

Asian territory disputes could trigger war: Panetta

AFP, Tokyo

China and other Asian countries could end up at war over territorial disputes if governments keep up their "provocative behaviour", US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said yesterday.

Speaking to reporters before arriving in Tokyo on a trip to Asia, Panetta appealed for restraint amid mounting tensions over territorial rights in the East China Sea and the South China Sea.

"I am concerned that when these countries engage in provocations of one kind or another over these various islands, that it raises the possibility that a misjudgment on one side or the other could result in violence, and could result in conflict," Panetta said, when asked about a clash between Japan and China.

"And that conflict would then have the potential of expanding."

The Pentagon chief's trip coincides with an escalating row between Asia's two largest economies over an archipelago in the East China Sea administered by Tokyo under the name Senkaku and claimed by China under the name Diaoyu.

Panetta said he and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton "both strongly urge that these countries -- rather than engaging in that provocative behaviour -- engage in an effort to find ways to peacefully resolve these kind of issues".

Panetta is due to hold talks today with his



Japanese counterpart where the dispute is expected to top the agenda before heading to China and then on to New Zealand.

He predicted economic rivalry would lead to more feuds in the future over potentially resource-rich areas in the Asia-Pacific region.

"We're going to face more of this. Countries are searching for resources," he said, adding: "There's got to be a peaceful way to resolve these issues."

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea also have Washington worried, as China has refused to withdraw claims to virtually all of the strategic waterway and has been accused of bullying smaller states in the area.

The Philippines and Vietnam have alleged Beijing has used intimidation to push its claims in the South China Sea, through which around half of the world's cargo passes.

The United States has backed an effort by the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) to seek a code to govern access to the sea, which would establish rules and a formal dialogue to prevent incidents from escalating into full-blown conflict.

Panetta's trip is part of a bid by President Barack Obama to shift Washington's diplomatic and military focus to Asia, amid concern over China's growing power and

No plans to bolster US forces in ME

AFP, Tokyo

The US military has no major plans to bolster its forces in the Middle East despite a week of violent protests targeting diplomatic outposts, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said yesterday.

With a substantial force already deployed in the region coupled with two US Marine counter-terrorism teams sent to Libya and Yemen, the military has the ability to respond as necessary to protect American diplomats, Panetta told reporters before arriving in Tokyo on an Asian tour.

Panetta praised the Libyan government's efforts to strengthen security at US missions and search for those behind the deadly attack on Tuesday against the American consulate in Benghazi.

The assault, in which security teams were overwhelmed by heavily-armed gunmen, killed the US ambassador Chris Stevens and three of his staff, in the worst attack on an American diplomatic mission since the 1970s.

Iran says it will target US interests if attacked

Admits Guards presence in Syria, Lebanon

AFP, Tehran

Iran's Revolutionary Guards yesterday admitted for the first time that members of its elite Quds Force are in Syria, and warned Israel and Washington against any attack on the Islamic republic's nuclear sites.

In a rare Tehran news conference, Guards commander General Mohammad Ali Jafari said officials from the Quds Force -- the Guards' special forces unit tasked with missions abroad -- were active in both Syria and Lebanon to "counsel" forces fighting the Syrian opposition.



Mohammad Ali Jafari

Hormuz in the oil-rich Gulf, US military bases in the Middle East and Israel, he warned.

"This is a declared policy by Iran that if war occurs in the region and the Islamic republic is involved, it is natural that the Strait of Hormuz as well as the energy (market) will face difficulties," he said.

US military bases -- such as those in Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates -- would equally be considered fair game.

Jafari explained that Tehran believed Israel was unsuccessfully trying to push the United States to take part in military action against Iran's nuclear facilities.

"I do not think the attack would be carried out without US permission," he said.

However if Israeli jets or missiles did strike Iran, "nothing of Israel would be left," he warned bluntly.

Anti-missile defence shields deployed by Israel and the United States in Arab states of the Gulf would be ineffective against a rain of Iranian missiles, he added.



End drone strikes, remove mistrust

Zardari asks US

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari Saturday reiterated demand for ending US drone attacks on militants in its tribal areas and called for removing a "trust deficit" with the United States.

Zardari's remarks came after talks with US special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Marc Grossman, who arrived in the Pakistani capital on Friday for meetings with top officials.

"They discussed bilateral relations, the fight against militancy, the regional situation, drug trafficking and drone attacks," presidential spokesman Senator Farhatullah Babar told reporters.

Zardari called for an end to the drone attacks, terming them counterproductive in the fight against militancy and in the battle of winning hearts, Babar said.

Zardari said "the goal of establishing a long-term, sustained and durable Pakistan-US equation would remain elusive until the issue of trust deficit was addressed in an effective manner".

Attacks by unmanned US aircraft are deeply unpopular in Pakistan, which says they violate its sovereignty

Gave N-tech to 2 countries

Pak nuke scientist says he did it on ex-PM's order

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan's disgraced nuclear scientist Abdul Qadir Khan has claimed that he had transferred nuclear technology to 'two countries' on the orders of slain former premier Benazir Bhutto.

"The then Prime Minister Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto summoned me and named the two countries which were to be assisted and issued clear directions in this regard," Khan said in an interview with the Jang media group. He did not name the two countries.

Khan claimed he had no option but to obey Bhutto, who was killed by a suicide attacker in late 2007. "I was not independent but was bound to abide by the orders of the PM, hence I did take this step in compliance with her order," he said. "The PM would have certainly known about the role and cooperation of the two countries, mentioned by her,

in our national interest," he claimed.

The transfer of nuclear technology is not easy and at least 800 people supervise the process, said Khan, who was placed under house arrest after he acknowledged in 2004 that he had run a clandestine proliferation ring.

Libya and North Korea are among the countries to which Khan's ring supplied nuclear technology and know-how. The People's Party-led government has eased restrictions on Khan over past few years.

Khan has also retracted his confession, claiming he was pressured to acknowledge on TV that he had run a proliferation network.

Khan said former PM Nawaz Sharif, who now claims credit for the 1998 nuclear tests, was "absolutely not ready to conduct" the blasts and didn't want to do so because of fear the US might be annoyed and his government might be threatened.



Striking miners flee South African police in Marikana at Lonmin's platinum mine on Saturday after hundreds of workers regrouped in a shantytown near where police shot dead 34 people last month. Inset, police arrest a miner in Marikana.

PHOTO: AFP

Roll back or face 'hard decisions'

Mamata talks tough, attacks Indian PM on economic reforms

IANs, Kolkata

Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee has asked the Congress to face "hard decisions" or roll back the twin "anti-people" policies of FDI in retail and the diesel price hike.

She also has taken a swipe at Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh by stressing leaders should be more concerned about common people than personal laurels.

"Everybody should think about the common masses of the country rather than the creamy section of the society. Because the creamy section is only one percent and common masses make the rest of the 99 percent of the population," said Mamata, also the West Bengal chief minister, at a protest rally in Kolkata on Saturday.

Mamata, whose Trinamool Congress is the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)'s second largest constituent, reminded the Congress not to cross the "Lakshman Rekha" (red line).



Reiterating her 72-hour deadline for the central government to rethink or face a "tough decision", she said her party did not agree with the UPA's "anti-people" decisions.

"We are not in favour of toppling the government. But they should not forget the 'Lakshman Rekha' of the alliance. We will not agree with any anti-people decisions. We have given 72-hour deadline to rethink...if you roll back, it's good. But if not, then be ready to face the consequences as we will take our own decision," she said.

Mamata, who along with several

Trinamool MPs and her entire cabinet, walked for more than five km during the protest, was strident in her opposition to the measures.

"I don't agree with such economic reforms which are anti-people because I believe in economic reforms which concern the grass root, the masses. Leaders should stop taking decisions which help only four-five people for gaining personal laurels from handful of people. It is a matter of entire country," she said.

The government Thursday announced a hike in diesel price by Rs 5 a litre and capped the supply of subsidised cooking gas cylinders per family to six per year. The next day, it decided to allow up to 51 percent foreign direct investment (FDI) in multi-brand retail.

The business community has hailed the decision of Manmohan, who has been credited to have started the economic reforms in the country in 1990s.

Mamata also accused the Congress-

BJP to launch 'political war' against govt

PTI, Hyderabad

Demanding rollback of the fuel price hike and FDI in retail, senior BJP leader M Venkaiah Naidu yesterday said the party would launch a "political war" against it.

The UPA government has failed on all fronts and mid-term polls are the only solution for the country, Naidu told reporters here.

Accusing the UPA government of not taking into confidence even its allies for allowing FDI investment in multibrand retail and hike in diesel price, the BJP leader said the party would chalk-out a detailed programme of "political war" soon.

The central government led by Congress has taken the decision to cover up its failure and divert attention of people, he alleged.

Terming the FDI investment in retail as a "unilateral decision", Naidu said the UPA government has failed to keep its promise made in parliament.

A nationwide agitation programme against the UPA government's anti-poor and anti-farmer policies would be chalked out during the party's three-day national executive meeting to be held at Faridabad from September 26, he said.

Talking to reporters in New Delhi, Senior BJP leader, Lal Krishna Advani said that the BJP and its allies have decided to observe a daylong nationwide shutdown on 20th September.

Destiny spent

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money, says a government report.

An investigation of the Department of Cooperatives (DoC) has found that the top managers of DMCSL spent about Tk 14 crore on the certificates.

DoC documents show there are 1.76 lakh registered cooperatives in the country but none of them ever printed certificates abroad.

"Destiny has set a record by printing its share certificates in a foreign country," said Amiya Kumar Chattopadhyay, additional registrar of DoC, which regulates cooperative societies in the country.

"Maybe some top Destiny officials used it as a means of laundering shareholders' money," said a DoC official preferring not to be named.

A shareholders' certificate, issued by a company to its investor, bears the latter's name and address, number of shares he owns and the share value.

Contacted, Destiny Group Chairman Rafiqul Amin said, "We printed the certificates from Hong Kong on high quality Australian paper to avoid forgery."

"The paper is chemically-treated and each certificate cost \$2 [Tk 164]," said Rafiqul, the immediate past chairman of Destiny cooperative.

Printing them in the country would cost between Tk 30 and 50 each, depending on the quality of the paper, said Ashraful Islam, general manager of SR Printing Press at Paltan in the capital.

Rafiqul Amin said DMCSL, registered in 2005, initially printed the certificates locally. "Later, we found that some people were claiming dividends against fake certificates. This prompted us to print on high quality paper in 2010."

However, DoC officials say claiming money using fake documents is not easy. Because detailed information of the shareholder, including his photo, is kept in the office file for identity check.

AFGHAN BASE ATTACK

6 US war jets destroyed

AFP, Kabul

Six US fighter jets were destroyed and two significantly damaged when insurgents stormed a heavily fortified Afghan base where Britain's Prince Harry is deployed on Friday, a Nato spokesman said.

Lieutenant Colonel Hagen Messer conceded that the scale of damage, carried out by more than a dozen attackers dressed in US Army uniforms and armed with guns, rockets and suicide vests who managed to storm the airfield, was unprecedented.

Three coalition refuelling stations were also destroyed and six aircraft hangars damaged in the assault at Camp Bastion in southern Helmand province, one of the toughest battlegrounds of the war, the US-led Nato force said.

In a statement, it said the attack was "well-coordinated" and carried out by around 15 insurgents, who were organised into three teams and who penetrated the perimeter fence.

A Taliban commander told Sky News that Harry was the main focus of the attack, but other Taliban spokesmen told media organisations that the attack was in revenge for the anti-Islamic film The Innocence of Muslims.

Harry, an army captain, was about two kilometres away with other crew members of the Apache attack helicopters, of which he is a co-pilot gunner, when the attack took place, sources said.



Prince Harry

Nato air strike kills 8 women in Afghanistan

BBC ONLINE

At least eight women died in a Nato air strike in Afghanistan's eastern province of Laghman, local officials yesterday said.

Nato has conceded that between five and eight civilians died as it targeted insurgents, and offered condolences.

The remote region in which the strike took place is out of the reach of central government.

Local officials in Laghman told the BBC at least eight women had died, while provincial council member Gulzar Sangarwal said nine were dead.

Major Adam Wojack, a spokesman for the Isaf international forces, said an investigation was under way.

Khmer Rouge 'First Lady' walks free

AFP, Phnom Penh

The former "First Lady" of Cambodia's murderous Khmer Rouge regime was freed yesterday, a court official said, after the country's war crimes tribunal had ruled she was unfit to stand trial.

Ieng Thirith, 80, who experts say has Alzheimer's disease, was driven in a convoy with police and officials from the purpose-built detention facility at the Phnom Penh court where she has been held since 2007.

"The accused Ieng Thirith has been released with some provisional conditions," court spokesman Neth Pheaktra told AFP.

The release of the ex-social affairs minister, one of only a handful of people ever brought before a court over atrocities during the Khmer Rouge era, will come as a bitter blow to many who survived the 1975-1979 regime, blamed for the deaths of up to two million people.

Cambodia's UN-backed tribunal ordered her release on Thursday but the move was delayed after prosecutors requested tighter conditions.

In a statement, the court's highest appeal body yesterday said it had agreed to impose extra provisional conditions, including that she registers her address and



Ieng Thirith

the the "Killing Fields" era, said the decision to free Ieng Thirith would be difficult for victims to accept.

Three other senior Khmer Rouge leaders, including Ieng Thirith's husband Ieng Sary, are currently on trial accused of the same atrocities.

This case -- only the second ever heard by the court -- is seen as vital to healing mental scars in Cambodia, but campaigners have voiced dismay at the slow progress of proceedings given the advanced age of the defendants.

One of the few women in the Khmer Rouge leadership, Paris-educated Ieng Thirith is believed to have been involved in some of the movement's most drastic policies.