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Activists keen to set sail and whip up a storm

By May Fung

DIAOYU Islands activists from Hong Kong are racing against Mother Nature in their bid to confirm China's right to the disputed islands east of Taiwan.

The group confirmed yesterday that it had bought a \$600,000 diving boat and plans to sail to the islands this week, possibly as early as Tuesday.

This follows earlier failed plans to launch a joint mission from Taiwan and to protest in Japan.

"We want to accomplish our mission before the typhoon season starts in June," said Albert Ho Chun-yan, chairman of the Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyu Islands.

"We will land on the islands and remove all the structures the Japanese have placed there.

"Then we will paint four big Chinese characters on the island which will say 'Chinese land'."

He said they would continue to make trips to the islands until the Japanese government apologised for its actions.

For safety purposes, the committee will shortlist 15 members and 25 reporters. The boat, which is licensed to carry 50 people, has a crew of seven.

The boat, *Diao Yu Tai*, cost \$600,000 and another \$400,000 is needed for the expedition.

Four boats hired by an American-Chinese group, Diaoyutai Research Foundation Inc, are expected to join up with the Hong Kong expedition in Taiwan and travel to the islands.

