

US, Pakistan agree to proceed with F-16s package deal

AFP, Washington

Pakistan has agreed to purchase a scaled-down package of American F-16 fighters after foregoing a larger purchase to finance relief efforts in last year's earthquake, officials said Thursday.

Pakistani Foreign Secretary Riaz Khan and US Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said after a round of talks that they had agreed to proceed with the sale but would not provide the number of aircraft.

Khan said it was "a much scaled-down request" from the package under consideration last year that reportedly included 25 new aircraft at around 25 million dollars apiece.

"In view of the constraints that we have on resources, we have now a far less ambitious package which is a mix of some old, used aircraft and some new," he told a joint news conference.

Burns said he reassured Khan "that we are committed to the sale of American F-16 aircraft to Pakistan and we intend to begin our consultations on this issue with Congress shortly."

Washington had blocked the sale of F-16s to Pakistan for 15 years to protest its nuclear weapons programme, but gave the green light in March 2005 to reward the South Asian ally for its help in the "war on terror."

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said in November he had to postpone the purchase to concentrate on helping victims of the devastating earthquake that killed more than 73,000 people the month before.

Khan said the US-Pakistan defence consultative group would

meet next week in Washington to discuss further cooperation between the countries, but he gave no details.

Pakistan already has more than 30 multi-role F-16s made by US aerospace giant Lockheed Martin Corp. and the deal announced last year for more fighters angered nuclear rival India.

But the United States said it was also prepared to sell New Delhi both F-16s and more sophisticated F-18 fighter-bombers if it wanted them.

Washington also jolted Pakistan when it struck a deal in March to supply long-denied civilian nuclear technology to the Indians as long as they kept it separate from their bomb-making activities.

Burns again sought to reassure the Pakistanis that the agreement was strictly to help India produce electricity and would not tip the balance of nuclear power on the subcontinent.

"It's going to be positive for the Indians, and I think our overall relationship with both Pakistan and India is going to be a force for stability in the region, quite frankly," he said.

But Khan took little pains to hide his country's concern.

"When it comes to security we also understand our own responsibility as a sovereign country," he said, vowing to take measures to correct any nuclear "imbalance" that cropped up.

"We will never be oblivious of the requirements of our security," Khan said. "We will continue to make efforts, if such efforts are needed, to maintain that deterrence."

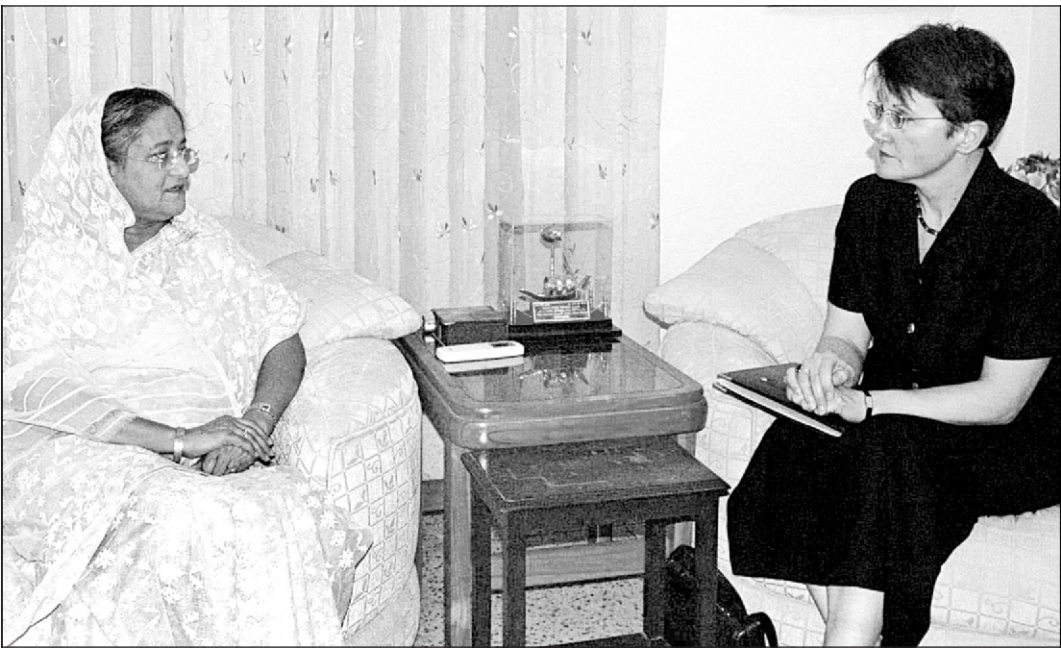


PHOTO: STAR

New US ambassador Patricia Butenis holds a meeting with opposition leader and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina at the latter's residence yesterday.

Aussies finish

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with seven fours and two massive sixes off Rajin Saleh in one over, was bowled by left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak only two runs shy of the target.

Brad Hogg, the left-arm spinner who was adjudged man of the series for his nine wickets, completed the chase hitting a boundary off Razzak while opener Simon Katich was not out with 42 off 69 deliveries, laced with five boundaries.

With the win, world champions Australia completed their 23-day tour of Bangladesh, their first full series in the country, expected by whitewashing the opposition in both the Test and one-day series.

Bangladesh had their best team back on the field but much-talked batsmen Mohammad Ashraful (13), who was rested in the second game, and Aftab Ahmed (1), failed to perform.

The Tigers made a disastrous start when Shahriar Nafees was trapped leg before by left-arm paceman Mitchell Johnson in the very third ball of the innings to return with consecutive ducks. Aftab departed with the scoreboard reading 8-2 and the home side then never looked to bounce back from the early collapse although Rajin Saleh (37) and inform Bashar (33) tried to recover. Bashar was the highest run-getter in the one-day series with 155 runs.

Hogg was the most successful Australia bowler with 3-17 while Johnson and Cullen took two wickets each.

Australia will leave Dhaka this morning.

10 US states

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Earth, not unlike a greenhouse. The greenhouse effect has always been with us, but scientists say that as cars and power plants release increasing amounts of gases like carbon dioxide, temperatures rise faster and have already begun to disrupt weather patterns.

Two top outlaws

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taking Alauddin with them. When they neared a culvert of the village, Alauddin's accomplices opened fire on the law enforcers, prompting them to retaliate.

Police said the Gono Bahini leader was caught in the crossfire while trying to escape from police van and died on the spot. He was wanted in seven cases including two for murder, they added.

Cyclone killed

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Transformation Trust (COAST), a non-government organisation, will hold a seminar in Cirdap auditorium at 9:00am today.

Civil Society members, NGO workers of coastal areas and leaders of different political and social organisations will attend the seminar.

April 29 Smriti Parishad Bangladesh organised a memorial meeting at the Jatiya Press Club in the capital yesterday.

Former minister Tofail Ahmed, environment scientists Dr Hasan Mahmud and Dr Ansarul Karim and former MP from Cox's Bazar district Mustaq Ahmed Chowdhury were present there.

Marking the day, Comrade Muzaffar Sangsad will arrange a memorial meeting at 5:00pm today in Tajul Auditorium in Purana Paltan.

Sandwip Young Society, Dhaka, will arrange a memorial meeting and doa mahfil in Multipurpose Auditorium of the Institute of Diploma Engineers of Bangladesh (IDEB) at 3:00pm.

Before the meeting, they will bring out a mourning procession from the IDEB to reach the Jatiya Press Club.

4-party names

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On behalf of Bhuiyan, BNP Office Secretary Mafiqul Hasan Tripti and Assistant Publicity Secretary Musa Ahmed went to Jalli's residence at 5:00pm and handed over the letter to him at 5:15pm. Fourteen-party leaders Rashed Khan Menon, Obaidul Quader, Hasanul Haque Inu and SM Kamal were present at that time.

Earlier the BNP secretary general talked to Jalli over telephone and fixed the time for sending the letter. He also wanted to know about Jalli's health conditions.

BHUIYAN'S PRESS BRIEFING

On dispatching the letter, Bhuiyan at a press briefing said they had already told the opposition that it matters little who would be on the committee, as the discussion would be confined to electoral process.

"As we have formed a coalition, it's quite natural that the coalition partners would make it on the committee. And we already told them (opposition) that there will be representation of all components of the four-party alliance," Bhuiyan said, talking about the inclusion of a Jamaat leader.

Regarding the opposition's request not to nominate a Jamaat man to the panel, he said the opposition should have no problem sitting with Jamaat as they did so in the past. On a possible solution to the ongoing political dispute, Bhuiyan said they are hopeful the committee would sit and take an appropriate decision.

He also said both the sides would approve the recommendations of the government-opposition committee at party forums.

Asked whether the inclusion of Mujahid and Amini will stand in the way of negotiations with the opposition parties, Bhuiyan said, "I don't think so. If they (opposition) don't come, we will request them further."

Regarding the opposition's movement, he said, "It will not be proper to announce such programmes that might give rise to

confrontations."

CONTENT OF THE LETTER

Thanking the opposition for sending the names of five leaders to be in the proposed committee, Bhuiyan in his letter has welcomed those selected.

"We hope the 10-member committee, five members from each side, will be able to reach a fair and acceptable decision through discussion," the letter reads.

"We are considering as positive your agreeing to keep the discussion limited to ways to make the next parliamentary election free, fair and neutral that I had proposed in my last letter," Bhuiyan adds.

"By the way, I would like to mention one thing again that we didn't have any opinion over who should take part in the discussion from your side. So, it should not be fair that you impose your opinion on us over who to participate from our side. In the interest of a fruitful discussion, we hope we will discuss with open mind and without condition."

Khulna journo

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bomb attack at Moilapota intersection under Khulna Police Station on the night of January 4 last year. He survived the attack, as the bomb did not explode.

Sub-Inspector (SI) Anisur Rahman filed an FIR (first information report) with Khulna Police Station as complainant. Later, ASP Abdul Hamid investigated the bomb attack case.

Former additional police super of Khulna Mofazzel Hossain has been left out of the charge sheet although four arrestees mentioned his name in their judicial confessions as the mastermind of the bomb attack.

Mofazzel Hossain was arrested in Dhaka on January 15 last year and released on bail in November the same year.

ASP Abdul Halim also submitted another charge sheet to the CMM's Court under Explosive Substances Act, accusing the five.

1.4cr voters on new list

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64 lakh ghost voters. While at least 970 thousand voters have died in the last five years," the CEC said at a luncheon meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham).

"The European Union in their letter addressed to the then chief election commissioner MA Syed noted that the voter list [of 2000] included a staggering 1.3 crore ghost voters," he said.

Aziz also quoted the US State Department report this year to mention the existence of 8 per cent fake voters on the 2000 list. He claimed the EC is preparing the fresh voter list with a view to end the 'epidemic of false voters'.

But the sharp rise in the number of voters on the fresh list, draft of which is scheduled to be published on May 3, does not agree with his claim.

If the NDI, US State Department and EU reports are correct, the existing roll has about one crore fake voters on it. So, if the ghost voters are excluded, the number of genuine voters on the current list should be 6.50 crore.

And, as the EC Secretariat officials say each year some 20 lakh people become eligible to be voters, the new list should contain about 7.50 crore voters. Then, how come the fresh list contain 8.90 crore voters, question some quarters concerned, adding the CEC's arguments show the new list may contain 1.4 crore ghost voters.

According to election officials the voter list prepared in 1995 was the most accurate among the seven prepared since 1970. The 1995 list registered 5.59 crore or 47.30 per cent of the then 11.83 crore population as voters.

"Before preparing the 2000 list, we estimated the number of voters to be 6.30 crore, considering the population and the 1995 roll," an official said. But it marked an

Estonia busts

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Estonia hidden amid legal cargos and were taken out of Estonia under the name of other goods after being repackaged at the bonded warehouse," Valing said.

"According to the customs documents, the recipients in the Asian countries were private companies, not government structures," she added, but the prosecutor's office refused to give the names of the companies that bought the goods.

Local media reports have estimated the value of the smuggled military equipment in the "millions of kroons" (hundreds of thousands of euros/dollars), but the prosecutor's office declined to comment while the investigation is underway.

The suspects did not have the permit required for trading in or handling strategic military goods, according to the charges sheet.

"The transport of such goods is under very strict international control as trading with such goods for military purposes could destabilise international security," Valing said.

Japanese

envoy

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can mobilise the collective wisdom to discuss effective tactics later on," he said.

He regretted that articles in newspapers regularly written by scholars and leaders, analysing problems and suggesting effective solutions, have had little impact on the government's policies.

"Some people told me that it was because the decision-making mechanism within the government and/or each political party was not always democratic or participatory, and therefore, did not easily adopt ideas from the outside," he said.

He referred to the opinion that the country's intellectuals were complacent over their status as armchair critics, who had developed frustration over the current situation, and did not take a step forward to change the situation.

"I am very pleased to witness such a movement like this initiated by the intellectuals of Bangladesh. If not, I would probably have left this country with a wrong perception about them," he said.

"If this movement eliminates confrontational politics, which hinders the potential of Bangladesh from being unlocked, the country should achieve more development and will see the bright future ahead, Horiguchi observed.

EU to request

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has been dealing with the situation.

The foreign minister elaborated on the multi-pronged campaign against the militants that include awareness raising campaigns and motivational programmes against militants through imams, madrasa teachers and religious leaders.

He also highlighted the combing operations undertaken by the law enforcement agencies against terrorists.

The European Parliament members from various political groups lauded Bangladesh for its achievements in economic and social sectors.

The foreign minister earlier attended a working lunch hosted in his honour by Neena Gill, Vice President of the European Parliament Vidal-Quadras Roca attended the luncheon along with several other European Parliament members. They discussed Bangladesh-EU bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and international issues of common concerns in a warm and cordial atmosphere.

Leepu's sports car

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work frame, I never thought I would be able to do this in just 28 days," Leepu said while talking to The Daily Star.

At the unveiling ceremony Bernie Fineman, a veteran who has worked in the motor trade for 48 years, thanked Leepu and his team for the cooperation and the hard work they put in building the rear-wheel-drive car. Bernie has worked for renowned companies like Rolls Royce and Jaguar and he provided the engine powering the M26.

Unlike Leepu's earlier works this car has an almost new power plant. The 1.8 litre 7K Toyota engine produced 84 brake horsepower (BHP) but Bernie tuned the engine to produce 42 more BHPs.

Bernie told The Daily Star, "I have really enjoyed working with Leepu and he deserved this recognition five years ago." While talking about the car's good looks he said, "People would throng the streets of London if the car was taken there."

Leepu has been working closely with Discovery Channel as part of their series on him working on different kinds of vehicles without advanced equipment or computers as the automotive industry is now so used to.

Bruce Fletcher the producer of the programme told The Daily Star yesterday.

Discovery Channel is initially shooting for two TV programmes with Leepu working on two different cars on two shows. "We are shooting for the second programme where Leepu is working on the second car," he said adding "the second car will be unveiled soon at the Old-Car show to be held at the National Museum."

Australia mulls culture and language test for immigrants

AFP, Sydney

Australia's conservative government said yesterday it may test immigrants' English skills and understanding of Australian cultural values before allowing them to become citizens.

Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs Andrew Robb said the proposed exam would help immigrants fit into Australian society and improve their job prospects.

"We've successfully integrated people from the four corners of the globe, we just have to get better at it as we require more workers with skills to carry out the growth needed in this country," Robb told Sky News.

Robb said the test could help elements of Australia's 300,000-strong Muslim community integrate more fully into the general population.

He said Muslim leaders had told him that more Australian based Islamic clerics, who are predominantly born overseas, needed to preach in English to make the religion more relevant to young Australians.

"There's 120,000 young Muslims born in Australia who only speak English and the Muslim community is saying to me that sermons in the mosque should be in a large part in English to make their faith relevant to them alongside their Australian culture," Robb said.

The test would require a functional understanding of English,

as well as knowledge of Australian history, customs, laws and values.

Robb cited individual freedom and commitment to the rule of law, gender equality, tolerance and the ethos of a "fair go" for all as quintessential Australian values.

But prominent members of the Muslim community -- still smarting from comments earlier this year from Treasurer Peter Costello who said Islamic immigrants should respect Australian values or leave the country -- reacted cautiously to the proposal.

New South Wales Islamic Council spokesman Ali Roude said the test could be likened to exams set under the notorious "White Australia" policy which were used to exclude non-Anglo-Saxon migrants until the 1950s.

"I would be most hesitant to endorse these changes if they could be seen as a return by stealth to those dark days all decent Australians had thought long past," he told AFP.

Australian Federation of Islamic Councils president Ameer Ali was also sceptical.

"There's all this talk about Australian values but no one says exactly what they are," he told AFP.

"There's a lot of grey areas and no clear cut ideas and to bring a test in under these circumstances would be dangerous."

US workplaces

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Contractors Association. He said he expects employers to tolerate absences.

"I think employers realise that without a functional guest worker program that we have serious problems," he said.

Estimates show Arizona will face a shortage of some 40,000 skilled labourers in construction by 2014, he said.

"The appetite for construction in the Southwest is so ravenous that getting employees to come and work for you is a major obstacle. If you're going to be competitive, you had better have a good working

relationship," he said.

In the Midwest, the meat production unit of Cargill Inc. decided to close down operations at five beef plants and two hog plants, freeing thousands of employees to participate in immigration rallies.

"We talked with employees and many wanted to participate in the May 1 activities. Because we share the concerns of many employees ... we felt it was appropriate to change the schedules," said Mark Klein, spokesman for Cargill, the nation's No. 2 beef producer and No. 3 pork producer.

Nepalese lawmakers

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Thursday, but his illness forced officials to push back his swearing-in from early Friday to later in the day, said the premier's spokesman, Gokarna Poudyal.

The reinstated Parliament got a bit of breathing space when the Maoists announced a three-month cease-fire on Thursday.

Even without an immediate rebel threat, the task ahead is enormous for legislators essentially returned to power by hundreds of thousands of Nepalis who took part in nearly three weeks of protests against Gyanendra's royal dictatorship and now demand real change in this near-feudal land where most eke out pitiful livings as landless farmers.

Many of Nepal's 27 million people remain distrustful of the political elite they backed in the demonstrations, well aware of the infighting and corruption that marked Nepal's last crack at democracy, which began after similar unrest in 1990 and ended with Gyanendra's seizure of power last year.

The top priority for the lawmakers who last sat in 2002 before Gyanendra dismissed the parlia-

ment at the request of the then-prime minister is readying Nepal to hold elections for a special assembly to rewrite the constitution.

The current charter gives the king broad powers to dismiss governments along with supreme command of the army.

The expectation on the streets and the key demand of the Maoists, who remain well-armed is a new charter that will limit or eliminate the monarchy's role, ensuring that Gyanendra can never seize power as he did in February 2005.

At the time, he said he needed authority to restore political order and crush the Maoists.

Those constitutional provisions will be the top goal of any special assembly, but experts says it's not clear if a new charter can legally remove the king from his role as the supreme arbiter of power in Nepal, or as the top commander of the military.

Any moves against the king's power are sure to face challengers in courts packed with royal appointees.

EI Baradei

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determine if Tehran's nuclear program is peaceful or weapons-related.

This request was made in the Council's presidential statement of March 29.

The report said there had been little progress since a previous assessment and "gaps remain in the agency's knowledge with respect to the scope and content of Iran's centrifuge program."

It added that "because of this and other gaps in the agency's knowledge including the role of the military in Iran's nuclear program, the agency is unable to make progress in its efforts to provide assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran."

The report said Iran had failed to provide "transparency measures" allowing for wider inspections.

It also brought up a new item, namely that the IAEA is unable to rule out that Iran may have received plutonium, which is an atomic weapons material, from abroad.

"The agency cannot exclude the possibility, notwithstanding the

explanations provided by Iran, that the plutonium analysed by the agency was derived from sources other than the ones declared by Iran," namely domestic experiments, it added.

Iran has offered to provide a timetable for cooperation with UN nuclear inspectors if the IAEA, rather than the Security Council, oversees Iranian compliance, the report said, citing an 11th hour letter sent by Iran on Thursday, the day before the deadline fell.

"Iran will provide a timetable within the next three weeks" if "the Iran nuclear dossier will remain, in full, in the framework of the IAEA and under its safeguards," the IAEA.

Diplomats described this as the kind of stalling tactic Iran has used in the past.

"Let's sleep another night on this letter and see what the Iranians affect they read the report," a senior official close to the IAEA said.