

Vietnam anti-China protestors reject order to stop

HANOI – Prominent Vietnamese intellectuals involved in recent anti-China protests on Friday rejected an order to halt their unprecedented rallies, but stopped short of saying they will march again.

In a petition to Hanoi's People's Committee, the local government, the group called the order illegal and denied its allegations that the protests were linked to "anti-state forces" and had caused public disorder.

"In fact, all these demonstrations took place peacefully and in order," presenting a good image of the citizens' patriotism that had been internationally recognised, said the document signed by 25 people including economists, bloggers, a former vice-minister and a retired general. It was posted on the popular Ba Sam blog (<http://anhbasam.wordpress.com>) and on the Nguyen Xuan Dien site (<http://xuandienhannom.blogspot.com>), which has become a rallying point for the demonstrators.

The government order published Thursday in Hanoi Moi, a mouthpiece for the ruling Communist Party, said that those who disobey and continue to gather illegally could face "necessary measures".

The demonstrations over a territorial dispute in the tense South China Sea have occurred almost every Sunday since early June and attracted up to 300 peaceful marchers – including names on the petition.

Two protests in July were forcibly dispersed by police after talks between Hanoi and Beijing, but subsequent rallies were allowed to go ahead.

Overtly political demonstrations are rare in authoritarian Vietnam but analysts said the gatherings initially served Hanoi's purpose in expressing displeasure with Beijing.

The petitioners called the unsigned People's Committee statement illegal. They said it violated the constitutional right to demonstrate and also contradicted earlier comments by Hanoi's police chief, Lieutenant General Nguyen Duc Nhanh.

He was quoted by the Tuoi Tre newspaper website on August 3 as saying the orderly demonstrators were patriotic and police had no policy of harassing or arresting them. Vietnam and China have a longstanding dispute over sovereignty of the potentially oil-rich Paracel and Spratly island groups, which straddle vital commercial shipping lanes in the South China Sea.

Protests began after tensions flared in May when Vietnam said Chinese marine surveillance vessels had cut the exploration cables of an oil survey ship inside the country's exclusive economic zone.

Hanoi bans unauthorized demonstrations

Authorities in Hanoi Thursday ordered a ban on all unauthorized demonstrations citing political and security concerns, the *Vietnam News Agency* reported.

The Hanoi People's Committee asked related agencies to carry out campaigns to inform the public about the order and encourage them to comply.

If anyone deliberately refuses to follow the order, all necessary measures will be taken to maintain public security, the news source quoted authorities as saying.

The municipal administration said that since June many demonstrations, marches and gatherings protesting China's violation of Vietnam's sovereignty have been taking place every Sunday.

While the early ones were patriotic in nature, some of the recent activities have been provoked by anti-government forces, disturbing public security, it said.

The forces aimed to divide the people of Vietnam, undermine diplomatic relations between Vietnam and China, and cause political disorders, the committee said.

It also said that the "spontaneous" gatherings, marchings and demonstrations had caused "bad influences" on security and contradicted the capital's reputation and image as "the city of peace," they said.

On May 26 a Chinese marine surveillance vessel cut the exploration cables of a Vietnamese vessel which was conducting seismic surveys in the nation's territorial waters.

Two weeks later, Viking II, a Norwegian ship contracted by PetroVietnam Technical Services Corporation and the French-owned CGG Veritas Joint-venture, was also harassed by Chinese ships.

Both incidents happened well inside Vietnam's 200 nautical mile (370 kilometers) Exclusive Economic Zone, sparking an outcry among the public, both in Vietnam and abroad, and continuous demonstrations were held in the capital over the past weeks.

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