

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

China touts Xinjiang at trade forum, spotlighting region once marked by detention centres

ALTAY, (CHINA), JUNE 10: China is hosting an international conference in Xinjiang to promote economic development efforts in the northwestern region, which has been known as the site of mass detentions of ethnic minorities.

The International Conference for Trans-Altai Subregional Cooperation, being held on Wednesday in the city of Altay, includes officials from Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russia and other nations who are there to discuss trade and economic cooperation in the landlocked region. China plans to develop coal, oil and gas, cotton and other industries in Xinjiang.

"Xinjiang has become a vivid epitome of China's rapid economic development and fully reflects the significant advantages and vitality of China's governance," said Chen Xiaojiang, secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Xinjiang



Committee. The region also has plans for a number of large infrastructure projects, including more railways and flights, Chen said.

Like many other provinces in China's west, Xinjiang is poorer than the industrial east coast. Rural residents of the province had a per capita income of 13,052 yuan (USD 1,927) in 2020, while rural residents in China's wealthy province Zhejiang had an income of 31,930 yuan (USD 4,714) in 2020.

The region's economic disparity is one of the forces that led to turmoil that culminated in attacks by a small number of extremists among the Uyghurs. China then imprisoned a million or more people from ethnic minority groups, mostly Uyghurs, beginning in 2017. The government said the detentions were a response to the attacks.

By 2021, China said it had shut most of the detention centres, but at least a few

camp were converted into facilities serving as prisons. Information leaked to The Associated Press showed thousands of Uyghurs were imprisoned with long sentences on what experts say were fabricated or exaggerated charges.

For those outside prison, particularly in areas of southern Xinjiang with large Uyghur populations, activists say forced participation in government jobs programmes has been widespread and is increasing in China's latest five-year economic plan, according to human rights group Global Rights Compliance.

The Chinese Government has previously said what it calls "anti-China forces" have exaggerated issues in Xinjiang by portraying authorities' counterterrorism and anti-extremism efforts as targeting specific ethnic, regional or religious groups. (AP)

After shocks complicate Philippine recovery from quake that killed 45, displaced thousands

GENERAL SANTOS (PHILIPPINES), JUNE 10:

Dozens of rescuers in hard hats scrambled out of a partially collapsed grocery in a southern Philippine city on Wednesday as it was rattled by an aftershock from a powerful earthquake that left at least 45 people dead and 17 others missing in the region. A safety officer blew his whistle, and others screamed to warn about 30 firefighters and coast guard personnel to dash to safety as concrete debris crashed down from the leaning three-story building in General Santos City in a frantic scene witnessed by an AP video journalist.

The coastal city, a bustling commercial hub and the country's tuna capital, was devastated by a 7.8-magnitude earthquake that hit on Monday and left a trail of destruction across southern Mindanao, the Philippines' second-most populous region.

"It was a strong aftershock, and an alarm was immediately sounded so those inside and under the damaged building could run out for a headcount," said Ressa Mia Tactaquin-Betoya, who speaks for the firefighters searching for the last employee missing in the ruined grocery, where two upper floors collapsed during the initial quake.

"It was scary because we don't want our rescuers to be harmed, so the area must be secured before they can go back in," she told The Associated Press.

The earthquake has been followed by more than 2,100 aftershocks, including a few that ranged up to 6.4 magni-



tude, which is strong enough to cause more casualties and damage, according to Terecinto Bacolcol, who heads the Philippines Institute of Volcanology and Seismology.

More than 25,000 people remain displaced, many of them staying in 45 government-run emergency shelters and still too traumatised to return home, officials said. Monday's quake was one of the most powerful to hit the Philippines in half a century. It injured at least 630 people and damaged more than 3,100 houses, 29 roads, 11 bridges and more than 100 government buildings.

It also damaged the international airport in General Santos, forcing it to shut down indefinitely except for government and military flights transporting aid and disaster-response personnel, Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines spokesman Eric Apolonio said.

About 6,000 public school

buildings in quake-hit provinces must be assessed before classes can resume. The quake struck on the first day of classes nationwide after a two-month summer break, and many who sustained injuries were young students who had gathered with excitement for morning flag-raising ceremonies.

Most of the deaths were caused by falling debris from collapsed buildings and landslides in General Santos and the nearby provinces of Sarangani, South Cotabato and Davao Occidental.

At least one person died after being swept out to sea following the quake, as waves up to 1.4 meters (4.6 feet) above tide level were measured in the southern Philippines. Smaller waves washed ashore in Indonesia and Palau and as far away as southern Japan before tsunami warnings were lifted.

Seven swimmers near

General Santos were swept away by strong currents in the minutes after the quake. Three were rescued by the coast guard, one managed to swim back to shore, one drowned, and two remain missing, the Philippine coast guard said.

The strong currents that swept away the victims were most likely set off by the earthquake, Bacolcol said.

The earthquake was set off by movement in the Cotabato Trench and was one of the strongest to hit the country since the same undersea depression triggered an 8.1-magnitude quake that whipped up tsunami waves on August 17, 1976 and killed about 8,000 people.

The Philippines, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, is often hit by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions due to its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of seismic faults around the ocean. (AP)

Ukraine launches long-range strikes on military, energy sites in Russia

KYIV, JUNE 10: A series of long-range Ukrainian attacks hit targets deep inside Russia on Wednesday, part of Kyiv's efforts to raise the costs of the war for the Kremlin by striking energy facilities and military industries.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces struck several military and energy infrastructure sites, including a military factory that he said supplied components for Russian drones and missiles.

In a post on social media, Zelenskyy said Ukrainian FP-5 Flamingo long-range missiles had hit the facility in Cheboksary, located in the Chuvashiya region more than 900 kilometres from the front line.

Russia's Defence Ministry said that air defences downed 326 Ukrainian drones overnight.

Oleg Nikolayev, the head of Chuvashiya, confirmed the missile attack but didn't give details. The Astra online news outlet reported that the Ukrainian strike hit the VNIIR-Progress plant that produces antennas for drones.

also said Ukrainian forces struck a refinery in Russia's Samara region, where Gov Vyacheslav Fedorishchev said that several industrial plants were damaged by drone strikes and three people were injured.

Fedorishchev didn't name the facilities that were dam-



aged, but Astra carried images of a large fire at the Samara refinery.

Zelenskyy added that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) had also targeted two oil infrastructure facilities in Russia's Vladimir region, about 700 kilometres from the front line.

In Russia-occupied Crimea, a Ukrainian drone hit the building housing a huge panorama painting depicting the defence of the city during 19th century Crimean War. Mikhail Razvozhayev, the Kremlin-appointed head of Sevastopol, said the painting by artist Franz Rubo was effectively destroyed.

As the more than 1,000-kilometre front line in the four-year war has remained largely static as swarms of

drones hinder advances, both sides have increasingly relied on long-range strikes.

The increasingly deep and audacious Ukrainian strikes have cast a challenge to Russia's President Vladimir Putin, defying his claim that Moscow was winning the war now in its fifth year.

Last week, Putin vowed to strengthen Russia's air defences after Ukrainian attacks set ablaze an oil terminal in St Petersburg and also hit a nearby naval base, casting a cloud on his showcase economic forum in his hometown.

The attacks on St Petersburg came as another embarrassment for the Russian leader, weeks after he pruned back an annual Victory Day parade in Moscow because of fears of Ukrain-

ian drone attacks.

Ukraine's Air Force says air defences downed 181 of 207 Russian drones.

A barrage of 26 drones struck Kharkiv early Wednesday, injuring at least four people, according to regional administration head Oleh Syniehubov. He said one person was killed and 15 others were injured in the region over the past 24 hours.

In Zaporizhzhia and its region, 10 people were injured overnight in a series of Russian aerial attacks, according to regional head Ivan Fedorov. In Odesa, a mother and two children, aged 8 and 10, required medical attention after Russian drones damaged two residential buildings, according to regional administration head Oleh Kiper. (AP)

'Self-proclaimed, dubiously invented milestone': Cong slams PM as he surpasses 'Nehru record'

NEW DELHI, JUNE 10: The Congress on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he may have passed a "self-proclaimed and dubiously invented" milestone but he is a "millstone" around India's neck, presiding over the "murder of democracy".

The opposition party's attack came as Modi became India's longest continuously serving elected prime minister.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said Jawaharlal Nehru became prime minister of India on August 15, 1947 presiding over a stellar Cabinet - the likes of which have rarely been seen in the world.

Over the next five years, modern India came into being, he said on X.

"Over 560 princely states were integrated peacefully into the Indian Union, the Constitution of India was debated and adopted, zamindari was abolished, reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were put in place, a number of multipurpose irrigation-cum-power projects were launched, the infrastructure for science and technology capability was established (including in nuclear energy), and India emerged as a

force in global affairs," Ramesh said.

Electoral rolls bearing 170 million registered voters were prepared to ensure universal adult franchise and free India's first General Elections were held between October 1951 and February 1952, he said.

"The 1947-52 record of achievements of India with Nehru as PM and in which stalwarts like Sardar Patel, Dr Ambedkar, Dr Rajendra Prasad, C Rajagopalachari, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad played such a pivotal role is now sought to be erased by Mr Modi who has a pathological fixation on Nehru," the Congress general secretary in-charge communications alleged.

"He (Modi) may have passed a self-proclaimed and dubiously invented milestone today but he is a millstone around India's neck, presiding as he is over the Murder of Democracy in India," Ramesh alleged.

The very same establishments of democracy -- an independent Election Commission and a sacrosanct voter list -- are now threatened, he claimed.

"Scientific temper has been erased through the destruction of our educational institutions as exposed most re-

cently by the NEET-CBSE scandals. Reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes have been weakened through privatisation and nefarious instruments like 'Not Found Suitable'," Ramesh said.

And while Nehru won in 1952, 1957, and 1962 with a hugely decisive majority, Modi "did not secure even a simple majority by a considerable margin in 2024 and had to hurriedly convene a NDA meeting bypassing the BJP Parliamentary Party to anoint himself as PM," Ramesh said, adding that "2024 was most certainly not a mandate for him".

Modi on Wednesday became the longest continuously serving elected prime minister of India, breaking the record of Nehru.

Modi crosses the record of Nehru's 4,399 days in power as an elected prime minister following the 1952 general elections.

Nehru's stint from 1947 to 1952 was as head of an interim government as elections were not held till 1952.

Former prime minister Indira Gandhi had a tenure of 14 years, more than that of Modi, but her Prime Ministership was not uninterrupted.

Xi says important consensus reached with Kim as he concludes rare North Korea visit

BEIJING, JUN 10: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday wrapped up his rare visit to North Korea, Beijing's strategically important neighbour, announcing that he reached an important consensus with its leader Kim Jong Un on developing relations between the two countries.

Soon after his arrival at a colourful red-carpet welcome in Pyongyang on Monday, Xi pledged China's "unwavering" support to Kim, who in recent years deepened ties with Russia much to Beijing's unease.

The two-day visit was his first trip to North Korea since 2019 and was also the first foreign visit by Xi this year.

There was no announcement about any concrete deals between the two strategic allies and the Chinese Foreign Ministry on Tuesday parried questions on any talks on denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea, which has conducted multiple nuclear tests since 2006, publicly declares itself a nuclear-armed state but Beijing on its part opposes nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula and supports denuclearisation.

Ahead of Xi's visit, Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of Kim Jong Un, announced through state-run KCNA news agency that North Korea will never surrender its nuclear-armed status and continue to expand its atomic arsenal.

also discounted reports that denuclearisation of the Peninsula figured in talks between Xi and US President Donald Trump during the American leader's recent visit to Beijing.

Answering questions on the outcome of Xi's visit to North Korea, officially called Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian hinted that there was no change in Beijing's stand on denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

China maintains continuity and consistency over its position and policy on the Korean Peninsula issue," he said replying to a question on the denuclearisation.

"China stands ready to enhance exchanges with the DPRK in diplomacy, law enforcement, military and other fields, pooling wisdom and strength for the growth of our bilateral relations," he

said. References to any discussions between Xi and Kim on North Korea's nuclear weapons programme were conspicuously absent from state media readouts.

According to recent reports, ties between China and North Korea were strained by mistrust as Pyongyang under Kim moved closer to Moscow and even deputed his soldiers to fight for Russia in its ongoing war against Ukraine.

Xi's trip was seen as an attempt by Beijing to regain the influence over its vital yet deeply unpredictable partner, which relies on China for basic supplies of oil and food in view of stringent UN sanctions over its nuclear programme.

Analysts say China wants stability on its border and influence in Pyongyang, but without being dragged into crises triggered by North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Xi said he had in-depth discussions on safeguarding peace and stability in the region and the world and thanked Kim for the warm hospitality and thoughtful arrangements for the visit, state-run Xinhua news

agency reported. The mutual understanding between China and the DPRK has become deeper and more comprehensive, and the future development direction has become clearer and more definite, Xi said.

For his part, Kim said that Xi's visit was a complete success, sending a positive message to the world that the DPRK and China are further strengthening their friendly cooperation, and attracting widespread attention from various sides.

Xi's visit was of great significance to bilateral relations and the future development of the region, Kim said, noting that the DPRK side stands ready to earnestly implement the important consensus reached during the visit, promote new tangible outcomes in bilateral cooperation, and advance DPRK-China relations to a new and higher level.

On Tuesday, Xi concluded his state visit to the DPRK and returned to Beijing.

Kim and his wife went to the airport to see Xi and his wife off and held a grand farewell ceremony in their honour, Xinhua reported.

Hong Kong charges 7 people, 2 firms over massive fire that killed 168

HONG KONG, JUNE 10: Hong Kong authorities on Wednesday charged seven people and two companies with offences including manslaughter and conspiracy to defraud over the city's deadliest fire in decades.

The massive blaze engulfed seven apartment buildings and killed 168 people on November 26, 2025. Former residents and relatives of the dead have been waiting for answers for months after the fire shattered the close-knit community of Wang Fuk Court, which housed thousands of people in the suburban district of Tai Po.

In a statement on Wednesday, authorities said police and the Independent Commission Against Corruption charged the suspects with 25 counts. Money laundering, attempting to pervert the course of public justice and tax evasion were also among the allegations. The seven people played different roles in the major renovation project of Wang Fuk Court. The two companies charged are the project consultancy firm, Will Power Architects Company, and Prestige Construction & Engineering Co., the main contractor involved in the project. The seven defendants, Wong Hap-yin, Hau Wa-kin, Ho Kin-

yip, Ng Yeuk, Hung Kwok-wai, Chung So-fan and Lin Min, were brought to court on Wednesday afternoon. Authorities said they included directors of the two companies and a registered inspector of Will Power. The defendants told the court that they understood the charges, and most appeared calm.

In March, police said they arrested 38 people on accusations related to the fire, including manslaughter and fraud. Nine have been charged, police said. The anti-graft agency said in the same month that they also arrested 23 people on suspicion of offences such as bribery and conspiracy to defraud.