

International

China's Xi flaunts Trump budding friendship in talk with Tillerson

Ties appear warmer following N Korea tensions

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping told US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson yesterday that he expected President Donald Trump's upcoming visit to be "wonderful", as ties appear warmer following tensions over how to handle North Korea. Xi smiled as he greeted Tillerson at the imposing Great Hall of the People across Tiananmen Square for talks expected to focus on North Korea and Trump's November visit.

The two men, however, did not mention the hermit state in public remarks before their private talks. Xi recalled that he and Trump have spoken on the phone several times and that they already met at the US leader's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida in April and the G20 summit in Hamburg in July. "I have enjoyed each

Chinese companies accused of supporting North Korea's weapons program. But China, which accounts for 90 percent of North Korea's international trade, has since backed a slew of additional United Nations sanctions against its neighbor.

A senior US official said this week that China appears to be on board with the plan to squeeze Pyongyang. "This is a relationship that continues to grow and mature on the strength of the relationship between yourself and President Trump," Tillerson told Xi. "And we look forward to advancing that relationship at the upcoming summit."

Tillerson also met with China's top diplomat, State Councillor Yang Jiechi, and Foreign Minister Wang Yi to lay the groundwork for Trump's trip, which will include stops in Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines between November 3 and 14. "Let us concentrate on cooperation and properly manage our differences in the spirit of mutual respect and mutual benefit so that we can keep moving the China-US relationship forward in the right direction," Yang said. Wang told Tillerson: "At present, China-US relations overall have a positive momentum and have arrived at an

important opportunity to progress further." Tillerson had been due to arrive on Friday evening but his aircraft's problems forced him to travel to China on a military transport plane yesterday.

'Two trains of thought'

While it has backed UN sanctions against Pyongyang, Beijing has insisted that the punitive measures must be coupled with efforts to organize peace talks. China has proposed a plan, which Russia has backed, in which North Korea would suspend its



BEIJING: US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, left, meeting with China's State Councillor Yang Jiechi at the Great Hall of the People. — AP

weapons programs in return for the United States to halt its military drills in the region. But the North conducted its sixth and most powerful nuclear test on September 3, and Trump and Kim have traded increasingly personal insults that have raised fears of a conflict.

"There appear to be two trains of thought in the international community regarding denuclearization of the peninsula: Crush North Korea or talk to North Korea so as to increase its sense of security. China and

Russia hold the latter view," China's state-run Global Times newspaper said in an editorial. The acting US assistant secretary of state for East Asia, Susan Thornton, told skeptical US lawmakers ahead of Tillerson's trip that China was making "growing, if uneven" progress in the strategy to strong-arm Pyongyang. "We have recently seen Chinese authorities take additional actions," she said, referring to new controls on the cross-border trade and finance that is North Korea's economic lifeline. — AFP



Trump's visit will be a special, wonderful and successful one

and every one of those engagements and we have made considerable efforts to push for the development of China-US relations," Xi said. "The two of us have also maintained a good working relationship and personal friendship," he said, adding that he believed Trump's visit "will be a special, wonderful and successful one".

Trump has touted his friendship with Xi but he has also prodded the Chinese leader in recent months to exert more pressure on North Korea to abandon its nuclear and missile activities. The Trump administration angered Beijing this summer by slapping sanctions on

Myanmar refugee exodus tops 500,000 as more Rohingya flee

TEKNAF: He trekked to Bangladesh as part of an exodus of a half million people from Myanmar, the largest refugee crisis to hit Asia in decades. But after climbing out of a boat on a creek on Friday, Mohamed Rafiq could go no further. He collapsed onto a muddy spit of land cradling his wife in his lap - a limp figure so exhausted and so hungry she could no longer walk or even raise her wrists.

The couple had no food, no money, no idea what to do next. Their two traumatized children huddled close beside them, unsure what to make of the country they had arrived in just hours earlier, in the middle of the night. Rafiq said their third child, an 8-month-old boy, had been left behind. Buddhist mobs in Myanmar burned the child to death, he said, after setting their village ablaze while security forces stood idly by - part of a systematic purge of ethnic Rohingya Muslims from Buddhist-majority Myanmar that the United Nations has condemned as "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing."

Five weeks after the mass exodus

began on Aug. 25, the UN says the total number of arrivals in Bangladesh has now topped 501,000. And still, they keep coming. "We don't ever want to go back," a stunned Rafiq said, describing his family's ordeal as Bangladeshi volunteers stuffed a small wad of cash into his hand and gave their children biscuits. Another man offered a bottle of water, and Rafiq poured some into his wife's mouth as she lay in his arms, staring blankly at the sky. "This is not our home. It is not our country," Rafiq said. "But at least, we feel safe here."

Desperate weeks

Not all those who have fled over the last few desperate weeks have survived. The International Organization for Migration said more than 60 refugees were confirmed dead or missing and presumed dead after one vessel capsized on rough seas in the area Thursday. The crisis began when a Rohingya insurgent group launched attacks with rifles and machetes on a series of security posts in



TEKNAF: Rohingya Muslim refugee carries his belongings as he walks with other people by night after crossing the border from Myanmar, on the Bangladeshi shores of the Naf River. — AP

Myanmar on Aug. 25, prompting the military to launch a brutal round of "clearance operations" in response. Those fleeing have described indiscriminate attacks by security forces and Buddhist mobs, including monks, as well as killings and rapes. While the international community has condemned the violence and called on Myanmar to protect the Rohingya, Sufi Ullah, a police officer in Teknaf, said nothing has changed. "We're seeing them come across whenever they get the chance," Ullah said. "They're hiding themselves in the forests and hills (inside Myanmar) in the daytime. And when they get the chance, they run. The Myanmar army is putting pressure on them. These people are afraid." Ullah said several

thousand new refugees arrived by boat in Bangladesh on Friday, and authorities were not expecting the flow to let up any time soon.

On Friday, dramatic scenes played out over and over as hordes of Rohingya who had crossed into Bangladesh overnight tried to make their way further inland. They trudged out of boats and through mud that in some places was knee deep. Men carried babies and old women on their backs. Everyone was exhausted. Sonabanu Chemmon was among those too weak to walk. Her son-in-law had carried her to one of Bangladesh's inland creeks, near Shah Porir Dip. But he then abandoned her along with several of her adult daughters. — AP

Political banners reveal gulf with mainland in HK

HONG KONG: The banners and posters were quietly hung in universities across Hong Kong, often appearing overnight, with bold white lettering calling out for change and testing the limits of the freedoms that Beijing will allow this free-wheeling city. "Hong Kong Independence!" one banner declared. "Fight for Our Homeland!" said another. To students from Hong Kong, the banners were a defiant insistence that their city is different from the rest of China, and that they can express themselves in ways unimaginable on the mainland.

But to many mainland students, the calls for independence were unpatriotic insults. Some pushed back in anger, ripping them from university bulletin boards and setting off shouting matches caught on videos that spread quickly on Chinese

social media, exposing the widening gulf between Hong Kong and the mainland, which rules this former British colony.

The series of September clashes over the banners not only rekindled a debate over Hong Kong's relative rights to free speech and protest - freedoms unseen on the mainland - they have also revealed deeper tensions between students from the city and those from the mainland. The issues are exacerbated by anxieties among Hong Kong's youth over a perceived loss of job prospects to their mainland peers and the chilling effect the ruling Community Party has on campus discourse.

The student spat is one part of broader tensions surrounding Beijing's relationship with Hong Kong as the city undergoes an increasingly tense 50-year transition to



HONG KONG: In this Sept 6, 2017, photo, students walk beneath a black banner reading "Hong Kong Independence" which is displayed at the Chinese University of Hong Kong campus. — AP

Chinese rule. Beijing created a special status known as "one country, two systems" for Hong Kong following its 1997 handover from Britain to mainland China, giving it wide autonomy and civil liberties. At the city's universities, student union bulletin boards called "Democracy Walls" became filled with politics, polemics and youthful anger.

In the years since then, increasing numbers of mainland students have come to the city to study, laying the groundwork for tensions. In the last academic year,

mainland students made up 76 percent of international students in public university programs, according to the government. Although there is a cap on undergraduate admissions of mainland students, the number of Chinese postgraduate students has doubled in the last decade, making them a much more visible presence on campuses. "Hong Kong students think that mainland students are taking their learning opportunities and degrees from them," said Chris Chan, an economics student at Hong Kong Baptist University. — AP

News in brief

India rail minister urges upgrades as toll rises

MUMBAI: India's railways minister yesterday told station managers "to spend whatever is necessary" to ensure passenger safety as the death toll from a stampede on a railway footbridge in Mumbai rose to 23. Railway officials said the accident happened after hundreds of people took shelter Friday on the station footbridge to escape a heavy downpour. Most of those killed were crushed to death, some suffocated and others fell from the narrow bridge. Around three dozen injured were also rushed to nearby hospitals.

Bali volcano evacuees outside danger zone told to go home

KARANGASEM: More than 144,000 people have fled from a rumbling volcano on popular tourist island Bali, but officials yesterday urged evacuees who live outside the immediate danger zone to return home. Mount Agung has been shaking since August, causing fears it could erupt for the first time since 1963 and triggering the highest possible alert level eight days ago. But officials say the number of evacuees has grown too high, and only people who live within nine kilometers of the crater should remain in temporary shelters or with friends and relatives further afield.

Afghan official: 2 people killed by roadside bombs

KABUL: At least two people including a police officer were killed by roadside bombs in Afghanistan's western Herat province, a provincial official said yesterday. Gelani Farhad, spokesman for Herat's provincial governor, said another officer was wounded when a police vehicle triggered the explosive in the Adraskan district. In a separate incident, Farhad said a civilian motorcycle hit a roadside bomb, killing one civilian and wounding another in the Shindand district. In yet another report from northern Kapisa province, at least nine civilians were wounded when a bicycle bomb exploded in a bazaar, said Qais Qaderi, spokesman for the provincial governor.

Poll shows Tokyo governor Koike's party threat to Abe

TOKYO: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's lead in next month's election has shrunk as the popular Tokyo governor pushes to unite opposition forces, a survey by Japan's top-selling daily indicated yesterday. Thirty-four percent of Japanese plan to vote for Abe's conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) while 19 percent favor a party formed this week by Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike, according to the poll in the Yomiuri Shimbun. It also showed one quarter of those polled were still undecided on how vote in the October 22 election. The findings suggest Abe's path to victory may not be as easy as earlier believed. The poll was taken on Thursday and Friday, right after the main opposition Democratic Party made a surprise move to join forces with Koike's newborn "Party of Hope". — Agencies