# South Asia ties 'no threat to 3rd party'

China tries to assure anxious India

AFP, Colombo

Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie says Beijing's increasingly close ties with South Asia are aimed at ensuring regional "security and stability" and are not intended to harm any "third party".

Liang, the first Chinese defence minister to visit Sri Lanka, did not name India -where he will arrive today-- but officials in New Delhi have expressed concerns about Beijing's influence in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan.

India fears it might be part of a Chinese policy to throw a "string of pearls" -- a circle of influence -- around regional rival India.

But in a speech released by Sri Lanka's military on Saturday, Liang said that China had only peaceful intentions in South Asia, while stressing that the Indian Ocean was an important supply route for his fastdeveloping country.

Beijing is seeking "harmonious coexistence and mutually beneficial and winwin cooperation" with countries in the

region, he told a Sri Lankan army staff college on Thursday, according to a copy of the speech.

In New Delhi, the minister will be a guest of the defence ministry, an Indian government spokesman said, without giving details of what will be discussed.

India is warily eyeing growing Chinese clout in what New Delhi regards as its traditional sphere of influence. Liang dismissed the "China-threat theory".

"Some people in the international community suspect that China would take the road of expansion with force and have been actively spreading the 'China-threat theory'," he said.

"The People's Liberation Army (China's armed forces) efforts in conducting friendly exchanges and cooperation with its counterparts in South Asian are intended for maintaining regional security and stability and not targeted at any third party," he added.

Liang said his trip to Colombo was aimed at further strengthening close ties with Sri Lanka, including military cooperation.

#### US drone kills four in Pakistan

AFP, Miranshah

A US drone strike targeting a militant compound yesterday killed at least four rebels in Pakistan's restive tribal region near the Afghan border, security officials said.

The strike took place in Degan area of North Waziristan, known as a bastion of Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Officials said the area had been the target of US drone strikes in the past, which killed several foreign militants.

The district is a stronghold of the Hafiz Gul Bahadur militant group, he said, adding that militants from the Afghan Taliban allied Haqqani network also operate in Degan.

There has been a dramatic increase in US drone strikes in Pakistan since May, when a Nato summit in Chicago failed to strike a deal to end a sixmonth blockade on convoys

# BJP ups ante over coal scam Sonia reaches out to leader of the opposition to defuse row

AGENCIES

Congress President Sonia Gandhi has reached out to Leader of Opposition Sushma Swaraj to break the logjam in parliament over the CAG report after BJP threatened nationwide street protest.

Taking the initiative, Sonia talked to the senior BJP leader on Friday coinciding with her hectic consultations with the party top brass including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, sources said.

But BJP appeared unrelenting on its stand.

"There will be no let up. We will further intensify our fight inside and outside Parliament," BJP spokesperson Shahnawaz Hussain said.

Asked if BJP would allow passage of some crucial bills, he said, "This is not a question of bills but of the nation. Our fight will continue."

"The fight on the coal scam will be sharper than that on Bofors (scandal). We will take the fight to the streets and the people," IANS quoted him earlier.



The main opposition party is demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh over the alleged corruption.

The government has already rejected demand for cancellation of coal blocks and slammed BJP for demanding resignation of the prime minister over the issue.

The Bofors scandal was a major

prepared to consult all stakeholders on any issue in keeping with the best traditions of parliamentary democracy, where a way should be found out through dialogue

scandal in the

late 1980s

resulting in the

Rajiv Gandhi

led Congress

government's

defeat in the

general

elections of

sources said

Sonia's

reaching out

to Swaraj is a

further vindi-

cation that the

party is always

Congress

1989.

Sonia and the prime minister deliberated at length the strategy ahead as business in parliament was washed out for the eighth consecutive day on Friday on the coal block allocation issue.

# Pacific big enough for US, China

Hillary plays down rivalry

AFP, Avarua

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton yesterday said that the South Pacific was big enough for both the United States and China but urged the Asian power to distribute its growing aid

Hillary vowed that the United States would remain committed to the South Pacific "for the long haul" and offered new aid as she became the first US secretary of state to take part in an annual summit in the vast but sparsely populated

Her visit comes as several island states forge closer ties with China, which according to Australia's Lowy Institute has pledged more than \$600 million in low-interest and mostly strings-free loans to the South Pacific since 2005. The US secretary of state, who will visit Beijing next week

for talks on the often fractious relationship between the world's two largest economies, played down rivalries in the South Pacific during the summit in the tiny Cook Islands. "We think it is important for the Pacific island nations to have

good relationships with as many partners as possible and that includes China and the United States," she told reporters. Hillary, in an address to the 15-nation Pacific Islands

Forum, said that all nations had "important contributions

and stakes" in the security and prosperity of the region. "I think, after all, the Pacific is big enough for all of us," she

said, in a line she used repeatedly during her visit. Chinese state media have accused Hillary Clinton of seeking to "contain" the rise of the Asian nation through her

latest tour of the region. However, China's Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai, who is also attending the Pacific forum, told reporters Beijing's presence in the Pacific was not about geo-political influence. Tiankai sounded a conciliatory note during his speech,

saying Thursday that China was "in this region not to seek any particular influence, still less dominance. Cui said that China was willing to work with other countries but added that China will not change it's policy for the region. Any potential US attempt to contest China's role would be fraught with difficulties as several nations in the region

that the Asian power was a greater friend than Washington. Prime Minister Henry Puna of the Cook Islands welcomed the renewed US interest but made clear the region would not distance itself from China.

have embraced China, with Samoa's leader saying in June

"They've (China) been very good to us," Puna said. "There

is certainly room for both in the Pacific."

She said that the US would welcome greater coordination with China on aid as well in protecting water resources and disaster relief. She announced \$32 million in new aid projects,



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton shakes hands with New Zealand Foreign Minister Murray McCully, centre, and Australian Parliamentary Secretary Richard Marles during a trilateral meeting at the New Zealand High Commissioner's house in Rarotonga, Cook Islands on Friday.

**GUINEA BOAT TRAGEDY** 

#### 30 feared drowned

AFP, Conakry

About 30 people were believed to have drowned after an overloaded boat sank off the coast of Guinea, as rescue workers said yesterday they had given up hope of finding survivors after an all-night search.

The pirogue, a flatbottomed boat used by fishermen and for transport, capsized a few minutes after setting off for Kassa Island which lies several kilometres from the capital Conakry on Friday.

A official had told AFP that a total of 58 people were on the boat, which had the capacity to

# Rebels target regime air power in Syria Clashes rage as Russia defends Assad's forces

AFP, Damascus

Syrian rebels launched deadly attacks on the military yesterday in a campaign increasingly targeting its air power, as President Bashar al-Assad's traditional ally Russia said it was "naive" to expect him not to fight back.

Rebel fighters captured the main air defence building in Albu Kamal on the Iraqi border, the Syrian Observatory for Human Right said, adding that "preliminary reports" suggested they had seized ground-to-air missiles that could boost their ability to down government aircraft.

The assault late Friday came hot on the heels of a rebel attack on the Abu Zohur air base in Idlib province in the northwest, where the Free Syrian Army said it downed a MiG warplane shortly after takeoff earlier

this week. With the insurgency intensifying, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said calls by Western and Arab governments for Assad to unilaterally pull back his troops amounted to a demand for "capitulation" that they had no right to make.

In their assault in Albu Kamal, rebel fighters also captured 16 air defence personnel and attacked the nearby Hamdan air base, the Syrian Observatory said. They were among a total of 125 people

killed in violence nationwide on Friday -- 74 civilians, 29 soldiers and 22 rebels, according to the Observatory's figures. The rebels claim to have destroyed a dozen aircraft on the ground in their attacks on air bases in recent days as they seek to counter

helicopter gunships against them. In talks with Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halaqi in Tehran on Friday, UN chief Ban Ki-moon said that Assad's regime must stop using its heavy weapons.

the government's use of MiG warplanes and

But the Russia's top diplomat said yesterday that such calls were "completely unrealistic".

"When our partners say that the government must stop first and withdraw all its soldiers and weapons from cities -- and only then call on the opposition to do the same -well, this is a completely unworkable scheme," said Lavrov.

"Either people are naive or it is some sort of provocation," he added.

and debate.

### Neil Armstrong's funeral held

**BBC ONLINE** 

A private funeral service has been held for US astronaut Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the Moon. He died last Saturday aged 82.

The funeral in Cincinnati, Ohio, was by invitation only, reflecting Armstong's own intensely private nature. Flags flew half-mast across America on Friday,

following President Barack Obama's order to mark the funeral.

#### Venezuela restarts refinery

AFP, Caracas

Workers resumed operations at Venezuela's biggest refinery on Friday, a week after an explosion that killed 42 people, state oil company PDVSA said.

Firefighters struggled for days to put out the blaze triggered by a gas leak at the Amuay refinery.

At least 20 members of a national guard unit assigned to protect the facility were killed, along

#### **Kyrgyz acting PM resigns**

IANS, Bishkek

Kyrgyz acting Prime Minister Omurbek Babanov has tendered his resignation, the government press service said yesterday.

Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev dismissed the government Aug 24, following the break-up of the majority coalition in parliament, and entrusted the Social-Democratic Party with forming a new coalition.

Atambayev has yet to accept Babanov's resignation. The coalition, formed in January by Omurbek

#### Wildfires under control in Spain

**BBC ONLINE** 

The advance of huge wildfires that have destroyed properties on Spain's Costa del Sol has been mostly halted, though pockets remain, officials said yesterday.

Some people who had fled their homes have now been able to return, although others spent the night

#### Ramdev calls for new agitation

PTI, New Delhi

Yoga guru Ramdev yesterday announced a fresh agitation targeting Congress from October 2 that will last till next Lok Sabha elections with immediate attention on upcoming Assembly elections in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh.

Addressing a press conference, Ramdev said he will continue his work despite Congress targeting him and his fight will be for a change in power and system.

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DIFFERENCE OVER IRAN STRIKE US scales down military

exercise with Israel

AFP, Washington

The United States has significantly scaled down a planned joint military exercise with Israel most likely because of disagreements on how to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions, Time magazine has reported on its website

Citing "well-placed sources in both countries", the magazine said Washington was slashing by more than twothirds the number of US troops going to Israel, and reducing the number and potency of missile interception systems that will be used in the exercise dubbed Austere Challenge 12, which is scheduled for October.

Instead of approximately 5,000 US troops, the Pentagon will send between 1,200 and 1,500. Patriot anti-missile systems will arrive in Israel as planned, but the crews to operate them will not, according to the report. Instead of two Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense warships,

the new plan calls for sending just one, and even the remaining vessel is listed as a "maybe", the report said. Basically what the Americans are saying is, "We don't trust you," a senior Israeli military official is quoted by Time as saying.

Time said the official explanation was budget restrictions. But the reductions coincided with growing tensions between the administrations of President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about Israel's threats to launch an airstrike on Iran over its nuclear program.



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