

ANGRY CHINA WARNS AGAINST 'CRADLE OF WAR' IN SEA

BEIJING: China warned rivals yesterday against turning the South China Sea into a "cradle of war" and threatened an air defense zone there, after its claims to the strategically vital waters were declared invalid. The surprisingly strong and sweeping ruling by a UN-backed tribunal in The Hague provided powerful diplomatic ammunition to the Philippines, which filed the challenge, and other claimants in their decades-long disputes with China over the resource-rich waters. China reacted furiously to Tuesday's decision, insisting it had historical rights over the sea while launching a volley of thinly veiled warnings at the United States and other critical nations.

"Do not turn the South China Sea into a cradle of war," vice foreign minister Liu Zhenmin told reporters in Beijing, as he described the ruling as waste paper. Liu also said China had "the right" to establish an air defense identification zone over the sea, which would give the Chinese military authority over foreign aircraft. A similar zone set up in 2013 in the East China Sea riled Japan, the United States and its allies. "Whether we need to set up one in the South China Sea depends on the level of threat we receive," he said. "We hope other countries will not take the chance to blackmail China."

'Confrontation'

The Chinese ambassador to the United States, Cui Tiankai, was even more blunt. "It will certainly intensify conflicts and even confrontation," Cui said in Washington on Tuesday. And the ruling Communist Party's mouthpiece, the People's Daily, said yesterday that China was prepared to take "all measures necessary" to protect its interests. China justifies its sovereignty claims by saying it was the first to have discovered, named and exploited the sea, and outlines its claims for most of the waterway using a vague map made up of

nine dashes that emerged in the 1940s. Those claims overlap with those of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan.

Manila, under previous president Benigno Aquino, launched the legal case in 2013 after China took control of Scarborough Shoal, a rich fishing ground within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone and far away from the nearest major Chinese landmass. China has also in recent years built giant artificial islands capable of hosting military installations and airstrips in the Spratlys archipelago, one of the biggest groups of features in the sea. Aside from stating that China's historical rights were without "legal basis", the tribunal ruled that its artificial island building and the blocking of Filipino fishermen at Scarborough Shoal were unlawful.

'Restraint, sobriety'

The Philippines, under new President Rodrigo Duterte, declined to celebrate the verdict. "We have to be magnanimous in victory," Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay told reporters in Manila yesterday. "In very delicate matters like this you cannot be provocative in statements. We urge everybody including China to exercise restraint and sobriety." Duterte has repeatedly said he wants to improve relations with China, which plummeted under Aquino because of the dispute, and that he would seek Chinese investment for major infrastructure projects such as a railway for the impoverished southern Philippines.

He is open to direct talks with China aimed at achieving a long-awaited code of conduct among rival claimants for the sea. China has long wanted to negotiate directly, and analysts said dialogue rather than conflict was the most likely scenario. Yet a military build-up in the sea continued. China launched naval drills in the northern areas before the verdict, while the US Pacific



In this file photo, the dilapidated Philippine Navy ship LT 57 Sierra Madre is in the shallow waters of Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea. — AP

Command said it had deployed an aircraft carrier for flights to support "security" in the sea. Taiwan, which was another loser in the verdict as its claims are very similar to those of China, sent a warship yesterday to the sea to protect its claims.

Indonesia also announced it would sharply strengthen security around its islands in the sea, where there have been clashes with Chinese vessels recently. China

used deadly force to seize control of the Paracel Islands from South Vietnam in 1974, and Johnson Reef from a united Vietnam in 1988. China faced immediate pressure to abide by the ruling from Western powers, which insist they have legitimate interests in the dispute because of the need to maintain "freedom of navigation" in waters that host more than \$5 trillion in shipping trade annually. — AFP

JAPAN EMPEROR INTENDS TO ABDICATE - 'IN A FEW YEARS'

IMPERIAL RESIGNATION UNPRECEDENTED IN MODERN JAPAN

TOKYO: Japanese Emperor Akihito, who has spent much of his time on the throne trying to heal the wounds of World War Two, intends to abdicate in a few years, public broadcaster NHK and other domestic media said yesterday, a step that would be unprecedented in modern Japan. The 82-year-old monarch, who has had heart surgery and been treated for prostate cancer in recent years, expressed his intention to the Imperial Household Agency, NHK said.

It did not cite a reason and officials at the agency could not immediately be reached for comment. Kyodo news agency, quoting a government source, said Akihito had been expressing his intention to abdicate to people around him for about a year, although in a separate report Kyodo quoted a senior Imperial Household Agency official as denying that the reports were correct.

Akihito has been cutting back on his official duties, handing over some of the burden to his heir, Crown Prince Naruhito, 56. Born in 1933, Akihito was heir to Emperor Hirohito, in whose name Japan fought World War Two. The soft-spoken Akihito marked the 70th anniversary of World War Two's end last year with an expression of "deep remorse", a departure from his previous remarks seen by some as an effort to cement a legacy of pacifism under threat from conservative Japanese nationalists.

"Looking back at the past, together with deep remorse over the war, I pray that this tragedy of war will not be repeated and together with the people express my deep condolences for those who fell in battle and in the ravages of war," he said. While Akihito's father was a controversial figure, Akihito "was the first post-war emperor to embrace the (pacifist) constitution and his role as a symbol of national unity," said Koichi Nakano, a political science professor at Sophia University in Tokyo. "He cares a great deal about war issues and reconciliation (with



TOKYO: Japanese Emperor Akihito waves to well-wishers who gathered for the annual New Year's greetings at the Imperial Palace in this file photo. — AFP

Asian countries). Naruhito has made clear that he will carry on with that," Nakano added.

Akihito has sought to deepen Japan's ties with the world through visits abroad. In 1992 he became the first Japanese monarch in living memory to visit China, where bitter memories of Japan's past military aggression run deep. Emperor Kokaku, who gave up the throne in 1817, was the last Japanese emperor to abdicate, NHK said. Miiko Kodama, a professor emerita at Musashi University, said the Imperial Household Law would need to be amended to allow Akihito to step down, a process that could

take time and debate in parliament.

A scientist by avocation, Akihito is the first royal heir to have married a commoner, Michiko Shoda, the daughter of a wealthy industrialist. Under the US-drafted, postwar constitution, Japan's emperor is "the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People", with no political power. Akihito's efforts to draw the imperial family closer to the people in image, if not in fact, have played into a carefully crafted picture of a "middle-class monarchy" that has helped shield it from the harsh criticism suffered by flashier royals abroad. — Reuters

SOUTH KOREA CONFIRMS ANTI-MISSILE SYSTEM SITE

SEOUL: Seoul said yesterday an advanced US missile defense system will be deployed in a remote southern county and will have the capacity to protect two thirds of the country against feared attacks from the North. The plan to deploy the powerful system, which fires projectiles to smash into enemy missiles, came last week after the United States placed North Korea's "Supreme Leader" Kim Jong-Un on its sanctions blacklist for the first time.

The move prompted objections from Russia and China, who accused Washington of flexing its military muscle in the region. Tensions have soared since Pyongyang carried out its fourth nuclear test in January, followed by a series of missile launches that analysts say show the North is making progress toward being able to strike the US mainland.

The Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, or THAAD, will be deployed in Seongju county about 200 kilometers southeast of Seoul, as agreed by US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter and his South Korean counterpart Han Min-Koo, according to the defense ministry in Seoul. The deployment will be completed by the end of next year and will be able to cover up to two thirds of South Korea from North Korean missiles. It will also protect key industrial facilities, including nuclear power plants and oil depots, the ministry added.

US military bases in the South will also be protected by the missile system, but Seoul and its surrounding areas will be left out. This could mean the military deploying more US Patriot anti-air and missile defense systems in these areas, Yonhap news agency

reported. There have been protests about the system's location, with residents fearing harmful economic and environmental effects. "We hope the people and residents in Seongju... render support" for the decision, the ministry said in a statement.

But thousands took to the streets yesterday in Seongju town, carrying banners reading "We absolutely oppose THAAD deployment", Yonhap news agency reported. The head of the county Kim Hang-Gon and some 10 others staged a hunger strike, cut their fingers and wrote slogans in blood on banners at yesterday's rally. "The THAAD deployment threatens the livelihood of the country's 45,000 residents, 60 percent of whom are engaged in watermelon agriculture", a group against the deployment said in a statement. North Korea threatened Monday to take "physical action" against the planned deployment of the powerful anti-missile system.

The move has also angered Beijing and Moscow, which both see it as a US bid to boost military might in the region. China on Friday said the move would "seriously damage" regional security in northeast Asia. The US and South Korea began talks on deploying the THAAD system to the Korean peninsula in February after the North fired a long-range rocket. South Korean authorities have scrambled to allay fears over possible trade retaliations from its largest trading partner China. Finance Minister Yoo Il-Ho told the National Assembly yesterday he believed China will separate politics from economic affairs and is not likely to hit the South with economic sanctions over missile system deployment. — AFP

GERMANY PLANS TO APOLOGIZE OVER 'GENOCIDE' IN NAMIBIA

BERLIN: Germany plans to formally apologize to Windhoek for the genocide of indigenous Namibians a century ago, a foreign ministry spokeswoman said yesterday, but added the move would not carry any obligation of reparations. "We are working towards a joint government declaration with the following elements: common discussions on the historical events and a German apology for the action in Namibia," the spokeswoman, Sawsan Chebli, told reporters.

The joint declaration with the Namibian government can serve as a basis for a parliamentary resolution, she said, adding however that the step would not translate into legal repercussions for Germany. "On the question of whether there could be reparations or legal consequences, there are none. The apology does not come with any consequences on how we deal with the history and portray it," she said. Berlin ruled what was then called South-West Africa as a colony from 1884 to 1915.

Incensed by German settlers stealing their land and cattle and taking their women, the Herero people launched a revolt in January 1904 with warriors butchering 123 German civilians over several days. The Nama tribe joined the uprising in 1905. The colonial rulers responded ruthlessly and General Lothar von Trotha signed a notorious extermination order against the Hereros.

Rounded up in prison camps, captured Namias and Hereros died from malnutrition and severe weather. Dozens were beheaded after their deaths and their skulls sent to German researchers in Berlin for "scientific" experiments. Up to 80,000 Hereros lived in Namibia when the uprising began. Afterwards, only 15,000 were left.

Germany has since 2011 formally handed back dozens of the skulls. But Berlin has repeatedly refused to pay reparations, saying that its hundreds of millions of euros (dollars) in development aid since Namibia's independence from South Africa in 1990 was "for the benefit of all Namibians". The speaker of the German parliament last July said the slaughter of indigenous Namibians a century ago constituted a "genocide" that stemmed from a "race war".

Norbert Lammert, writing in a guest column for news weekly Die Zeit, said the Herero and Nama peoples had been systematically targeted for massacre by German imperial troops. Since then, the government has also used the term, with Chebli yesterday also saying that "we have spoken of genocide for a long time." German lawmakers in June passed a resolution recognizing the World War I massacre of Armenians by Ottoman forces as genocide, drawing a furious rebuke from Turkey which called it a "historic mistake". — AFP

WIDER IMPACTS OF SOUTH CHINA SEA COURT RULING

MANILA: An international ruling striking down China's claims to most of the South China Sea was chiefly a victory for the Philippines, which launched the David v Goliath legal challenge. The verdict, by a UN-backed tribunal in The Hague on Tuesday, is meant to be legally binding on just those two countries. However it has wider ramifications for the region. Here are some key questions and answers on those impacts:

Who are the other winners?

The other nations with South China Sea coasts—Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Brunei. China claims it has sovereignty over waters almost reaching the coasts of Southeast Asian nations based on historical rights. It vaguely defined this area with a map of nine dashes. The tribunal ruled China had no historical rights and its nine-dash map had no legal basis. All those nations, not just the Philippines, can now argue in legal or diplomatic settings that China has no rights to their coastal waters.

Any other losers?

Taiwan. Its claims to most of the sea are very similar to China's, and are based on the same old maps. Taiwan also occupies the biggest land feature in the Spratlys archipelago, Itu Aba—also known as Taiping. President Tsai Ing-wen sent a warship to Taiping on Wednesday to "defend Taiwan's maritime territory".

US military presence

The United States is not a claimant but it has in recent years been sending warships and military aircraft to the disputed waters in a show of force that has angered China. The ruling will embolden the US, providing it with legal justification for a military presence it says is needed to ensure "freedom of navigation" in the sea.

ASEAN infighting

Probably not. The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian nations—which includes the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Brunei—have for more than a decade sought to broker an agreement with China to resolve the competing claims. But ASEAN unity has crumbled with member nations Cambodia and Laos supporting China. The South China Sea will once again be a top agenda item when ASEAN holds meetings of foreign ministers and leaders in Laos this year. But don't expect a

united ASEAN stance against China.

Wider implications

Yes. In an unrelated territorial row, Japan says it has exclusive economic rights in the Philippine Sea based on a small atoll it administers there called Okinotorishima. China, South Korea and Taiwan dispute this. Tuesday's ruling did not address this issue. But its pronouncement that similar small features in the South China Sea did not generate exclusive economic zones has led to concerns in Tokyo of legal action. — AFP



NANJING: Workers chat near a map of South China Sea on display at a maritime defense educational facility in Nanjing in east China's Jiangsu province. China blamed the Philippines for stirring up trouble and issued a policy paper yesterday calling the islands in the South China Sea its "inherent territory," a day after an international tribunal said China had no legal basis for its expansive claims. — AP