

Duterte says Xi offering gas deal if case ignored

● The tribunal in The Hague invalidated China's claims to almost the entire South China Sea

● Any agreement to forget the arbitral award would be a major setback to Vietnam and Malaysia

● Duterte did not say if he had agreed to Xi's offer

Reuters | Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said his Chinese counterpart has offered Manila a controlling stake in a joint energy venture in the South China Sea, if it sets aside an international arbitral award that went against Beijing.

Duterte said Chinese President Xi Jinping told him during their recent meeting that if he ignored the Permanent Court of Arbitration's 2016 ruling, China would agree to be the junior partner in a joint venture to de-



Set aside your claim. Then allow everybody connected with the Chinese companies. They want to explore. If there is something, they said, we will be gracious enough to give you 60 per cent, only 40pc will be theirs. That is the promise of Xi Jinping

RODRIGO DUTERTE
PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT

velop gas deposits at the Reed Bank, located within Manila's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

"Set aside the arbitral ruling," Duterte was quoted as telling reporters late Tuesday in remarks provided by his office on Wednesday.

"Set aside your claim," he said, quoting Xi. "Then allow every-

body connected with the Chinese companies. They want to explore. If there is something, they said, we will be gracious enough to give you 60 per cent, only 40pc will be theirs. That is the promise of Xi Jinping."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying did not give specifics at a briefing

on Wednesday on the exchange between the presidents, but said Xi noted that cooperation would yield greater progress in exploiting the sea's resources.

Hua said Duterte had expressed willingness to hasten maritime oil and gas exploration and development cooperation between China and the Philippines. With regard to some

"specific situations," working groups between the two sides would consult closely, she said.

The tribunal in The Hague clarified maritime boundaries and the Philippines' sovereign entitlements, and in doing so, invalidated China's claims to almost the entire South China Sea. China does not recognize the ruling.

Duterte has sought to befriend Xi, hoping to secure billions of dollars of investment, avoiding challenging China over its activities in the South China Sea, including its militarized artificial islands.

Big setback

Any agreement to forget the arbitral award and team up with China would be a major setback to other claimants, especially Vietnam and Malaysia, which like the Philippines have experienced repeated challenges from China's coastguard inside their EEZs.

The United States has called that bullying and coercion aimed at denying rivals' access to their energy assets.

Duterte did not say if he had agreed to Xi's offer, but said the part of the arbitral award that referred to the EEZ "we will ignore

to come up with an economic activity".

The tribunal said the Philippines had legal rights to exploit gas deposits that China also claims at the Reed Bank, about 85 miles (140km) off the Philippine coast.

The Philippines only accessible gas resources at the Malam-paya fields are set to run out by 2024.

A joint project with China has been talked about for decades, but has gone nowhere because of the competing claims. Joint activity could be deemed as legitimizing the other side's claim, or even relinquishing sovereign rights.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin on Wednesday told news channel ANC that a preliminary agreement between China and the Philippines would avoid stating which country was entitled to the gas.

"It's very clear - no legal position is compromised if we enter into this agreement," Locsin said, adding that putting aside the arbitration case was immaterial, because an international court had already made its decision.

"It's final and binding," he added.

Niger floods killed 57



The floods have destroyed over 12,000 houses and more than 2,000 hectares (nearly 5,000 acres) of crops

Niamey

Deadly floods across Niger have left 57 people dead and affected more than 130,000 since they began in June, according to the latest government toll.

Extreme weather is common in Niger, one of the world's poorest countries, but the capital and even desert areas in the North were hit during this year's rainy season, which typically lasts three months.

Niger's government said in a statement late Tuesday

the floods had resulted in 57 deaths and that 132,528 people had been affected.

The rains had destroyed over 12,000 houses, killed more than 850 cattle and engulfed more than 2,000 hectares (nearly 5,000 acres) of crops.

The south-east Maradi and south-central Zinder regions have been the hardest hit by the floods this year, with more than 65,000 and people affected. Last year, 56 people died in flooding which affected over 200,000 in total.

On 9/11, Trump vows to hit Taliban 'harder' than ever

Washington

President Donald Trump used 9/11 remembrance commemorations yesterday to announce an unprecedented escalation of the US military assault on Afghanistan's Taliban -- just days after he wanted to hold peace talks with the insurgents.

Speaking at a Pentagon ceremony marking the 18th anniversary of the terrorist attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people, Trump said that over "the last four days" US forces have "hit our enemy harder than they have ever been hit before and that will continue."

Trump said the assault was ordered after he canceled peace talks with the Taliban over the weekend in retaliation for a bomb attack that killed one US soldier last week.

The precise nature of the US offensive against the Taliban that Trump described was not immediately clear.

On Monday, Trump had already declared that "over the last four days, we have been hit-



US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump attend 9/11 remembrance ceremonies where Trump says US war on Taliban intensifying

ting our Enemy harder than at any time in the last ten years!"

But US troop levels in Afghanistan are only around 14,000, a fraction of the peak of about 100,000 in 2010.

In his Pentagon speech, Trump also issued a threat against militants ever attacking on US soil again, saying the re-

sponse would be unlike any ever seen before.

"If for any reason, they come back to our country, we will go wherever they are, and use power, the likes of which the United States has never used before," he said.

"I'm not even talking about nuclear power. They will never

have seen anything like what will happen to them," he added.

The warlike comments were all the more startling because it was only on Saturday that the Republican former businessman announced on Twitter that he'd been about to meet with Taliban leaders on Sunday at his Camp David presidential retreat.

Before the tweet, no one outside Trump's immediate circle was aware of the development.

It came after months of painstaking, mostly behind-the-scenes negotiations on cutting back the US troop presence and extricating the United States from a long, fruitless war.

It was also stunning for the choice of the prestigious Camp David setting on a date so close to the September 11, 2001, anniversary.

Trump's abrupt reversal of that plan and decision to punish the Taliban for last week's bomb attack was followed by the sacking of his controversial national security advisor John Bolton on Tuesday.

Egypt Brotherhood chief, deputy get life for 'spying'

Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday sentenced 11 senior Muslim Brotherhood figures to life in prison on charges of spying for the Palestinian Hamas group, a judicial source said.

They included the Brotherhood's supreme guide Mohamed Badie and his deputy Khairat al-Shater who were both handed life sentences -- 25 years in life.

Five other Brotherhood members were sentenced to jail terms ranging from seven to 10 years while six were acquitted, the source said.

The defendants were accused of "committing crimes in col-



The supreme guide of Egypt's outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and 10 others were sentenced to life by a Cairo court on charges of spying for the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas

laboration with foreign organizations" namely Hamas and the Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah, the source said.

They were also accused of "financing terrorism" and committing acts undermining the country's stability and security.

Mohamed Fahmy, the judge presiding over the case, said before the verdict was announced: "The crimes the defendants committed harmed the independence and security of the country."

"They betrayed their nation and there is no excuse for them," he added.

The verdict can still be appealed, the source added.

The case initially involved ousted president Mohamed Morsi who died after falling ill during a court session in June.

China to exempt 16 categories of US products from tariffs

Beijing

China announced yesterday it would exempt 16 categories of products from US tariffs, ahead of a fresh round of trade talks next month.

Beijing and Washington have been embroiled in a year-long trade war that has seen the two sides slap punitive tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars in two-way trade.

The exemptions announced Wednesday will become effective on September 17 and be valid for one year, according to the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council, which released two lists that include seafood products and

anti-cancer drugs.

The lists mark the first time Beijing has announced products to be excluded from tariffs.

Other categories that will become exempt include alfalfa pellets, fish feed, medical linear accelerators and mould release agents.

Wednesday's lists do not include big-ticket items such as soybeans and pork.

But in the statement, the commission said it was also considering further exemptions.

Trade negotiators have said they will meet in Washington in early October, raising hopes for an easing of tension.