

US stands by Japan angering China

Beijing cries foul after Hillary's veiled threat over territorial row

AFP, Beijing

Veiled US warnings to Beijing not to challenge Japan's control of disputed islands encouraged Tokyo's "dangerously right-leaning" government and "betrayed" Washington's vow of neutrality, Chinese state media said yesterday.

The comments came as Japan's

ISLAND ROW

coastguard said three Chinese government ships had entered Japanese territorial waters around the islands, known as the Senkaku in Japanese and the Diaoyu in Chinese.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Friday said the area around the islands in the East China Sea was under Japan's control and therefore protected under a US security treaty with Tokyo.

Speaking at a joint news conference with Japanese Foreign



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida speak to the press following talks at the State Department in Washington, DC on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Minister Fumio Kishida in Washington, and without mentioning Beijing directly, she said the US opposed "any unilateral actions" to undermine Japanese authority over the islands.

But in a commentary piece, the official Chinese news agency Xinhua criticised Washington's position, saying it "cast doubts on (US) credibility as a responsible

power in the region".

It was "unwise" for Washington "to throw support behind Japan in Tokyo's islands dispute with Beijing", Xinhua said, adding: "This unbalanced position has betrayed its declared intention to stay neutral on the issue."

The US proposal for "tighter military alliance with Japan will only encourage Tokyo's danger-

ously right-leaning tendency", Xinhua said.

But Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang was quoted by the agency as saying that Beijing "has always advocated to resolve issues between relevant countries through bilateral dialogue and by peaceful means".

The United States insists it is neutral on the ultimate sovereignty of the islands.

"We want to see China and Japan resolve this matter peacefully through dialogue," Clinton said Friday.

"We do not want to see any action taken by anyone that could raise tensions or result in miscalculation that would undermine the peace, security and economic growth in this region."

China has persistently criticised the US position and the sending of maritime surveillance ships to the potentially gas-rich area is seen by experts as a way to contest the notion that Japan holds effective control.

US, China agree on N Korea sanctions

AFP, United Nations

The United States and China have made a deal under which the UN Security Council will expand existing sanctions against North Korea for staging a ballistic missile test, envoys said Friday.

The deal was struck after weeks of intense negotiations following the December 12 launch. The talks have involved US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi, according to envoys.

China wants to shield its ally against new action on top of sanctions ordered after its nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009. US and Chinese diplomats made no immediate comment on the negotiations.

140 countries adopt Mercury treaty

AFP, Geneva

Delegations from some 140 countries have agreed to adopt a groundbreaking treaty limiting the use of health-hazardous mercury, the Swiss foreign ministry said yesterday.

The world's first legally binding treaty on mercury, reached after a week of thorny talks, will aim to reduce global emission levels of the toxic heavy metal also known as quicksilver, which poses risks to human health and the environment.

Countries will be asked to sign the treaty next October in Minamata, Japan, in honour of the town's inhabitants who for decades have suffered the consequences of serious mercury contamination, a statement said.

Mercury is found in products ranging from electrical switches to thermometers to light-bulbs, to amalgam dental fillings and even facial creams, and large amounts of the heavy metal are released from small-scale gold mining, coal-burning power plants, metal smelters and cement production.

Serious mercury poisoning affects the body's immune system and can lead to problems including psychological disorders, loss of teeth and problems with the digestive, cardiovascular and respiratory tracts.

Rahul appointed as Congress VP

Call grows within party for his PM candidacy in coming polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Rahul Gandhi was formally elevated to the number two position in India's ruling Congress party yesterday after being appointed its vice-president, but his role in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls would be decided later.

The anointment of the 42-year-old leader nine years after he entered politics was formalised at the meeting of the party's highest policy making body, the Congress working committee (CWC), which unanimously adopted a resolution for this moved by defence minister AK Antony.

The decision ends prolonged speculation about a bigger role for Rahul, so far one of the 11 general secretaries of the Congress. The speculation focussed on the possibility of his being made working president or secretary general of the party.



It was clear that the party has stopped short of naming Rahul either as its face in the 2014 polls or as its prime ministerial candidate, obviously, giving itself time to see how the political scenario pans out in the run up to the polls.

But Oil Minister Veerappa Moily hailed Gandhi as the country's leader for the "present and for the future" at a meeting of the party in the tourist city of Jaipur in northern India aimed at brainstorming for the 2014 elections.

Another veteran Congress member, Mani Shankar Aiyar, said the party would back Gandhi, whose father, grandmother and great-grandfather all led India, should he decide to accept a bigger role.

Calls for Gandhi to take a greater role within the party have become louder in recent months, especially in the wake of reverses suffered by the Congress-led government in some of its traditional strongholds.

Flu epidemic kills 29 US children

AFP, Washington

A flu epidemic gripping the United States is more severe than usual, striking the elderly especially hard, health authorities said Friday as they also announced 29 child victims.

With the nation only about halfway through the season, complications are likely to worsen for those who caught the flu, said Tom Frieden, chief of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



PHOTO: AFP

A still image broadcast by Algeria's Ennahar TV yesterday shows hostages surrendering to Islamist gunmen who overtook a gas facility in Tiguentourine near In Amenas in the south of the country. Islamists killed all seven of their remaining foreign captives before being gunned down at a gas plant in the Algerian desert, state media said, ending one of the bloodiest international hostage crises in years.

MALI CRISIS AU leaders call for more global involvement

AFP, Abidjan

West African leaders yesterday called for greater international involvement in Mali as they met to speed up the deployment of regional troops to boost a French-backed offensive to halt an Islamist onslaught.

The emergency summit in Ivory Coast's main city Abidjan was also attended by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius who clearly said it was time for the Africans to take over and "as soon as possible", adding that this was "the aim of our meeting."

"France was obliged to intervene very, very rapidly, otherwise there would have been no more Mali," Fabius said on his arrival in Abidjan. "But it is well understood that it is the Africans that must pick up the baton."

France said Saturday it had 2,000 of the 2,500 troops it had pledged on the ground in Mali, amid fears that the vast arid north

which the rebels control could become a haven for Islamist militants and threaten security both in the region and overseas.

Ivory Coast President Alassane Ouattara, who is also current head of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional bloc, said it was high time other countries did their bit in Mali.

"The hour has come for a broader commitment by the major powers and more countries and organisations to the military operations to show greater solidarity with France and Africa in the total and multi-faceted war against terrorism in Mali," said Ouattara at the start of the meeting.

Malian soldiers, backed by French troops and air power, retook the key central town of Konna on Thursday from Al-Qaeda-linked rebels who had swooped down more than a week ago from their northern stronghold and threatened the capital Bamako.

POST-MUBARAK CLASHES

Egypt drops hundreds of charges

REUTERS, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday dismissed cases against 379 people accused of involvement in clashes with police during protests near the Interior Ministry in November 2011 in which 42 demonstrators were killed.

The decision was based on President Mohamed Morsi's offer of an amnesty for those facing charges related to events during and after the 2011 uprising.

Cairo and other cities saw many violent protests against the army rulers who took over interim power after Mubarak was ousted on February 11, 2011.



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