

No Military Solution to South China Sea Dispute – Kerry



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry adjusts his ear phones during a joint news conference with India’s External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj (not pictured) in New Delhi, India, August 30, 2016.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry called on Wednesday on China and the Philippines to abide by an international tribunal’s decision on the disputed South China Sea and said there was no military solution to the problem.

Kerry’s remarks, made in a visit to India, came ahead of a G20 summit in China on Sunday and Monday that could be overshadowed by arguments over everything from territorial disputes to protectionism by China, diplomats say.

An arbitration court in The Hague ruled in July that China did not have historic rights to the South China Sea. China dismissed the case lodged by the Philippines and rejected the ruling.

“The United States continues to call on China and the Philippines to abide by the tribunal’s recent decision which is final and legally binding on both parties,” Kerry told a gathering of students in New Delhi.

China claims most of the South China Sea, through which more than \$5 trillion of trade moves annually. Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam have rival claims.

China has vowed to take all measures needed to protect its sovereignty over the South China Sea and says its actions there, which have included land reclamation and construction of air fields and docks on reefs, are peaceful.

China has blamed the United States and its allies in the region, such as Japan and Australia, for stoking tension.

The United States and Japan have no territorial claims in the South China Sea and say their priority is freedom of navigation.

Kerry said the United States supported diplomatic efforts to resolve territorial disputes to which there was “no military solution”.

“We are also interested in not fanning the flames of conflict but rather trying to encourage the parties to resolve their disputes and claims through the legal process and through diplomacy,” Kerry said.

The United States and India, in a joint statement issued on Tuesday after security talks, reiterated the importance of freedom of navigation and over flight in the South China Sea.

They said states should resolve disputes through peaceful means

and “exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that could complicate or escalate disputes affecting peace and stability”.

U.S. ally the Philippines welcomed the tribunal’s ruling in July but it is keen not to anger China. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte says he will hold talks with China on the issue.

Duterte is attending a summit next week in Laos of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which both U.S. President Barack Obama and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang are also going to.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin, asked in Beijing whether Li would meet Duterte there, said it was not clear what bilateral meetings might take place.

Liu did not refer directly to the United States but said interference by some countries outside the region was a challenge in China-ASEAN relations.

“Frankly, some countries outside the region don’t want to see China-ASEAN relations develop so quickly and become so close. Some people, some countries, are constantly interfering in the development of China-ASEAN relations,” Liu said.

Venezuela’s Maduro Vows Crackdown on Protest Violence



Supporters of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro rally in Caracas on August 27, 2016

CARACAS (AFP) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro vowed to jail opposition leaders if they incite violence during upcoming protests seeking a referendum on removing him from power.

Maduro, blamed by opponents for a devastating economic crisis, accused opposition leaders of plotting a “terrorist coup” against him before Thursday’s nationwide protests.

“We must defeat the coup d’etat without impunity,” he told supporters at a rally in Caracas billed as an early counter-demonstration.

“Whoever gets involved in a coup plot, or calls for violence, is going to jail, sir. Shriek, weep or scream, but you’re going to jail.”

Maduro accused the United States of plotting against leftist governments in Latin America.

“The threat is coming directly from American imperialism,” he said.

One opposition figure, Yon Goicoechea, was arrested on charges of possessing explosives which he allegedly planned to detonate at the upcoming protests.

Opposition lawmaker Tomas Guanipa said the authorities had planted evidence against him.

“Even if you throw us all in jail, you won’t stop the people from taking to the streets to fight for democratic, electoral and peaceful change,” he said.

The protests are the first since electoral authorities indicated it was too late to organize a recall vote this year -- infuriating the opposition, which wants a referendum by January in order to trigger new elections.

The protests are intended to pressure authorities to let the referendum go ahead.

Venezuela is facing a deep economic recession fueled by the fall in the price of oil, its main export.

With shortages of food, medicine and basic goods, the opposition coalition behind the referendum drive -- the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) -- insists that ditching Maduro’s socialist government is the only way out of the crisis.

Venezuela’s neighbors are becoming increasingly wary of developments in the once-booming economy.

The Organization of American States (OAS) on Tuesday denounced Maduro’s government as a “dictatorship,” criticizing its “wave of repression” against opponents before the march.

The measures “completely contradict democratic principles and values,” OAS chief Luis Almagro said, calling on the government to permit the demonstration as part of a “broader framework of freedom.”

Venezuela’s Catholic Church also called on the government to allow Thursday’s protests to go ahead freely.

The journalists’ union meanwhile said conditions for the press are difficult ahead of the demos.

Masked attackers threw Molotov cocktails and flaming excrement at the offices of the opposition-leaning newspaper El Nacional on Tuesday, after the authorities denied entry on Monday to a team of reporters from Al Jazeera TV.

Indian Forces Kill Teen in Kashmir

SRINAGAR (Press TV) - Indian forces have shot dead a teenager in Kashmir in fresh clashes between protesters and New Delhi forces in the disputed Himalayan region.

Police said the young man was killed on Wednesday when paramilitary troops fired live rounds at protesters in the northern village of Nadihal.

“The boy died in the firing. Five other protesters also received bullet injuries,” AFP quoted an unnamed police officer as saying.

Locals residents said the boy was aged 18.

Fierce clashes erupted after residents demonstrated against an earlier raid by soldiers searching for protest leaders in the violence-hit region.

Protesters also clashed with troops in other areas of the region including the main city of Srinagar.

Indian forces fired live ammunition, shotguns and tear gas in the southern town of Anantnag at protesters who responded by hurling stones. Dozens of civilians were injured in the latest fierce clashes.

“We have reports about 50 protesters

were injured in Anantnag, mostly with pellets,” another senior police officer said.

A fresh round of anti-India protests has erupted across the Muslim-majority region after authorities lifted a curfew for the first time in 54 days. However, shops and schools are still closed due to a strike called by the region’s independence leaders.

The curfew was declared following large protests against Indian rule, triggered by the killing of Burhan Wani, a popular pro-independence fighter, by Indian forces on July 8.

Nearly 70 people in Kashmir have been killed and thousands more injured, mostly by government forces, in a crackdown since early July, when tension escalated in the region.

There are an estimated 500,000 Indian troops currently deployed in the restive territory.

Since India and Pakistan won independence from British rule in 1947, they have been claiming Kashmir in full but have only partial control over it. Thousands of people have been killed in the unrest in Kashmir since early 1990s.



FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — The first commercial flight between the United States and Cuba in more than a half century is scheduled to fly from Fort Lauderdale to the central city of Santa Clara on Wednesday morning, re-establishing regular air service severed at the height of the Cold War.

JetBlue Flight 387 was set to take off at 9:45 a.m. EDT for a 72-minute journey that will open a new era of U.S.-Cuba travel, with about 300 flights a week connecting the U.S. with an island cut off from most Americans by the 55-year-old trade embargo on Cuba and formal ban on U.S. citizens engaging in tourism on the island.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Pentagon has ordered a review of the USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier, which is under construction and due to be delivered in November, a Defense Department spokesman said.

Defense Undersecretary for Acquisition Frank Kendall ordered the review, citing a list of problems with the ship, Bloomberg News reported.

“With the benefit of hindsight, it was clearly premature to include so many unproven technologies” on the carrier, Kendall wrote to Navy Secretary Ray Mabus in an Aug. 23 memo, according to Bloomberg.

A Pentagon spokesman confirmed to Reuters that Kendall had ordered the review. It was not immediately clear who would conduct it.

KIGALI (Xinhua) -- Members of the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (EAPCCO) are looking for smart ways to counter cyber crime that has become increasingly prevalent and sophisticated across the globe.

The law enforcement officers from 13 EAPCCO member countries made the remarks on Wednesday during the opening of the 18th EAPCCO Annual General Meeting (EAPCCO-AGM) at the Kigali Convention Centre.

The high level forum, dubbed: “Enhancing cooperation and innovation in combating transnational organized and emerging crimes,” has brought together more than 100 delegates from across the African region.

TUNIS (Xinhua) -- The death toll from a road accident involving a heavy truck and a bus in northwestern Tunisia on Wednesday rose to 16, the Tunisian Interior Ministry said.

The accident also left 85 others wounded and caused 15 cars to collide.

It occurred on the Kasserine road when a truck skidded due to a brake failure and collided first with a bus before hitting a high-voltage-electric pole that fell, causing a dozen cars to catch fire, the ministry said.

The injured have been rushed to local hospitals and rescue operations are underway.

Merkel: ‘Germany Will Remain Germany’ After Migrant Influx

BERLIN (AP) — Chancellor Angela Merkel says the influx of migrants won’t fundamentally change Germany, a year after she first insisted that “we will manage” the refugee crisis.

Merkel said in an interview with the daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung published Wednesday that her mantra — which she has used repeatedly since coining it on Aug. 31 last year and which has divided opinion in Germany — remains “the right motif for this task.”

On Sept. 4 last year, a few days after she first used it, she and Austria’s then-chancellor decided to let in migrants who had piled up in Hungary. Germany registered over a

million newcomers last year, though the actual number is believed to be lower, and the influx has unsettled many residents.

“Germany will remain Germany, with everything that is dear to us,” Merkel was quoted as saying.

She added that there has been constant change over the decades and that “change is not a bad thing — it is a necessary part of life,” but made clear that Germany won’t give up its values.

Merkel conceded that, in earlier years, Germany ignored the issue of migrants heading for Europe and the need for a pan-European solution.

“A lot of refugees already came

in 2004 and 2005, and we left it to Spain and others on the (EU) external borders to deal with that,” she said. “And, yes, we also resisted a proportional distribution of refugees then.”

“Germany was very happy that, after the many refugees we had taken in during the wars in Yugoslavia, others mostly now had to deal with the issue,” she added. “I can’t deny that.”

Merkel and the European Union’s executive Commission have made little headway with efforts to get other EU nations to share the burden of hosting the refugees who arrived in the current influx.