

Hillary seeks Southeast Asia's unity

Warns against coercion in South China Sea

AFP, Jakarta

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned yesterday against coercion in the conflict-riven South China Sea and voiced hope that Beijing would find a peaceful resolution with Southeast Asian nations.

With tensions mounting in recent months between China and other claimants to the strategic waterway, Hillary on a visit to Indonesia declared anew that the United States found a "national interest" in ensuring freedom of navigation.

Hillary, who heads today to Beijing, did not criticise China directly but voiced clear unease over the fast-growing Asian power's recent establishment of a remote garrison in the sea hotly disputed among six states.

"The United States believes very strongly that no party should take any steps that would increase tensions or do anything that would be viewed as coercive or intimidating to advance their territorial claims," She said.

"We believe the nations of the region should work collaboratively together to resolve disputes without coercion, without intimidation, without threats and certainly without the use of force," She said.

Hillary, speaking at a news conference with



Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, urged progress on a code of conduct to manage the overlapping disputes, warning that a "miscalculation" could escalate the situation in the tense waters.

During Clinton's last visit to the region in July, foreign ministers of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or Asean, failed to reach a consensus that would allow them to negotiate jointly with China.

Hillary praised a subsequent declaration by the Asean foreign ministers, led by Natalegawa, who

recommitted to a peaceful resolution of disputes and to a unified position on a code of conduct.

Hillary, who will become the first US secretary of state to visit all Asean nations when she stops in Brunei later this week, expressed optimism that the elusive code of conduct could come closer to reality in time for a November summit to be attended by President Barack Obama.

"I think we can make progress before the East Asia Summit and it's certainly in everyone's interest that we do so," she said.

The Indonesian foreign minister voiced support for Asean unity and said that the overlapping claims in the South China Sea "must be resolved peacefully".

But Natalegawa, who last month welcomed Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi to Jakarta, said that the diplomatic efforts should not be seen as targeting Beijing.

The Philippines and Vietnam have both accused China of an intimidation campaign over territorial disputes in the South China Sea, a waterway through which half of the world's cargo sails.

But several Southeast Asian nations including Cambodia have close ties with China and have been less enthusiastic about taking a hard line.

In a show of support for Asean, Hillary will today visit the bloc's headquarters in Jakarta and meet its secretary-general, Surin Pitsuwan.

Pak suicide attack on US vehicle kills 4

AFP, Peshawar

A suicide car bomber struck a US consulate vehicle in Pakistan yesterday, killing four people in the deadliest attack targeting Americans in the frontline state of the war on al-Qaeda for two years.

US officials said no Americans were killed, despite statements from a regional Pakistani cabinet minister that two Americans were among the dead.

Up to 19 people were wounded when the bomber struck during the morning rush hour in the northwestern city of Peshawar, near the office of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and residential quarters used by the US consulate.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but it was at least the third time that the consulate and its staff have been targeted by militants.

Karzai wrong on Afghan operation

Says Australian defence minister

AFP, Sydney

Australia yesterday flatly rejected comments from Afghan President Hamid Karzai that a recent night-time raid which left two men dead was carried out without the approval of local authorities.

Kabul had slammed Australia over the mission, carried out in the wake of last week's killing of three Australian troops by a rogue Afghan soldier, describing it as a "unilateral military operation".

"The president condemns the operation as a breach of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Afghanistan and Nato on the special military operations," Karzai's office said in a statement.

But Defence Minister Stephen Smith said the operation in restive Uruzgan province had full authorisation, was conducted jointly with 60 Australians and 80 Afghan troops, and had followed the established rules of engagement.

"The statement that has been issued by President Karzai's palace over the weekend in Kabul that this operation was not authorised is wrong," Smith said.

"That is not factually correct, and this point has been made strongly by Australia's ambassador to Afghanistan to palace and presidential officials."

Smith said Australia was "disappointed" by Karzai's comments, describing the situation as a "misunderstanding".

Kurd rebels' attack kills 29 in Turkey

AFP, Diyarbakir, Turkey

Kurdish rebels armed with machine-guns and rocket launchers attacked a security complex in southeastern Turkey overnight, triggering fierce clashes that left about 29 people dead, local sources yesterday said.

"Nine security agents were killed and eight others wounded," said Vahdettin Ozkan, governor of Sirnak province, while other local sources said about 20 members of the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) had also died.

Ozkan said a group of rebels attacked the security complex at Beytusebap, killing the nine members of the security forces. Police and soldiers returned fire, triggering fierce clashes.

RACE TO WHITE HOUSE Romney has no new idea: Obama

AFP, Toledo, Ohio

US President Barack Obama was in the blue-collar heartland of Ohio yesterday, seeking to energize his labor union base after accusing Republican foe Mitt Romney of failing to offer "a single new idea" to solve the country's problems.

The motorcade of the president, who arrived in Toledo Sunday, was greeted by pockets for friendly well-wishers, who carried signs "New citizen for Obama," "Toledo built Jeep. Thank you, President Obama," "Obama 2012" and "4 more years."

Toledo is home to General Motors and Chrysler factories, whose workers benefited from the 2009 multi-billion-dollar auto industry bailout championed by the president.

Obama is on a four-day "Road to Charlotte" tour taking in territory that will decide November's election, in which his prospects are clouded by a painfully slow economic recovery and 8.3 percent unemployment.

He has already visited Iowa and Colorado and plans to make a trip to hurricane-stricken Louisiana later in the day.

Should Obama win Ohio, a perennial bellwether state and one where most polls show him with a narrow lead, he will be the hot favorite to win a second term in the White House.

No Republican has won the White House without having Ohio in his column.



US President Barack Obama greets well-wishers upon arrival at Toledo Express International Airport in Toledo, Ohio, on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

NZ to leave Afghanistan in April 2013

BBC ONLINE

New Zealand yesterday formally announced it will pull its troops out of Afghanistan by April 2013.

Officials say this is a reflection of "careful logistical planning" and is part of the international forces' transition plan.

The announcement comes after five New Zealand soldiers were killed in two incidents last month.

Over its 10-year deployment, the New Zealand PRT [Provincial Reconstruction Team] has contributed to international counter-terrorism efforts, improved security, and the development and governance of Bamiyan province., Defence Minister Jonathan Coleman said in a statement.

NEWS IN brief

Cameron plans first reshuffle

BBC ONLINE

Speculation is mounting about an imminent ministerial reshuffle as MPs return for a new parliamentary term.

The reshuffle, which could come as early as today, would see the first major changes to David Cameron's top team since he became prime minister.

Although high-ranking ministers like the chancellor are unlikely to be affected, changes are expected in the cabinet and junior ministerial posts.

This comes as the government announces further measures to boost growth.

On Sunday, Mr Cameron said he wanted to "cut through the dither" that was holding the British economy back - amid growing unease among Conservative MPs who argue there is no coherent plan to get the country out of recession.

Veil breakthrough on Egypt's TV

AFP, Cairo

A veiled anchorwoman read the news on Egypt's state television for the first time on Sunday, reflecting a shift in official media since the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak and the subsequent rise of Islamists.

Fatma Nabil made her first appearance on the Channel 1 midday broadcast, wearing a black suit and a cream-coloured scarf or hijab covering the hair and neck.

Until the revolution that toppled president Hosni Mubarak last year and brought a Muslim Brotherhood president to power, women in Islamic headscarves and particularly full-face veils had been

Unification Church founder Moon dies

AFP, Gapyeong, South Korea

Sun Myung Moon, the self-styled messiah from South Korea who founded the controversial Unification Church and a business empire with interests spanning cars to sushi, died yesterday at the age of 92.

Moon, who was hospitalised with complications from pneumonia more than two weeks ago, died shortly before 2:00 am at a hospital in the church's headquarters in Gapyeong, east of Seoul.

Revered by his followers but denounced by critics as a cult-building charlatan, Moon was a deeply divisive figure whose shadowy business and financial dealings saw him jailed in the United States.



Aleppo strike kills dozens

UN envoy says Syria mission near-impossible

BBC ONLINE

Violence is continuing in Syria, with opposition activists saying that a warplane may have killed as many as 25 people in a single strike in Aleppo province.

A bomb also exploded near a roundabout in the Jaramana district of Damascus.

Meanwhile, speaking to the BBC, the new international envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, said he viewed his new mission as near-impossible.

He is expected to visit Syria and meet President Bashar al-Assad on Saturday.

In Aleppo, human rights groups said several women and children were among the 25 victims when a building was hit in the town of al-Bab.

Al-Bab, just to the north-east of Aleppo, appears to be largely in rebel hands, and has been heavily pounded by government forces in recent weeks, says the BBC's Jim Muir in Lebanon.

Increasingly, as the conflict deepens, the regime has made fuller use of its air power - attack helicopters and fixed-wing jets - to support its ground forces as they try to root out the lightly-armed rebels from towns, cities and villages all

over the country, our correspondent says.

Despite the disparity in firepower and manpower, the government is nowhere near winning what has become a civil war of attrition, but the rebels are also not within sight of victory, our correspondent says.

In the car bombing in the Damascus suburb, there are reports of material damage and casualties, but no figures have been given yet.

The explosion is the second within 10 days targeting the predominantly Druze and Christian area of Jaramana.

Separately, the head of the Red Cross is heading to Syria to meet President Assad to try to improve aid access to civilians.

Brahimi, the new UN-Arab League envoy on Syria, was appointed after his predecessor, Kofi Annan, resigned, saying he no longer saw a way to fulfil his mission after his peace plan failed to achieve a meaningful ceasefire.

"I'm coming into this job with my eyes open, and no illusions," Brahimi told the BBC's Lyse Doucet in an interview in New York. "I know how difficult it is - how nearly impossible. I can't say impossible - [it is] nearly impossible."

S Africa frees first batch of miners

AFP, Pretoria

A South African court yesterday freed the first batch of 270 miners arrested for the killing of 34 fellow workers who were gunned down by police in a wildcat strike last month.

The court granted the release after prosecutors provisionally withdrew the murder charges amid public outrage following the bloodshed at Lonmin's Marikana mine in the worst day of police violence in post-apartheid South Africa.

"The murder charges against the accused are at this point of time withdrawn," said Magistrate Esau Bodigelo as he released 47 miners in the court north of Pretoria. "You may stand down," he added as applause broke out in the courtroom.

Yemeni air strike wrongly kills 10

REUTERS, Sanaa

Ten civilians including a 10-year-old girl were killed in a Yemeni government air strike that had apparently missed its intended target, a car carrying Islamist militants, tribal officials and residents there said yesterday.

The missile attack in a mountainous area in the centre of the country on Sunday prompted angry protests by relatives of the victims, residents told Reuters.

The impoverished Arabian Peninsula state has become a key battleground for the United States in its war against al-Qaeda militancy.

The country has been in turmoil since an uprising against veteran ruler Ali Abdullah Saleh began in January last year.

UK fails to freeze Mubarak-era assets

BBC ONLINE

The UK government is failing in its commitment to freeze assets of the regime of former Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak, a BBC investigation found yesterday.

Publicly available documents reveal property and companies linked to key figures in the Mubarak circle that have been unaffected by sanctions.

Egyptian officials accuse the UK of hiding stolen wealth and breaching international anti-corruption accords.

The UK says it is doing as much as it can to trace the funds. Reports that President Hosni Mubarak and his inner circle stole tens of billions of dollars helped fuel the revolution which overthrew him on 11 February last year.

Three days later, UK Foreign Secretary William Hague told parliament the UK would co-operate with an Egyptian government request to freeze the assets of several former officials.

But it was a further 37 days before Britain and other EU states applied the sanctions - a period when Egypt says the accused officials were able to move their money elsewhere.



Gamal Mubarak's UK home

London in November 2011, seven months after her assets were ordered to be frozen.

Another similar document shows that a London investment company, Medinvest Associates, co-founded by Mubarak's younger son Gamal, and still belonging to a Cypriot firm he helped run, continued operating until it dissolved itself, voluntarily, in February this year - 11 months after sanctions were imposed.

Meanwhile there is no indication on Land Registry documents of any freeze on the large house worth between £8m and £10m in Wilton Place, off Knightsbridge in London, that was Gamal Mubarak's UK home for many years until the Egyptian revolution.

INDIA COAL SCAM Govt rejects BJP's demand

Says IMG review blocks allocations

PTI, New Delhi

The Government yesterday rejected BJP's demand for immediate cancellation of 142 coal block allocations but appealed to the Opposition to allow parliament to function and participate in a debate on the issue.

"The demand for cancellation of all 142 coal blocks allocated after 2004 is not founded on sound logic... It (cancellation) cannot be done through dictate or arbitrary orders," Finance Minister P Chidambaram told reporters.

"There is a procedure for it and that procedure is underway," he said.

He was reacting to the BJP's demand for immediate cancellation of 142 coal blocks and an independent probe before any discussion can take place on the issue in Parliament.

Chidambaram also termed as "outrageous" the BJP's demand for resignation of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The BJP's demand for an inquiry is "a little belated" because CBI has already commenced probe, he said.

Explaining the government's position behind not accepting the demand for cancellation of coal blocks, he said an Inter-Ministerial Group is going into the issue and a date of September 15 has been set for a decision.

Indian doctor held over militant plot

AFP, Bangalore, India

Police in the southern Indian city of Bangalore said yesterday they had arrested a doctor over an alleged plot by Islamist militants to assassinate prominent politicians.

Nayem Siddiqui was detained late on Sunday in Davangere, 250 kilometres from Bangalore, in the latest of more than a dozen arrests after police said they had foiled the alleged assassination plan.

Siddiqui and the other suspects have been held under anti-terrorism laws for suspected links to the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba group, which is blamed for the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) militant outfit.