

TERRITORIAL ROW WITH INDIA, BHUTAN

China's 'coercive' tactics evident in its claims

Says Pentagon, reports Beijing's push to double its nuke warhead arsenal

AGENCIES

China has been using coercive tactics in pursuit of territorial and maritime claims in the South and East China Seas, as well as along its border with India and Bhutan, the Pentagon has said.

China is engaged in hotly contested territorial disputes in both the South China Sea and the East China Sea. Beijing has built up and militarised many of the islands and reefs it controls in the region. Both areas are stated to be rich in minerals, oil and other natural resources and are vital to global trade.

China claims almost all of the South China Sea. Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims over the area.

"China's leaders use tactics short of armed conflict to pursue China's objectives. China calibrates its coercive activities to fall below the threshold of provoking armed conflict with the United States, its allies and partners, or others in the Indo-Pacific region," the Pentagon said in its annual report on China to the Congress.

China has been fast expanding military and economic influence in the Indo-Pacific region, triggering concern in various

countries of the region and beyond.

"These tactics are particularly evident in China's pursuit of its territorial and maritime claims in the South and East China Seas as well as along its border with India and Bhutan," said the report titled "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020" that was released by the Pentagon.

"Tensions with India persist along the northeastern border near the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China asserts is part of Tibet and therefore part of China, and near the Aksai Chin region at the western end of the Tibetan Plateau," the Pentagon said in its report to the Congress.

The report, however, makes no mention of the latest stand-off between India and China in Ladakh.

The report also said that the Chinese military was pressing to double its 200-plus nuclear warheads within a decade with the ability to launch them aboard ballistic missiles by land, sea and air. A Pentagon official said that although China remains far behind the US in terms of nuclear warheads, the acceleration shows Beijing moving from its traditional "minimum deterrence posture" to full-fledged competition.



The aerial photo shows an area of Amazon rainforest reserve burning south of Novo Progresso, in Para state, Brazil. Despite guarantees from President Jair Bolsonaro's government that it is acting to curb the destruction of world's largest rainforest, there were 29,307 fires in the Brazilian Amazon last month, just 5.2 percent lower than August 2019, official figures showed Tuesday. Fires meanwhile tripled year-on-year in the Pantanal, the world's largest tropical wetlands, according to data based on satellite images from Brazil's national space agency, causing alarm on a new front. Photo was taken on August 16, 2020.

PHOTO: AFP

DEVELOPING COVID-19 VACCINE

US refuses to join WHO's effort

AGENCIES

The Trump administration said Tuesday that it will not work with an international cooperative effort to develop and distribute a Covid-19 vaccine because it does not want to be constrained by multilateral groups like the World Health Organization.

The decision to go it alone, first reported by The Washington Post, follows the White House's decision in early July to pull the United States out of the WHO. Trump claims the WHO is in need of reform and is heavily influenced by China.

Some nations have worked directly to secure supplies of vaccine, but others are pooling efforts to ensure success against a disease that has no geographical boundaries. More than 150 countries are setting up the Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility, or COVAX.

That cooperative effort, linked with the WHO, would allow nations to take advantage of a portfolio of potential vaccines to ensure their citizens are quickly covered by whichever ones are deemed effective, reports AP.

The WHO says even governments making deals with individual vaccine makers would benefit from joining COVAX because it would provide



China to allow some int'l flights into Beijing
India's case tally nears 3.8m as country reopens
Pakistan puzzles health experts as virus cases drop

backup vaccines in case the ones being made through bilateral deals with manufacturers aren't successful.

"The United States will continue to engage our international partners to ensure we defeat this virus, but we will not be constrained by multilateral organizations influenced by the corrupt World Health Organization and China," said White House spokesman Judd Deere.

The virus emerged late last year in China and has now infected more than 25.7 million people

globally and killed almost 858,000.

After a freeze of more than five months, China is poised to resume direct international flights to Beijing from several countries with low rates of the deadly coronavirus, aviation authorities said.

The new rules will apply from today to flights from Thailand, Cambodia, Pakistan, Greece, Denmark, Austria, Sweden and Canada, all with low numbers of imported cases of the virus which has hammered global travel, reports AFP.

In India, coronavirus infections rose to almost 3.8 million yesterday, as states continued to relax rules on movement despite the surge in cases. The country reported 78,357 new cases in the past 24 hours, according to federal health data, taking total infections to 3,769,523. Some 66,333 people have died.

Six months after the coronavirus arrived in Pakistan, the country appears to have dodged the worst of the pandemic, baffling health experts and dampening fears its crowded urban areas and ramshackle hospitals will be overrun.

Following an initial surge, the number of infections has plummeted in recent weeks, with Covid-19 deaths hovering in the single digits each day.

Putin critic Navalny poisoned with Novichok nerve agent

Says Germany; demands explanations from Moscow

AFP, Berlin

Tests carried out on Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny showed that he was poisoned by a Novichok chemical nerve agent, the German government said yesterday, demanding explanations from Moscow.

"It is a shocking event that Alexei Navalny has become the victim of an attack with a chemical nerve agent in Russia," said government spokesman Steffen Seibert in a statement.

"The government condemns this attack in the strongest terms. The Russian government is urgently requested to provide clarifications over the incident."

Tests carried out by the German army in consultation with the Charite hospital in Berlin, where Navalny is being treated, had found "unequivocal evidence of a chemical nerve agent from the Novichok family," Seibert said.



Navalny, 44, fell ill after boarding a plane in Siberia last month. He was initially treated in a local hospital before being flown to Berlin for treatment.

The Charite hospital has reported "some improvement" in Navalny's condition but he nevertheless remains in a medically induced coma and on a ventilator.

The case has drawn parallels with two suspected Kremlin-linked poisonings in Britain. In 2006, President Vladimir Putin was blamed for the radiation poisoning death of former KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko in the British capital.

In 2018, the Kremlin was also accused of being behind the attempted murder of ex-double agent Sergei Skripal in Salisbury, England, using a Novichok nerve agent.

The German government said it would inform Nato and EU partners over its findings and seek a joint reaction on the case.



US President Donald Trump talks with local people while examining property damage to a Kenosha business in the aftermath of recent protests against police brutality and racial injustice and ensuing violence after the shooting of Jacob Blake by a police officer in Kenosha, Wisconsin, US, on Tuesday. During the visit, Trump said the recent violent demonstrations in the city were acts of "domestic terror" committed by violent mobs.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Trial of Charlie Hebdo attack accomplices begins

REUTERS, Paris

Fourteen alleged accomplices to the Islamist gunmen who attacked the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in 2015 went on trial on Wednesday, as the country recalled a dark episode that marked the onset of a wave of militant violence.

On Jan. 7, 2015, Said and Cherif Kouachi, armed with automatic weapons, went on the rampage in the offices of Charlie Hebdo, whose satire on race, religion and politics tested the limits of what society would accept in the name of free speech. They killed 12 people in an attack claimed by al-Qaeda.

The next day, Amedy Coulibaly, an acquaintance of Cherif Kouachi, shot dead a female police officer. On Jan 9, he killed four Jewish men at a kosher supermarket. In a video, he said he acted in the name of Islamic State.

The three were killed by police in different stand-offs.

Eleven of the 14 defendants appeared in courtroom and told the presiding judge they would answer the court's questions. Three are being tried in absentia.

The defendants face charges ranging from supplying weapons and logistical help to financing terrorism and membership of a terrorist organisation.

More than 250 people have been killed in France in Islamist violence since the attacks, which laid bare France's struggle to counter the threat of homegrown militants and foreign jihadists.

Meanwhile, Charlie Hebdo re-ran a series of cartoons yesterday depicting a very sensitive topic for Muslims that triggered the 2015 attacks.

Charlie Hebdo's no-taboo journalism has for years divided France. Egypt's highest Muslim authority Al-Azhar, Pakistan condemned the decision. Christophe Deloire, head of global media watchdog Reporters Without Borders, said it was an act of courage and a rejection of intimidation.

President Emmanuel Macron said France would remember those killed. "Satire is not a discourse of hate," the president told a news conference in Beirut.

End of a dynasty?

Joe Kennedy defeated in US Senate primary

AFP, Boston

Congressman Joe Kennedy, long seen as a rising star, crashed to defeat Tuesday in his bid for a US Senate seat, the first time the storied American political dynasty lost a state election in Massachusetts.

Incumbent Senator Ed Markey, a political veteran who re-cast himself as the fiery liberal in the race, harnessed the state's progressive energy to handily turn back a primary challenge from Joseph Kennedy III, the grandnephew of assassinated president John F Kennedy.

The 39-year-old Kennedy said he called Markey "to congratulate him and to pledge my support" in the months ahead.

Since he is not allowed to be on the ballot as a candidate for both the House and Senate, Kennedy is not running for re-election to his House seat. Come January, there will be no one from the Kennedy clan in elected office.

The grandson of slain attorney general Robert F Kennedy is part of the family's fourth generation to carry the political torch, entering the House of Representatives in 2013.

"Every race I've ever run, I've made it clear it's me on the ballot," Kennedy told AFP as he stumped for 11th-hour votes Tuesday in Boston.

For the Kennedy clan, there was much on the line. For all but two years since 1947 -- nearly a third of the history of the United States -- a Kennedy has served in elected office.

They are the quintessential American dynasty, one of the closest things the country has to royalty.

Like his presidential great-uncle, the lanky, red-haired Kennedy ran on the promise of a new generation.

And he had received the rare endorsement of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who in 2018 appointed him to deliver the Democratic response to President Donald Trump's State of the Union speech.

New book reveals icy ties between Melania and Ivanka

AFP, New York

A new book released Tuesday dishes on the supposed icy relationship between Melania Trump and her stepdaughter Ivanka, fuel for gossips eager to speculate about first family rivalries.

Author Stephanie Winston Wolkoff says she was once a friend of the president's third wife, also acting as an advisor until 2018 when she fell out of favor after reporting revealed colossal spending on Donald Trump's inauguration, which she played a key role in organizing.

Anecdotes fill the 351-page book "Melania and Me: The Rise and Fall of My Friendship With the First Lady," purporting to lift the veil off the ex-model of Slovenian origin.

Often portrayed as enigmatic, Melania's pouty pursed lips are dissected on social media and at one point the slogan #FreeMelania painted her as the victim of a difficult husband.

Winston Wolkoff, a former Vogue events organizer, describes a much more aggressive figure, notably detailing

how she and Melania choreographed every minute detail of the inauguration -- and prevented Ivanka from appearing in key photos of the ceremony.

The 50-year-old first lady allegedly nicknamed her 38-year-old daughter-in-law "princess," calling her and her husband Jared Kushner "snakes."

The book also leads readers to believe that Melania -- who caused a stir in 2018 after wearing a jacket with the message "I really don't care, do u?" scrawled on the back to visit a child migrant detention center -- might influence certain White House decisions.

The first lady's spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham has dubbed the book "wildly self-aggrandizing" revenge from a woman who joined the ranks of the president's enemies.

But as campaign season heats up, the book appears a likely hit.

Its release comes days after Melania and Ivanka exchanged what appeared to be an icy stare at the Republican Convention where the president formally accepted the nomination to run for a second term.



NEWS IN BRIEF

Japan's Suga announces PM run with strong party backing

Japan's chief cabinet secretary Yoshihide Suga formally announced his bid to become the country's next prime minister yesterday, with growing party support making him the race's clear favourite. Suga unveiled his candidacy following days of speculation about his plans and shortly after the ruling Liberal Democratic Party set a September 14 vote on Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's successor. A parliamentary vote will follow two days later, with lawmakers expected to endorse the new LDP leader as prime minister. He won't run unchallenged, with former defence minister Shigeru Ishiba and LDP policy chief Fumio Kishida already announcing they will stand.

All commitments met for Taliban peace talks: Afghan president

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani yesterday said that the government had met all of its commitments for peace talks with the Taliban, as a team left for Qatar to prepare for negotiations.

Ghani's remarks came after Kabul broke an impasse with the insurgent group on Monday by resuming a protracted prisoner exchange, a key hurdle to long-delayed negotiations between the two sides opening in Doha. Kabul had balked at the release of the final 400 Taliban inmates who Ghani described as "a danger to the world", before a group of prominent Afghans approved their release for the sake of peace talks. Ghani's comment suggests that the government pledge has been met. The prisoner exchange was agreed in a deal between the Taliban and the United States in February, which said Kabul should release 5,000 militants in return for the Taliban freeing 1,000 Afghan troops.

Notorious Khmer Rouge prison commander dead at 77

The Khmer Rouge commander known as 'Comrade Duch', Pol Pot's premier executioner and security chief who oversaw the mass murder of at least 14,000 Cambodians at the notorious Tuol Sleng prison, died yesterday. He was 77. Kaing Guek Eav or 'Comrade Duch' was the first member of the Khmer Rouge leadership to face trial for his role within a regime blamed for at least 1.7 million deaths in the "killing fields" of Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. Duch died at 00:52 am at the Khmer Soviet Friendship Hospital in Phnom Penh, Khmer Rouge tribunal spokesman Neth Pheaktra said. He gave no details of the cause, but Duch had been ill in recent years. In 2010, a UN tribunal found him guilty of mass murder, torture and crimes against humanity at Tuol Sleng prison, the former Phnom Penh high school which still stands as a memorial to the atrocities committed inside. He was given a life sentence two years later after his appeal that he was just a junior official following orders was rejected. Duch - by the time of his trial a born-again Christian - expressed regret for his crimes.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS