lack of knowledge, Asian women tend to have "neutral attitudes" towards menopause, says Prof Rukshini. Many believe they should endure it, as compared with Caucasian women, who proactively seek out ways to manage it.

"Several studies have shown that Asian women lack knowledge on menopause and are unprepared for this transition in their lives. They also have several misconceptions and there is a demand for more trustworthy sources of information," she says.

Prof Rukshini says subsequent research has shown that women in their 50s who use MHT experience a lower risk of breast cancer or blood clots, she says.

"MHT has been shown to be safe and effective in most women under the age of 60 with bothersome menopausal symptoms who are not at risk of breast cancer or blood clots," she says.

In fact, letting perimenopausal symptoms fester and suffering in silence may lead to bigger problems down the line.

Dr Chua says: "It is important to put the risk of breast cancer associated with MHT into clinical con-

text. The risk associated with long-term oestrogen use is much lower than the risk conferred by obesity, inactivity and alcohol use.

"If women have reduced their own risks of breast cancer by not smoking, drinking excessively, not becoming obese or sedentary, they would have very little fear about the very marginal increased risks added if they need to consider using MHT for improved quality of life."

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ord or track menopause cases," Prof Yong says.

He adds: "Women will be living more than a third of their lives after menopause due to increasing life-spans. The problems with undiagnosed menopausal symptoms would correspondingly increase."

NUH's ongoing Integrated Women's Health Programme (IWHP) gives a glimpse into the possible scale of the issue.

Started in 2014, this cohort study of 1,200 women aged 45 to 69 aims to holistically identify symptoms of menopause and its associated medical conditions. It has generated over 15 publications to date.

A study published in October 2023 found that over six in 10 of the women reported at least one moderate to extremely severe symptom, which is consistent with figures from other developed countries, Prof Yong says.

Interestingly, the No. 1 symptom here is muscular and joint discomfort (arthralgia), whereas hot flushes are the most common symptom in Western countries.

The IWHP's latest study published in December found that three out of four of the women studied had arthralgia. Prof Yong says the reason is unclear.

Rounding up the top five symptoms among women in Singapore are, in descending order, sleep problems, vaginal dryness, physical and mental exhaustion, and hot flushes.

Those suffering from severe symptoms were more likely to suffer from moderate disability and weaker lower-body strength. They also rated their health status as poorer compared with others.

Despite their symptoms, only 21 out of the 1,200 women in the cohort study were taking menopausal hormone therapy (MHT). This typically involves taking oestrogen and progesterone in the form of gels, patches and/or oral preparations under a doctor's guidance.

Civil servant Sushela, 57, started

Ms Chen Xujin, 63, sought treatment for her perimenopausal symptoms early and now enjoys a range of sports as well as dancing. PHOTOS: ISTOCKPHOTO, JASON GUAH

TOP FIVE MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS AMONG WOMEN IN SINGAPORE

- Muscular and joint discomfort (arthralgia)
- Sleep problems
- Vaginal dryness
- Physical and mental exhaustion
- Hot flushes

SOURCE: NATIONAL UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS INTEGRATED WOMEN'S HEALTH PROGRAMME



Singapore women experience more aches and pains and sleep disturbances than the typical hot flushes and mood swings. The symptoms are therefore less specific and not immediately thought of as menopause-related. Women may suffer lethargy and tiredness from the symptoms and not realise it is due to menopause.

DR CHUA YANG, a gynaecologist and obstetrician who runs private practice A Clinic For Women