

CHINA RIVERBOAT TRAGEDY Hope fades for 400 missing

AFP, Jianli
Rescuers yesterday started cutting through the hull of a capsized Chinese cruise ship, state media said, in a desperate effort to find survivors among more than 400 people still missing days after the disaster.

Only 14 people have been found, along with 26 bodies, since the "Eastern Star" overturned late Monday in a storm on the Yangtze river, leaving part of the boat protruding from the murky water.

Chinese state media agency Xinhua warned the disaster could become the deadliest in the country for almost seven decades as rescue workers started cutting a small hole in the bottom of the ship in an attempt to free anyone still inside.

"The ship sank in a very short timeframe so there could still be air trapped in the hull," it quoted Li Qixiu of the Naval University of Engineering as saying, which "means there could still be survivors."

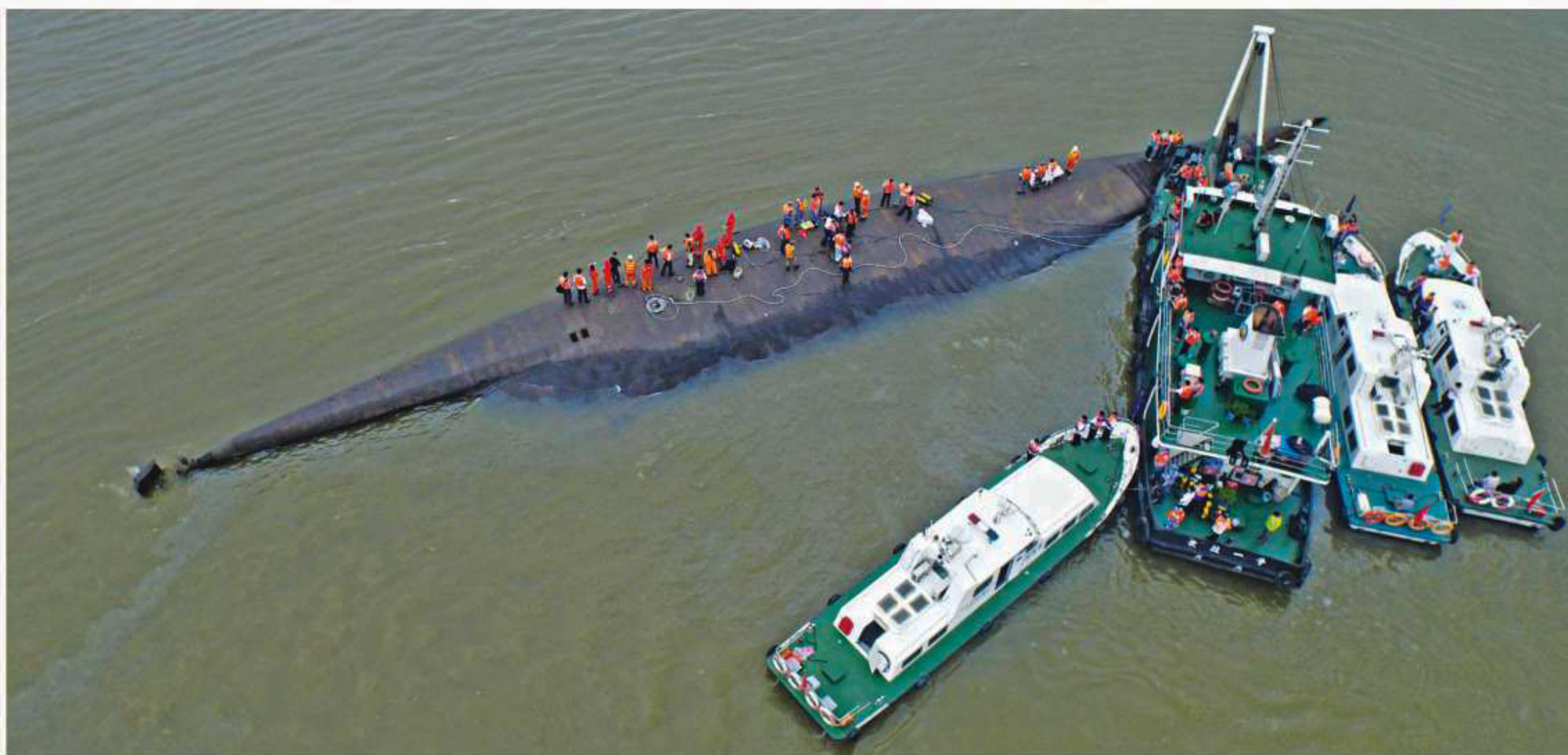
Witnesses and state media said the ship -- which was carrying a total of 456 people, most aged over 60, on a holiday cruise -- sank in a matter of seconds after it was hit by bad weather. Weathermen said a tornado was in the area at the time.

Media reports said the 250-foot (76.5-metre) vessel had floated three kilometres downriver after it capsized.

Around 20 bodies appeared to have been found yesterday with dozens of divers searching each of the ship's cabins one by one, CCTV said.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, who has been directing operations, vowed to keep searching despite the tough conditions.

The captain and chief engineer, who were also among the survivors and were being questioned by police, both reportedly said the ship was caught in a freak storm.



(From top anti-clockwise) An aerial view shows rescue workers searching on the sunken ship at Jianli section of Yangtze River, Hubei province, China; rescuers listen for reactions from inside a sunken ship; a relative of a missing passenger cries on the banks of the river; and students pray for the victims on the sunken cruise ship at a school in Zhuji, Zhejiang province yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Aquino likens China to Nazi Germany

AFP, Tokyo

Philippine President Benigno Aquino yesterday likened present-day China to Nazi Germany during a speech in Japan, hinting the world cannot continue to appease Beijing as it claims ever-more territory in the South China Sea.

The comments come as disquiet grows over the quickening pace of China's land reclamation programme in international waters, including its construction of a runway long enough for large military planes.

"If there was a vacuum, if the United States, which is the superpower, says 'we are not interested', perhaps there is no brake to ambitions of other countries," Aquino told an audience of business leaders in Tokyo when asked about China's rising might and the role of the US in checking it.

"I'm an amateur student of history and I'm reminded of... how Germany was testing the waters and what the response was by various other European powers," he said, referring to the Nazis' territorial conquests in the months before the outbreak of World War II.

"They tested the waters and they were ready to back down if, for instance, in that aspect, France said (to back down).

"But unfortunately, up to the annexation of the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia, the annexation of the entire country of Czechoslovakia, nobody said stop.

"If somebody said stop to (Adolf) Hitler at that point in time, or to Germany at that time, would we have avoided World War II."

Fight may last 'generation': US

AFP, Doha

The Islamic State group is a "global threat" which will take a generation or more to defeat, Washington's envoy for the US-led coalition fighting the jihadists said yesterday.

Despite "strategic momentum" against ISIS -- or Daesh as he called it -- General John Allen conceded that the fight would continue for several years in a keynote speech to the US-Islamic World Forum in Doha, Qatar.

And he added that if ISIS was not defeated it could "wreak havoc on the progress of humanity".

"This will be a long campaign," he said. "Defeating Daesh's ideology will likely take a generation or more. But we can and we must rise to this challenge.

"In an age when we are more interconnected that at any other time in human history, Daesh is a global threat."

On the ground, Iraqi officials yesterday voiced fears that jihadists will use their seizure of a dam in Ramadi to mount fresh attacks on pro-government

forces preparing to try to retake the city.

A string of advances last month by the Islamic State group cast doubt on the strategy of the US-led coalition battling the jihadists, but Washington has insisted it is on the right track.

WAR ON ISIS

US says 10,000 militants killed in nine-month campaign

Iraq says militants advance 'failure for whole world'

Coalition vows support for bid to recapture Ramadi

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said after the May 17 fall of Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, that his men would take it back within days but operations are moving slowly.

The chaotic retreat from Ramadi last month was reminiscent of the

complete collapse of federal forces in second city Mosul a year ago, when ISIS-led fighters conquered almost a third of Iraq within days and brought the country to the brink of breakup.

US Deputy Security of State Anthony Blinken told France Inter radio that 10,000 ISIS members had been killed since the start of a nine-month-old US-led air campaign in Iraq and Syria.

At a meeting in Paris that wrapped up on Tuesday, Western powers and other members of the 60-nation coalition vowed more support for Abadi's efforts.

Abadi had said that ISIS's regained momentum on the ground was a sign of the "failure" of the international community to provide adequate support.

But Washington and the coalition insisted they had a "winning strategy" of air strikes combined with thousands of forces training and advising Iraqi forces.

"In Iraq right now we have the right strategy, a combination of air strikes, training and effective global partners,"

Libya blocks UN action on EU migrant plan

AFP, United Nations

Libya's ambassador to the United Nations said Tuesday that his government is refusing to give its consent for UN action aimed at endorsing Europe's military plan to fight migrant smugglers in the Mediterranean.

Ambassador Ibrahim Dabbashi told AFP that as long as European governments were discussing the plan with Libyan militias that control coastal territory, there would be no green light for a UN resolution.

"The position of Libya is clear: as long as the European Union and some other countries are not dealing with the legitimate government as the sole representative of the Libyan people, they will not get any consent on our part," Dabbashi said in an interview.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini last month appeared before the Security Council to request UN backing for Europe's plan to confront the migrant crisis by using military force against smugglers.

The Security Council's EU members -- Britain, France, Lithuania and Spain -- are working with Italy on a draft resolution that would endorse the EU naval force, authorizing the use of force in Libyan territorial waters.

But the resolution requires the Libyan government to first give its consent for the operations that could also take place on its coastal territory.



A man holds a baby that survived what activists said was a site hit by a barrel bomb dropped by forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad at the old city of Aleppo, yesterday. Regime barrel bombs -- crude weapons made of containers packed with explosives -- have often struck schools, hospitals, and markets in Syria.

PHOTO: AFP

MH370 search will not be expanded further

AFP, Sydney

The hunt for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 will not be expanded beyond its current search area unless there are specific new leads, Australian officials said yesterday.

In April, more than a year after the plane vanished en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 239 mostly Chinese people on board, Malaysia, Australia and China announced that the search zone would double in size.

This boosted the area of the remote southern Indian Ocean being scoured by three specialist vessels to 120,000 square kilometers.

But it will not be expanded any further, the Australian-led Joint Agency Coordination Centre (JACC) said in an update.

"In the absence of credible new information that leads to the identification of a specific location of the aircraft, governments have agreed that there will be no further expansion of the search area," it said.

The hunt for the aircraft, which disappeared on March 8 last year, has been a complex undertaking, with Australia initially concentrating on a remote 60,000 square kilometre area of the ocean far off its west coast.

The zone was determined by analysing data from satellite signals which indicate the plane went down in the Indian Ocean after mysteriously diverting.

Japan mulls toilets in elevators!

AFP, Tokyo

Japan is looking at installing toilets in elevators and providing an emergency supply of drinking water for people trapped by the nation's frequent powerful earthquakes, an official said yesterday.

The move comes after dozens of people were left high and dry, some for over an hour, following a 7.8 magnitude quake on Saturday that stopped lifts.

Most of the elevators automatically halted at the nearest floor and opened their doors, but 14 were stranded between storeys.

A meeting between officials from the infrastructure ministry and elevator industry bodies agreed to look into providing toilets for use in an emergency, an official from the Association of Elevator Makers told AFP.

Israel risks losing credibility over Palestine stance: Obama

AFP, Jerusalem

US President Barack Obama said in an interview broadcast Tuesday that Israel risks losing "credibility" over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's stance on the creation of a Palestinian state.

Obama made the comments to an Israeli television station in response to a question about Netanyahu's comments regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state before and after March elections.

Netanyahu sparked international concern when he ruled out the establishment of a Palestinian state while campaigning for the March 17 general election but later backtracked on the comments.

"... The danger here is that Israel as a whole loses credibility," Obama said in the interview with Israel's channel 2.

"Already, the international community does not believe that Israel is serious about a two-state solution."

On Sunday, Netanyahu said he was committed to the establishment of a Palestinian state, calling on the Palestinian leadership to return to negotiations unconditionally.

Obama however said Netanyahu's statements on the subject after the election have had "so many caveats, so many conditions, that it is not realistic to think that those conditions would be met any time in the near future."

"And I think that it is difficult to simply



accept at face value the statement made after an election that would appear to look as if this is simply an effort to return to the previous status quo in which we talk about peace in the abstract, but it's always tomorrow, it's always later," Obama said.

Asked about a continued US veto at the United Nations on resolutions condemning Israel, Obama said that a lack of progress in peace efforts would make such a policy

Wars in Pakistan, Afghanistan kills 150,000: study

AFP, Washington

The wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan have left nearly 150,000 soldiers and civilians dead since 2001, a new US study estimates.

Another 162,000 have been wounded since the US-led offensive that toppled the Taliban government in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks, says the study by the Costs of War Project, based at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University.

The war in Afghanistan is intensifying rather than moving toward an end, it added, as the number of deaths and injuries has increased significantly in recent years.

In Pakistan, the war has seen a lower intensity in recent years although there remains "very hot conflict" in the northwest of the country.

CERN's Large Hadron Collider turns on 'data tap'

AFP, Geneva

Scientists yesterday hailed a "new era" in their quest to unravel mysteries of the universe as the world's biggest particle smasher started experiments with nearly doubled energy levels in a key breakthrough.

The tests at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) came after a sweeping two-year revamp of the collider and will help scientists to study fundamental particles, the building blocks of all matter, and the forces that control them.

During its next run, researchers will look for evidence of "new physics" and probe "supersymmetry" -- a theoretical concept informally dubbed Susy; seek explanations for enigmatic dark matter and look for signs of extra dimensions.



Yesterday's collisions of 13 teraelectronvolts (TeV) followed a muscling of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), used in 2012 to prove the existence of the Higgs Boson -- which confers mass and is also known as the God particle.

CERN said everything went according to plan at the giant lab, a 27-kilometre (17-mile) ring-shaped tunnel straddling the French-Swiss border.

During what it dubbed as its "Season Two", the LHC will in the course of the next three years strive to fill gaps in the so-called "Standard Model" -- the mainstream theory of how the visible Universe was created but which does not explain dark matter.

"It is time for new physics!" declared CERN's outgoing director general Rolf Heuer.

NEWSIN brief

Myanmar jails writer for 'insulting religion'

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar on Tuesday jailed a writer for two years with hard labour for "insulting religion", his lawyer said, with rights groups condemning the verdict as the country's latest strike on freedom of expression. The Lawyer told AFP the sentence passed at Chaung Oo township court Tuesday was punishing his client, Htin Lin Oo, a columnist and former information officer for the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party, for "criticising those monks who use the excuse of nation, race and religion to

MERS outbreak closes schools in South Korea

AFP, Seoul

South Korean President Park Geun-Hye yesterday urged officials to ease rising public panic over an outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) that has infected 30 people, killed two and closed hundreds of schools. Five new confirmed cases were reported overnight, making this the largest MERS outbreak outside Saudi Arabia, where the virus has killed more

Most Brits want to stay in EU: poll

AFP, Washington

An overwhelming majority of young Brits want to remain within the EU, a new poll showed Tuesday, adding that as the euro crisis fades support for European integration is rebounding. After reaching a low point two years ago in the wake of the economic crisis, the popularity of the European Union is growing again despite the rise of Euroskeptical parties, the Pew

4-hour surgery to mend Kerry's broken leg

AFP, Washington

Globe-trotting US diplomat John Kerry on Tuesday underwent successful surgery to mend a broken leg, and his doctor hopes to get him up and walking within 24 hours. Kerry broke his leg during a cycling accident in the Alps at the weekend and was flown back to the United States on board a C-17 military plane having canceled planned

Helmut Kohl 'doing well' after surgeries

AFP, Berlin

Former German chancellor Helmut Kohl is doing "well under the circumstances" after undergoing two operations, his office said Tuesday, in response to alarming media reports about the health of the man who oversaw reunification. Kohl, 85, had a hip operation in early May, which went well, and subsequently needed a further operation which prolonged his stay in hospital, a statement said, without specifying what the