

'Suspect confesses Nemtsov murder'

AFP, Moscow
A Russian judge yesterday said Zaur Dadayev, one of the five suspects in the murder of opposition activist Boris Nemtsov, had confessed to his involvement, as four others pleaded innocent in a Moscow court. Dadayev, a former deputy commander for the Chechen police was arrested on Saturday in the republic of Ingushetia.

Nagaland lynching: Cops arrest 18

AFP, New Delhi
Police charged 18 people yesterday after a frenzied mob stormed a prison and lynched a rape suspect in India's northeast, in an act of vigilante justice condemned by rights groups and political leaders. The arrests came after Syed Farid Khan, a Bengali-speaking man, was stripped and beaten to death by angry mob after snatching him from police custody for allegedly repeatedly raping a 19-year-old tribal woman.

'10,000 Europeans may wage jihad by 2015'

AFP, Paris
As many as 10,000 Europeans could be waging jihad in Iraq and Syria by the end of this year, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls warned yesterday, a three-fold increase on current numbers. "There are 3,000 Europeans in Iraq and Syria today. When you do a projection for the months to come, there could be 5,000 before summer and 10,000 before the end of the year," Valls told French television channel iTele.

Egypt postpones retrial of 2 Jazeera journos

AP, Cairo
The retrial of two Al-Jazeera English journalists who face terror-related charges in Egypt has been postponed to March 19.

Veteran Journalist Vinod Mehta passes away

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi
Distinguished Indian journalist and author Vinod Mehta died yesterday after a prolonged illness. He was 73. Mehta, the founder-Editor of 'Outlook' magazine, breathed his last at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) where he was admitted with lung infection. He died of multiple organ failure, AIIMS spokesperson Amit Gupta said.

Afghan prison rioters kill two cops

AFP, Mazar-i-Sharif
Rioting prison inmates in northern Afghanistan killed two policemen and set another on fire after taking their hostage yesterday, in a dramatic episode that left 20 others wounded before they attempted to escape, officials said. One prisoner was also killed and 15 were wounded in the violence, they added.

Taiwan ship with 49 missing in Atlantic

AFP, Taipei
A Taiwanese ship carrying 49 crew has vanished in the remote South Atlantic Ocean without any sign of a mayday call but shortly after its skipper reported it was taking on water, authorities said yesterday. The fishing vessel, built 28 years ago, was sailing about 1,700 nautical miles off the Falkland Islands when it vanished at around 3:00 am on February 26, according to recorded satellite data.

Mystery persists, a year on
No clue in new report as countries vow to search on

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Emotional families marked the first anniversary of the disappearance of flight MH370 yesterday as a new report said the battery on its black box locator beacon had expired, but shed no new light on the cause of the disaster.

Prime Minister Najib Razak said his nation remained committed to the search for the Malaysia Airlines jet, believed to have crashed in the southern Indian Ocean, and was hopeful it would be found.

Earlier, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, whose country is leading the search effort, said that while the current search is expected to be completed in May, it could be extended if there are "reasonable leads."

Next of kin, many of whom have criticised Malaysia's handling of the disaster, held ceremonies in Kuala Lumpur and Beijing to remember the missing and urge authorities to never abandon the expensive and arduous search.

"The only answer I want is where is the plane, then only will we know," said Jacquita Gonzales, wife of the flight's cabin crew supervisor Patrick Gomes.

"The whole world has heard what he (Najib) has said, so they can't go back on their word."

A report by an international investigative team released yesterday raised no red flags relating to the crew or the aircraft's condition to indicate any cause for the disappearance.

But it said the 30-day battery powering the underwater locator beacon on the flight data recorder was due to expire in December 2012.

Although the battery on the plane's cockpit voice recorder was up-to-date, this could have contributed to the failure to find the plane, said Gerry Soejatman, a Jakarta-based aviation consultant.

A year-long hunt in the deep ocean far off Australia's west coast, where satellite data indicate the Boeing 777 crashed, has yielded nothing yet.

The plane inexplicably veered from its Kuala Lumpur-Beijing route on March 8 of last year with 239 passengers and crew aboard.

Relatives and friends of the missing held an emotional public remembrance in Kuala Lumpur that included prayers and live video links with other next of kin around the world.

A temporary wall erected for the occasion contained scrawled messages such as "Never give up hope" and "I miss you so much brother and sister, please come back."

"My mother was on MH370. It has been a year so far. It has been a most painful year for many of us, a never-ending battle," said Grace Subathirai. "My mother was my world, everything to me," she added, her voice breaking.

In Beijing, relatives who have bitterly criticised Malaysia's national carrier and government for their handling of the crisis, held a small protest near the Malaysian embassy to mark the anniversary.

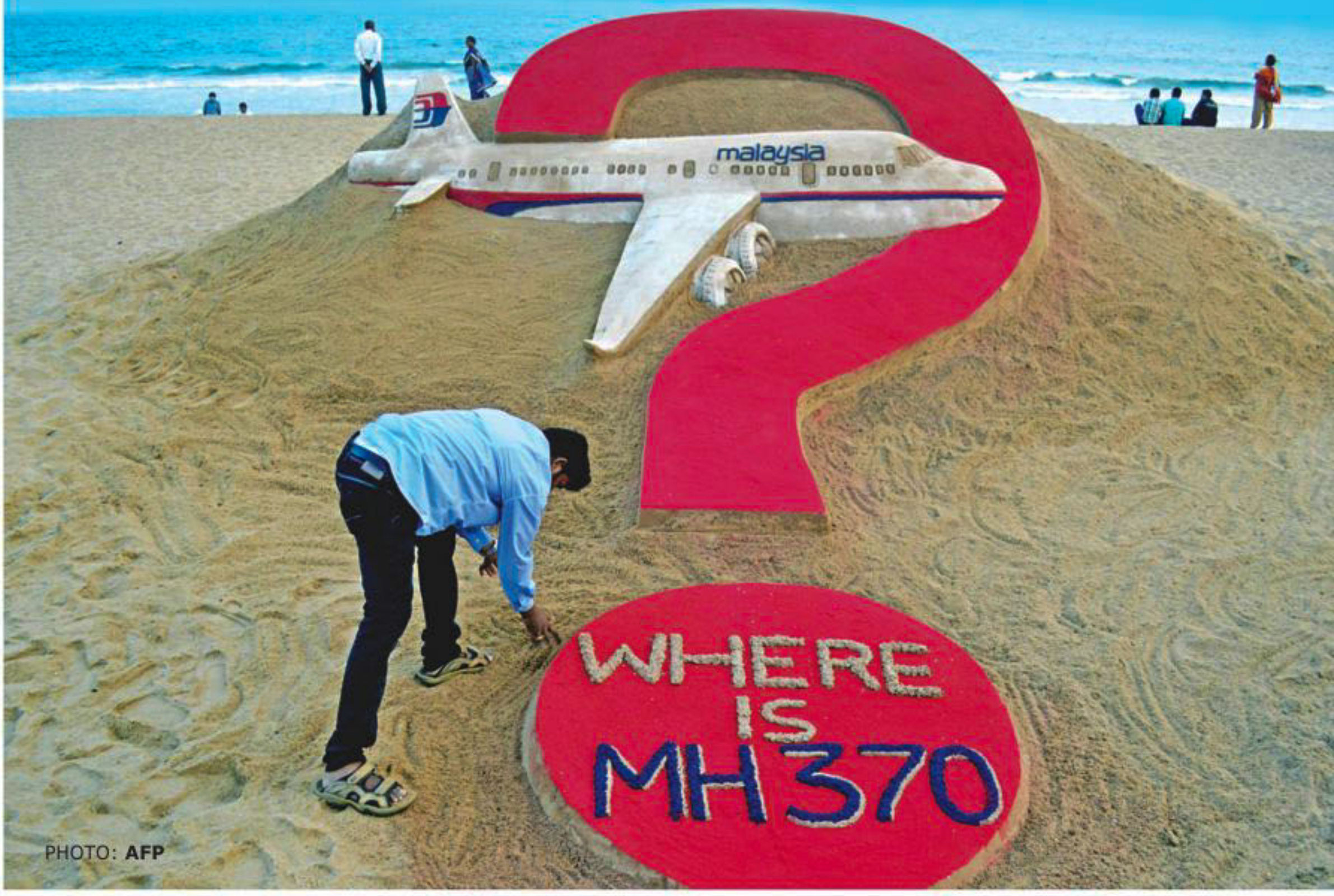


PHOTO: AFP

Beijing will not abandon Russia
China asserts its clout as diplomatic heavyweight

AFP, Beijing

China asserted its place on the global diplomatic stage yesterday, pledging to steadfastly support Russia in the face of Western sanctions, scolding regional rival Japan, and making clear it sees the US as an equal.

Foreign minister Wang Yi, speaking to reporters at a packed annual press conference, staunchly defended China's national interests, while proclaiming that its rise is no threat to the international order.

He stressed that Beijing would not abandon old friends and allies such as Moscow, which is beleaguered under sanctions and international opprobrium, and Pyongyang, in recent years more often than not a headache for China's leaders rather than an asset.

Chinese President Xi Jinping is due to visit the US, the world's only superpower, later this year and Wang emphasised that the two countries are equals that must work to overcome tensions.

Wang vowed to deepen economic and diplomatic cooperation with Russia, even as it faces Western sanctions over the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine.

Beijing and Moscow have regularly used their veto power on the UN Security Council to thwart Western initiatives such as on Syria's civil war, and Wang said they would "continue to carry out strategic coordination and cooperation to maintain international peace and security".

Sino-Russian relations were based on "mutual need", he said, and they would work to increase trade to an annual \$100 billion a year while intensifying cooperation in sectors including finance and energy.

Oil and gas are crucial to Russia, which has suffered from the plunge in global crude prices, and Wang's comments suggest President Vladimir Putin -- with whom Xi has a strong personal relationship -- can count on Beijing's support.

He was also defiant over Beijing's interests in the South China Sea, almost all of which it regards as its territory amid disputes with Southeast Asian countries.

Asked about reports Beijing was reclaiming land in the area, he said China was "carrying out necessary construction on its own islands and reefs".

"We have every right to do things that are lawful and justified," he added.

Addressing his annual press conference, Wang Yi also said a warm welcome awaited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he makes his first visit to China later this year.

Terming the "China-India boundary question, a legacy of history", Wang said: "Chinese dragon and Indian elephant should join in a duet to work for the early revitalization of two ancient civilizations, common prosperity of the two emerging markets and amicable co-existence of two large neighbours," he said.

Modi is expected to visit China before May 6, around the time when his government completes one year in office.



Wang Yi



EMAIL CONTROVERSY
Obama defends Hillary Clinton

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama on Saturday cautiously threw his weight behind his former top diplomat Hillary Clinton, as she battles a fallout over her use of a private email account while heading the State Department.

Obama told CBS News he only learned this week, after a New York Times report, of Hillary's practice of conducting her official email business from a personal account on a private email server connected to her New York home.

But the president also stressed the need for transparency. His comments came amid mounting pressure, particularly from Republican foes, for Hillary to release all of her email correspondence, which she said she was asking the State Department to do.

In the face of accusations that her move was inappropriate, Obama defended Hillary's overall record. "Let me just say that Hillary Clinton is and has been an outstanding public servant. She was a great secretary of state for me," he said.

The House of Representatives panel investigating the deadly attacks on the US mission in Benghazi, Libya said it had issued subpoenas for Hillary's emails, prompting accusations by Democrats that Republican leaders were "targeting secretary Clinton for political reasons." Hillary is most likely to be the Democrat's nominee for US presidential election next year.

Indian oil giants face sanctions

PTI, New Delhi

Indian State-owned ONGC, IOC and OIL are among the five global companies named by the US administration for having energy ties with Iran, for which they can face sanctions by America.

The US government accountability office has named Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), Indian Oil Corp (IOC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL) along with China's CNPC and Sinopec as "foreign firms reported to have engaged in commercial activity in Iran's energy sector between November 8, 2013, and December 1, 2014".

The US Iran Sanctions Act provides for steps against persons, including foreign firms, investing more than \$20 million in Iran's energy sector in any 12-month period.

The three firms have been named

for their stake in the Farsi offshore block in Iran.

US GAO had included only ONGC and OIL in its previous report last year and kept IOC out because of "insufficient information available".

But in the report this year, it said: "The firm's (IOC's) 2013-14 annual report stated that the firm has a 40 per

cent participating share in the Farsi Block Project."

It cites ONGC's annual report mentioning 40 per cent interest in Farsi block as well as OIL's annual report stating 20 per cent stake in the block for being included in the report.

All the three firms gave similar response to US GAO saying the "explora-

tion contract (for Farsi block) expired in 2009" and that they had "not carried out any activity after 2007 in the Farsi Block".

Besides OVL, US GAO had also withdrawn Petronet LNG Ltd as well as Hinduja Group firm Ashok Leyland Project Services from the list saying "there were no open-source reports of the firms conducting commercial activity in Iran".

According to GAO, the US has not imposed sanctions on any firm for their Iran energy ties since 1998.

The US and its allies have pursued the sanctions route to isolate Iran over its alleged nuclear programme.

OVL, IOC and OIL explored for oil and gas in Iran's Farsi block and proposed investing \$5.5 billion to produce gas from the 21.68 trillion cubic foot discovery they made in the offshore area located near the Saudi Arabian border.

IRAN TIES

Sitting comfortably?
You have a big reason to worry

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A new study has found that for each hour a day that an adult spends sitting down during their lifetime, the likelihood of developing heart disease goes up by 14 per cent.

It further warns that a daily session at the gym won't undo the damage because any increase in fitness from an hour's exercise is overridden by several hours of sitting.

Scientists from the Medical College of Wisconsin tracked levels of activity of 2,031 adults whose average age was 50.

They compared the number of hours each participant spent sitting down each day with the levels of deposits in blood vessels that act as signal for heart disease.

The participants all spent between two to 12 hours a day sitting at the office and in front of the television. The researchers concluded that for every hour spent sitting, the levels of deposit rose by 14 per cent.

Lead researcher Dr Jacquelyn Kulinski, an assistant professor of cardiovascular medicine, said that adults with office jobs should go for a walk every hour: "Reducing the amount of time you sit by even an hour or two a day could have a significant and positive impact on your future cardiovascular health."

A series of research papers published in UK health journal The Lancet in 2012 said that inactivity is as damaging to health as smoking.

UN slams ISIS over destruction of Hatra

AFP, Baghdad

The United Nations' cultural body has condemned the "destruction" by the Islamic State jihadist group of Hatra, a stunning Roman period ancient fortress city in the Iraqi desert.

The destruction of the UNESCO world heritage site was reported two days after the Iraqi antiquities ministry said that IS bulldozed the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, and a week after the jihadists released a tape of them smashing artefacts in the Mosul museum.

"The destruction of Hatra marks a turning point in the appalling strategy of cultural cleansing under way in Iraq," UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova said.

The UNESCO statement did not say when or how Hatra, which was built around 2,200 years ago, was destroyed, nor was any Iraqi official able to provide such details.

But razing the entire site of Hatra, whose thick walls and large buildings understood two Roman invasions in the 2nd century, would be no small undertaking. UNESCO describes Hatra as "a large fortified city under the influence of the Parthian Empire, the capital of the first Arab kingdom, and bearing the roots of Islamic Arab cities."

"This is a direct attack against the history of Islamic Arab cities, and it confirms the role of destruction of heritage in the propaganda of extremist groups," Bokova said.



Thousands march against Israeli PM

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Tens of thousands of people marched in Tel Aviv calling for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to be replaced in the upcoming elections.

Israeli media reported up to 30,000 protesters in the Rabin Square, chanting "Bibi, you've failed, go home," calling Netanyahu by his nickname.

They matched under the banner 'Israel wants change' yesterday, ahead of elections on March 17, in which the Prime Minister is seeking his fourth term in office.

The keynote speaker was Meir Dagan, a former Mossad chief who accused Netanyahu of failing in deal with Iran and forfeiting Israel's interests for the sake of his own political survival by not pushing for a peace deal with the Palestinians.

Opinion polls show the PM and his right-wing Likud party running neck-and-neck with rival Isaac Herzog, head of the centre-left Zionist Union.

'Our march is not over yet'

Selma civil rights milestone marked by first black US president

BBC ONLINE

US President Barack Obama has marked the 50th anniversary of the Selma civil rights march in Alabama by paying tribute to the "heroes" who took part.

He delivered a speech commemorating "Bloody Sunday" on 7 March 1965, when security forces attacked black demonstrators in the city.

Obama said the marchers, who were campaigning for equal voting rights, had "given courage to millions".

His wife Michelle and about 100 members of Congress also attended the event.

"Because of what they did, the doors of opportunity swung open not just for African-Americans, but for every American," he said, standing in front of the Edmund Pettus Bridge where the violence took place.

A crowd of some 40,000 people watched as Obama and his family led a symbolic walk across part of the bridge, accompanied by those who had made the march in 1965.

Police beat and used tear gas on demonstrators as they made their way over the crossing, on a day that became known as "Bloody Sunday".

That event, and a follow-up march from Selma to Montgomery two weeks later, helped build momentum for approval of the Voting Rights Act by Congress later that year. The legislation, pushed by President Lyndon Johnson, removed all barriers preventing African-Americans from registering as voters.

Obama reminded the American public that despite progress the fight against racism was not over.

He addressed the recent police killings of unarmed black men and teenagers, which had triggered protests in several US cities.

"This nation's long racial history still casts its long shadow upon us. We know the march is not yet over, the race is not yet won," he said.



US President Barack Obama (4L) lead a symbolic walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery civil rights marches in Selma, Alabama, on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP