

Territorial Disputes: Japan warns China of worsening ties

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China's ambassador to Japan Cheng Yonghua answers questions from journalists after a meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida at the Japanese Foreign Ministry in Tokyo yesterday.

Photo: AFP

Japan yesterday warned China that ties were “deteriorating markedly” over disputed East China Sea islets, and China's envoy in Tokyo reiterated Beijing's stance that the specks of land were its territory and called for talks to resolve the row.

Tensions between Asia's two largest economies have risen since Japan saw an increasing number of Chinese coastguard and other government ships sailing near the disputed islets, known as the Diaoyutai Islands (釣台) in Taiwan, the Diaoyu Archipelago (釣魚台) in China and the Senkakus in Japan, over the past few days.

Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Fumio Kishida called in Chinese Ambassador Cheng Yonghua (鄭永華) for the second time since Friday last week and told him that China was trying to change the “status quo” unilaterally, a ministry statement said.

It also said Kishida told Cheng that the environment surrounding Japan-China ties was deteriorating markedly.

Cheng said after the meeting that he told Kishida the islands were an integral part of China's territory and that the dispute should be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue.

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“I told him that ... it is natural that Chinese ships conduct activity in the waters in question,” he told reporters.

“I also told him both countries need to work on dialogue through diplomatic channels so as not to make things more complicated and escalated,” Cheng said.

Kishida summoned Cheng after the latest flare-up in tensions over dozens of Chinese vessels that sailed near the islands over the weekend.

Cheng had been called in by Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Shinsuke Sugiyama on Friday.

The flurry of Chinese incursions into the waters follows a period of sustained pressure on Beijing about its activities in the South China Sea, and Chinese criticism of what it saw as Japanese interference in that dispute.

The US, its Southeast Asian allies and Japan have questioned Chinese land reclamation on contested islands in the South China Sea, particularly since the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands, last month rejected China’s historic claims to most of that sea.

China has refused to recognize the court ruling on a case brought by the Philippines.

Japan called on China to adhere to it, saying it was binding, but Beijing warned Japan not to interfere.

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