

PHILIPPINES' DUTERTE SAYS HE NEVER CURSED OBAMA

JAKARTA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said yesterday he told President Barack Obama during their encounter in Laos that he never cursed him. On a visit to Indonesia, Duterte told the Filipino community there that he told Obama: "President Obama, I'm President Duterte. I never made that statement, check it out." He said that Obama responded: "'My men will talk to you,' and he replied 'OK.'"

Duterte blamed the media for distorting his words, saying he did utter "son of a bitch" but it was not directed at Obama. Before traveling to Laos for regional summits, Duterte said Monday that Obama should not question him about the rising death toll in his war on drugs, which has been criticized abroad and by Duterte's opponents in the Philippines. More than 2,800 suspected drug dealers and users have

been killed since Duterte took office. Asked how he would explain the killings to Obama, he said in a long answer that the Philippines has long ceased to be a colony of the United States and he did not have a master except the Filipino people. "I do not care about him. Who is he?" Duterte said. "You must be respectful. Do not just throw questions and statements. Putang Ina, I will swear at you at that forum," he added, using the Tagalog phrase for "son of a bxxxh."

Obama then canceled a meeting with Duterte in Laos but the two met informally on Wednesday in a holding room before attending a gala dinner. Duterte, who assumed the presidency in June, has had an uneasy relationship with the US, his country's longtime treaty ally. He has said he is charting a foreign policy not

dependent on the US, and has moved to reduce tensions with China over rival territorial claims. He also said he showed a picture of an atrocity during the US pacification campaign in the southern Philippines at the beginning of the last century at the East Asia Summit in Laos that included Obama, in order to stop criticism over human rights violations in the war on illegal drugs. The photograph showed about 200 dead Filipino Moros stacked in a common pit, with an American soldier holding a rifle while stepping on the breasts of a naked Moro woman. He said he told the leaders, "This is human rights, what do you intend to do?" and "Human rights violations whether committed by Moses or Abraham, is still violation of human rights." The whole room was silent and he waited for Obama to respond but he remained quiet, Duterte said. — AP

HOW DOES ONE SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE N KOREA?

ANOTHER NUCLEAR TEST DRAWS GLOBAL OUTCRY

BEIJING: North Korea's fifth nuclear test is yet more evidence of how ineffective sanctions are in deterring Pyongyang while China is unwilling or unable to intervene, analysts say, with some arguing a new approach might be necessary—engagement. Since Pyongyang's first nuclear test sent tremors worldwide, it has been hit by five sets of United Nations sanctions over its atomic and missile programs.

The carrot has been tried as well as the stick, with offers of food aid if Pyongyang abandons its weapons. It has pursued them regardless, even as its own people have regularly suffered crippling food shortages over the years, under both Kim Jong-Il and his son and successor Kim Jong-Un. His rule—the third reign of the Kim dynasty—has seen former top officials executed, including his own uncle, and blood-curdling threats of war against the South and the US, interspersed with appeals for peace.

At the same time he has yet to visit Beijing to pay his respects to China's rulers, his country's key diplomatic protector and provider of trade and aid. Even so, and despite yesterday's new test, Beijing is unlikely "to opt for significantly greater pressure on the DPRK", said Bonnie Glaser, senior adviser for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington. China prefers "diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang that results in a peace treaty and an eventual decision by the DPRK to give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for economic assistance and US diplomatic recognition," she said.

Each successive test has been met with greater outrage and hand-wringing from the international community, to no avail. Washington has long pushed the Asian giant to up the pressure on its unruly neighbour, but it is not clear how rigorously Beijing has enforced sanctions and tensions between the world's top two economies have risen. Without Beijing's help, analysts agree, sanctions are a lost cause.

Yesterday's test "shows that our approach to North Korea has failed, we haven't managed to deter their nuclear ambitions," said Jenny Town, managing editor of 38 North, a website focusing on North Korea analysis. "Without China, this is a losing battle, we need cooperation and collaboration to find solutions," she said. John



South Korean amphibious vehicles fire smoke shells during a re-enactment of the Incheon landing to mark the 66th anniversary of the start of Operation Chromite, the battle that turned the tide in the Korean War, in the western port city of Incheon. — AFP

Carlson of the Lowy Institute in Sydney took a similar stance. "The only way to change the DPRK's behavior is to engage with it and see if there are incentives that can persuade it to freeze its nuclear and missile programs," he said. But prospects for engagement look dim. US President Barack Obama has his hands full with conflict in Syria, and South Korean president Park Geun-hye has held a hard line against the North.

Driving a wedge

While China has been increasingly frustrated by the North's defiance, Beijing fears both a flood of refugees if its neighbor is plunged into turmoil, and the presence of US troops on its border in a unified Korea. Relations have improved recently, with top North Korean party official and former foreign minister Ri Su Yong making a rare visit to China and meeting Xi in May—just months after Pyongyang's fourth nuclear test. The North may have even informed China of its intention to stage Friday's blast, said Adam Cathcart an expert on Sino-North Korean relations at the University of Leeds in the UK.

"North Korean diplomat Choe Son-hui went to Beijing on Tuesday, and slipped out sometime thereafter—it is quite possible that the purpose of that visit was to

privately inform Chinese comrades of the planned test," he said. A recent agreement between Washington and Seoul to station a missile defense system known as THAAD in the South has infuriated Beijing, which says the hardware poses a significant threat to regional security. "THAAD brought China and North Korea closer by driving a wedge between China and South Korea," said John Delury, a historian at Yonsei University in Seoul.

Beijing's foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said Friday that "unilateral" actions taken by "relevant parties" had made the situation "more tense and complicated", in remarks apparently directed at South Korea and the US. "To some degree, North Korea is using its nuclear plan to manipulate China's relationship with South Korea and the US," said Zhang Liangui, a professor at the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee school.

Without Chinese action, Cathcart said, "there is very little that can be done to retaliate or otherwise make the North Korean leadership feel more pain as a result of the test". "North Korea has done very thorough work in insulating itself from intrusive global systems generally, and the people are well accustomed to outside sanctions." — AFP

ON MAO ANNIVERSARY, XI MAKES NO MENTION

BEIJING: Chinese state media yesterday marked the 40th anniversary of the death of the founder of modern China, Mao Zedong, with articles praising him, but President Xi Jinping visited a school and did not mention the day. Mao, who died in 1976, remains a divisive figure. His image adorns banknotes and his embalmed body attracts hundreds, if not thousands, of visitors a day to Beijing.

While the ruling Communist Party has acknowledged Mao made mistakes, there has yet to be an official accounting for the chaos of the Cultural Revolution when Mao declared class war, or the millions of deaths from starvation during the 1958-61 Great Leap Forward, a failed attempt at rapid industrialization.

The Hunan Daily, the main party paper in Mao's home province in the south of China, carried a small article on its front page proclaiming "Chairman Mao, the people cherish your memory", but banished to its fifth page a longer article about him. The party's official People's Daily carried several pictures of him on its Weibo microblog along with a collection of some of his most well-known quotes and asked people to name their favorite. However it disabled the comments section.

Xi, who doubles as party and military chief, made no mention of Mao in his main activity for the day as reported by state media, going to a Beijing school ahead of China's Teachers Day, which falls today. While there he "underscored the importance of better basic education", according to Xinhua news agency, and watched students playing football, Xi's favorite sport. Xi suffered personally during the Cultural Revolution when his father was imprisoned. Xi was sent to the countryside to live with peasants, like millions of other urban Chinese youth.

Mao has become a potent symbol for leftists within and without the party who feel three decades of market-based reform have gone too far, creating social inequalities like poverty and graft. In lauding Mao, they sometimes seek to put pressure on the current leadership and its market-oriented policies. A day earlier, a small group of Mao fans attended the opening of a calligraphy and art exhibition about him in Beijing. "Chinese people, the broad masses of the Chinese people, in their hearts, have never forgotten Mao Zedong. They will remember him forever. And they still promote his principles," artist Yao Weidong told Reuters. "So if there are corrupt officials, we use Mao Zedong Thought to defeat them. We all remember very clearly. Most of us have not forgotten Chairman Mao." —Reuters