

Vessels from China, Taiwan still in ‘standoff’

Taiwanese coast guard says

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's coast guard said yesterday its vessels were in a "standoff" with Chinese ships involved in an operation in waters southeast of the island democracy.

Chinese state media reported on Saturday that the "law enforcement operation" was in response to talks between Japan and the Philippines to draw a boundary in waters to the east of Taiwan.

China, which asserts Taiwan is part of its territory, called the talks "illegal" and has claimed exclusive control over the waters. Taiwan's coast guard said its vessels had "expelled" four Chinese ships from the island's



"restricted waters", and were now 33 nautical miles southeast of the island's southernmost tip.

"Vessels from both sides are still in a standoff," the Taiwanese coast guard said.

The coast guard said that it "strongly condemns China's use of the Japan-Philippines negotiations as a pretext to conceal its attempts to create the illusion of 'jurisdiction'".

Taiwan has deployed seven patrol vessels to help with surveillance of the Chinese ships. Tokyo and Manila said last month they would start talks "to delimit the maritime boundary" of an economic zone and continental shelf between them, angering Beijing.

On Saturday, Beijing's transport ministry organised maritime police from the coastal provinces of Fujian and Guangdong to "conduct a special maritime traffic law enforcement operation in waters east of Taiwan Island", Xinhua said.

The report did not give details on operation, including how long it lasted or whether it was still ongoing, and it did not say whether maritime police sent ships to the area.

The operation was "a necessary action taken against Japan and the Philippines' unilateral announcement they would start 'negotiations on delimiting a maritime boundary'" near Taiwan, Xinhua added.



A mourner carries the body of five-year-old Palestinian Maryam Qaddoum, killed with her father in an Israeli strike on the Rimal shelter, during their funeral in Gaza City yesterday. Gaza's civil defence service said an Israeli airstrike on a police station killed at least five people and wounded several.

PHOTO: AFP

100 DAYS INTO WAR ON IRAN

Trump fails to rally US support

Analysts say the unpopularity of war may reshape US policy, hurt Republicans

AGENCIES

Yesterday marked 100 days since the United States and Israel launched their war against Iran. Despite ongoing battles and intermittent ceasefire talks, the conflict remains deeply unpopular among Americans, posing a political challenge for President Donald Trump and his Republican Party.

Polling before the war showed most Americans opposed bombing Iran, and sentiment has not shifted. Many voters view the war as unnecessary and harmful to US interests. "Few Americans think this war serves American interests," said Shibley Telhami, professor at the University of Maryland, who has tracked public opinion on the conflict.

Experts warn that the lack of support could weaken Trump politically. Democrats hope to capitalize on this discontent in November's midterm elections, aiming to regain control of Congress and block Trump's agenda.

A University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll released Thursday found only 16 percent of voters believe the US is winning the war. The majority, including a third of Republicans, say the conflict has hurt American interests. Telhami called the findings "stunning," noting that skepticism spans both



older and younger Republicans — a troubling sign for Trump.

Trump has dismissed concerns about the war's economic fallout, pointing instead to stock market gains. Telhami argues the president is projecting confidence to avoid appearing desperate to end the conflict, which could weaken his negotiating position. "He cares for a lot of reasons, one of which is legacy, particularly on economics," Telhami said.

Critics also highlight the administration's lack of transparency before launching strikes on Iran. Congress was not consulted, and the public was not briefed on the necessity of war,

reports Al Jazeera online.

Jonathan Guyer of the Institute for Global Affairs said the conflict resonates with broader frustrations over US militarism, ties to Israel, and a ballooning defense budget projected to reach \$1.5 trillion. "The unpopularity of Israel, the unpopularity of the Iran war, the unpopularity of US militarism — these have a lot of resonance," Guyer noted.

After decades of costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Americans appear weary of another prolonged conflict. Analysts say this discontent could shape US policy and weigh heavily on Republicans in upcoming elections.

God stands with the poor, forsaken

Pope Leo tells 1.2m crowd in Madrid outdoor Mass

REUTERS, Madrid

Over a million people filled the streets near one of Madrid's main squares yesterday to join Pope Leo for an outdoor Mass, likely to be the largest event of his week-long visit to Spain, where the Pope said God stands with society's poor and forsaken.

Throng of people pressed along barriers near the landmark Cibeles Square, waving flags and shouting "Long live the pope", as Leo arrived in his white popemobile for the event. Some tossed flower petals as he arrived in the square.

Some 1.2 million people were in the square and its surrounding streets, the Vatican and local organisers said. Leo urged the crowds to live their Catholic faith by helping others in his sermon for the Mass. He said that God "identifies with the poor, the downtrodden, those who are alone and forsaken".

The pope also expressed hope earlier that Madrid would "remain a welcoming and inclusive city, where social life is inspired by genuine human values" in a message in a guestbook as he was handed the key to the city by its mayor.

Armenians vote with peace efforts, Russia in focus

REUTERS, Yerevan

Armenians headed to the polls yesterday in a parliamentary election seen as a test of the government's efforts to forge a peace deal after a crushing military defeat by Azerbaijan three years ago.

Polls show Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's ruling Civil Contract party leading, backed by up to 32 percent of voters, with the pro-Russian Strong Armenia party trailing in second place with up to 11 percent.

Since coming to power in 2018 Pashinyan has moved Armenia closer to the West and away from traditional patron Russia, which has provoked Moscow's ire in the lead-up to the vote.

GDP per capita has doubled under Pashinyan, a journalist and opposition activist turned politician. "I really like how Armenia has been growing right before my eyes," 39-year-old voter Karine Darbinyan said at a rally for Pashinyan in Yerevan's central square on Friday.

Pashinyan has faced a wave of criticism from the opposition and some sections of the public, who have accused him of capitulating to Azerbaijan, particularly since the 2023 war.

He has countered by placing his peace effort centre stage in his campaign, above all the agreement he signed at the White House last August with Azerbaijan after fighting between the two had raged on and off since the late 1980s.

Pashinyan said his government would provide a "balanced foreign policy" if re-elected.

Nuke programme 'line of no retreat'

N Korean leader's sister says ahead of a visit by Xi

AFP, Seoul

North Korea's nuclear weapons programme is "the line of no retreat", the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong Un said in a statement carried by state media yesterday ahead of a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Pyongyang has long insisted on its right to nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programmes, although they are forbidden under the terms of UN Security Council sanctions. It enshrined its nuclear status in its constitution in 2023.

"The DPRK's status as a nuclear weapons state is the line of no retreat," Kim's sister Kim Yo Jong said in the English version of a statement published by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency.

"We will never tolerate any threat or compromise related to our sovereignty and security," she said.

She also cited reported US weapons sales to South Korea, describing them as the "ceaseless arms buildup of the hostile countries", in justifying Pyongyang's efforts to strengthen its arsenal.

Kim Yo Jong is a key player in the North's communications and foreign policy and her statement came on the eve of Xi's visit, which, according to state media, is scheduled to take place today and tomorrow.

Beijing is a vital source of political and economic support to North Korea, one of the most diplomatically isolated countries in the world and which is under heavy international sanctions.

Xi's visit to Pyongyang will be his first in seven years, and comes after he hosted back-to-back summits with US President Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin last month.



NIGERIA'S STATE OF BORNO

Hundreds of kidnap victims freed from Boko Haram

AFP, Maiduguri

Several hundred people kidnapped by Boko Haram earlier this year from a village in the northeastern state of Borno were freed over the weekend, a senator and local youth leader said yesterday.

Kidnappings, often for ransom, have become a key tactic of Boko Haram jihadists in their 17-year-old insurgency against the Nigerian state, mostly concentrated in the northeast.

Samaila Kaigama, president of the Borno South Youth Alliance (BOSYA), said his group "has secured the release of all the 416 women and children abducted from Ngoshe".

They were released Saturday, Kaigama told journalists. Mohammed Ali Ndume, a senator from Borno, confirmed the release to AFP.

It was not immediately clear how the victims' release was secured. But separately, the military said it executed an "intelligence-led rescue operation" freeing 360 people.

The victims had been held by Boko Haram militants "under harsh conditions after being abducted from several communities, particularly within the Ngoshe axis", it said.

"Sadly, two infants died due to exhaustion from prolonged captivity and harsh terrain," Daniel Bwala, a spokesman for President Bola Tinubu, said on social media.

The military statement said troops had gathered intelligence and used "psychological operations" to sow "mistrust within the insurgent ranks" before "the commencement of the assault phase".



A handout image from Ukraine's Energoatom shows damage to a spent nuclear fuel storage facility, following what the company said was a drone strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, near Chornobyl, Ukraine, in this image released yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CUSTODY DISPUTE

Ex-wife of UAE royal released on bail

AFP, Dubai

The ex-wife of a nephew of Dubai's ruler has been released on bail, the emirate's government media office said, after she was held during a custody battle.

Zeynab Javadli was detained after her former husband, Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum, accused her of abducting their three children.

"Dubai Public Prosecution confirms that Ms Zeynab Javadli has been released on bail following questioning," the Dubai Media Office said in a statement on Saturday.

It added that the questioning was "in connection with an ongoing investigation into allegations that she abducted her children and refused to return them to their father, who was granted custody".