

GROUNDING WARSHIP

China, Philippines’
dispute heats up

AFP, Manila

President Ferdinand Marcos said yesterday he was “not aware” of any agreement with China to remove a Philippine Navy vessel grounded on a reef in the disputed South China Sea.

Marcos’ remarks were in response to Beijing’s insistence in recent days that Manila had “repeatedly” promised to tow away the crumbling BRP Sierra Madre from Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands.

The BRP Sierra Madre, which the Philippines deliberately grounded in 1999 in an effort to check China’s advance in the hotly contested waters, has long been a flashpoint between Manila and Beijing.

Tensions flared at the weekend when the Philippines accused Chinese Coast Guard vessels of blocking and firing water cannon at boats on a resupply mission to a handful of Filipino marines stationed on the World War II-vintage ship.

“I’m not aware of any agreement that the Philippines should remove from its own territory its own ship, the BRP Sierra Madre, from the Ayungin Shoal,” Marcos said in a video posted on the Presidential



Communications Office’s Facebook page, using the Philippine name for Second Thomas Shoal.

“And let me go further, if there does exist such an agreement, I rescind that agreement as of now,” he said.

The Chinese embassy in Manila did not respond to a request for comment about Marcos’s remarks.

The Philippine military and coast guard said six Chinese coast guard vessels and two Chinese “militia” boats were involved in Saturday’s incident.

One of the Philippine charter boats carrying supplies was prevented from reaching the shoal. Another charter boat unloaded its cargo successfully.

The Philippine marines deployed on the run-down vessel depend upon resupply missions to survive their remote posting.

Beijing has defended its actions as “professional” and accused Manila of “illegal delivery of construction materials” to the grounded ship.

“The Philippine side has repeatedly made clear promises to tow away the warship illegally ‘stranded’ on the reef,” a spokesperson for China’s foreign ministry said Tuesday.



Members of United Naga Council take part in a rally to demand a solution to the Indo-Naga political issue in the spirit of the Indo-Naga Framework Agreement in Senapati, in India’s northeastern Manipur state yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Lawmakers
in India
pass data
protection law

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian lawmakers yesterday passed a data protection law that will dictate how tech companies process users’ data amid criticism that it will likely lead to increased surveillance by the government.

The law will allow companies to transfer some users’ data abroad while giving the government power to seek information from firms and issue directions to block content on the advice of a data protection board appointed by the federal government.

The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2023 gives the government powers to exempt state agencies from the law and gives users the right to correct or erase their personal data.

The new legislation comes after India withdrew a 2019 privacy bill that had alarmed tech companies like Facebook and Google with its proposals for stringent restrictions on cross-border data flows.

The law proposes penalties of up to 2.5 billion rupees for violations and non-compliance.

However, it has drawn criticism from opposition lawmakers and rights groups over the scope of exemptions.

The Internet Freedom Foundation has said that the law does not contain any meaningful safeguards against “over-broad surveillance”, while the Editors Guild of India has said it affects press freedom and dilutes the Right to Information law.

Deputy minister for information technology Rajeev Chandrasekhar has said that the law will protect the rights of all citizens.

Ukrainian drones shot
down near Moscow
Says Russia; EU country buys dozens of second-hand Leopard tanks from Belgian trader for Kyiv

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia said it had shot down two Ukrainian drones near Moscow yesterday, one near a major airport to the south of the city and one to the west of the capital.

“An attempt by the Kyiv regime to carry out a terrorist attack with unmanned aerial vehicles was prevented over the territory of the Moscow region,” the defence ministry said. “Two UAVs were destroyed by air defences.”

One was shot down near Domodedovo, where one of Russia’s biggest international airports is located, and another near the Minsk motorway, Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyanin said.

Drone air strikes deep inside Russia have increased since a drone was destroyed over the Kremlin in early May. Civilian areas of the capital were hit later in May and a Moscow business district was targeted twice in three days earlier this month.

In recent days, Ukrainian remotely piloted boats, also referred to as drones, have attacked a Russian fuel tanker and a navy base at Russia’s Novorossiysk port on the Black Sea.

In Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Tuesday that the revival of a deal with Russia to allow Ukrainian grain exports, brokered by Ankara and the UN, “depends on Western countries which



must keep their promises”.

“I think a solution can be found,” Erdogan added, referring to a recent telephone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who refused to extend the accord.

Meanwhile, dozens of second-hand Leopard 1 tanks that once belonged to Belgium have been bought by another European country for Ukrainian forces fighting Russia’s invasion, the arms trader who did the deal said Tuesday.

The German-made Leopards were at the centre of a public spat earlier this year after Belgian Defence Minister Ludivine Dedonder said the government had explored buying back tanks to send to Ukraine but had been quoted unreasonable prices.

The clash highlighted a predicament faced by Western governments trying find weapons for Ukraine after more than a year of intense warfare – arms they discarded as obsolete are now in high demand, and often owned by private companies.

Freddy Versluys, CEO of defence company OIP Land Systems, bought the tanks from the Belgian government more than five years ago.

He told Reuters he had now sold all 50 tanks to another European government, which he could not name due to a confidentiality clause. He said he also could not disclose the price.

AMAZON RAINFOREST
8 nations launch
alliance to fight
deforestation

AFP, Belém

Eight South American countries agreed Tuesday to launch an alliance to fight deforestation in the Amazon, vowing at a summit in Brazil to stop the world’s biggest rainforest from reaching “a point of no return.” The closely watched summit of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) adopted what host country Brazil called a “new and ambitious shared agenda” to save the rainforest, a crucial buffer against climate change that experts warn is being pushed to the brink of collapse. The group’s members – Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela – signed a joint declaration in Belém, at the mouth of the Amazon River, laying out a nearly 10,000-word roadmap to promote sustainable development and end deforestation.

NIGER CRISIS
Ex-rebel leader
launches anti-
coup movement

REUTERS, Niamey

A former rebel leader and politician in Niger has launched a movement opposing the junta that took power in a July 26 coup, a first sign of internal resistance to army rule in the Sahel country. Rhissa Ag Boula said in a statement seen yesterday that his new Council of Resistance for the Republic (CRR) aimed to reinstate ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, who has been in detention at his residence since the takeover. “Niger is the victim of a tragedy orchestrated by people charged with protecting it,” the statement said. The launch comes as diplomatic efforts to reverse the coup appeared stalled.

Forest fires rage
in Spain, Portugal
Record heat warning issued

AFP, Madrid

Temperatures were expected to hit 44 degrees Centigrade (111 Fahrenheit) in Spain and Portugal yesterday as the two countries boil under their third heatwave of the summer.

With huge forest fires raging across southern Portugal for fifth successive day, Spain’s weather service warned that the average temperature across the country could hit a 70-year record.

“This will probably be the hottest five August days in 73 years,” said AEMET, the state meteorological agency, with almost the whole country under red weather alerts.

Winds and extreme heat are also driving fires that have devastated 15,000 hectares of trees in neighbouring Portugal over the past few days.

The biggest blazes are in the southern Odemira region, where more than 1,500 people have been evacuated with the fires reaching the Algarve, a hugely popular tourist destination.

But firefighters tackling the wildfires said they were bringing them under control yesterday, with a fall in temperatures and greater humidity at the coast helping stem the spread as hot air moves east.

Experts say the recurring heatwaves, which have been getting longer and more intense, are a consequence of climate change. The Iberian Peninsula is bearing the brunt of climate change in Europe, with droughts and wildfires becoming more and more common.



Attendees observe a moment of silence at the time of the atomic bombing at 11:02 am as they hold a peace memorial ceremony at an indoor facility due to approaching Typhoon Khanun in Nagasaki, Nagasaki prefecture, Japan yesterday, as the city marks the 78th anniversary of the atomic bombing during World War II.

PHOTO: AFP

Dozens of
Pakistanis
involved
Says Afghan Taliban
on recent IS attacks

AFP, Kabul

Dozens of Pakistani Islamic State group militants have been killed or captured in Afghanistan in the past year, Kabul’s Taliban authorities said yesterday, days after Islamabad blamed Afghans for involvement in suicide attacks on its territory.

Tensions between the neighbours have mounted recently over an uptick in suicide attacks in Pakistan, with Islamabad claiming militants are frequently helped by Afghans.

Afghan government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP yesterday that in the past year, 18 people “eliminated by our forces in Afghanistan” were Pakistani citizens.

“They were Daeshis (members of IS) and they were involved in various bombings and attacks,” he said.

He was expanding on a statement issued late Tuesday that said Taliban authorities should not be blamed for “the security failure of any country in the region”.