

International

China scolds US for withdrawing an invite to a major naval drill

Closing door does not promote trust, says Beijing

BEIJING: China's Defense Ministry expressed regret yesterday after the United States withdrew an invitation to China to attend a major US-hosted naval drill, saying that closing the door does not promote mutual trust and cooperation. The Rim of the Pacific exercise, known as RIMPAC and previously attended by China, is billed as the world's largest international maritime exercise and held every two years in Hawaii in June and July.

RIMPAC enabled the armed forces of the world's two largest economies to directly engage with each other. It was viewed by both countries as a way to ease tensions and reduce the risk of miscalculation should they meet under less friendly circumstances. The Pentagon said the withdrawal of the invitation was in response to what it sees as Beijing's militarization of islands in the disputed South China Sea, a strategic waterway claimed in large part by Beijing.

In a brief statement, China's Defense Ministry said the United States had "ignored the facts and hyped up the so-called 'militarization' of the South China Sea", using it as an excuse to uninvite China. "This decision by the United States is not constructive. Closing the door to communication at any time is not conducive towards promoting mutual trust and communication between the Chinese

and US militaries," it added. China's island-building program in the South China Sea has sparked concern around the region and in Washington about Chinese intentions. China says it has every right to build what it calls necessary defensive facilities on its own territory.

Irresponsible remarks

Over the weekend China's air force landed bombers on islands in the sea as part of a training exercise, triggering concern from Vietnam and the Philippines. The ministry reiterated that its building of defense facilities was to protect the country's sovereignty and legitimate rights, and had nothing to do with militarization. "The United States has no right to make irresponsible remarks about this," it added.

"Being invited or not cannot change China's will

to play a role in protecting peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, and cannot shake China's firm determination to defend its sovereignty and security interests". It is in both countries interests to develop healthy military ties, and China hopes the United States keeps the broader picture in mind, abandon its "zero sum" mentality and appropriately handle disputes, the ministry said.

Pentagon officials have long complained that China has not been candid enough about its rapid

US withdraws invite over Chinese buildup in South China Sea



YOKOSUKA: Photo shows the The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Millius (DDG 69) as it arrives at US Fleet Activities (FLEACT) Yokosuka, to become part of the Forward Deployed Naval Forces (FDNF) in Japan. —AFP

military build-up and using South China Sea islands to gather intelligence in the region. In an editorial on its website, widely-read Chinese state-run tabloid the Global Times said there was no way China could trade in its interests in the South China Sea for access to the exercise. "If the US military increases its activities in the South China Sea, then our side will need to further strengthen its military deployments there," it wrote.

Chinese officials have accused Washington of viewing their country in suspicious, "Cold War"

terms. Speaking at a separate briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said China has sovereign rights in the South China Sea and it is not realistic for the United States to use this kind of action to try to coerce Beijing. The United States has dispatched warships to disputed areas of the South China Sea in a bid to challenge China's extensive sovereignty claims in the territory, which is subject to various claims by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Brunei and Malaysia. —Reuters

Taiwan FM quits after Burkina Faso cuts ties

TAIPEI: Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu yesterday tendered his resignation after Burkina Faso announced it was breaking diplomatic ties with the island. "As a government official, I must be responsible for policies, and I have verbally tendered my resignation to the president," Wu told a press conference. Wu added that Taipei was cutting relations with Burkina Faso "to safeguard our sovereignty and dignity" and halting bilateral aid and cooperation programs. Burkina Faso is the second country to dump Taiwan within weeks after Dominican Republic switched recognition to Beijing earlier this month, leaving the island with only 18 diplomatic allies around the world.

It was not immediately clear if Burkina Faso and China would establish diplomatic relations but Wu said it would only be "sooner or later" and that "everyone knows China is the only factor". "Why China chose now to steal our ally, everyone can see although we couldn't go

into the WHA (World Health Assembly), but we are developing deeper relations with more and more like-minded countries. I believe China can see this," he said.

Wu's comments came after the landlocked west African state said earlier Thursday that it was breaking diplomatic ties with Taiwan. "The Burkina government decided today to break off its diplomatic relationship with Taiwan," Foreign Minister Alpha Barry said, in an announcement that follows a string of similar moves by African states since 2000. "Since 1994, Burkina Faso has had cooperation relations with Taiwan," Barry said in a statement.

"But today, changes in the world, the current socio-economic challenges facing our country and our region call on us to reconsider our position." China still considers Taiwan to be a renegade province to be reunified, by force if necessary, even though they split in 1949 after a civil war. The two have been engaged for years in a diplomatic tug-of-war in developing countries. Economic support and other aid are often used as bargaining chips for diplomatic recognition. Relations between Taiwan and China have worsened since President Tsai Ing-wen took office in May 2016 as her government refuses to acknowledge that Taiwan is part of "one China." —AFP

Pakistani mob destroys 100-year-old minority Ahmadi mosque

ISLAMABAD: A mob led by right-wing Muslim clerics tore down the dome and minarets of a 100-year old Pakistani mosque belonging to the marginalized Ahmadi community, officials and the community said yesterday. Ahmadis are one of the most persecuted groups in Sunni-majority Pakistan, with Islamists and religious hardliners labeling them heretics, while harsh Pakistani laws ban them from calling themselves Muslims or using Islamic symbols.

Saleemuddin, a spokesman for the Ahmadi community, said a mob stormed the mosque complex in Sialkot, near the Indian border in Punjab province, overnight. He put the number at several hundred. He said there was collusion between the mob and local government officials, but police denied such accusations. Asad Sarfraz, a police official, said municipal government officials

were at the mosque complex removing what he called "illegal renovation".

"An emotionally charged mob of people belonging to different groups and segments of society reached there and damaged several parts of the building," Sarfraz said. Sarfraz said about 60-70 people were involved and authorities were attempting to identify the attackers. Saleemuddin denied the renovation work was illegal and said the community had obtained permission from the local government to upgrade the building. He shared an application approved by the municipal government with Reuters.

A social media video of the attack's aftermath shows a crowd cheering a local cleric, who then claims to have ransacked the mosque. "I want to thank the Sialkot administration, the DPO (District Police Officer), DC (District Commissioner), the TMA (Town Municipal Corporation), from the bottom of my heart," said the cleric, from the majority Sunni community.

"Because as Muslims it was your responsibility to complete this work." The Ahmadis consider themselves to be Muslims but their recognition of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who founded the sect in British-ruled India in 1889, as a "subordinate prophet" is viewed by many of the Sunni majority as a breach of the Islamic tenet that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was God's last direct messenger. —Reuters