

## VIETNAM SAYS IT PREFERS BILATERAL TALKS WITH CHINA ON SCS

**VIENTIANE, Laos:** Vietnam aims to settle its territorial dispute with China in the South China Sea through bilateral negotiations even though it doesn't rule out applying international laws, as the Philippines did in its recent arbitration victory, the deputy foreign minister said yesterday.

"Our consistent policy is to settle disputes through peaceful means in accordance with national laws and United Nations (conventions and laws), and we attach quite (a lot of) importance to bilateral negotiations," Le Hoai Trung told The Associated Press. "For us, all means of peaceful settlement are important. All

means. So you can count (international arbitration) but we attach importance to bilateral negotiations," he said in the interview on the sidelines of a regional security meeting being hosted by Laos. "The important factor is you need to have the goodwill, and you need to base your claims on international law, the relevant international law," he said.

China claims almost all of the resource-rich South China Sea on historical grounds, overlapping with claims by the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei. Only Philippines has taken its dispute to The Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration, which ruled in its

favor earlier this month on the basis of the 1982 UN Conventions on the Laws of the Sea. China, however, does not attend the tribunal's authority over the matter and has rejected the ruling.

The ruling should embolden all claimants now that they know the international law does not favor China. Yet, the four Southeast Asian countries, which have little clout in the face of China's might, are reluctant to escalate tensions by internationalizing the dispute. At a meeting of the foreign ministers of 10 Southeast Asian nations on Sunday, even the Philippines was reluctant to have the grouping rebuke China,

and in several forums said its dispute had nothing to do with the region, according to diplomats who attended the closed-door meetings. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak with the media. The continuing conciliatory tone toward China was evident in Trung's comments.

"We should use everything that we have to promote friendship and promote negotiations. And not to look at it as who has won or who has lost. So, self-restraint. And try to move forward ... guided by constructive and positive spirit and work for friendship," he said.

China and Vietnam have had long-running territorial disputes in the Spratly Islands and the Paracels in the South China Sea. Tensions spiked in 2014 with a standoff after China moved a massive oil rig off the Paracels.

China is now Vietnam's largest trading partner and the Asian neighbors have since tried to mend ties by exchanging high-level visits although tensions remain over the islands. Trung said Vietnam has resolved several of its border issues with Cambodia, Laos, China and Malaysia through bilateral negotiations, and there is no reason why it can't resolve the South China Sea this way. —AP

## N KOREA WARNS US OF 'TERRIFYING PRICE' OVER NUKE TENSIONS

### AFTER US BLASTED PYONGYANG'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

**VIENTIANE, LAOS:** North Korea warned the United States yesterday that it will pay a "terrifying price" if the Korean Peninsula sinks into deeper tensions, stepping up its rhetoric hours after US Secretary of State John Kerry blasted Pyongyang for its nuclear program.

Kerry told a regional security conference being hosted by Laos that North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons - when the world is trying to rid itself of them - is "very provocative and deeply concerning." He urged the country to follow the lead of Iran, which hammered out a deal

to end its nuclear program in return for the lifting of sanctions.

However, North Korea was slapped with new UN sanctions in March, and Kerry urged the international community to fully enforce those and previous sanctions. In North Korea's typical fashion of unleashing rhetorical threats, its foreign minister, Ri Yong-ho, told the same conference, known as the ASEAN Regional Forum, that it is ready to face any sanctions and took them into account when it took the "inevitable strategic decision" to develop nuclear weapons to

counter the "never-ending nuclear blackmails of the US." North Korea says it needs nuclear weapons to cope with what it sees as US military threats. The United States stations about 28,500 troops in South Korea and regularly holds joint military drills with South Korea. Pyongyang has long demanded Washington withdraw its troops from South Korea and stop the joint drills, which it calls an invasion rehearsal.

"We are ready to show that even a (powerful) country will surely not be safe if it tries to torment and harm a small country," Ri said, according to the text of his speech released to the media. "The United States will have to pay dearly a terrifying price."

#### Crude nuclear devices

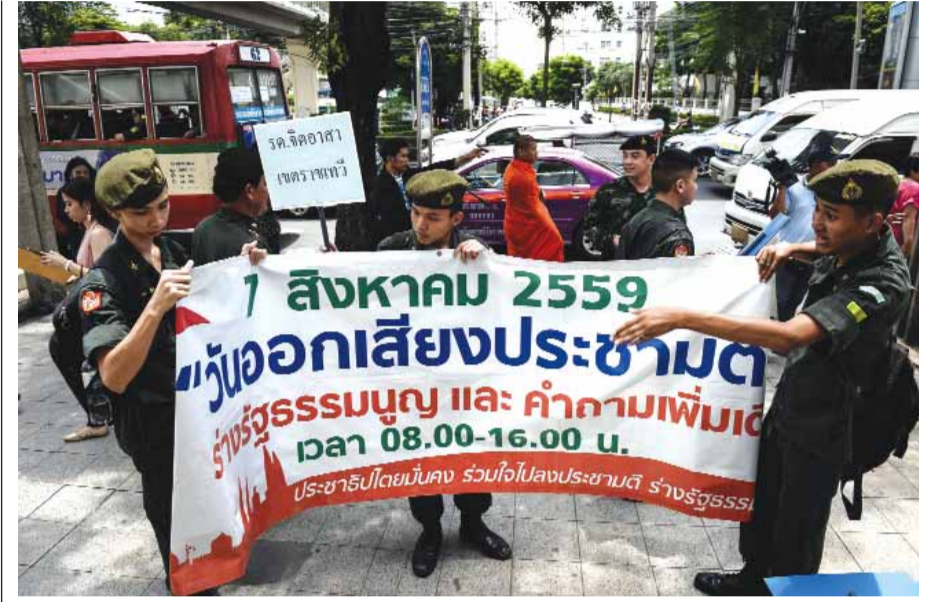
Some analysts say North Korea has developed a handful of crude nuclear devices and is working toward building a warhead small enough to mount on a long-range missile capable of reaching the continental US. However, South Korean defense officials say the North has neither such a miniaturized warhead nor a functioning intercontinental ballistic missile.

Kerry said if Iran can give up nuclear weapons so can North Korea. "But North Korea alone ... the only country in the world defying the international movement towards responsibility, continues to develop its own weapon, continues to develop its missiles, continues the provocative actions," he said.

"North Korea in January did another nuclear test. In February, March, April, May, continually they have done missile tests," he said. "So together we are determined, all of us assembled here - perhaps with one exception assembled here - to make absolutely certain the DPRK understands that there are real consequences for these actions." —AP



**VIENTIANE, LAOS:** North Korea Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho talks to reporters after a break during the 23rd Asean Regional meeting yesterday. —AP



**BANGKOK:** Students doing military service yesterday holding banners during a campaign encouraging the public to vote in the upcoming referendum on Thailand's draft constitution. This will head to the polls on August 7, 2016 for the first time in more than two years to cast votes in a junta-organized referendum fraught with controversy. —AFP

## CHINA-PHILIPPINES SHOULD 'TURN PAGE' ON SEA ROW: KERRY

**VIENTIANE:** The Philippines and China should "turn the page" and hold talks over contested areas of the South China Sea after a tribunal shot down Beijing's claims to the strategic waterway, US Secretary of State John Kerry said yesterday.

Relations between China and the Philippines hit a nadir earlier this month after Beijing refused to recognize a UN-backed ruling invalidating its claims to much of the sea. The Philippines, which says it owns areas claimed by China, took the case to a Hague-based tribunal for arbitration.

Kerry reiterated Washington's stance that the tribunal's decision to favor the Philippines was binding, but added that it was time to seek new ground. "I would encourage President Duterte to engage in dialogue, in negotiations," Kerry told reporters in Laos, referring to the tough-talking new Philippines leader.

Kerry is due to fly to Manila for talks with Duterte later yesterday. Kerry's call for fresh talks between Manila and Beijing comes at the request of his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. "The foreign minister said very clearly the time has come to move away from public tensions and turn the page," Kerry told reporters. "And we agree with that... no claimant should be acting

in a way that is provocative, no claimant should take steps that wind up raising tensions."

The two envoys met on the sidelines of a regional security forum of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that has been dogged by the issue of the South China Sea.

The Philippines had been expected to push for the bloc to support the tribunal ruling in a punchy joint-statement. But the bloc shied away from a diplomatic confrontation with China.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay told reporters that he supported that approach, describing the tribunal case as a dispute just between Beijing and Manila. "The other countries are not part of our filing of the case before the arbitral tribunal so why would we insist that it be put in the ASEAN statement," Yasay said.

ASEAN member states span communist autocracies such as Laos and Vietnam, the tiny Islamic sultanate of Brunei and populous democracies like Indonesia and the Philippines. It works on the basis of consensus diplomacy. But critics have slammed the grouping for failing to present a strong front against China's aggressive divide and rule policy among its neighbors. —AFP

## HONG KONG JOURNALISTS JAILED IN BEIJING

**BEIJING:** Two Hong Kong journalists have been jailed in China for running an "illegal business" that sent political magazines to the mainland, one of their lawyers said yesterday, as Beijing cracks down on press freedoms in the semi-autonomous territory. Publisher Wang Jianmin, 62, was jailed for five years and three months and editor-in-chief Guo Zhongxiao was given two years and three months by the court in Shenzhen, Wang's lawyer told AFP.

"The two both admitted guilt to the court and said they 'will not appeal,'" said Chen Nansha. The sentences come after five booksellers from Hong Kong whose publishing house was known for gossipy titles about Chinese political leaders went missing and resurfaced in the main-

land last year.

One of the five is still detained and another, who skipped bail and returned to Hong Kong, has revealed how he was blindfolded and interrogated for months during his detention. Wang and Guo's magazines are widely available in the former British colony, which has greater freedoms than the mainland under agreements signed with Britain during the 1997 handover.

The pair were detained in June 2014, when Shenzhen police said they were "operating an illegal publication". According to reports at the time of their trial in November, prosecutors said their Hong Kong-registered company National Affairs Limited had earned HK\$7 million (US\$900,000) from publications New

Way Monthly and Multiple Face.

But the defense insisted that only eight copies were sent to the mainland, all to friends of the publisher, the South China Morning Post said. Concerns are mounting about press freedoms in Hong Kong, where mass rallies in 2014 for fully free leadership elections failed to win political reform, and young campaigners are increasingly demanding more distance from Beijing. Although the city has the status of a special administrative region of China, the two have separate legal systems, distinct police jurisdictions and maintain strict border controls. Pro-democracy Hong Kong lawmaker Lee Cheuk-yan told AFP that the sentences imposed on the journalists were "a warning to anyone who

wants to do business in China especially in the area of publication—they will be subjected to suppression and censorship and if they are not following the party line, then they will be jailed."

Hong Kong's companies register shows that National Affairs Limited is a private firm registered in March 2007. Neither Wang nor Guo are listed as directors. Wily Lam, a China expert at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said the magazines—which covered Chinese politics—were printed in Hong Kong, then distributed in the mainland through unofficial networks.

"Beijing is sending an additional warning apart from the arrest of the Causeway Bay booksellers, not to play with fire," he said. —AFP

## CHINA JAILS COLOMBIAN MODEL FOR 15 YRS OVER DRUGS

**BEIJING:** An aspiring Colombian beauty queen has been convicted of drug smuggling by a Chinese court and sentenced to 15 years in jail, state-run media reported yesterday. Juliana Lopez Sarrazola, 23, was caught in possession of a laptop with 610 grams (1.3 pounds) of cocaine hidden inside at an airport in the southern city of Guangzhou in July last year, the Yangcheng Evening News said.

She was sentenced to 15 years in prison on Monday and will be expelled from the country once the term is served, according to the report, which described her as a model. Videos posted online show Sarrazola seeking a place in the 2014-15 Senorita Antioquia beauty contest, the winner of which has a chance to compete to represent Colombia at Miss World.

Sarrazola said she agreed to carry the drugs for a Colombian drug dealer, identified only as Sergio in the report, because she wanted to borrow money from him to attend the Miss World pageant, the newspaper said.

She was paid for her air tickets, hotel and \$776 in cash and the drug dealer agreed to reward her with a further \$2,500 if the scheme went through, it said.

The final of Miss World 2015 was held in Sanya in China's island province of Hainan. Sarrazola's lawyers appealed to the court for leniency on the grounds that Sergio threatened to kill her family if she refused to comply with his demands, the Nanfang Daily reported. Colombian authorities had previously said she could face death penalty if convicted. —AFP

## THAI RIGHTS ACTIVISTS CHARGED OVER REPORT ON ARMY TORTURE

**BANGKOK:** Three prominent Thai rights defenders were charged yesterday with criminal defamation over a rare report describing torture suffered by detainees in the restive south, police said.

Thailand's southern tip is a hotbed of violence, with more than 6,500 people—mostly civilians—killed in a 12-year insurgency by Muslim rebels against the Buddhist-majority state. But the near-daily shootings and bombs make few international headlines, and watchdog groups say rights abuses are frequent in the shadowy region governed for a decade by emergency laws. Three activists behind the landmark report on torture allegedly carried out by soldiers in the south are now facing jail time after the military charged them with defamation, which carries a two year prison sentence, and violating the computer crimes act, which carries three years.

Rights groups say both broadly-worded laws are routinely used by powerful interests to silence critics. "All three denied the charges and will submit written testimonies later," Winyou Tiamrat, the police officer handling the case in the southern province of Pattani, said of Pornpen Khongkachonkiet, Anchana Heemmina and Somchai Homlaor.

Their report, based on interviews with 54 former detainees, described a host of physical and mental torture tactics allegedly used by soldiers and police. Beatings, threats at gunpoint, sensory deprivation and partial suffocation were all routine during detention, the report said.

The military, which denied the report's allegations, has in the past admitted rights abuses but prosecutions of soldiers are extremely rare. The insurgents have also employed brutal tactics including shootings, beatings and bombings. Pornpen expressed fears her case would deter others from investigating the heavily-patrolled region and push victims of abuse back into the shadows. "We are trying hard to create a space for people (in the south) to express their grievances," she told AFP. — AFP



**VIENTIANE:** US Secretary of State John Kerry (R) talks with an aide as he attends the Regional Security Forum (ARF) on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) annual ministerial meeting yesterday. —AP

## US TELLS CHINA THAT ANTI MISSILE SYSTEM NOT A THREAT

**BEIJING:** South Korea's decision to deploy an advanced US anti-missile defense system does not threaten China's security, a senior US administration official said Wednesday at the end of a visit to China by US National Security Adviser Susan Rice.

The announcement by South Korea and the United States this month that they would deploy a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) unit has already drawn protests from China that it would destabilize regional security.

The decision is the latest move to squeeze increasingly isolated North Korea, but China worries the system's radar will be able to track its military capabilities. Russia also opposes the deployment. "It is purely a defensive measure. It is not aimed at any other party other than North Korea and the threat it poses and this defensive weapons system is neither designed nor capable of threatening China's security interests," the official told reporters on a conference call. South Korea and the United States have

said THAAD would only be used in defense against North Korean ballistic missiles. North Korea has launched a series of missiles in recent months, the latest last week when it fired three ballistic missiles in what it said was a simulated test of preemptive strikes against South Korean ports and airfields used by the US military.

The missiles flew 500-600 km (300-360 miles) into the sea off its east coast and could have hit anywhere in South Korea if the North intended, the South's military said.

North Korea came under the latest round of UN Security Council sanctions in March after its fourth nuclear test in January and the launch of a long-range rocket the following month.

Rice also emphasized the importance of all sides implementing UN sanctions on North Korea, and was pleased that China said it remained committed to their implementation, said the senior US official who declined to be identified. —Reuters

## SOUTH KOREA WARNS CITIZENS AGAINST ATTACK, ABDUCTION BY NORTH

**SEOUL:** South Korea warned its citizens in China and Southeast Asia yesterday of the risk of "dangerous acts" by North Korea after news reports said North Korea may have sent agents to those places to harm or abduct South Koreans.

South Korean Christian missionaries, journalists and North Korean defectors to the South could be prime targets, Sun Nahm-kook, a deputy spokesman for the South's foreign ministry, told a news briefing. "The government has stepped up monitoring over the possibility of dangerous acts by the North against our citizens and has strengthened security measures for the safety of our citizens," Sun said. The warning came after South Korean media said the North had sent teams of agents to China and Southeast Asia to harm or abduct

South Koreans in retaliation for the South's granting of asylum to workers from a restaurant run by the North in China. North Korea has accused the South of abducting the 12 waitresses and a male manager who worked at the restaurant and has demanded their return. The South has said the restaurant workers defected on their own free will.

South Korean embassies in China and Southeast Asia have urged citizens to be extra vigilant and to avoid contact with North Koreans, Sun said. South Korea's Yonhap news agency and YTN news channel reported on Tuesday that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un had sent more than 10 teams of agents to China and Southeast Asia to target South Koreans, quoting sources familiar with developments in the North. — Reuters