

NAGASAKI ATOMIC BOMBING ANNIVERSARY

Abe pledges nuke free Japan

REUTERS, Tokyo

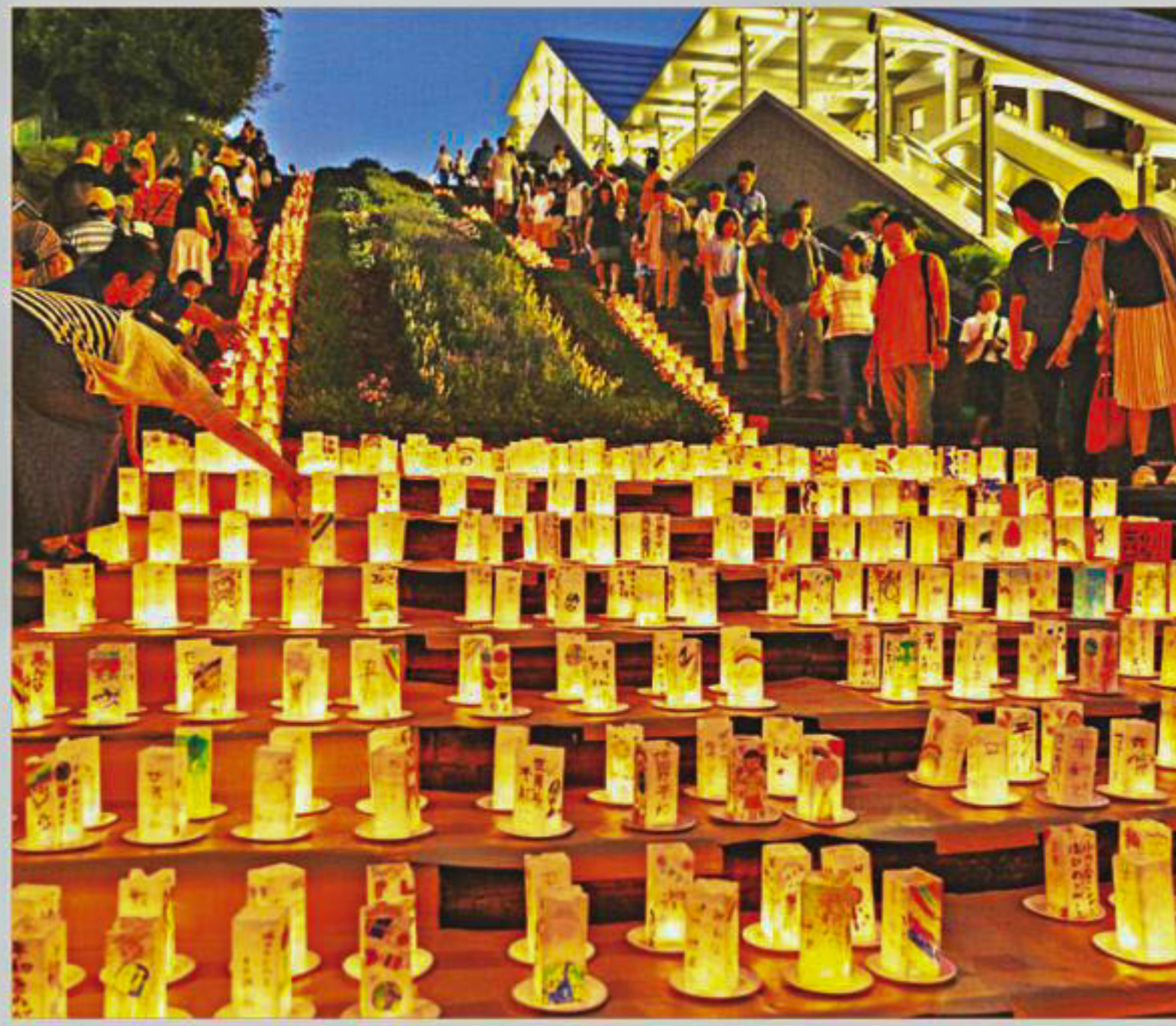
Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday marked the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki by renewing his commitment to a nuclear weapons free Japan, following criticism for not making the same pledge on the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing last week.

"As the only nation in the world to have suffered a war-time nuclear attack, I have renewed my resolve to play a leading role in pursuing a world without nuclear weapons and maintain the three non-nuclear principles," Abe said in Nagasaki Peace Park.

The "three non-nuclear principles" are Japan's long-standing policy of not possessing or producing nuclear arms and not letting others bring them into the country.

Japan's defense minister triggered a new row over controversial security legislation on Wednesday when he said the bills under consideration by parliament would not rule out the military transporting the nuclear weapons of foreign forces.

Abe's cabinet adopted a resolution last year reinterpreting the pacifist constitution, drafted by Americans after World War Two, to let Japan exercise collective self-defense, or defend an ally under attack.



From left, Thousands observe a vigil at the Nagasaki Peace Park to remember those who died when US dropped an atom bomb on the city; An image of the atomic blast's mushroom cloud was projected onto Nagasaki's Urakami Cathedral which was destroyed in the attack; A wall clock that stopped working at 11:02am when the explosion occurred 70 years ago, has been displayed at the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum.



PHOTO: MAIL ONLINE

NEPAL'S CHARTER CRISIS

Parties overcome another hurdle

Sign deal drawing up internal state borders

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's rival parties have signed an agreement drawing up the country's internal borders in a breakthrough that paves the way for a new national constitution, the country's prime minister said yesterday.

Spurred by April's devastating quake, Nepal's parties struck a historic deal in June to divide the country into eight provinces but left the crucial task of delineating state borders to a federal commission.

The new agreement, signed after midnight Saturday, came after days of negotiation and resolves a major issue that has blocked progress on the charter since 2008. As a result, the commission will no longer be required to set state boundaries.

"A constitution with federalism and demarcation has been ensured," Prime Minister Sushil Koirala wrote in a post on Twitter. "I call on everyone to not be stuck on minor disagreements and work to build and develop the country," Koirala said.

Information Minister Minendra Rijal

told AFP that "the agreement was reached last night and it has moved the constitution writing process a step forward".

The deal comes after a series of public consultations held across the Himalayan nation last month. In some cases, the consultations were marred by violence, especially in the southern plains, which are home to the Madhesi community, who expressed anger about a lack of detail on where and how new internal borders will be drawn.

"We have tried to understand the public stance and strike a balance on conflicting feedback responses," Rijal said.

Opposition parties have long pushed for new provinces to be created along lines that could favour historically marginalised communities like the Madhesi. Other parties have attacked this model, calling it a threat to national unity.

As a result of the negotiations, the number of provinces was reduced to six and, under the new agreement, every province in the landlocked country will share a border with regional power India.

Taliban attack kills 21 in Afghanistan

AFP, Kunduz

A Taliban attack killed at least 21 people in northern Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, after a wave of lethal bombings in the capital as the insurgency escalates following a bitter power transition.

The Afghan interior ministry said all those killed Saturday evening in the Khanabad district of Kunduz province were civilians, although local officials called them anti-Taliban militiamen.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, which comes after a barrage of bombings in Kabul killed at least 51 people on Friday, the deadliest day for the capital in years.

"The incident took place (when) a suicide bomber detonated his suicide vest in Khanabad district," the interior ministry said.

No country can set up military base

Maldivian president assures Indian PM

PTI, New Delhi

Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen has assured Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi that his country will not allow any foreign power to set up a military base under the new law allowing foreign ownership of land, allaying India's concerns over possible expansion of Chinese strategic assets in the archipelago.

Yameen, in a letter to Modi, also assured his government will keep the Indian Ocean a "demilitarised zone", official sources said.

"Maldivian President has assured Prime Minister Modi that no country can set up a military base in Maldives and that it will be a demilitarised Indian Ocean," government sources said.

Yameen's letter was handed over to External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj by Maldivian Foreign Secretary Ali Naseer Mohamed, who left on Saturday after a two-day visit here.

The letter of assurance came after India conveyed its concerns over the impact of the recently passed constitutional amendment which allowed foreigners to own land in the island nation. It is understood that the concerns were conveyed by Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar who was in Maldives last week.

The new law passed by the 85-member Majlis, will allow foreigners who invest more than USD 1 bn to purchase land within the project site in which at least 70 percent of the area of the completed project must be reclaimed land.

Earlier, Maldives' Constitution only allowed long-term leasing of land which could be up to 99 years.

The development created a flutter among the officials here who felt the new law could enable China to set up bases in the Maldives, thereby giving a strategic advantage to Beijing over New Delhi.

NEWS IN brief

Myanmar floods toll hits 99

AP, Yangon

The number of people affected by flooding across Myanmar was approaching 1 million yesterday, with waters in the low-lying southwestern delta inundating homes and forcing villagers into temporary shelters, the government said. International aid is on the way following appeals by the government, but so far, most of the help has come from volunteers ferrying noodles, rice and clean water door-to-door in small boats.

Scotland to ban GM crops

AFP, London

Scotland is set to ban the cultivation of genetically modified (GM) crops, officials announced yesterday. It is set to implement the move under European Union rules introduced earlier this year which allow countries to opt out of growing the crops, a statement from the Scottish government said.

Singapore turns 50

AFP, Singapore

Singapore yesterday marked 50 years since independence with nationwide celebrations including a huge military parade and fireworks display that will also pay tribute to former founding leader Lee Kuan Yew. Singapore became a republic on August 9, 1965, when it was ejected from the Malaysian federation following a stormy two-year union.

Turkey airstrikes kill nearly 400 Kurds

AFP, Ankara

Nearly 400 members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) have been killed and hundreds injured in two weeks of Turkish airstrikes on positions in northern Iraq, the official Anadolu news agency reported yesterday. The report, which could not be independently verified, said at least four PKK leaders and 30 female rebel fighters were among the dead.

MH370 search resumes

AFP, Saint-denis De La Reunion

The hunt for more wreckage from the missing MH370 resumed on France's Reunion island in the Indian Ocean yesterday after being suspended since Friday. A wing part was found on the island in late July and confirmed by the Malaysian prime minister to be part of the Boeing 777 which went missing on March 8, 2014 with 239 people onboard.

Haitians vote long-delayed polls

AFP, Port-au-prince

After nearly four years of delays, Haiti staged legislative elections yesterday in a vote overshadowed by fears of violence and poor turnout. Polling stations opened at 6:00 am for the first time since President Michel Martelly came to power in May 2011.



A demonstrator hold a sign during a march from the location where Michael Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson to mark the first anniversary of his death yesterday in St. Louis, Missouri. Brown was shot and killed by a Ferguson police officer on August 9, 2014. His death sparked months of violent protests in Ferguson and drew nationwide focus on police treatment of black offenders.

PHOTO: AFP

WEST BANK ARSON PROBE

Israel police arrest several suspects

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel arrested several suspects yesterday in raids linked to the deadly firebombing of a Palestinian home and placed two more alleged Jewish extremists in a controversial form of detention without trial, officials said.

The authorities' moves came as calls mounted for a crackdown on Jewish extremism in the wake of the July 31 arson attack in the West Bank village of Duma that killed an 18-month-old child and his father.

The child's mother and four-year-old brother were also critically wounded in the firebombing, which occurred only hours after a stabbing attack at a Jerusalem Gay Pride march that killed a 16-year-old girl and wounded five other people.

Typhoon Soudelor kills 12 in China

AFP, Beijing

Typhoon Soudelor killed 12 people in eastern China and five are missing after parts of the country were hit by the heaviest rains in a century, state media reported yesterday.

The casualties were reported in and around Wenzhou city in the province of Zhejiang, where downpours caused mudslides and several houses collapsed on Saturday night, Xinhua news agency reported.

It quoted local disaster relief officials as saying the dead and missing may have been washed away by floods or buried under ruined homes.

About 1.36 million people in the city were affected by the typhoon, the agency said, estimating direct economic losses at 3.83 billion yuan (\$617 million).

Nearby Wencheng county saw downpours of 645 millimetres in 24 hours -- the heaviest in 100 years -- after the typhoon made landfall on Saturday night, it said.

The storm had landed in Fujian province and cut power to more than three million homes there, Xinhua said, but more than a

third had electricity restored by yesterday morning.

Billed as the biggest typhoon of the year last week with winds of up to 230 kilometres (140 miles) an hour, Soudelor -- named after a legendary Micronesian chief -- has since weakened.

China's National Meteorological Center forecast the typhoon would be downgraded to a tropical depression by yesterday night as it moved further inland.

Soudelor left six people dead in Taiwan, where it ripped up trees and triggered landslides, damaging electricity lines and knocking out power to a record four million households.

Almost half a million homes were still without power yesterday, Taiwan Power Co. said, as blocked roads hampered efforts to restore supplies in some areas.

Taiwan's death toll rose to six after an eight-year-old girl who went missing Thursday after being swept out to sea with her mother and twin sister was found dead.

Her mother and sister, caught in the strong waves on the east coast, were the first victims of the typhoon.

YEMEN CRISIS

Loyalists retake provincial capital

AFP, Aden

Forces loyal to Yemen's exiled government recaptured a southern provincial capital from Shia rebels and their allies yesterday as they pressed an advance from second city Aden.

Zinjibar, capital of Abyan province, had been held by troops of the renegade 15th Brigade which remains loyal to ousted strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh who is allied with the rebels.

Troops entered the coastal town, some 50 kilometres east of Aden, after overrunning the brigade's barracks outside with support from Saudi-led air strikes, military sources said.

Residents of Zinjibar forced out by fighting that devastated their city also returned yesterday to take stock of the damage, a relief official said.

But many, including loyalist fighters, lost their lives as they traded on mines planted by the rebels before they withdrew from the city.

At least 19 people were killed and 163 wounded on Saturday and yesterday in Zinjibar and the surrounding area, Aden health chief Al-Khader Laswar told AFP.

Mines and unexploded ordnance have caused similarly high death tolls in Aden itself since the rebels' pullout last month, with dozens of civilians reported killed and hundreds wounded.

Zinjibar is the third southern provincial capital from which the rebels have been driven out.

The loyalists secured Aden in mid-July and Lahj provincial capital Huta on August 4.

Aden was the last refuge of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi before he fled into exile in neighbouring Saudi Arabia in March.

ISIS' recipe to success

Ex-officers in Saddam's army dominate the militant band

AGENCIES

Once part of one of the most brutal dictator's army in the Middle East, over 100 former members of Saddam Hussein's military and intelligence officers are now part of ISIS.

Now they make up the complex network of ISIS's leadership, helping to build the military strategies which have led the brutal jihadi group to their military gains in Syria and Iraq.

The officers gave ISIS the organization and discipline it needed to weld together jihadi fighters drawn from across the globe, integrating terror tactics like suicide bombings with military operations.

Patrick Skinner, a former CIA case officer who has served in Iraq, said Saddam-era military and intelligence officers were a 'necessary ingredient' in the Islamic State group's stunning battlefield successes last year, accounting for its transformation from a 'terrorist organization to a proto-state'.

"Their military successes last year were not terrorist, they were military successes," said Skinner, now director of special projects for The Soufan Group, a private strategic intelligence services firm.

In the run-up to the 2003 US-led invasion, Saddam publicly invited foreign mujahedeen to come to Iraq to resist the invaders.

Thousands came and Iraqi officials showed them off to the media as they were trained by Iraqi instructors. Many stayed, eventually joining the insurgency against American troops and their Iraqi allies.

After the collapse of the Saddam regime, hundreds of Iraqi army officers, infuriated by the US decision to disband the Iraqi army, found their calling in the Sunni insurgency. In its early stages, many insurgent groups were relatively secular.

But Islamic militants grew in prominence, particularly with the creation and increasing strength of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Some Sunnis were radicalized by bitterness against the Shiite majority, which rose to power after Saddam's fall and which the Sunnis accuse of discriminating against them.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's first two deputies, who each played a major role in setting up what would become its sweep over Syria and Iraq, were both Saddam-era officers, according to those interviewed by the AP.

They were Sameer al-Khalifawi, an air force colonel killed in fighting in Syria in 2014, and Abdullah el-Bilawi, a former intelligence officer who was killed in Mosul by the Iraqi military in May 2014. The group's current second-in-command is also a former Saddam-era army major, Saud Mohsen Hassan, known by the pseudonyms Abu Mutazz and Abu Muslim al-Turkmani.

During the 2000s, Hassan was imprisoned in the notorious US-run Bucca prison camp, the main detention center for members of the Sunni insurgency, where al-Baghdadi also was held. The prison was a significant incubator for the Islamic State group, bringing militants like al-Baghdadi into contact with former Saddam officers, including members of special forces, the elite Republican Guard and the paramilitary force called Fedayeen. In Bucca's Ward 6, al-Baghdadi gave sermons and Hassan emerged as an effective organizer, leading strikes by the prisoners to gain concessions from their American jailers, the intelligence chief said. Former Bucca prisoners are now throughout the ISIS leadership.

Al-Baghdadi has drawn these trusted comrades even closer after he was wounded in an airstrike earlier this year, the intelligence chief said. He has appointed a number of them to the group's Military Council, believed to have seven to nine members -- at least four of whom are former Saddam officers. He brought other former Bucca inmates into his inner circle and personal security.

Saddam-era veterans also serve as 'governors' for seven of the 12 'provinces' set up by the Islamic State group in the territory it holds in Iraq, the intelligence chief said. Many of the Saddam-era officers have close tribal links to or are the sons of tribal leaders in their regions, giving ISIS a vital support network as well as helping recruitment.

These tribal ties are thought to account, at least in part, for the stunning melt-down of Iraqi security forces when ISIS captured the Anbar capital of Ramadi in May.

