

Second carrier nears launch



The construction site of China's first home-made aircraft carrier.
[Photo/People.cn]

China's first domestically built aircraft carrier is being outfitted with equipment and the work is progressing smoothly, Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian said on Thursday.

As for the carrier's launch, Wu said the date is coming soon and "we won't keep the public waiting for too long".

Wu made the remark in response to media speculation that the new carrier would be launched on April 23—the 68th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army Navy.

Outfitting usually implies installing radar, engines and other key components. But some equipment, like the weapons systems, also has to be installed after the ship has been launched into the water, said Zhu Chenghu, a professor at National Defense University.

"The launch is only the first step," he said. "By current progress, the new carrier would still have to undergo one to two years of testing, both at the dock and at sea, before it could be officially handed to the Navy.

"Nevertheless, China launching its first domestically designed aircraft carrier is a monumental step toward building a world class navy," he said. "The valuable lessons learned from building a carrier from scratch will help China build more carriers faster in the future and enable them to reach combat readiness quicker."

According to the Defense Ministry, the new aircraft carrier is under

construction in Dalian, Liaoning province. It will have a displacement of about 50,000 metric tons, as well as conventional engines and fighter jet launch systems similar to those of the CNS Liaoning—China’s first aircraft carrier.

The most important difference lies in the roles of the two vessels, Zhu said. While the Liaoning is primarily for training and research purposes, the new carrier will focus on combat and defense.

The new carrier will have more cargo room, more sophisticated radar, more advanced weapons systems, and more reliable engines than the Liaoning, which was refitted from an unfinished Soviet-era carrier—the Varyag—that “did not leave much leeway for optimization and improvement due to its old design,” he added. It was commissioned by China in 2012.

PLA Major General Peng Guangqian, a military strategist, said China’s carriers, as well as the carriers from other nations, are still far behind US carriers in terms of size, scale and combat capability, “because US Navy doctrine requires unchallenged global dominance, while Chinese carriers are mainly used for self-defense”.

When asked about the Chinese military’s recent drills on the Chinese side of the Sino-Myanmar border following clashes between Myanmar security forces and ethnic rebels, Wu said the drills were part of the annual training schedule and China had informed Myanmar of the drill before it began.

[New Xinjiang regulation aims to prevent extremism](#)

Northwest China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region has introduced China’s first local regulation, which will come into effect on Saturday, to contain and eradicate extremism.

The regulation clarifies major acts of extremism, proposes detailed measures to prevent, contain and purge them, and identifies responsibilities of government departments and the public.

According to the regulation, 15 actions are categorized as extremism, including interfering with others’ religious freedom, forcing others to participate in religious activities, driving believers of different religions away from their homes, expanding the concept of “halal” to areas other than food, wearing or forcing others to wear burqa-like robes, marriage or divorce through religious means rather than legal processes, and depriving children of the right to national education.

The introduction of the regulation draws a clear line between legal religion

and illegal religion, which provides legal support for protecting the former and purging the latter, said Chen Tong, president of the law school under Xinjiang Normal University.

Wildlife diversity increases at planned park



An image of a snow leopard is captured by an infrared camera in the Sanjiangyuan area in January. [Photo/Xinhua]

Wildlife protectionists and herders said the diversity of wild animals has increased in the Sanjiangyuan area, China's first planned national park.

A three-year observation project, which began in 2014, recorded frequent sightings of snow leopards, brown bears, lynxes, Tibetan foxes, wolves, steppe cats and otters in the region, said Xiao Lingyun with Peking University's Center for Nature and Society.

These animals were observed in a 2,000-square-kilometer area, Xiao said.

"From images captured by infrared cameras, we can see these animals often move around, not alone, but in groups, and their movements show they have a rather casual lifestyle," she said.

It is generally known that wild animal habitats have grown increasingly fragmented due to human activity, but the fact that wild carnivores were

frequently observed at the source of the Lancang River is a key sign that the area has a diverse animal population, Xiao said.

“Some wild species establish their habitats near residences of local herders, and they are not fearful of humans,” said Zhao Xiang, a wildlife protectionist with the Shanshui Nature Protection Center.

Sanjiangyuan literally means “the source of three rivers”, referring to the Yangtze, Yellow and Lancang (Mekong) rivers.

The national park is expected to open in 2020.

Panda dies after being released into the wild

Hesheng, a captive-bred panda, died in September 2016, two months after being released into the wild in southwest China’s Sichuan Province, Chengdu Research Base for Giant Panda Breeding announced Friday.

The male panda, born in 2013, had undergone training at Liziping Nature Reserve from March 2016 and was released into the wild in July.

On Sept. 11, Hesheng was spotted safe and well some 3.5 km away from where he was released. Just weeks later, however, on Sept. 27, his GPS collar sent an alarm, prompting an overnight search for Hesheng.

When researchers found his limp body they noticed injuries on his right shoulder, right ear and right hind limb. An autopsy confirmed Hesheng died of septicemia due to a bacterial infection after being attacked by unknown animals.

Giant pandas are among the world’s most vulnerable and rare animals, with a known population of only 1,600, mostly in China.

PLA’s THAAD opposition ‘more than words’



Senior Colonel Wu Qian, spokesperson of China's Ministry of National Defense (MOD), responds to media questions at a routine press conference on March 30, 2017. [Photo by Chen Boyuan/China.org.cn]

The Chinese military once again expressed its firm opposition to the deployment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) system in South Korea, stressing its opposition "will never be just in words."

Senior Colonel Wu Qian, Ministry of National Defense (MOD) spokesperson, speaking at a routine press conference on March 30, said China was serious about opposing THAAD.

"The deployment of THAAD will never make South Korea any safer. The Chinese military's opposition against THAAD will never be just in words," he insisted.

The MOD's strong stance came after two THAAD launchers, along with support equipment, were delivered to a U.S. base in South Korea, according to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency. Analysts said that THAAD might be fully operational in April.

Former South Korean President Park Geun-hye, recently impeached on corruption charges, agreed to the THAAD deployment on the grounds of the nuclear threat from North Korea.

Sr. Col. Wu refuted this. He said that China opposes any country jeopardizing another state's safety, as well as regional stability, under the pretext of the ballistic missile threat from North Korea.

Apart from China, Russia also opposes THAAD, believing it disturbs the regional strategic equilibrium. On March 28, Chinese and Russia military

delegates held their second meeting on joint anti-ballistic missile issues in Geneva on the sidelines of the Conference on Disarmament.

Their first meeting was held last November during the 7th Xiangshan Forum in Beijing. Soon afterwards, they conducted a joint computerized anti-ballistic missile (ABM) test.

As to whether the next such test would involve a live firing, the MOD spokesperson responded only vaguely.

“The THAAD system deployed by the United States and South Korea far exceeds the defense needs of South Korea,” he said, citing a memo issued after the Geneva meeting. “We oppose any country deploying the military facilities whose capacities are beyond their own defense requirements.”

Recent American reports speculated that North Korea might conduct its sixth nuclear test shortly. Hence, both the United States and South Korea stepped up their vigilance, and were keen on knowing whether the PLA would strengthen its border defenses with North Korea in case of such a nuclear test.

The MOD spokesperson declined to respond to a “hypothetical question,” but emphasized that the Chinese military maintained normal combat readiness and training.