

NAGASAKI MARKS 71ST ATOMIC BOMBING ANNIVERSARY

TOKYO: The Japanese city of Nagasaki yesterday marked 71 years since its destruction by a US atomic bomb, with its mayor lauding a visit by US President Barack Obama to Hiroshima earlier this year. A bell tolled as thousands of people, including ageing survivors and relatives of victims, observed a minute's silence at 11:02 am, the exact moment of the blast.

Some 74,000 people died in the initial explosion, while thousands of others perished months or years later from radiation sickness. The attack came three days after the US dropped the first ever atomic bomb on Hiroshima, which ultimately killed 140,000 people.

Nagasaki Mayor Tomihisa Taue lauded Obama's landmark May visit to Hiroshima the first ever by a sitting US president.

"Knowing the facts becomes the start-

ing point for thinking about a future free of nuclear weapons," Taue said, calling on other world leaders to visit his city.

Local officials and those who survived the bombing called for strict adherence to Japan's post-war tradition of pacifism and were critical of the Japanese government. "The government of Japan, while advocating nuclear weapons abolition, still relies on nuclear deterrence," the mayor said, calling it a "contradictory state of affairs".

Toyokazu Ihara, 80, who survived the Nagasaki bombing, used his address to call for abolition of nuclear weapons and world peace.

"Nagasaki must be the last," he said, concluding his Japanese remarks with an English sentence intended for global citizens. Hiroshima mayor Kazumi Matsui on



NAGASAKI: People offer silent prayers for victims during a memorial ceremony to mark the anniversary of the atomic bombing, at the Peace Memorial Park in Nagasaki, western Japan yesterday. — AFP

Saturday marked the commemoration of the bombing of his city, also citing Obama's visit. He said the visit was proof of the "absolute evil" of nuclear weapons.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in his address in Nagasaki, called on world leaders to honor the global Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"We must not allow a repeat of the horrible experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that happened 71 years ago," Abe said. Abe has moved to extend the scope of Japan's military and deepen the nation's alliance with Washington in the face of threats from China's expanding military strength and unpredictable North Korea. North Korea last week test fired a ballistic missile that landed in waters off Japan's coast for the first time. — AFP

News

in brief

Iraq parliament lifts Speaker's immunity

BAGHDAD: Iraq's parliament yesterday voted to lift the immunity of its speaker and two lawmakers to allow for corruption allegations to be investigated. Speaker Salim Al-Juburi said in a statement that he had agreed to submit the lifting of his own immunity to a parliamentary vote. A majority of the 237 members in attendance subsequently voted to lift parliamentary immunity for Juburi and two others MPs, Mohammed al-Karbuli and Taleb Al-Maamari, a parliamentary official said. Juburi then testified before a judiciary commission in response to corruption allegations Defense Minister Khaled Al-Obeidi made publicly earlier this month, judiciary spokesman Abdelsattar Bayraqdar said in a statement. Juburi has denied the accusations against him, which Obeidi made while appearing in parliament to answer graft allegations he said were brought in retribution for his rejection of corruption. Corruption is widespread in Iraq's government, from senior officials to low-level functionaries, and while Iraqis have repeatedly demonstrated for change in the past year, little in the way of real reform has taken place.

MH370 plunged into ocean at high speed

SYDNEY: MH370 plunged into the ocean at high speed up to 20,000 feet a minute-reinforcing analysis that the missing Malaysia Airlines jet crashed in the current search zone, a report said yesterday. The Boeing 777 disappeared on March 8, 2014 en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 239 people onboard. An extensive underwater hunt in the southern Indian Ocean has not yet found the crash site, fuelling speculation it may be outside the current search zone, particularly if someone was at the controls at the end of the flight. A manned plane could have been glided down, allowing it to enter the water outside the 120,000 square kilometer area being searched, some experts have suggested. But extensive testing by aircraft manufacturer Boeing and new Australian defense department data analysis both suggest that regardless of the possible actions of one or both of the pilots-the jet dived into the ocean at high speed, The Australian reported.

US delivers \$50 m worth of assistance to Lebanon

BEIRUT: The United States has delivered \$50 million worth of military assistance to Lebanon's army to help it battle against Muslim extremists near the border with Syria. US Ambassador to Lebanon Elizabeth H Richard told reporters at Beirut's port that the latest assistance is in "an entire ship full of military equipment." A US Embassy statement said the shipment includes 50 armored Humvees, 40 Howitzers and over 1,000 tons of ammunition. The US has been speeding up delivery of ammunition to help Lebanon's military combat jihadi groups near the border with Syria. In March, Washington delivered three Huey II helicopters, raising to 10 the number of such US-made aircraft in Lebanon's fleet Washington has provided more than \$1 billion in military assistance to Lebanon since 2006.

Iran to auction property of a death row tycoon

TEHRAN: Iran said yesterday it would auction off property owned by billionaire Babak Zanjani, who was sentenced to death for corruption earlier this year. A number of luxury villas and apartments, shops and other properties will be sold, reported the Mizan Online newspaper, which is close to the judiciary. Bidders must make their offers in sealed envelopes by August 20, it added. Zanjani, 41, was sentenced to death for fraud and other financial crimes in March after a lengthy trial during which he was accused of fraudulently pocketing \$2.8 billion. He rose to prominence after the international community imposed sanctions on the Islamic republic's banks as punishment over its nuclear program.

Mali says 5 soldiers missing after attack

BAMAKO: At least five Malian soldiers have gone missing after an attack in the central Mopti region, where armed Islamic extremists are active, a military source said yesterday. The assailants struck "one of our positions on Monday between the locations of Tenenkou and Severe. We have no news of five of our soldiers," said the source, reached at the defense ministry. The source blamed the attack on Ansar Dine, a mainly Tuareg group that early in 2012 seized control of northern desert territory with two other movements, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The jihadists were ousted from major northern towns in a French-led military operation in 2013, but still launch attacks from desert hideouts.

Sudan rebels sign AU-brokered deal

KHARTOUM: Prominent Sudanese rebel groups said yesterday they have signed a roadmap brokered by African Union mediators to end deadly conflicts in Sudan's strife-torn Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan regions. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and millions displaced over the years in the three regions as ethnic minority groups rebelled against President Omar Al-Bashir's Arab-dominated government. While Khartoum representatives signed the roadmap at a previous round of talks in March in Addis Ababa, prominent rebel groups refused to come on board at the time. But on Monday they signed it in the Ethiopian capital.

PAKISTAN LAWYERS GO ON STRIKE AFTER DOZENS KILLED IN ATTACK

QUETTA ATTACK KILLS DOZENS OF LAWYERS

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani lawyers staged a nationwide strike yesterday after dozens of colleagues were slain in a suicide bombing that killed 74 people at a hospital in the southwestern city of Quetta. Medical staff said up to 60 of those killed in Monday's bombing at a government hospital were lawyers who had gathered to mourn the assassination earlier that day of the president of the Baluchistan Bar Association, Bilal Anwar Kasi. Yesterday morning, four of over one hundred people wounded, including two more lawyers, died in hospital, taking the toll to 74, said Abdul Rehman, the medical superintendent at the Civil Hospital Quetta.

Shops, businesses, schools and universities in the city and several other towns in the southern province of Baluchistan remained closed as the government announced three days of mourning. Islamic State was one of two Islamist militant groups to claim responsibility for the atrocity, although officials and analysts said they had doubts over whether the Middle East-based movement was behind the blast. It was the deadliest militant attack in Pakistan this year and the latest in a string of strikes on lawyers, seen by some militants as an extension of the state and so legitimate targets.

"How weak and pathetic are these people who target hospitals, where women and children, where patients, go to get treatment?" Ashtar Ausaf Ali, Pakistan's attorney general, said yesterday at a protest outside the Supreme Court in the capital Islamabad.

Supreme Court Bar President Ali Zafar called for the government to do more to protect lawyers. "Lawyers are relatively more vocal against militancy and they are fighting cases against people accused of terrorism, so it would make sense that they are being targeted," said Ali Malik, a Lahore-based lawyer.

"An attack on lawyers makes a mockery of the law enforcement agencies, it undermines the promises of the state against terrorists and breeds fear among vulnerable citizens."



ISLAMABAD: Pakistani lawyers shout slogans against the killing of their colleagues a day after suicide bombing at the Civil Hospital in Quetta, during a protest in Islamabad yesterday. — AFP

Doubts over claims

The bombing in Quetta, the provincial capital of Baluchistan province, was initially claimed by Jamaat-ur-Ahrar, a faction of the Pakistani Taleban that is fighting to overthrow the government and impose strict Islamic law. Later, however, Islamic State said one of its fighters carried out the attack, in what would mark an escalation in the ability of the group, or its regional offshoots, to strike in Pakistan. "A martyr from the Islamic State detonated his explosive belt at a gathering of justice ministry employees and Pakistani policemen in the city of Quetta," Islamic State's Amaq news agency reported.

Some Pakistani analysts were sceptical. "The ISIS claim seems very unconvincing," said Intiaz Gul, director of the Center for Research and Security Studies in Islamabad. "The claim of responsibility by

Jamaat-ur-Ahrar is more credible," said Muhammad Amir Rana, head of the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies. He noted that Jamaat had sworn loyalty to Islamic State's Middle East leadership in 2014, but later switched back to the Taleban. "Every time they have carried out an attack, they have taken responsibility independently (of Islamic State)," Rana said.

It remains unclear what ties, if any, Jamaat has to Islamic State, whose leadership is a rival to both the Taleban and Al-Qaeda over claims to represent the true Islamic Caliphate. In September 2014, Jamaat-ur-Ahrar rejected the Pakistani Taleban during a leadership struggle and swore allegiance to Islamic State, also known as Daesh. By March 2015, the group was again swearing loyalty to the main Pakistani Taleban. The reason for its return

to the fold remains murky, but Jamaat also never specifically disavowed Islamic State. Only last week, Jamaat was added to the United States' list of global terrorists, triggering sanctions.

Baluchistan, which borders Afghanistan, is home to many militant groups, most notably sectarian outfits who have launched a campaign of suicide bombings and assassinations of ethnic Hazaras - Persian-speaking Shiites who mostly emigrated from Afghanistan and are a small minority of the Shiite population in Sunni-majority Pakistan. "Many groups based in Baluchistan have an anti-Shiite agenda, so they find ideological linkages with ISIS," said a military official who was based in Quetta until 2015. "But is ISIS present there to a degree that they can carry out this kind of well-planned, pre-meditated attack? I don't think that is possible." — Reuters

AMBASSADOR TELLS UK: KEEP YOUR DOOR OPEN TO CHINA

LONDON: China has cautioned Britain against closing the door to Chinese money and said relations were at a crucial juncture after Prime Minister Theresa May delayed signing off on a \$24 billion nuclear power project. In China's sternest warning to date over May's surprise decision to review the building of Britain's first nuclear plant in decades, Beijing's ambassador to London said that Britain could face power shortages unless May approved the Franco-Chinese deal. "The China-UK relationship is at a crucial historical juncture. Mutual trust should be treasured even more," Liu Xiaoming wrote in the Financial Times. "I hope the UK will keep its door open to China and that the British government will continue to support Hinkley Point - and come to a decision as soon as possible so that the project can proceed smoothly."

The comments signal deep frustration in Beijing at May's move to delay, her most striking corporate intervention since winning power in the political turmoil which followed Britain's June 23 referendum to leave the European Union. Her decision indicates a much more cautious view of Chinese investment and a willingness to take a tough line with EU allies such as French President Francois Hollande. Cast as the jewel illustrating a new "Golden Era" of relations between China and Britain, the Hinkley financing deal was signed in Downing Street during a state visit to Britain by President Xi Jinping last year.

Golden era?

Under plans drawn up by former Prime Minister David Cameron, French utility EDF and China General Nuclear Power Corp would fund the cost of building two Areactor European Pressurized Water Reactors at the Hinkley C nuclear plant in Somerset, in southern England. Britain has committed to pay a minimum price for the power generated by the plant for 35 years, though critics said London had agreed to pay far too much.

Hinkley is seen as the frontrunner to closer ties with China on nuclear issues, paving the way for tens of billions of dollars of investment and another two nuclear power plants with Chinese involvement. Cameron raised some eyebrows with allies by pitching Britain as the pre-eminent gateway to the West for investment from China and made London the biggest

international trading centre for offshore yuan outside China. Britain is currently discussing an agreement for landmark financial services links, including a London-Shanghai stock connection.

In the comment published in the Financial Times yesterday, China's ambassador said Hinkley was not "some whimsical idea or rushed decision" and pointedly said that Chinese investment had flowed because both countries "respected and trusted each other." "If Britain's openness is a condition for bilateral co-operation, then mutual trust is the very foundation on which this is built," said Liu. Once Britain exits from the EU, London would need to clinch a new trade deal with China, whose \$11.3 trillion economy is currently more than four times as big as Britain's at \$2.4 trillion. Liu said Chinese companies had invested more in the United Kingdom than in Germany, France and Italy combined over the past five years.

Natural concerns

Since May won the top job, Britain has repeatedly said that it values its relationship with China and that it was natural for the incoming government to want to look at the plans in detail. "This decision is about a huge infrastructure project and it's right that the new government carefully considers it," a government spokesman said. "We co-operate with China on a broad range of areas from the global economy to international issues and we will continue to seek a strong relationship with China." But Nick Timothy, May's influential joint chief of staff, also said last year that security experts were worried the state-owned Chinese group would have access to computer systems that could allow it to shut down Britain's energy production.

"Rational concerns about national security are being swept to one side because of the desperate desire for Chinese trade and investment," Timothy wrote in October 2015 in a column for a conservative news and comment website. China was buying British silence on human rights, Timothy said, and stated that British security services thought China's spies were working against UK interests. "No amount of trade and investment should justify allowing a hostile state easy access to the country's critical national infrastructure," he said. A final decision on Hinkley is due in September. — Reuters

XI'S HERE TO STAY: JINPING TIPPED TO OUTSTAY TERM

BEIJING: Already China's most powerful leader in decades, President Xi Jinping will probably seek to extend his term to more than 10 years, analysts say, the first Communist Party chief to do so since Deng Xiaoping. The ruling party's leaders have reportedly gathered at their secretive annual Beidaihe retreat on the northern Chinese coast, where discussions are expected to focus on the composition of its next all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee (PSC).

The 19th Party Congress, slated for next year, will decide a new PSC line-up, traditionally seen as indicating Xi's most likely successor after he steps down, due in 2022. But Xi has thus far delayed anointing an heir. And while Chinese Communist leaders have often maintained influence after their official retirement, scholars and analysts increasingly believe Xi will try to stay in office beyond his standard term. "A lot of analysts now see it as a given" that Xi will seek to stay party general secretary, the country's most powerful post, said Christopher K Johnson, a former CIA analyst and now China specialist at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Willy Lam, expert on politics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said there was a 60 to 70 percent chance that Xi would refuse to give up the role. Doing so would violate the unofficial rule set by Deng Xiaoping, who led China from 1978-1989, that general secretaries stay in office no longer than 10 years. That principle has helped smooth transfers of power within the party since the 1990s. As well as ensuring regular renewal at the top, and opportunities for different Communist Party factions to dominate at different times, the concept also seeks to prevent the emergence of a despot.

'No heir apparent'

China's constitution sets term limits for presidents and ministers, but there is no such rule for the party secretary. Analysts say if Xi's close ally Wang Qishan, a PSC cadre who is due to retire, is allowed a sec-

ond term it could establish a precedent for the party chief. Xi has made his enduring ambition clear by installing himself as chairman of most of the powerful new groups within the party, said Victor Shih, professor at the University of California, San Diego. Doing so "increases the threshold for anyone to replace him," he said.



Chinese President Xi Jinping

"Moreover, there is no heir apparent now." Xi has already smashed several unwritten party rules since ascending to general secretary in 2012, Johnson noted. His anti-corruption drive felled the once hugely powerful security chief Zhou Yongkang, breaking the tacit understanding that former top leaders were immune to such campaigns-and giving him an incentive to stay in power. More time as president could allow Xi to follow through on long-promised reforms and bolster his more assertive foreign policy in the South China Sea, experts say. Xi's allies could argue a longer term would let him pursue his ambitious targets of national rejuvenation and doubling 2010 per capita income by 2020, in time for the 100th anniversary of the party's founding. — AFP