

China assures Russia, India of deepening ‘co-operation’

REUTERS, Beijing

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang assured his Russian and Indian counterparts of deepening bilateral ties, promising that “coordination and cooperation” will only grow stronger, in a show of solidarity with two of China’s biggest neighbours.

Qin met in India on Thursday with other foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, a bloc of nations spanning most of Eurasia, with Beijing seeking to preserve stable relations with countries in the region as ties with the West, particularly Washington, remain tense.

During his meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of the SCO meeting, Qin said China is “willing to maintain communication and coordination with Russia to make tangible contributions to the political settlement of the crisis” in Ukraine.

The two sides also agreed to strengthen communication and coordination with other SCO member-states and maintain the bloc’s “unity”, according to a statement from the Chinese foreign ministry yesterday.

They additionally agreed to strengthen coordination in the Asia-Pacific, the ministry said, without giving details.

In a separate meeting with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Qin said China is willing to deepen “coordination and cooperation” on international and regional issues with India and bring ties back to a “healthy” track of development.

China’s ties with India have deteriorated since 2020, when their troops clashed on a disputed Himalayan border and 24 people were killed. Last month, Beijing published a map showing Arunachal Pradesh, claimed by India, as part of Tibet, angering New Delhi.

Qin told Jaishankar that the situation on the border is “generally stable”.

“We should draw experience and lessons from history, grasp bilateral relations from a strategic height and a long-term perspective, respect each other, learn from each other, and achieve mutual success,” Qin told Jaishankar.

Currently the SCO bloc includes Russia, India, China, Pakistan and four Central Asian countries. Iran and Belarus are expected to be inducted into the SCO at a summit in New Delhi in July.



Britain's King Charles meets well-wishers during a walkabout on the Mall outside Buckingham Palace ahead of his and Camilla, Queen Consort's coronation, in London, Britain yesterday. Charles, 74, and his wife Camilla will be crowned at London's Westminster Abbey today in a glittering but solemn religious ceremony with traditions dating back some 1,000 years, followed by a procession, resplendent with pomp and pageantry.

PHOTO: REUTERS

RUSSIAN MERCENARIES vow to quit Bakhmut

Blame lack of ammunition; Ukraine says they are piling in

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russia’s main mercenary group yesterday announced plans to pull out of the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, but Ukraine said the mercenaries were reinforcing their positions to try to seize it before Russia marks victory in World War Two next week.

Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin said his men had been starved of ammunition and would expect the army to take their place in Bakhmut next Wednesday, jeopardising what has long been Russia’s main target in its attempt to carve up its neighbour.

“My lads will not suffer useless and unjustified losses in Bakhmut without ammunition,” Prigozhin said in a video accompanying a written withdrawal announcement addressed to the head of general staff, the defence ministry, and President Vladimir Putin as supreme commander.

The announcement said “bureaucrats” had held back supplies despite knowing that Wagner’s target date to capture the city was May 9, when Moscow holds its World War Two Victory Day.



“If, because of your petty jealousy, you do not want to give the Russian people the victory of taking Bakhmut, that’s your problem,” Prigozhin added in the video.

Ukrainian troops have been pushed back in recent weeks but have clung on in the city to try to inflict as many losses as possible on their Russian opponents ahead of Kyiv’s planned big push against the invading forces along the 1,000 km (620 mile) front line.

It was not clear if Prigozhin, who often makes impulsive comments, would go ahead with the withdrawal if his men got extra ammunition or if the row might even be a smokescreen.

A senior Ukrainian official said Russia was bringing Wagner mercenary fighters from along the front line to Bakhmut so as to capture it by Victory Day.

“We are now seeing them pulling (fighters) from the entire offensive line where the Wagner fighters were, they are pulling (them) to the Bakhmut direction,” Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar said on Ukrainian television.

The Kremlin declined to comment on Prigozhin’s statement.

But the threat and the video highlighted the pressure Russian forces are under as Ukraine makes the final preparations for a counter-offensive backed by thousands of Western-donated armoured vehicles and freshly trained troops.

Ukraine said two people had been killed in the eastern Donetsk region and nine wounded over the past 24 hours and electricity distribution networks had been damaged by shelling in Donetsk and the southern Kherson region.

Russia has been largely untouched by the conflict, but Russian news agencies reported a second drone attack in as many days on the Ilsky oil refinery in the south yesterday, causing a fire but no casualties.

ENDING J&K SPECIAL STATUS

Pak-India talks hurt by Delhi’s decision: Pak FM

REUTERS, Goa



Pakistan’s foreign minister yesterday said India’s decision to end the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) territory in 2019 has undermined the environment for holding talks between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. The onus was on India to create a conducive environment for talks, Foreign Minister

Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari told reporters on the sidelines of a meeting of regional bloc Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in the Indian state of Goa. The visit by Bhutto-Zardari to India is the first by a Pakistani foreign minister to Delhi in over a decade and has garnered a lot of media attention in both countries. The two have fought three wars, share frosty relations and have downgraded their diplomatic ties. The Pakistani foreign minister said, however, that despite his rare visit to India, there was no change in the status of diplomatic relations. But he added that politics and foreign policy should not hold “hostage” sporting ties between the rivals. “I hope we’re in a position to not have sports suffer as a result of foreign policy,” Bhutto-Zardari said when asked if Pakistan would send its team to India for the event.

SUNAK’S ELECTORAL TEST UK Tories suffer losses in local polls

AFP, London

Britain’s ruling Conservatives yesterday suffered high-profile losses as results poured from Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s first major electoral test since he took office last year. In the depths of the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades, the local council elections held Thursday across swathes of England illuminated the main parties’ standing ahead of a UK-wide general election expected next year. Sunak admitted it was not looking good for his Tories. “It’s always disappointing to lose hard-working Conservative councillors,” the prime minister told Sky News. But he vowed to press ahead with the “people’s priorities” – including halving double-digit inflation, restoring economic growth, and stopping boatloads of migrants crossing the Channel. The vote counting will only be complete later yesterday, just as Britain gears up for today’s coronation of King Charles III. But the main opposition Labour party crowed that the trend was already clear from the 230 English districts electing more than 8,000 council seats. “These results have been a disaster for Rishi Sunak as voters punish him for the Tories’ failure,” said Shabana Mahmood, Labour’s national campaign co-ordinator. “These results show that we are on course for a majority Labour government,” she added. By 9:20 am (0720 GMT), 62 councils had declared their results. Sunak’s Conservatives had lost 228 seats – one-third of the total they were defending so far.