

International

South Korea, US mark 70th anniversary of Korean War

Tributes paid to the 'sacrifice, bravery' who laid down their lives

SEOUL: South Korea and the United States yesterday reaffirmed their commitment to defending "the hard-fought peace" on the divided peninsula as the allies marked the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War.

Communist North Korea invaded the US-backed South on June 25, 1950, triggering a three-year war that killed millions. The fighting ended with an armistice that was never replaced by a peace treaty, leaving the peninsula divided by the Demilitarized Zone and the two Koreas still technically at war.

"On this day in 1950, the US-ROK military alliance was born of necessity and forged in blood," US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper and his South Korean counterpart Jeong Kyeong-doo said in a joint statement. The two paid tribute to the "sacrifice, bravery, and legacy of those who laid down their lives in defence of a free, democratic, and prosperous" South, the statement read.

Seoul's defence ministry puts the war's military fatalities at 520,000 North Koreans, 137,000 Southern troops and 37,000 Americans.

The North has a different history of the conflict, which it knows as the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War, and insists that it was attacked first, before it counter-assaulted.

The official Rodong Sinmun newspaper carried more than 10 stories on the war yesterday, including an editorial asserting that a US invasion had

turned "the entire country into ashes".

"A ceasefire is not peace," it said. "The enemy is aiming for the moment that we forget about June 25 and lower our guard."

The nuclear-armed North, which is subject to multiple international sanctions over its banned weapons programmes, says it needs its arsenal to deter a US invasion.

Negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington have been deadlocked for months, leaving inter-Korean relations in a deep freeze despite a rapid rapprochement in 2018 that brought three summits between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and the South's President Moon Jae-in.

The Rodong Sinmun carried a picture of a war heroes' cemetery on the outskirts of Pyongyang, with the caption reading: "The great achievements of the victory generation will not be forgotten."

White doves

At the site of one of the key battlefields in Cheorwon county, near the Demilitarized Zone dividing the peninsula, a handful of surviving South Korean war veterans marked the anniversary.

"It is our misfortune that the South and North had to live for nearly 70 years in confrontation because of the war," a veteran said, before releasing white doves as a symbol of their hopes for a final peace settlement.

Kim on Wednesday suspended plans for mili-



CHEORWON: Korean War veterans salute before a monument during a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the start of the Korean War at the Baengmagoji War Memorial in Cheorwon, near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating north and south Korea. —AFP

tary moves aimed at the South, after the North raised tensions last week by demolishing a liaison office on its side of the border that symbolised inter-Korean cooperation.

Recent events showed that inter-Korean relations "can turn into a house of cards at any time", the South's JoongAng Daily said in an editorial yesterday on the anniversary.

The South Korean government has "persistently turned a blind eye" to Pyongyang's provocations, it said, resulting in a "slackening sense of security".

"There is no free ride in keeping peace," the editorial read, adding: "We hope the government and defence ministry deeply reflect on the lesson of 70 years ago." —AFP

Chinese veterans of Korean War urge peace

SHANGHAI: Chinese army veteran Yu Jihua faced the United States on the battlefield in the Korean War and the 87-year-old has no wish to see a repeat as tensions rise again between the nuclear-armed superpowers.

The 1950-53 conflict broke out 70 years ago yesterday and just a few months later would see Chinese and US forces engaged in combat for the first time. The two giants are deeply at odds again today over a range of trade and geopolitical issues, and no one is more sensitive to that than Yu, who still suffers night terrors from the war. "If a war is started, people all over the world will suffer," he warns. Yu was a teenager when he was among a "human wave" of Chinese soldiers thrust into battle to prevent ally North Korea collapsing in the face of a militarily superior American-led UN coalition. They turned the tide, sending UN forces retreating southwards, and the brutal fighting ended with no formal peace treaty.

South and North Korea are still technically at war. Up to three million Koreans died, along with 37,000 Americans. Chinese casualty figures are disputed but Western estimates commonly cite 400,000 dead, while Chinese sources put it at about 180,000. "We must all cooperate and then the whole world will be happy," says Yu. He and fellow veterans of China's so-called volunteer army are marking the anniversary with calls for peace. —AFP

Beijing officials declare outbreak 'under control'

BEIJING: The new coronavirus outbreak that has infected 256 people in Beijing since early June is "under control", officials in the Chinese capital said Wednesday, but fears still remain over the risk of community transmission.

Authorities have raced to contain the outbreak linked to the largest wholesale food market in Beijing after the first case was announced on June 11, leading to a partial lockdown of the city.

"The Beijing epidemic directly linked to Xinfadi (market) is basically under control, but at the same time we have discovered household and workplace cluster infections and cases of community transmission," said Beijing municipal government spokesman Xu Hejian at a briefing.

"The prevention and control situation remains complicated, we cannot lower our guard in the slightest."

Officials found that 253 out of 256 Beijing cases were linked to Xinfadi in the south of the city, while contact tracing for the remaining three was still ongoing.

The city announced seven new cases on Wednesday, with the rate of infection slowing since the start of this week.

"This sends a very positive signal, and proves that the prevention and control measures taken lately, as well as lockdown of residential compounds, are effective," said Lei Haichao, head of the Beijing health commission.

"The combination of fever clinics, discovering (cases) from close contacts, and mass nucleic acid testing have played an important role in early detection."

The city increased its daily nucleic acid sample testing capacity to 300,000 from 100,000 per day in early June, said Lei, adding that 137 cases — just over half — were found through screening.

Nearly three million people have been tested. Many cases have been low-income migrant workers at Xinfadi and nearby restaurants. The market and dozens of residential compounds have been under lockdown since June 13.

Beijing has mass-tested wholesale market workers, restaurant workers, residents of medium and high-risk neighbourhoods and delivery couriers over the past week.

The cities of Wuhan, where the initial COVID outbreak emerged late last year, and Mudanjiang have also seen similar mass testing campaigns to root out undiscovered asymptomatic cases.

Experts warned that smaller, recurrent outbreaks were likely in future.

"There may be an increase in cases in the winter or next spring, but I don't think the outbreak will be as big as the first wave of the pandemic," said Zhong Nanshan, a leading respiratory expert who spearheaded China's response to the SARS pandemic. —AFP