



Xi plays down US-China row

Says Pacific big enough for both countries

AFP, Beijing

China's relationship with the US is "stable" despite tensions in the South China Sea, President Xi Jinping told top American diplomat John Kerry yesterday, adding that the Pacific Ocean is "vast enough" for both powers, state media said.

Xi met with Kerry in Beijing as tensions between the world's two biggest economies mount over Chinese island-building in strategic but disputed waters.

The United States is weighing sending warships and surveillance aircraft within 12 nautical miles -- the normal territorial zone around natural land -- of artificial islands that Beijing is building in the South China Sea.

Such a deployment could lead to a standoff on the high seas in an area home to vital global shipping lanes.

Beijing regards almost the whole of the South China Sea as its own, and satellite images show China is rapidly building an airstrip on an artificial island in the Spratly archipelago, which is also claimed in whole or part by US ally the Philippines, and Vietnam, among others.

But on Sunday Xi told Kerry that, "in my view", relations between the two countries "have remained stable on the whole", according to state-run news agency Xinhua.

"The broad Pacific Ocean is vast enough to embrace both China and the United States," Xi said.

'ISIS entering Europe as refugees'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

ISIS militants are posing as refugees and being smuggled into Europe across the Mediterranean, it has been reported.

Islamic State fighters are taking advantage of the current migrant crisis in the Mediterranean by joining over-filled boats leaving northern Africa for Europe, according to government advisor Abdul Basit Haroun.

Abdul Basit Haroun said smugglers were hiding ISIS militants on boats filled with migrants.

Officials in Italy and Egypt have previously warned that IS militants could reach Europe by migrant boat.

However, experts have cautioned that it is very difficult to verify or assess such claims.

Haroun based his claim on conversations with smugglers in parts of North Africa controlled by the militants.

He alleged that ISIS was allowing the boat owners to continue their operations in exchange for half of their income.

About 60,000 people are estimated to have tried to cross the Mediterranean this year, fleeing conflict and poverty. Since the 2011 uprising, Libya has been without a stable government, and the chaos has allowed trafficking networks

there to thrive.

In an interview with BBC Radio 5 live Investigates, Mr Haroun said IS used the boats "for their people who they want to send to Europe, as the European police don't know who is from IS and who is a normal refugee or not".

These militants often sat separately from the other migrants, he said.

Earlier this year, the EU's

humanitarian crisis.

However, experts have cautioned that both countries have an interest in influencing the international response to the Libya crisis, and that it is difficult to verify the threat without evidence.

"Egypt is particularly keen to amplify the threat of Islamic State in Libya as it is desperately seeking approval for international intervention in the coun-

when those boats come in, they go unnoticed".

ISIS, which controls large parts of Iraq and Syria, has been active in recent months in Libya, exploiting a power struggle between rival groups after the fall of Col Muammar Gaddafi.

It is believed that local militias are often active partners with the smugglers, while Libya's coastguard has admitted to the BBC that they cannot handle the volume of migrant boats and will only interfere if a boat runs into trouble.

On Thursday, the European Union firmed up plans to crack down on people smugglers in the Mediterranean.

Germany said it was confident of winning UN Security Council approval for an ambitious EU naval military operation, part of a wider plan to stem the flow of people risking their lives to reach Europe from the shores of North Africa.

In an effort to destroy the human traffickers' "business model", the EU wants to be able to identify, intercept and possibly destroy the smugglers' boats in Libyan waters, something that would require a United Nations resolution.

The formal decision to create the mission should be taken at Monday's meeting with ministers then expected to ask the European military authorities to set it up, the sources added.



Migrants sit at a detention center after they were detained by the Libyan authorities in Tripoli, Libya, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

border control agency, Frontex, warned that it was "possible" that foreign fighters were using irregular migration routes to get into Europe.

Egypt's ambassador to the UK has warned of "boats full of terrorists" if the international community does not act, while the Italian government has expressed fears of militants infiltrating the boats, while emphasising that the boats are a

try," Alison Pargeter, an analyst focusing on Libya for the Royal United Services Institute, a British defence think tank, told the BBC earlier this year.

Meanwhile, Christian Kaunert, an expert in terrorism and refugee issues at Dundee University, said the risk of militants infiltrating migrant boats was "plausible - but whether it's absolutely credible is difficult to assess because by definition,

NEWS IN brief

Ecuador breaks reforestation record

AFP, Catequilla

Ecuador broke the world record for reforestation Saturday, as thousands of people pitched in to plant 647,250 trees in a single day, President Rafael Correa said. Environment Minister Lorena Tapia said on Twitter that 44,883 people planted the trees on more than 2,000 hectares of land. The record, set just last year, apparently was taken from a group in the Philippines, Guinness said.

Good news for animal lovers!

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The Australian Government has formally recognised animals as 'sentient' beings (animals that have emotions) by amending animal welfare legislation. The Animal Welfare Amendment Bill was passed on last Tuesday. The Act stipulates that it is now necessary to 'recognise animals as sentient' and that owners must 'attend properly to the welfare of those animals'. The legislation included a ban on the use of animals for testing

Saradha scam: Actor Mithun quizzed

PTI, Kolkata

The enforcement directorate (ED) recently questioned Trinamool Congress MP and actor Mithun Chakraborty in connection with the multi-crore Saradha chitfund scam. The actor, during the about three-hour questioning, told the investigators that he would deposit the amount of less than Rs 2 crore he had received as a brand ambassador to the fund to be restored to the cheated depositors.

US drone strike kills Six Pak militants

AFP, Peshawar

A US drone strike killed at least four militants in Pakistan's restive tribal region near the Afghan border on Saturday, Pakistani security officials said. The strike took place in Warokey Mandi area of Shawal district in North Waziristan, a tribal region where the Pakistani military has since June been battling militants linked to

UN urges extension of Yemen ceasefire

Huthi rebels boycott Riyadh talks

AFP, Sanaa

A UN envoy called for an extension of a humanitarian ceasefire in Yemen due to expire yesterday as the Huthi Shia rebels boycotted political talks in Riyadh.

The appeal followed clashes on the ground between rebels and pro-government forces that killed dozens across south Yemen on Saturday despite the truce, which has largely held.

"I call on all parties to renew their commitment to this truce for five more days at least," UN envoy to Yemen Ismail Ould Sheikh Ahmed said in the Saudi capital.

"This humanitarian truce should turn into a permanent ceasefire," the Mauritanian diplomat added.

Aid groups have also called for a lasting truce in the impoverished country, where a Saudi-led regional coalition has been waging an air war on the Iran-backed Huthis since late March.

Yemeni political parties began talks Sunday in the Saudi capital aimed at finding a political solution to the crisis.

But the Huthis stayed away from the meeting of about 400 delegates including President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, who has taken refuge in Riyadh.

The war has sent tensions soaring between Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia and its Shia rival Iran, which has vehemently denied accusations it armed the Huthis.

UN says more than 1,500 people have died in the conflict since late March.

Russia won't sign arms trade treaty

AFP, Moscow

Russia will not sign the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty that requires governments to ensure their exports will not fuel conflicts, a senior foreign ministry official said yesterday.

"We decided not to join. We weighed all the pros and cons and decided it is not obligatory for us," Mikhail Uflyanov, who heads the foreign ministry's non-proliferation and arms control department, told TASS state news agency.

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) entered into force in December. So far 130 countries have signed it and 67 have ratified it.

Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the ATT covers international transfers of everything from tanks to combat aircraft to missiles, as well as small arms.



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi draws a bow next to his Mongolian counterpart Chimed Saikhanbileg (4th R) as they attend a Naadam festival celebration on the outskirts of Ulan Bator, Mongolia, yesterday. India will open a \$1 billion credit line to bolster Mongolia's "economic capacity and infrastructure", Saikhanbileg and Modi announced yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Egypt launches 'total war' on Brotherhood

Says experts; US condemns Morsi verdict; six Islamist militants hanged

AFP, Cairo

The United States yesterday voiced alarm at death sentences handed to Egypt's ousted president Mohamed Morsi and dozens of others, a verdict experts called a declaration of "total war" on his Muslim Brotherhood.

Morsi was among more than 100 defendants ordered by an Egyptian court on Saturday to face the death penalty for their role in a mass jailbreak during the 2011 uprising.

He ruled for only a year before mass protests spurred then-army chief and now President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to overthrow him in July 2013.

Washington expressed concern over Saturday's verdict. "We have consistently spoken out against the practice of mass trials and sentences, which are conducted in a manner that is inconsistent with Egypt's international obligations and the rule of law," a State Department official said.

"We continue to stress the need for due process and individualised judicial processes for all Egyptians in the interests of justice."

A government crackdown under Sisi has seen hundreds of Morsi's Islamist supporters killed, thousands jailed and dozens sentenced death after mass trials which the United Nations has described as "unprecedented in recent history".

Yesterday, prison authorities hanged six men convicted in a military court of participating in militant attacks on soldiers, following what Amnesty International labelled a "grossly unfair" trial.

Experts said the verdict underscored Sisi's vow to eradicate the 87-year-old Muslim Brotherhood movement, which topped successive polls between the fall of Mubarak and Morsi's presidential win in May 2012.

"The new regime of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is using all elements of the state to break the political will of the Muslim Brotherhood," Fawaz Gerges, professor of Middle East studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science, told AFP.

"The judicial system is also waging an all-out war against the Muslim Brotherhood. This clearly reflects a total war waged by the Egyptian state against the Muslim Brotherhood."



Palestine receives papal blessings

Pope creates first Palestinian saints a day after signing a treaty

MAIL ONLINE

Pope Francis described Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas as an 'angel of peace' before he canonised two 19th century nuns in hopes of encouraging Christians across the Middle East who are facing a wave of persecution from Islamic extremists.

Sisters Mariam Bawardy and Marie Alphonsine Ghattas, who lived in what was 19th century Palestine, were among four nuns made saints today at a Mass in a sun-soaked St. Peter's Square.

President Abbas joined an estimated 2,000 pilgrims from the region, many of them waving Palestinian flags, for the canonisation of the first saints from the Holy Land since the early years of Christianity.

When he and Pope Francis met on Saturday, the Pope

described the Palestinian president as 'an angel of peace', and church officials are holding up Bawardy and Ghattas as a sign

of hope and encouragement for Christians across the Middle East at a time when violent persecution and discrimination have driven many Christians from the region of Christ's birth.

The two nuns were canonised along with two other nuns, Saints Jeanne Emilie de Villeneuve from France and Maria Cristina of the Immaculate Conception from Italy.

The ceremony highlighted Pope Francis' drive to help embattled Christian communities in the

Middle East.

Abbas' visit comes days after the Vatican finalized a bilateral treaty with the 'state of Palestine' that made explicit its recognition of Palestinian statehood.



Syria pushes ISIS back from Palmyra

AFP, Damascus

Syrian troops pushed Islamic State group jihadists back from the ancient city of Palmyra yesterday, easing fears over the world heritage site, after fighting that left hundreds dead.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said nearly 300 people have been killed in four days of fighting since IS launched an assault on the desert oasis city on Wednesday.

The toll comprised 123 soldiers and loyalist militiamen, 115 ISIS fighters as well as 57 civilians, dozens of whom were executed by the jihadists, the Observatory said, quoting sources on the ground.

On Saturday the jihadists pressed their offensive and seized



the northern part of the modern town of Palmyra, known as Tadmur in Arabic, but were driven out by regime forces.

Provincial governor Talal Barazi told AFP the army was "still combing the streets for bombs" after recapturing the northern districts.

But the Observatory said clashes were still under way yesterday in the northern suburb of Al-Amiryah, around the prison east of the city and around Haql al-Hail gas field northeast of Palmyra.

Syrian antiquities chief Mamoun Abdulkarim expressed relief that ISIS, known for its wanton destruction of archaeological sites in territory it controls in Syria and Iraq, did not attack the site.

The antiquities chief said he had been "living in a state of terror" that ISIS would destroy the first and second century temples and colonnaded streets that are among Palmyra's architectural treasures.

On Thursday, UNESCO chief Irina Bokova appealed to Syrian troops and jihadists to spare Palmyra, which the organisation describes as one of the most important cultural centres of the ancient world.

Taliban attack EU vehicle in Kabul; 3 killed

AFP, Kabul

Three people including a British national working with the European Union police were killed yesterday when a Taliban attacker rammed his explosives-laden car into a foreign convoy in Kabul, the latest attack of Afghanistan's fighting season.

At least 18 people were wounded in the attack, which comes three days after 14 people -- mostly foreigners -- were killed in a Taliban assault on a Kabul guest house that trapped dozens attending a concert.

The suicide bomber targeted the foreign convoy, which included two vehicles of the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL), during the Sunday morning rush hour near Kabul airport.

Taliban insurgents, who have stepped up attacks on foreign targets after launching their spring offensive late last month, claimed responsibility for the car bombing.

On Friday the militant group justified its targeting of foreigners, saying that people from "invading countries" do not count as civilians.



The amazing tale of Panchen Lama

BBC ONLINE

Tibetan exiles are calling for China to release a high-ranking monk who disappeared 20 years ago when he was just six years old.

The boy was detained by the Chinese authorities just three days after the Dalai Lama declared him to be the reincarnated Panchen Lama.

The Panchen Lama is the second most important figure in Tibetan Buddhism. Many consider him to be one of the world's longest-serving political prisoners.

China has refused provide details of the whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.

In 1995 it anointed its own Panchen Lama, Gyaltsen Norbu, who while popular among some Tibetans has been described by exiles as a "stooge of the atheist Chinese Communist Party government".

The Dalai Lama, whom Beijing sees as a separatist threat, has in the past strongly criticised China for "brazen meddling in the system of reincarnation".

Tibet is governed as an autonomous region of China. Beijing claims a centuries-old sovereignty over the region, but many Tibetans argue that Tibet was colonised.