

## US to keep up drone strikes in Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

Pentagon Chief Leon Panetta yesterday said the US would continue to attack al-Qaeda in Pakistan despite complaints from Islamabad that the drone strikes violate its sovereignty.

"We have made it very clear that we are going to continue to defend ourselves," Secretary of Defence Panetta said in India a day after the US announced the killing of al-Qaeda's number two Abu Yahya al-Libi.

"This is about our sovereignty as well," Panetta added, arguing that al-Qaeda militants who orchestrated the September 11 attacks on the United States were in Pakistan's tribal areas.

"The leadership of those who were involved in planning this attack are located in Pakistan, in the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas)," he said.

Panetta confirmed the strike on "another deputy leader" of the terror group, referring to al-Libi who once escaped from a US jail in Afghanistan and had escaped previous assassination attempts.

# India 'lynchpin' for US in Asia

Panetta says both countries must overcome differences over Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

Pentagon chief Leon Panetta yesterday vowed to expand defence ties between India and the United States, saying New Delhi was a "lynchpin" in a new US military strategy focused on Asia.

At a think-tank in the Indian capital Panetta was expected to say, according to prepared comments, that military ties had dramatically improved over the past decade.

But he was due to say more work was needed to ensure the two countries could safeguard the "crossroads" of the global economy spanning the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific.

"For this relationship to truly provide security for this region and for the world, we will need to deepen our defence and security cooperation.

"This is why I have come to India," Panetta was to tell an audience at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

Panetta's two-day visit to New Delhi is part of a tour of the region that reflects Washington's shift to the Asia-Pacific in the face of a rising China, with US officials portraying India as an anchor for the new approach.

In his talks with Defence Minister AK Antony, Panetta discussed Nato's planned withdrawal of combat forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 as well expanding arms sales and joint military training between the two countries.

The United States favoured a more active role for India in Afghanistan, Panetta was to say in his speech.

Having overcome suspicions from the Cold War era, "our two nations have finally and irreversibly



PHOTO: AFP

**US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, right, talks with Indian Defence Minister AK Antony in New Delhi yesterday.**

started a new chapter of our history," he said.

Panetta, who met with Indian leaders on Tuesday and yesterday, said he believed the relationship "can and should become more strategic, more practical, and more collaborative."

He said a new US strategy sought to "expand our military partnerships and our presence in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia."

"Defence cooperation with India is a lynchpin

in this strategy."

Panetta called for more joint research and production efforts, expanding military exercises and for both countries to tackle legal dilemmas posed by space weapons and cyber warfare.

Security ties with India have steadily improved but US officials have yet to realise the goal of a game-changing partnership that could check China's role and empower the two countries' economies, analysts say.

India favours improving military ties with the United States but does not want to become a full-fledged US ally, preferring a degree of breathing space, analysts say.

A day after al-Qaeda's number two leader was killed in a drone strike in Pakistan, Panetta acknowledged that both India and the United States faced difficulties with Islamabad.

"Pakistan is a complicated relationship for both of our countries, but one that we must work to improve," he said.

He said he welcomed initial steps taken by India and Pakistan to normalise trade ties.

The US tilt towards Asia -- including closer ties to New Delhi -- is widely seen as a response to China's growing military and economic might, particularly in the South China Sea.

Panetta said both the United States and India wanted to see Beijing play a prominent role in the region.

Earlier on his nine-day tour through Asia, Panetta unveiled plans to shift the majority of the US naval fleet to the Pacific by 2020, a symbolic step meant to signal US determination to preserve its influence in the face of a rising China.

## AFGHANISTAN RE-CONSTRUCTION China vow bigger role for allies

AFP, BEIJING

China, Russia and four Central Asian countries have vowed to play a bigger role in Afghanistan, Chinese President Hu Jintao said in comments published yesterday, as Nato forces prepare to pull out.

He said the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) -- a group intended as a counterweight to US influence in Central Asia and dominated by China and Russia -- had also decided to strengthen Afghanistan's role in the organisation.

The comments came as leaders of the SCO member states met in Beijing for a two-day summit on security and economic issues across the region.

"We will... play a greater role in the peaceful reconstruction process in Afghanistan," Hu said in an interview published in the People's Daily newspaper, the ruling Communist Party mouthpiece.

"The SCO supports Afghanistan becoming an independent, peaceful, prosperous, neighbourly country, free from terrorism and drugs," he said.

The SCO -- which groups China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan -- was formed in 2001 with the view of counterbalancing US and Nato influence in the region. India, Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia are observers.

Hu said the organisation -- which has invited Afghanistan as a guest at this year's summit -- had decided to grant the troubled country observer status, amid general concern as Nato forces prepare to pull out by the end of 2014.

Russia has criticised the withdrawal timeline, and President Vladimir Putin -- who is currently attending the SCO summit in Beijing -- has cited the stability of Afghanistan as an issue of "common concern".

India, meanwhile, has voiced fear that Islamic radicals will gain strength once Western forces pull out of the country.

# China-Russia ties 'crucial' for world peace

Says China PM; opposes use of force against Iran

AFP, Beijing

China's Premier Wen Jiabao yesterday said closer ties with Russia were of "crucial importance" for global peace, as the two nations seek to resist international action on Syria and Iran.

Wen made the comments during a meeting with President Vladimir Putin in Beijing, on the sidelines of a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), set up in 2001 to allow Russia and China to rival US influence in Asia.

"The situation internationally remains very difficult," Wen told Putin, who is on his first Asian trip since his historic election win.

"Strengthening the strategic partnership between our countries not only corresponds with the core interests of the two countries, but has crucial importance for ensuring peace and stability in the world."

Putin yesterday said the two countries had also agreed to build military ties, as the



Wen Jiabao

United States turns the focus of its huge firepower towards the Pacific -- China's backyard.

Russia and China have also joined together in resisting Western sanctions imposed on Tehran.

China's President Hu Jintao, speaking in an interview released by the official Xinhua news agency, said countries should refrain from escalating the issue of Iran's nuclear programme.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday said in China that further sanctions on Iran would be "counterproductive".

"Additional sanctions are completely counterproductive, they are already adopted not only by the security council, but by some states, which we think undermines our collective actions," Lavrov told reporters.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who arrived in Beijing late Tuesday, is expected to seek support for his country as he meets with other leaders on the sidelines of the summit.



PHOTO: AFP

**Chinese President Hu Jintao and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin attend a concert to mark a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Beijing yesterday.**

## China closes Tibet to tourists

AFP, Beijing

Chinese authorities have closed Tibet to foreign visitors, travel agents said yesterday, just 10 days after two Tibetans set themselves on fire in the troubled region.

Major travel agencies said they were told by Tibetan tourism authorities in late May that travellers from overseas would not be allowed into the vast, remote region and said they were clueless about how long the ban would last.

China sporadically bans foreign travel to Tibet, where many Tibetans complain of cultural and religious repression at the hands of Chinese authorities -- a claim the government denies.

Since March last year, 37 people have set themselves on fire in Tibetan-inhabited areas of China in protest.

## Corruption linked to Europe's crisis

Says Transparency International

AFP, Brussels

Links between Europe's financial crisis and corruption can no longer be ignored, with Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain doing the least against malpractice, Transparency International said yesterday.

More accustomed to tracking corruption in poorer African or Asian states, the organisation said links between the private and public sector favoured abuse of power, misappropriation and fraud, while also undermining economic stability.

A 60-page report titled "Money, politics and power: corruption risks in Europe" noted "a strong correlation between corruption and fiscal deficits" and said Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain topped a list of nations "found to have serious deficits in their integrity systems."

Of the 25 countries surveyed -- the European Union's 27 members minus Austria, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta, but including Norway and Switzerland -- only 19 regulate lobbies.

"Across Europe many of the institutions that define a democracy and enable a country to stop corruption are weaker than often assumed," said Cobus de Swardt, who heads the watchdog.

A huge 74 percent of Europeans believe corruption is a major problem in their country, according to EIU surveys.

## Protein 'pill' targets dengue scourge

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A Malaysian prince is promoting a noble weapon against the worsening scourge of dengue fever: A protein "pill" that starves mosquito larvae and could revolutionise the global dengue fight.

It is a fight that is intensifying: more than 2.5 billion people -- around 40 percent of Earth's population -- live in areas susceptible to the mosquito-borne virus, with up to 100 million infected annually, according to the World Health Organisation.

Enter Prince Naquiyuddin Jaafar, one of the most popular members of Malaysia's nobility, whose anti-dengue technology targets the offspring of mosquitoes in a bid to win the battle against the virus-spreading pest.

A former diplomat and son of Malaysia's past king, Naquiyuddin, 65, has been involved in a wide range of philanthropic and charitable pursuits, but dengue has been a particular passion.

Among Naquiyuddin's diverse business activities is the biotech company he founded in 2007, EntoGenex, which has taken a pre-existing protein called the Trypsin Modulating Oostatic Factor, or TMOF, and developed it into what he calls a fatal "diet pill" for mosquitoes.

TMOF is mixed into yeast cells which are then inserted in rice husks, allowing them to float on water where they will be eaten by mosquito larvae, said Alan Brandt, EntoGenex's research head. "Larvae love yeast," he added.

Once consumed, it shuts down mosquito larvae digestive systems, starving them to death before they can grow and spread dengue, Naquiyuddin said as he showed slides and photographs of dead mosquitos at the firm's high-tech research facility in downtown Kuala Lumpur.

"The 'pill' has a 100 percent success rate against all larvae species within 24 hours, and there is no way for resistance to build as it is not a toxic chemical but a protein which only affects mosquitos," Naquiyuddin said.

TMOF is harmless to animals and humans, Brandt said, washing a handful of the rice husks down with a glass of water in his laboratory as proof.

Naquiyuddin's "pill" is now registered for use in Malaysia, Pakistan and the Philippines, while Ghana, South Africa, Cameroon and Sri Lanka are either conducting field trials or seeking approvals to use it.

He hopes it could potentially become a weapon in the even larger fight against malaria, which kills an estimated 650,000 people per year. Dengue kills 20,000 people worldwide every year.



Prince Naquiyuddin Jaafar (left)

# China, Russia 'decisively against' regime change

Assad appoints new PM as clashes rock Damascus

AFP, Damascus

China and Russia yesterday said they were "decisively against" intervention or regime change in Syria as Arab and Western calls mounted for tougher international action in the 15-month conflict.

As rebel fighters stepped up their attacks in and around Damascus, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that regime change in Syria would lead the Middle East to "catastrophe".

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who has voiced mounting frustration with the Chinese and Russian position, was to discuss the situation with allies in Istanbul later on Wednesday, a Turkish diplomatic source said.

In a joint statement issued after two days of talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese

leaders, Beijing and Moscow said they strongly opposed intervention and regime change in Syria.

"Russia and China are decisively against attempts to regulate the Syrian crisis with outside military intervention, as well as imposing... a policy of regime change," the statement said.

Speaking in the Chinese capital, the Russian foreign minister urged the international community to resist calls from the exiled opposition to help oust President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Meanwhile, Assad appointed a regime loyalist, agriculture minister Riad Hijab, as premier to replace Adel Safar, who formed his government in April last year, a month after the Arab Spring-inspired uprising erupted.

Syria's new parliament was elected on May 7 in a vote boycotted by opposition groups and dismissed by Washington as a "farce".

Assad appointed a regime loyalist,

agriculture minister Riad Hijab, as premier to replace Adel Safar, who formed his government in April last year, a month after the Arab Spring-inspired uprising erupted.

On Tuesday, 55 people were killed in violence across Syria, including 26 soldiers, 19 civilians and 10 rebels, according to the Observatory's figures.

On Tuesday, Russia said Assad could leave power as part of a settlement to end bloodshed in Syria.

And the United States endorsed yesterday the Arab League's proposal to invoke the United Nations' tough Chapter VII sanctions against the Syrian regime.

But Washington held off from supporting Chapter VII's powers to initiate a military intervention and focused on economic sanctions against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's embattled government.

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