

# China will react if necessary: Xi

REUTERS, Shanghai

Chinese President Xi Jinping has vowed not to stir up trouble in the South China Sea but said China would react "in the necessary way" to provocations by other countries, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

The comments come at a time of deep tension between China and Vietnam over Beijing's decision in early May to move an oil rig into disputed waters between the Paracel islands and the Vietnamese coast.

Days after China deployed the rig, the Philippines accused Beijing of reclaiming land on a disputed reef in the Spratlys to build what would be its first airstrip in the South China Sea.

"We will never stir up trouble, but will react in the necessary way to the provocations of countries involved," Xinhua quoted Xi late on Friday as saying in a meeting with Prime Minister Najib Razak of Malaysia, which is also embroiled in a long-running maritime dispute with China.

China has become increasingly willing and able to assert its claims over disputed waters, causing concern among the other parties to the disputes, analysts say.

The decision to deploy the oil rig enraged Vietnam and sparked anti-China rioting. Scores of Vietnamese and Chinese ships continue to square off around the rig and a Vietnamese boat sank this week after a collision that both sides blamed on the other.

Xi told Najib the situation in the South China Sea was "stable in general, but signs deserving our attention have also emerged".

Southeast Asian nations with maritime claims have been slow to band together against China, but last week Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and Philippine President Benigno Aquino made a rare joint denunciation of China.



## SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW



Sources: D.Rosenberg/MiddleburyCollege/HarvardAsiaQuarterly/Phil gov't



Turkish riot police officers detain CNN International correspondent Ivan Watson (Center L) near Taksim square yesterday, as the police blocked access to the square during the one year anniversary of the Gezi park and Taksim square demonstrations. Turkey's combative prime minister warned protesters that police would do "whatever is necessary" to clamp down on demonstrations which rocked the country last year and threatened Erdogan's rule.

PHOTO: AFP

## UKRAINE CRISIS

### Moscow urged to recognise new Kiev leader

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine yesterday accused Russia of unleashing a mass propaganda campaign to persuade global powers not to recognise an election that gave the presidency to a pro-Western tycoon.

The United States for its part acknowledged a "fundamental disagreement" with Russia and said President Barack Obama would extend his support to Petro Poroshenko when he meets the winner of the May 25 presidential election in Warsaw on Wednesday.

The months-long fight for future of the ex-Soviet nation -- splintered between a more nationalist west and a heavily Russified south-east -- has killed more than 300 people and resurrected the geopolitical barriers of the Cold War.

Ukraine's separatist insurgency only intensified after Poroshenko won 54.7 percent of a ballot that was disrupted across swathes of the eastern rust belt.

Ukraine's acting foreign minister said Russia was now using every means at its disposal to unsettle the new Kiev leaders and regain control over its historic domain.

Russia on Friday accused Ukraine of breaching the 1949 Geneva Conventions protecting civilians in wartime by killing and wounding peaceful citizens during its seven-week "anti-terrorist operation" in the separatist industrial regions of Lugansk and Donetsk.

Russian President Vladimir Putin -- keen on seeing Ukraine join a post-Soviet economic union that includes only Belarus and Kazakhstan -- promised to "respect" the will of Ukrainian voters, but has not congratulated Poroshenko on his win.

# China 'destabilising' region: US

AFP, Singapore

US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel yesterday warned China against "destabilising actions" in the South China Sea, and backed Japan's plans to take on a more muscular military role as a counterweight to Beijing.

Stressing US commitments to allies and friends in Asia, Hagel called for a peaceful resolution of maritime disputes and issued a blunt message to China, which was represented by a high-level military delegation at a security forum in Singapore.

"In recent months, China has undertaken destabilising, unilateral actions asserting its claims in the South China Sea," Hagel told the annual Shangri-La Dialogue.

He accused China of restricting the Philippines' access to Scarborough Shoal, putting pressure on Manila's long-standing presence

in Second Thomas Shoal, beginning land reclamation at various locations and moving an oil rig into disputed waters with Vietnam.

Hagel said that while the United States does not take sides on rival claims, "we firmly oppose any nation's use of intimidation, coercion, or the threat of force to assert these claims".

"The United States will not look the other way when fundamental principles of the international order are being challenged," he said.

China reacted angrily to Hagel's comments, with Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army Wang Guanzhong describing them as baseless.

"This speech is full of hegemony, full of incitement, threats, intimidation," said Wang.

The lieutenant-general is due to make his own speech today.

Veteran diplomat Fu Ying, head



Chuck Hagel

of the foreign affairs committee in China's rubber-stamp parliament, did not refer to Hagel by name but said countries should "not keep resorting to the 20th century mentality which is about war and conflict."

Four Southeast Asian states -- Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam -- claim parts of the South China Sea, which China

claims in nearly its entirety, citing what it calls historic rights. Taiwan is the sixth claimant.

The South China Sea straddles vital shipping lanes, and some of the disputed islets and shoals are believed to sit atop vast energy deposits.

China is also in dispute with Japan over islands in the East Sea, which Tokyo calls Senkaku and Beijing refers to as Diaoyu.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe opened the Singapore forum Friday by saying his country would play a more "proactive" role in Asian security, including providing coast guard vessels to the Philippines and potentially Vietnam.

Restating a US declaration, Hagel said "the Senkaku Islands fall under our mutual defence treaty with Japan" and backed Tokyo's plans to play a greater role in maintaining security in Asia.



'GOOD GOVERNANCE'

## Modi scraps all ministerial groups

PTI, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday abolished all the 30 GoMs and EGOs and told ministries and departments to take decisions on pending matters.

Announcing the decision to scrap 9 Empowered Groups of Ministers and 21 Groups of Ministers, the Indian PMO said the decision would expedite the process of decision-making and "usher in greater accountability in the system".

The Ministries and departments will now process the issues pending before EGOs and GoMs and take appropriate decisions at the level of Ministries and departments itself, said an official statement.

To reduce jams, Modi to use tunnel

In a bid to minimise traffic snarls caused by VIP movement, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi may frequently go 'underground' to get airborne. Confused? The PM will increasingly use a substantially underground tunnel built between his Race Course Road residence and Safdarjung Airport from where he will take choppers for flying to nearby places.

The work on the tunnel is reportedly complete almost four years after the project was conceptualised. Since the PM routinely drives to the airport, the idea was to have a secure access to the airport from the PM's house. Also, the tunnel is to serve as an emergency evacuation route.

## 5 suspects arrested over UP gang-rape

AFP, Katra Shahadatgunj

Five men have been arrested over the brutal gang-rape and murder of two girls found hanging from a mango tree in northern India, police said yesterday.

Meanwhile, the leader of India's Uttar Pradesh state yesterday asked federal police to investigate the case, amid mounting public anger over their deaths.

The discovery Wednesday of the bodies of the cousins, aged 14 and 12, in impoverished Katrashadatganj village in Budaun district of Uttar Pradesh, marked the latest sexual violence case to stir national outrage.

Preliminary murder and gang-rape charges were filed against three men while two policemen are accused of being criminal accessories, police sources said. Police reports said the girls were still alive when they were hung.

He said all those named in a police complaint by the families had been arrested and police were probing whether more were involved.

The farm labouring family of the two cousins told AFP police could have "saved" the girls but said they refused to help when they found they were from a low caste.

There is a long history of women and girls from India's lower castes being sexually abused by people from higher castes.

India toughened sex assault laws following the fatal December 2012 gang-rape of a student on a bus in New Delhi which triggered nationwide protests, but the move has done little to stem the tide of sex attacks.

According to Indian government statistics, a rape happens every 22 minutes but activists say the figure is conservative as many rapes go unreported in the conservative nation.

## US rebukes junta, urges immediate elections

AFP, Singapore

Thailand's coup leaders faced fresh international condemnation yesterday when US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel demanded immediate elections and the release of detainees held by a junta which says there will be no polls for at least a year.

Speaking at an Asian security conference in Singapore, the Pentagon chief urged Thailand's military to free scores of people detained under martial law since generals seized power from the civilian government on May 22.

Hagel called on the junta to end its curbs on "free expression" -- which include banning political gatherings of more than five people and sweeping media controls -- and for the army to "immediately restore power to the people of Thailand" through elections.

Condemning the kingdom's "retreat from democracy" Hagel said the US had suspended its long-standing military ties with Thailand.

Australia's foreign minister yesterday also said Canberra had reduced its "engagement" with the Thai military.

Junta chief Prayut Chan-O-Cha late Friday gave a rough timetable for a return to democracy, offering polls once a reconcilia-

tion drive across the bitterly split nation and a year-long reform period are complete.

In his first televised address to the nation, he said power transition to democracy may take 15 months. But he warned his roadmap will probably fail "if there are still protests or people do not co-operate".

Since taking power, authorities have overridden the constitution, curtailed civil liberties under martial law.

After leading Thailand's 19th actual or attempted coup in modern history, Prayut ordered the detention of scores of political figures, academics and activists.

Some of the detainees have been freed after signing agreements to refrain from their political activities, among them several high-profile figures from the 'Red Shirt' movement -- which supports the ousted government of Yingluck Shinawatra.

But rights groups have warned detentions violate basic civil liberties and that military courts wield unchecked power.

Anti-government demonstrators staged a months-long protest against the government prior to the coup. Twenty-eight people died in political violence linked to those rallies, losses Prayut said left him no choice but to intervene.

## COUP IN THAILAND



Activists from The All India Democratic Women's Association and Indian Students Union shout slogans in front of Uttar Pradesh Bhawan in New Delhi yesterday, against the gang-rape and death of two teenage girls in Budaun district, India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

PHOTO: AFP

## WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL WOMEN

Forbes magazine's annual rankings for 2014

1 Angela Merkel, Chancellor, Germany

2 Janet Yellen  
Chair, US Federal Reserve

3 Melinda Gates  
Philanthropist, US

4 Dilma Rousseff  
President, Brazil

5 Christine Lagarde  
Managing director, IMF, France

6 Hillary Clinton  
Former state secretary, US

7 Mary Barra  
CEO, General Motors, US

8 Michelle Obama  
First lady, US

9 Sheryl Sandberg  
COO, Facebook, US

10 Virginia Rometty  
CEO, IBM, US

AFP Source: Forbes



## Sabahi contests Egypt polls results

REUTERS, Cairo

The defeated candidate in Egypt's presidential election, Hamdeen Sabahi, appealed on Friday against results that gave former army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi victory, saying election rules had been broken.

Leftist politician Sabahi won 3 percent of votes in the election against more than 93 percent of votes cast for Sisi, judicial sources said. Official results have yet to be announced.

On Thursday, Sabahi conceded defeat but said the official turnout figures was too high and were "an insult to the intelligence of Egyptians".

Sabahi's campaign said in a statement it had made a legal complaint to the elections committee objecting to "the existence of campaigning inside polling stations" by Sisi supporters, among other abuses.

It also appealed to the committee to nullify all votes cast on the third day of polling.

Authorities extended voting by one day at the last minute on Tuesday, an extraordinary measure that observer missions said raised questions about the integrity of the electoral process although it was not an illegal move.

Sisi led the overthrow of Mursi after mass protests against his rule. Sabahi came third in 2012 elections that brought Mursi to power as Egypt's first freely elected leader.

## Indian foreign Secy meets Afghan leaders

PTI, Kabul

A day after reviewing the security for Indian consulate in Herat, Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh on Saturday met Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the two Presidential candidates.

Singh, who flew to Herat on Friday to review the situation following the May 23 attack on Indian consulate, held meetings with Karzai and Presidential candidates Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani in the Afghan capital where they discussed key issues, including security of Indian assets in the country.

Afghanistan will see a runoff on June 14 between former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah and ex-World Bank economist Ashraf Ghani to elect a successor to Karzai in the country's first democratic transfer of power.