

# PM receives UN open letter on tourism

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday received the "Open Letter on Travel and Tourism" in recognition of Bangladesh's tourism potential to boost socio-economic growth and create jobs.

Taleb Rifai, visiting secretary general of United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), handed over the open letter to the PM when he met the premier at the Gono Bhaban.

The Open Letter on Travel and Tourism, initiated by the UNWTO and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC), calls upon heads of state and government around the world to acknowledge tourism's key role in socioeconomic growth.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Prime Minister's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said Rifai discussed with the PM various aspects of tourism in South and South-East Asia.

Terming Bangladesh part of international tourism, the UNWTO secretary general said tourism enhances employment opportunities as it is a labour-intensive industry and it is

good for mankind.

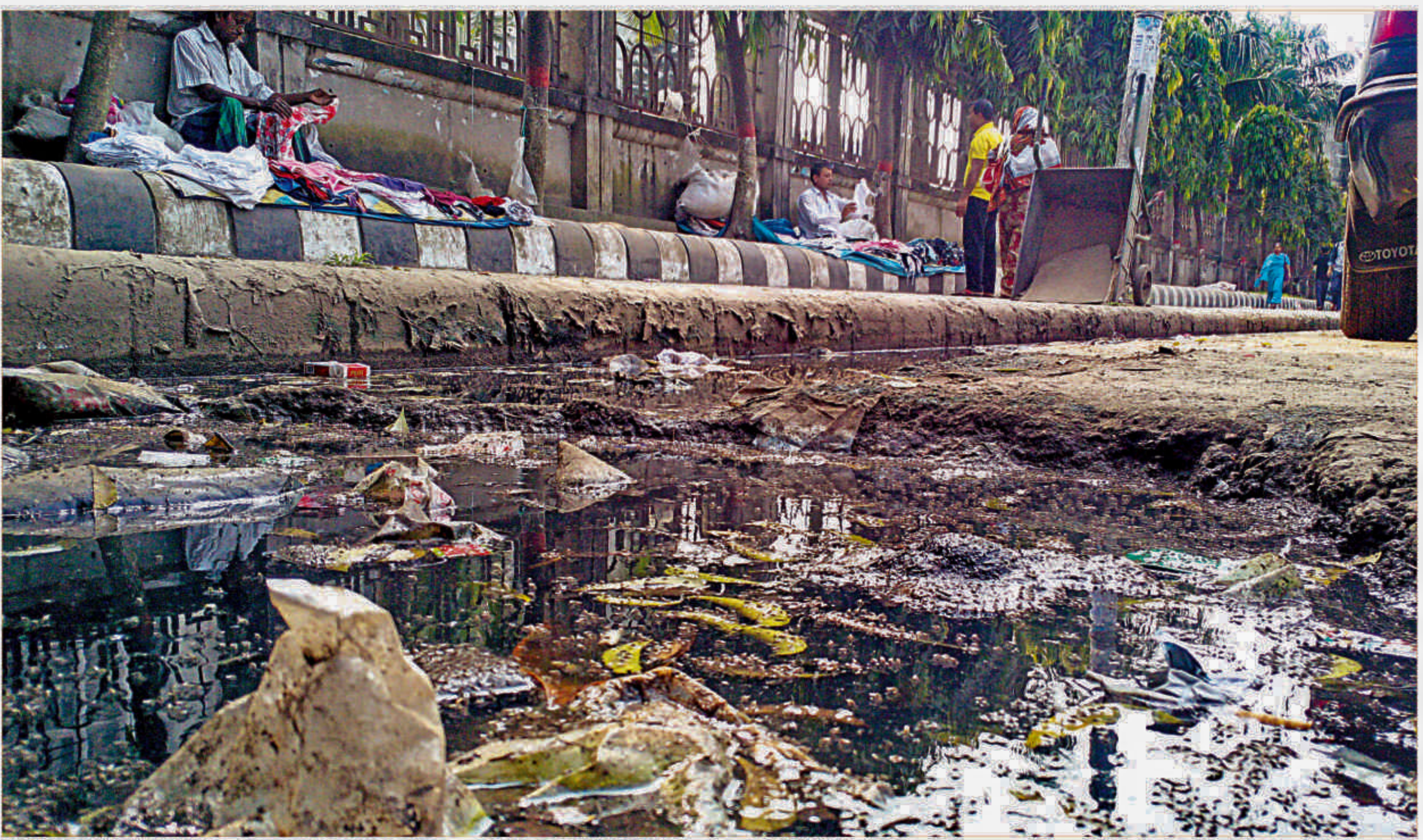
Tourism played a pivotal role in sustaining economy in the region despite economic recession across the Europe for over half a decade, he added.

Hasina said her government would do more to promote and develop tourism in the country. She sought support from the UNWTO on human resource development as well as beach management.

The Bangladesh government has been building necessary infrastructures while steps have been taken to ensure security of tourists, she noted.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon, Afghan Minister of Information and Culture Abdul Bari Jahani, Bhutanese Minister of Economic Affairs Loynpo Norbu Wangchuk, Deputy Minister for Tourism of Cambodia TOP Sopheak and Myanmar's Deputy Minister for Hotel and Tourism Tin Shwe were present during the meeting.

The UNWTO and WTTTC present open letter to heads of state and government in turn, highlighting the importance of travel and tourism.



Mosquitoes find this pothole right in front of the Dhaka South City Corporation head office as a safe breeding place. The DSCC claims more than 283 workers spray larvicide and adulticide around the city every day to stop breeding of mosquitoes. But it seems to have had little effect. At least 1,930 dengue cases, mostly in the capital, have been reported in the last nine months, the highest in nine years. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

## Kaunia OC tasked with probe into Hoshi murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

The investigation officer (IO) of Japanese national Kunio Hoshi murder case has been changed.

ABM Zahidul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Rangpur's Kaunia Police Station, has replaced the previous IO, Mamunur Rashid, OC (investigation) of the same police station, Zainul Abedin, additional superintendent of Rangpur police, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the change was made on Sunday by the five-member probe committee, headed by Deputy Inspector General of Police (Rangpur range) Humayun Kabir, formed over the killing.

After Hoshi's murder on October 3, Rezaul Karim, the then OC of the police station, filed a case, accusing three unidentified persons. Mamunur was made the IO afterwards.

But recently, Zahidul replaced Rezaul Karim, who has been transferred to Pirganj Police Station in Rangpur.

Zainul said the probe body made Zahidul the new IO as he was senior to Mamunur and was more experienced.

Hoshi was shot dead in a village of Kaunia upazila on October 3. Three days later, a Rangpur court placed two people - Rashed-un-Nabi Khan Biplob, a member of BNP's Rangpur city unit, and Humayun Kabir Hira, a friend of Hoshi, -- on a 10-day remand.

Days later, the court cancelled the remand of Biplob and sent him to jail. Hira is on remand in another murder case, said police sources.

In connection with Hoshi murder, police on October 10 released two private bank officials, who were detained at Rajshahi the previous day, following questioning.

Hoshi was buried at Munshipara graveyard in Rangpur city on October 13 as per Muslim rituals.

## BNP leader Quayum the 'big brother'

FROM PAGE 1

a joint convener of Dhaka city BNP, left the country on April 28, the day elections to Dhaka North and Dhaka South city corporations were held, said family and party sources.

Since then he has been staying either in Malaysian or in Dubai. He also often visited London.

Talking to The Daily Star from Malaysia last night, Quayum said the government wants to make him a "scapegoat" branding him as the so-called "Boro Bhai".

He also alleged that the government was staging another "Joi Mia drama" as seen during the tenure of BNP government centring the investigation of August 21 grenade attack.

In 2005, Joi Miah, a petty criminal, was falsely implicated and the Criminal Investigation Department obtained his "confessional statement" in the grenade attack case.

Yesterday, family members claimed Quayum's brother MA Matin was picked up by a group of plainclothes cops on October 20

from in front of his Madhya Badda residence.

Police, however, rejected the claim.

"I fear police will not admit arresting my brother until they extract his confession that I had sent him money to carry out the killing," Quayum said.

According to party sources, Quayum is considered one of the trusted party colleagues of BNP Chief Khaleda Zia. He was assigned by the BNP high-ups to make "big contributions" to the opposition's anti-government movement in late 2014.

He is accused in a number of cases filed with Badda Police Station, said its officer-in-charge.

Matin, however, has no affiliation with BNP or any other political party. A deputy managing director of Navid Woolwears Limited, he has no cases filed against him, said the family.

Talking to this newspaper, Matin's wife Dilruba last night said three to four people picked up her husband

around 7:45pm on October 20 while he was preparing to go to mosque for prayers.

"Without saying anything or giving my husband any opportunity to talk with us, police took him away by a microbus," she added.

"We went to the local police station and higher authorities of the law enforcement agencies to know whereabouts of my husband. But none admitted picking him up. With my two children, I have been passing my days in great anxiety," a weeping Dilruba added.

Earlier, a lead investigator had hinted that the Tavella murder mastermind could be from BNP-Jamaat alliance and they have found a top Jamaat leader linked with the murder plan.

"There were different layers involved in the implementation of the plan. This tactic was followed so that police cannot reach the mastermind," the investigator added.

At the lowest tier was the so-called "Boro Bhai" who hired three killers

for a certain amount of money.

Police on Monday said three of the four arrested -- Tamjid Ahmed alias Rubel alias Shooter Rubel, Russell Chowdhury alias Chakki Russell and Minhazul Arifin Russell alias Bhagne Russell -- directly took part in the shooting.

One of the trio claimed the contract was settled at Tk 7 lakh while another said it was Tk 15 lakh, according to an official, who could not say what figure the third one gave.

Police also arrested Shakhawat Hossain alias Sharif, whose motorbike was used by the alleged killers.

'RUBEL TORTURED' Rubel made a confessional statement before a magistrate on Monday evening, court sources said. His family members yesterday alleged that he was tortured to make the confession and they came to know this when they met him at the jail gate.

Rubel's uncles Mainuddin Ahmed Touhid and Mamun Khan told this correspondent that four of their family members met him at the jail

gate yesterday and talked to him for about 20 minutes.

Rubel told them that cops tortured him and forced him to give scripted deposition in the Tavella killing case. Touhid alleged his nephew was unable to walk normally.

According to the family members, detectives in plainclothes picked up Rubel on October 12 evening from Badda link road area. He had remained missing since then. The family filed a general diary regarding this with Badda Police Station on October 21.

Contacted, DB Inspector Zeahad Hossain, investigation officer of the case, denied the allegations.

Meanwhile, locals at Badda, the neighbourhood of the arrestees, said the youths are druggies. The four are known to each other and involved in BNP politics.

According to family members, Bhagne Russell and Sharif were a bit mentally imbalanced after their wives left years ago.

## Nuclear power plant

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Preparatory work to build the plant is underway under a \$500-million technical assistance from Russia, said the minister.

Interest rate for the Russian loan has not been fixed yet.

Muhith, however, said it would be a maximum of 4 percent, and the repayment period would be 28 years with a grace period of 10 years. The loan is neither concessional nor commercial.

In case of commercial loans from the Asian Development Bank, Bangladesh normally pays service charge of around 4 percent, with repayment period of 20 years.

In June, Rosatom submitted a feasibility report on the plant to Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

The Russian corporation said the plant would use a new generation reactor that has a lifespan of 60 years with an option of extending it for 20 years.

The reactor contains improved safety features, and its passive safety system is capable of working for 72 hours in case of any critical or emergency situation, it said.

Rosatom will maintain the plant for the first year of its commercial opera-

tion before handing over its control to the Bangladesh authorities.

"We may float an international tender to award the job of running the plant. Even, we may ask them [Rosatom] to continue to do it," said Muhith.

Rosatom will bear fuel costs for the first year of operation, and Bangladesh thereafter.

Muhith said the fuel costs would gradually come down.

He couldn't say what the production cost of a unit (kilowatt-hour) of electricity at the plant would be.

The minister, however, said it would be much less than that of electricity produced in plants, which run on fossil fuel or coal.

Muhith said the Russian loan for the plant would be a major debt burden, considering the current level of Bangladesh's foreign borrowing.

The country's debt burden is now \$18 billion, which will go up to \$30 billion after five years at the current pace of external borrowing.

The amount would reach \$42 billion if the Russian loan is added to it.

Asked whether Bangladesh's economy will come under strain in repaying the loans, he said, "Yes, we will face

pressure the way we service the debt now. However, it is quite low if we compare it with the standard debt burden."

Muhith said it takes around seven years to develop a workforce for maintaining a nuclear power plant.

The government already sent some Bangladeshi scientists to Russia to gain knowledge about nuclear power plants. Russia asked Bangladesh government to send another group of 25 by September next year, he said.

A total of 250 Bangladeshis will receive hands-on training in Russia.

In 2009, the government had initially estimated that the nuclear power plant would cost between \$3 billion and \$4 billion.

However, similar plants are now being built by Russia in different countries with price tags ranging from \$10 billion to \$13 billion.

Bangladesh has stepped up efforts to diversify its energy sources for producing power, as the country's gas reserve is depleting fast.

Once operational, the nuclear power plant would ensure significant energy diversity for the country, said government officials.

## US not sure

FROM PAGE 1

said, "We certainly note with concern ISIL's [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] claim of responsibility for the attack. And, as we have elsewhere, we take those claims seriously."

"It's by law enforcement authorities there in Bangladesh to confirm responsibility. But I think it's prudent for us to take ISIL claims seriously, and we do. But I just don't have anything specific to give you in terms of actual responsibility for it... We need to let the law enforcement agencies there in Bangladesh investigate this and come to their own conclusions," Kirby added.

The IS reportedly claimed responsibility for the murders of Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella in Dhaka's diplomatic zone on September 28 and Japanese national Kunio Hoshi in Rangpur on October 3.

Refuting the claims, the Bangladesh government said it found no militant links with the murders and that the attacks were aimed at destabilising the country.

Kirby said the US is working relentlessly with Bangladesh to identify the killers of the two foreigners.

"We are working closely with the

government of Bangladesh and key partners to assess who is responsible for these attacks and to help bring them to justice."

## BSF kills Bangladeshi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) beat a Bangladeshi cattle trader to death on Putkhali border in Jessore's Benapole early yesterday.

The dead, Monirul Islam, 32, was of Balunda village in Benapole.

Around 5:00am, the BSF men of Angral camp picked up Monirul when some Bangladeshi cattle traders along with cattle were returning home through the border, said Lt Col Abdur Rahim, commanding officer of 23 Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

The BSF members then tortured Monirul to death and left the body on the Isamoti river bank, said the BGB official.

Gaighata police of India recovered the body and sent it to Gaighata Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

## US warship near Chinese islands

FROM PAGE 1

Washington's long-awaited move to assert freedom of navigation may escalate the dispute over the strategically vital waters, where Beijing has been transforming reefs and outcrops into artificial islands with potential military use.

China claims sovereignty over almost the whole of the area, raising concerns it could one day seek to dictate who may transit its bustling sea lanes.

Several neighbouring countries including the Philippines, a US ally, have competing claims and the dispute has raised fears of clashes in an area through which a third of the world's oil passes.

The US action was part of the country's "routine operations in the South China Sea in accordance with international law", an American official told AFP. "We will fly, sail, and operate anywhere in the world that international law allows."

China's foreign ministry spokes-

man Lu Kang blasted the exercise, saying the ship had "illegally entered" the waters near the islands "without receiving permission from the Chinese government".

Beijing "resolutely opposes any country using freedom of navigation and overflight as a pretext for harming China's national sovereignty and security interests", he said, adding it would "staunchly defend its territorial sovereignty".

In a commentary, the official Xinhua news agency condemned a "flagrant and baseless provocation" that added to regional instability.

But despite the Chinese rhetoric, analysts said more such operations could be expected.

Beijing's so far limited response showed that it had had "its bluff called", said Rory Medcalf, director of the International security programme at the Lowy Institute in Sydney.

"The US and its allies and partners should now help the Chinese leader-

ship in saving face, by emphasising that freedom of navigation operations are normal, not extraordinary," he said.

There have been repeated confrontations in the area between Chinese vessels and boats from some of its neighbours who assert rights to the waters, particularly the Philippines and Vietnam.

Both are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which has long called on China to negotiate a code of conduct in the region, as are fellow claimants Brunei and Malaysia. Taiwan also makes claims over part of the sea.

Manila has infuriated the world's second-largest economy by taking the dispute to a United Nations tribunal, and Philippine President Benigno Aquino said the US action demonstrated that "the balance of power says that there is not just a single voice that must be adhered to".

Beijing's South China Sea re-claims have been seen as an

attempt to assert its claims by establishing physical facts in the water, but Aquino said: "There is no de facto changing of the reality on the ground."

Beijing has repeatedly said the construction work is primarily for civilian purposes, and Chinese President Xi Jinping during a visit to Washington last month pledged that the country will not militarise the area.

But satellite images of the islands published by the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies show that Beijing has reclaimed millions of square metres of land in the Spratlys, known as Nansha in Chinese.

The pictures also show a host of facilities with the potential for military applications being developed, including as many as three runways, at least one of them 3,000 metres (10,000 feet) long.

The US, which is engaged in a foreign policy "pivot" to Asia, and

China, which has the world's largest military and is expanding the reach of its navy, are jockeying for position in the Pacific.

Beijing regularly calls for a "new model of major country relations", implying equality between the world's top two economic and military powers.

Yesterday's operations were "not directed at any specific country," the US official said.

"US forces operate in the Asia-Pacific region on a daily basis, including in the South China Sea," he added.

The sail-by was "long overdue", said Bonnie Glaser, a senior China expert at CSIS, adding that the exercises "should be done quietly, regularly, and often".

"There should be no media fanfare," she added. "The way this has been handled has left the Chinese believing that the US is challenging its sovereignty rather than simply exercising freedom of the seas."

## Paris to host Syria crisis meet

AFP, Paris

France will host a meeting on the Syria crisis with Western and Arab allies later yesterday, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said.

The "working dinner" at the French foreign ministry will include "the main partners engaged with France in dealing with the Syrian crisis: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Qatar, Turkey, Germany, the United States, Italy and Britain," Fabius said in a statement.

"They will discuss the means to bring about a political transition towards a united and democratic Syria, respectful of all communities, while also reinforcing our fight against terrorism," he added.

Tuesday's meeting will feature mainly lower-rung officials, with the United States sending its deputy secretary of state Tony Blinken in the place of his boss, John Kerry.