

ANGER IN TAIWAN AFTER CHINA INTRODUCES NEW ENTRY CARD

TAIPEI: A new electronic entry card for Taiwanese visitors to China has sparked protests and a political backlash despite Beijing touting the move as a way to make travel easier. China introduced the card on Monday after announcing it in June, but Taiwanese authorities say they were not told of the roll out.

The island's Mainland Affairs Council's top China policy decision-making body said there had not been "proper communication" in advance of the launch. "The way they are doing this is

irrespective of Taiwan and has hurt the feelings of Taiwan people," it said in a statement. Taiwan's Premier Ma Chinkuo also said he was "extremely dissatisfied" adding that he had been given no prior notice of the move.

Around 20 members of the anti-China Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) threw eggs and let off firecrackers outside Beijing-friendly president Ma Ying-jeou's residence Tuesday night in protest. "The cards may benefit some Taiwanese businessmen and students in

China, but the policy is aimed at downgrading Taiwan to the level of Hong Kong and Macau (both semi-autonomous regions of China)," TSU spokesman Chang Chao-lin said yesterday.

Self-ruling Taiwan split from China at the end of a civil war on the mainland in 1949, but Beijing still sees the island as part of its territory awaiting reunification. It does not recognize Taiwanese passports. The card had already been on trial for visitors to the southern Chinese

province of Fujian for two months. China says it is part of wider measures to reduce barriers with Taiwan.

Visitors used to need two documents—a paper visa and an entry permit to enter China. Now they just need the electronic card, which will replace the old paper document and be valid for five years. Ties between China and Taiwan have improved markedly since 2008 after Ma came to power promising to beef up trade and tourism links. But recently public sentiment has once

again turned against closer ties with Beijing, with voters saying trade deals have been agreed in secret and have not benefited ordinary citizens.

Tensions flared earlier this year when Beijing rejected Taipei's bid to become a founding member of a China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). There was also anger over its decision to inaugurate a new flight route near Taiwan and in response to a military drill carried out against a backdrop that resembled Taipei. — AFP



SEATTLE: Chinese President Xi Jinping speaks during his welcoming banquet at the start of his visit to the United States, at the Westin Hotel. — AFP

XI CALLS FOR LESS 'SUSPICION' IN US-CHINA TIES AHEAD OF TALKS

'CONFLICT WOULD LEAD TO WORLDWIDE DISASTER'

SEATTLE: China's president on Tuesday called for less "suspicion" in ties between the world's top two economies, ahead of landmark talks later this week with US President Barack Obama. Xi Jinping's comments, at a keynote speech in the commercial hub of Seattle, came as US aerospace giant Boeing reportedly clinched a deal with Chinese firms to sell 300 aircraft.

"We want to see more understanding and trust and less estrangement and suspicion," said Xi, whose country has seen somewhat strained ties with the United States on several issues. "Conflict and confrontation between the two powers would lead to disaster for both countries and the world at large," stressed Xi.

Ahead of talks with the Obama administration later this week on hot-button issues like China's expanding presence in the South China Sea, cyber theft and human rights, Xi sought to convince an audience of mostly businessmen and US state officials that China was a positive force in the global economy and was pushing forward with reforms based on rule of law and market principles. China's foreign policy priority was to build what he described as a "new model" of relationship with Washington based on "non-confrontation, non-conflict, mutual respect and willing cooperation," said the president. "We must read each other's strategic intentions correctly."

'Legitimate concerns'

Xi vowed to treat US investors in China fairly and fight against commercial cyber theft, a growing complaint against China by American businesses. "We respect the international business norms of non-discrimination," he told an audience that included the chief

executives of some of the largest US businesses, including Boeing, Amazon, DuPont, IBM and Microsoft, all of whom have substantial business in China. "We will address legitimate concerns of foreign investors in a timely fashion."

On the hacking issue, he said China itself is a victim and was ready to set up a "high-level" mechanism with the United States to discuss the problem. "The Chinese government will not in whatever form engage in commercial theft or encourage or support such attempts by anyone." At the same time, he suggested that US threats to sanction Chinese officials over the alleged hacking were out of line, saying cyber theft was a crime that had to be prosecuted "in accordance with law."

He also stressed that China's economic downturn was temporary and that the government was on top of recent market turmoil. "At present all economies are facing difficulties and our economy is also under general pressure," Xi said. "China's stock market has reached the phase of self-recovery and self-adjustment," he said. Xi is spending two days in Seattle meeting with the governors of US states with substantial trade and investment ties to China, and the businesses themselves, sending a message to the White House that US companies need China.

'No House of Cards'

Xi was introduced by legendary US diplomat Henry Kissinger, who made the first secretive effort in 1971 to restore long-broken relations with China and who praised Xi as the man able to take the relationship to a new level. The Chinese leader charmed his audience with quotes from Martin Luther King, recollections of

former visits to Seattle and knowing references to popular US culture, including the romance comedy "Sleepless in Seattle." Defending his government's crackdown on corruption, he quipped: "This has nothing to do with power struggle. This is no 'House of Cards.'" But he also took pains to remind Washington that China has been a responsible partner and team player in dealing with crises from Ebola to North Korea's nuclear threat to global warming, as well as acting to support the world economy in the 2008 financial crisis.

And, following on from his comments on his government's anti-corruption fight, he pointed a direct finger at the US government's allowing Chinese wanted for corruption to hide in the United States. He called for Washington's cooperation "so that corrupt elements will be denied an overseas safe haven." He also responded to criticisms that China's tough new security law will effectively outlaw foreign non-governmental organizations, saying the country welcomed and would protect those whose activities "are beneficial to the Chinese people."

But he also stressed they had to obey Chinese law: "On their part, foreign NGOs in China need to obey Chinese law and carry out activities in accordance with the law." White House National Security Advisor Susan Rice met Tuesday with several representatives from among the universities, businesses and rights groups that would be forced to register and report to the Chinese security services if the draft law enters into force. "Today's discussion focused on concerns that the draft legislation would further narrow space for civil society in China," the White House said in a statement that came hours after the Chinese leader landed in the United States. — AFP

SIX MORE BANGKOK BOMB CONSPIRATORS ARRESTED

KUALA LUMPUR/BANGKOK: Malaysia has arrested six people suspected of being part of a human trafficking network and who may have helped a bomber who killed 20 people at a Bangkok shrine last month escape from Thailand, police said yesterday. The suspects joined two people already in Malaysian detention who may have helped the bomber, who Thai police said was a foreigner of unknown identity, flee across southern Thailand's border with Malaysia, police in both countries said.

Four of the six people arrested last week were believed to be minority Uighur Muslims, who come from China's far western Xinjiang region, said Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay, director of the Malaysian police counter-terrorism unit. Thai police have made two arrests over the Aug. 17 blast, Thailand's worst ever bombing, that killed 20 people, including 14 foreigners, seven from Hong Kong and mainland China. The chief suspect is a man in a yellow shirt caught on security camera footage leaving a backpack at the shrine. He was implicated by a man in Thai detention who admitted to delivering the bag containing the bomb to him, police say. Ayob told Reuters the six were not directly linked to the bombing but to a human-trafficking gang.

"We believe that they facilitated the movement of the yellow-shirt man but we cannot

confirm since it is an ongoing investigation," Ayob said. Malaysia's arrests are the latest pieces in a puzzle pointing toward a connection to Uighurs that Thai authorities have sought to play down. Thai police have ruled out a political motive linked to Uighurs for the blast, suggesting instead the reason was that a human trafficking gang was angered by a police crackdown.

A Thai police investigator who had just returned from Malaysia confirmed the suspected bomber was not among the latest suspects, who were likely part of the trafficking network. The Uighur issue could be a thorny one for Thailand and any substantive link between the bombing and Thailand's forced repatriation of 109 Uighurs at China's behest in July could result in criticism that its foreign policy may have triggered the attack.

"They are not terrorists because they haven't announced what they want," Thai police spokesman Prawut Thawornwiri told reporters yesterday. Thousands of Uighurs have tried to flee China saying they face persecution, which Beijing rejects. Many use trafficking networks through Southeast Asia to Turkey, where they are largely welcomed and have ethnic and religious affinity. Suspects believed to be Turkish and Thais living in Turkey are among those on Thailand's wanted list for the bombing. — Reuters



KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian police Deputy Inspector Gen Noor Rashid Ibrahim gestures as he speaks during a press conference at the police headquarters. — AP

WOMAN CHARGED IN 'BALLOONGATE'

KUALA LUMPUR: A Malaysian woman was charged yesterday with insulting scandalized Prime Minister Najib Razak by dropping balloons bearing pro-democracy messages near him during a public event, her lawyer said. The case against Bilqis Hijjas-dubbed "Balloongate" on social media—has drawn public ridicule as an example of government overkill in pressuring its critics.

Bilqis Hijjas, 36, a dance producer, dropped yellow balloons with the words "justice," "democracy" and "media freedom" from an upper floor of a shopping mall while Najib and his wife officiated a function down below. The incident occurred on August 31, one day after tens of thousands of yellow-shirted protesters paralyzed the capital Kuala Lumpur with massive demonstrations demanding Najib's ouster over allegations of corruption and abuse of power.

With a group of supporters waiting outside a Kuala Lumpur court bearing yellow balloons, Bilqis was charged inside with "insulting behavior" that could affect public order. "You can't just say you have insulted someone and charge them in court for dropping balloons," said Bilqis' lawyer Michelle Yesudas, calling the charges "utterly ridiculous." The penalty for the charge is a mere 100 ringgit (\$23), but Bilqis was contesting it on "principle," Yesudas said. Bilqis is free on bail. Najib is under intense fire over allegations of huge sums missing from a state-owned firm he launched, and mysterious transfers of nearly \$700 million into his own bank accounts. Najib has denied wrongdoing but has moved to quash the allegations by sacking officials and going after whistleblowers. Critics of Najib's government say it routinely pressures the opposition and other opponents with a range of charges. — AFP

PHILIPPINE KIDNAPPERS HAUL HOSTAGES INTO MOUNTAINS

SAMAL: Gunmen holding three foreigners and one Filipina hostage slipped past a naval cordon and escaped to remote mountains in the southern Philippines, leaving few clues to their identities, police said yesterday. Elite army troops were trying to track the bandits while air force helicopters were readied for a possible rescue as the gunmen trekked into Davao Oriental province, a hotbed of Maoist and Islamic rebels, said Senior Superintendent Aaron Aquino, the region's deputy police commander.

The gunmen seized the Norwegian manager of a luxury island resort on Monday night, along with two Canadian tourists and one of their local girlfriends. The victims were aboard yachts anchored at the resort's marina. The abductions added to a string of kidnapp-

ings of foreigners and locals in the conflict-plagued south since the 1990s, which have been typically carried out by Islamic militants seeking to extort ransoms.

"Rest assured, our security sector will not stop until they catch this group," President Benigno Aquino told reporters. The president's assurance echoed comments made by the nation's leaders whenever a foreigner has been kidnapped, but the captives' releases have generally only been secured with ransom payments.

Adding to concerns about the captives, police said yesterday the gunmen had evaded a naval blockade around Samal Island, where the abductions took place. The gunmen had sailed about 50 kilometers east to Davao Oriental, a poor region on the far southeastern edge of Mindanao Island close to Indonesia with

remote mountains and isolated fishing communities. "Our scout rangers are following their tracks. They are on their trail. The air force is also helping, ready for insertion," Aquino, the police commander, told DZBB radio. He said "intelligence" sources had informed police that the gunmen reached Davao Oriental on Tuesday night, but he acknowledged authorities still did not know the gunmen's identities or motives. "We are waiting for contact from the kidnappers so we will know their demands," he said. Canadian tourists John Ridsdel, 68, and Robert Hall, 50, were among those abducted, police said. The other foreigner was the Norwegian resort manager, Kjartan Sekkingstad, 56, and the local woman was Hall's 40-year-old Filipina girlfriend, identified only as Tess.

Chilling footage

Chilling footage from the resort's surveillance cameras emerged yesterday showing the gunmen walking their hostages along a jetty at the marina. In the footage, broadcast by local television networks, a shirtless and bearded male hostage was seen shaking off the grip on his arm of one of the rifle-wielding men, but still not daring to try and run away.

The three others appeared to have been hauled from their beds, with one male hostage shirtless and with a blanket wrapped around his waist. The woman walking next to him was in a night gown. Investigators said they were looking at the possible involvement of communist guerillas or Islamic rebels excluded from a peace treaty signed in 2014 with the government, according to police. Communist and Islamic rebels have been waging decades-long struggles that have claimed tens of thousands of lives. The impoverished southern Mindanao region, including Davao Oriental, has proved fertile recruiting grounds and sanctuary for both groups. — AFP



MINDANAO: A combination made from undated handout photos released by Eastern Mindanao Command (EASTMINCOM) on September 22, 2015 shows Norwegian employee Kjartan Sekkingstad (left), 56, and Canadian tourists John Ridsdel (center), 68, and Robert Hall (right), 50, the three kidnapped foreigners who were seized by gunmen from aboard yachts just before midnight on September 21 on Samal island, a short boat ride from the southern commercial center of Davao. — AFP



JAKARTA: Indonesian workers weld part of a train wagon after a packed commuter train slammed into the back of another at a station in the Indonesian capital yesterday injuring at least 35 people, according to an official. TV footage showed the two trains crushed together, with considerable damage to the front end of one and the back of the other, and emergency workers carrying the injured out on stretchers. — AFP