

CHINA VOWS TO CONTINUE BUILDING ON DISPUTED ISLES

BEIJING: China yesterday vowed to continue building in disputed reefs of the South China Sea, as state media said construction had finished on two lighthouses on reefs claimed by other countries.

Beijing has been bolstering its claim to almost all the South China Sea by rapidly building large artificial structures resembling islands, straining ties with neighbors.

The lighthouses on Cuateron Reef and Johnson South Reef in the Spratly islands have been officially opened, the state-run Xinhua news agency said late Friday. China established control of the Johnson South Reef after a skirmish with Vietnam in 1988. The Philippines claims both reefs as part of its territory. The lighthouses are 50 metres high, Xinhua said. State television gave prominence to

images of the white-structures standing above blue waters.

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said in an online statement that they would improve "safety of navigation" for ships. "Next, China will continue to build other civil facilities on occupied islands reefs in the Nansha Islands," she added using China's name for the Spratlys. China's building has

increased tensions with Washington, which has condemned the structures. Hua's statement came after reports said that the US would send navy ships close to the islands built by China, testing whether Beijing will defend them. Beijing claims sovereignty over almost the entire sea, including waters, islands, reefs, shoals and rocky outcrops nearer to other countries.

Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam—all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) — claim parts of the sea, while Taiwan is a sixth claimant. Chinese President Xi Jinping has said China will not militarise its newly-built structures in the Sea, but satellite images show it has constructed runways capable of use by air force jets. — AFP



PYONGYANG: Military equipment is paraded in Pyongyang yesterday. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (Inset) declared yesterday that his country was ready to stand up to any threat posed by the United States as he spoke at a lavish military parade to mark the 70th anniversary of the North's ruling party and trumpet his third-generation leadership. — AP

N KOREA READY FOR 'ANY' US WAR, LEADER TELLS PARADE

KIM PRESIDES OVER MILITARY PARADE ON 70TH ANNIVERSARY

PYONGYANG: North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un said yesterday his country could fight any war provoked by the United States, as he presided over a vast military parade to mark the 70th anniversary of the ruling Workers' Party. Thousands of troops marched through the capital followed by columns of tanks, armored vehicles and ballistic missiles, in what was tipped to be one of the largest ceremonial displays of military strength in North Korea's history.

Dressed in his customary dark Mao suit, Kim struck a more belligerent note than in previous public addresses, telling the assembled masses in Kim Il-Sung square that North Korea could fight any war begun by the US. "Our party dauntlessly declares that our revolutionary armed forces are capable of fighting any kind of war provoked by the US and we are ready to protect our people and the blue sky of our motherland," he said. His words were met with rapturous applause from tens of thousands of flag-waving spectators, while above the square, a large banner slung from a gas-filled balloon read: "Long live the invincible Workers' Party of Korea." Buildings surrounding the plaza, named after Kim's grandfather, the founding leader of North Korea, were festooned with red hammer-and-sickle party flags and the national colours of blue, white and red. Poor but nuclear-armed North Korea often threatens to destroy the US and South Korea, with which it technically remains at war after their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce, not a treaty. The North remains deeply politically isolated on the world stage, and its closest ally China was the only country to send a diplomat to Saturday's event.

'Cutting-edge' weapons

As night fell after the parade—a tribute to the ruling party that has served at the whim of three generations of the Kim dynasty—the skies of Pyongyang were lit up with a fireworks display over the banks of the Taedong River. On the ground, roaring crowds held up their coloured squares to create huge images of Worker Party flags and spelling out the name of Kim Jong-un.

The scale of the event was already apparent from satellite images taken four days before which showed a sprawling training ground in Pyongyang featuring some 800 tents, 700 trucks and 200 armored vehicles. When announcing plans for the "grand-style" parade back in February, the ruling party's top decision-making body had stressed the importance of "cutting-edge" weaponry suitable for modern warfare. North Korea has conducted three nuclear tests and threatened a fourth as part of a nuclear weapons and missile program that it has pursued through a barrage of international sanctions. There is debate among experts as to how far it has come in developing those weapons, especially the ability to shrink nuclear warheads so that they can fit on a missile. An exhaustively researched report published this week by the US-based Institute for Science and International Security estimated that North Korea had between 10 and 16 nuclear weapons as of the end of 2014. The report argued it was likely the country could already build a warhead to fit atop a Nodong missile—with a range of less than 800 miles (1,300 kilometres) — but added that the reliability of such a weapon was open to question.

10-10

Months of planning and preparation have gone into yesterday's celebrations, involving a mass mobilization of state personnel and resources to ensure its success. The capital was given a comprehensive makeover—its streets lined and decorated with giant posters, red banners and national flags, many of them displaying the numerals "10-10" in reference to the ruling party's official October 10 birthday. The North excels at such choreographed displays of military muscle, which aim to boost pride and patriotism at home while sending a defiant message to an international community that has sought, without success, to pressure Pyongyang into abandoning its nuclear weapons ambitions.

But they also reflect North Korea's diplomatic isolation, and Chinese party politburo standing committee member Liu Yunshan was the only foreign dignitary of any significance attending Saturday's event. Kim and Liu met for talks on Friday, during which the Chinese official delivered a letter from President Xi Jinping, and voiced Beijing's willingness to work with Pyongyang on resuming multi-party talks on its nuclear program.

"The DPRK (North Korea) is willing to make efforts to improve relations between the North and the South and safeguard the stability of the peninsula", Xinhua reported the young leader as saying.

China remains North Korea's most important diplomatic ally and economic partner, even as Beijing has grown increasingly wary and impatient with Pyongyang's nuclear weapons ambitions. — AFP

JAPAN FUMES AS UNESCO ARCHIVES NANJING MASSACRE DOCUMENTS

TOKYO: Japan yesterday lashed out at UNESCO's decision to inscribe documents related to the Nanjing massacre in its Memory of the World register, describing it as "extremely regrettable" and calling for the process to be reformed. On Friday the UN's cultural and scientific body agreed to 47 new inscriptions, including a request by Beijing to mark documents recording the mass murder and rape committed by Japanese troops after the fall of the Chinese city of Nanjing in 1937.

The massacre, often referred to as the "Rape of Nanjing", is an exceptionally sensitive issue in the often-tense relations between Japan and China, with Beijing charging that Tokyo has failed to atone for the atrocity.

Japan had called for the Nanjing documents not to be included and accused UNESCO Saturday of being politicized. "It is extremely regrettable that a global organization that should be neutral and fair entered the documents in the Memory of the World register, despite the repeated pleas made by the Japanese government," Tokyo's foreign ministry said in a statement.

"As a responsible member of UNESCO, the Japanese government will seek a reform of this important

project, so that it will not be used politically," the statement added. The UNESCO decision came after a two-year process during a meeting of experts tasked with studying nominations from 40 countries. The new inscriptions were agreed at a meeting

that ran from Sunday to Tuesday and was held in the United Arab Emirates. Chinese state media hailed the decision on Saturday, citing researchers as saying that UNESCO's move was an act of "global recognition" for the massacre. "Inscription of the documents

will help us honor history, refute wrong claims and disseminate the truth," the official Xinhua news agency cited Zhu Chengshan, curator of the state-run Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall as saying.

Killing, rape and destruction

The Japanese military invaded China in the 1930s and the two countries fought a full-scale war from 1937 until Japan's defeat in World War II in 1945. China says 300,000 people died in a six-week spree of killing, rape and destruction after the Japanese military entered Nanjing. Some respected foreign academics put the number lower but there is very little mainstream scholarship doubting that a massacre took place. In Japan, however, some conservatives and nationalists deny that atrocities were committed, a source of regular regional friction.

In February, a senior executive at Japan's publicly funded TV broadcaster NHK denied the massacre, reportedly dismissing accounts of it as "propaganda". Japan's official position is that "the killing of a large number of noncombatants, looting and other acts occurred" took place, but it adds "it is difficult to determine" the true number of victims. — AFP



NANJING: Visitors look at photos of survivors on display at the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall in Nanjing yesterday. Japan lashed out at UNESCO's decision to inscribe documents related to the Nanjing massacre in its Memory of the World register, describing it as "extremely regrettable" and calling for the process to be reformed. — AFP

HUNDREDS FACE OFF IN AUSTRALIAN TOWN IN ANTI-ISLAM PROTEST

SYDNEY: Hundreds of protesters faced off with left-wing opponents yesterday in a standoff over plans to build a mosque in a rural Australian town, witnesses said, the latest anti-Islam protest since a Muslim teenager killed a police officer this month. Farhad Khalil Mohammad Jabar, 15, was shot and killed by police after he opened fire on police accountant Curtis Cheng as Cheng left police headquarters in the Sydney suburb of Parramatta on Oct 2.

Right-wing activists from the United Patriots Front, which says that its aim is opposing the spread of Islam, faced off with members of a left-wing coalition promoting tolerance in the town of Bendigo in Victoria state. The dispute began over plans to build a mosque in the town and has been simmering for months.

Police said four arrests were made, but all were subsequently released. The two groups were generally well behaved, a police spokeswoman told Reuters. Witnesses said the two groups between them numbered in the hundreds. The right-wing protest was part of a coordinated worldwide series of anti-Islam protests organized by fringe extremist groups, with calls on social media for further protests in US cities and elsewhere later in the day. The Islamic Council of Victoria said it had met with police to ensure security of Muslims and had warned on its website that yesterday had been named "by certain fringe groups as a world anti-mosque protest day". Australia's political leaders, including Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, have condemned threats against the Muslim community. — Reuters

CHINA SAYS US HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT BIASED

BEIJING: A US congressional commission's criticism of China's human rights record did not "accord with the facts", the Chinese government said on Friday, the latest friction over a long-running thorn in relations.

The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China said on Thursday that it saw in China "a disturbing deterioration in human rights and rule of law conditions that pose a direct challenge to US national interests and US-China relations".

The report comes weeks after Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Washington, during which US President Barack Obama laid out concern over human rights. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a regular briefing that US officials and the American public must be more objective. "This report has nothing new, embraces a persistent bias in order to make irresponsible remarks about China's domestic affairs, and makes criticisms that don't accord with the facts," Hua said.

"China's 1.3 billion people have the greatest authority to pass judgment," she said. The US commission said China was moving further away from a rule of law system and had increased pressure on civil society. It also criti-

cized the state of religious freedom and Beijing's treatment of ethnic minorities.

"President Xi has presided over an extraordinary assault on the rule of law and civil society", US Representative Chris Smith, the commission's chairman, said in an emailed statement. Florida senator and Republican presidential candidate Marco Rubio co-chairs the committee.

In a statement later on Friday, Smith took issue with China's criticism of the commission report and invited Beijing's ambassador to the United States to testify before the human rights panel. The report "gets the facts correct, we stand by the conclusion that this year saw a 'disturbing deterioration' of human rights", Smith said. Activists say that under Xi, China is conducting its most intense crackdown on human rights in two decades.

Nearly 1,000 rights activists were detained last year — almost as many as in the previous two years combined, according to Chinese Human Rights Defenders, a coalition of Chinese and international activist groups. China has long argued that it is unfairly singled out for criticism of its rights record and says other governments should examine their own records before making accusations. — Reuters



WUHU: People gather outside a restaurant after a gas explosion in Wuhu, in China's Anhui province yesterday. At least 17 people were killed after the explosion ripped through a restaurant in China causing a fire, state media said. — AFP

TAIWAN'S MA DEFENDS CHINA POLICY ON NATIONAL DAY

TAIPEI: Taiwan's embattled President Ma Ying-jeou defended his China-friendly policies yesterday in his last National Day speech, as thousands gathered in the capital Taipei. Relations between Taiwan and Beijing have warmed since Ma took power in 2008, promising that closer ties would bring economic prosperity. But public sentiment has turned against the ruling Kuomintang party (KMT) as fears grow of increased influence from Beijing and the island's economy stagnates.

Ma defended the rapprochement, saying it had turned the region from a "flashpoint" into an "avenue of peace". "Every year during my two terms in office, the cross-strait situation has become progressively more peaceful and more stable," he told crowds outside the presidential office in Taipei celebrating the 104th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of China. It was his last National Day speech before he steps down next year after a maximum two terms. The KMT suffered a rout at local elections last November, partly due to its China policy. The Beijing-sceptic opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is expected to win the presidency in January.

Ma expressed "deepest concern" over the future, urging the next president to stick to the "1992 consensus" — a tacit agreement between

the KMT and Beijing which acknowledges there is "one China" but allows each side their own interpretation. "If we diverge from it, relations will deteriorate. And if we oppose it, there will be turmoil in the Taiwan Strait," Ma warned. Taiwan is self-ruled after a split with the mainland in 1949 following a civil war, but China still considers the island part of its territory waiting to be reunified by force if necessary.

There are questions over how the DPP will approach China policy should it come to power, having alienated Beijing in the past.

DPP presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen has repeatedly pledged to maintain the "status quo", but has been criticised by the KMT for failing to give details of her policy.

Ma denied the island's sovereignty had been eroded under his leadership. He said: "The government's cross-strait policy is not biased towards mainland China while selling out Taiwan. Nor does it undermine our sovereignty." Tsai attended the National Day celebrations—the first DPP head to have done so. DPP legislator Tien Chiu-chin termed it as "a gesture of reconciliation" with the ruling party. Military fighter jets flew over the presidential office as part of the celebrations, leaving a trail of red, white and blue, while student groups and military bands paraded. — AFP