

MOVE TO COUNTER IRAN THREAT US readies arms deal with Saudi Arabia

AFP, Washington

The United States is readying a major arms package for Saudi Arabia with an eye to countering a changing threat from Iran, a senior US defence official said.

Defence Secretary Robert Gates is expected to discuss the US recommendations with the Saudis next week in a visit to the kingdom with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the official said Friday.

"We've been working very hard on the Saudi arms package, which we believe is critical to the overarching architecture that we believe we are going to need ... to deal with the changing strategic threat from Iran and other forces," the official said.

The official who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity said discussions with Congress on the arms package have just begun and that no announcements were expected during Gates' visit to Saudi Arabia.

"What there may be is discussion about what the administration is willing to go forwards with (and) ... what we would recommend to the Hill and others," she said, referring to Congress on Capitol Hill.

The Pentagon provided no details on the arms package, which will reportedly total 20 billion dollars over the next decade.

But administration officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said it would include selling Saudi Arabia advanced weapons known as Joint Direct Attack Munitions, or JDAMs.

JDAM is a low-cost guidance kit converting existing unguided

free-fall bombs into accurately guided "smart" weapons.

Munition equipped with such

kits can attack simultaneously

multiple targets in a coordinated

strike by single or multiple aircraft.

JDAM weapons were extensively used by the United States in recent conflicts. More than 650 of them were dropped during the 1999 operation in Kosovo, more than 4,500 during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in 2002 and over 6,500 during the invasion of Iraq in March-April 2003, according to defence experts.

The package also will include new weapons for the United Arab Emirates, another US ally in the Persian Gulf, and both military and economic support to Egypt, the officials said.

Meanwhile, the Boston Globe reported in March that it is believed to include air and missile defence systems, advanced early warning radar aircraft, and light coastal combat ships.

The New York Times reported in April that the package had been delayed because of Israeli concerns over the sale to Saudi Arabia of certain precision guided munitions.

Gates and Rice are expected to emphasise US commitment to the region's security at a time when there is fierce debate at home of whether to withdraw US forces from Iraq.

Congress has the power to block such sales, but the White House is hoping to avoid a major fight on the issue.

Israel, meanwhile, is reported to have asked for the F-22 Raptor, the stealthy US fighter jet, which is difficult to see on radar.

CA donates

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Hanif Sanket, singers Syed Abdul Hadi, Subir Nandi and Andrew Kishore.

Cultural Affairs Adviser Ayyub Quadri and Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim were present.

Earlier on July 10, the CA had donated Tk 4 lakh from the same fund for treatment of the ailing singer.

RU plans

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Hossain admitted the move of listing the teachers' names under directions of the higher authorities.

Some 200 RU teachers under the banner of Progressive Teachers' Society (PTS) went on a day's leave en masse in an extraordinary move demanding release of Hasina.

Chairmen loyal to BNP-Jamaat have already submitted leave applications of the teachers of their departments, sources said.

The authorities handed over the leave petitions to the intelligence officials, sources added.

Several teachers, who went on leave, told reporters that the intelligence officials have phoned them to inquire about Thursday's programme.

They also expressed concern over the investigation by the university authorities and the intelligence officials and were fearful of further harassment.

Abdus Sobhan, PTS convener and also a syndicate member, strongly protested the authorities' move and said they have no right to collect the leave petitions.

Hasina

FROM PAGE 1
Tawfique said she is passing her days in apprehension that 'criminal justice system' would not work in the extort case against her, and she would not get justice.

He quoted Hasina as saying, "System of criminal justice will not work here as it failed in 1975 after the killing of Bangabandhu and most of his family members."

The counsel entered the special jail on the Jatiya Sangsad compound at 2:40pm and discussed with the former prime minister the case against her for over one and a half hours.

On the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) notice for submitting Hasina's wealth statement, he said the authorities are playing a double standard. "Authorities seized all papers and documents from Hasina's residence and then the ACC asked her

to submit wealth statement within seven days ... what the ACC did is not consistent with due process."

Through her counsels, Hasina once again alleged that the government has planned to keep her away from election by convicting her in false cases. She urged the people to be united to uphold their constitutional rights.

The AL chief accused the government of violating the constitution. The government is making new laws which are contrary to the constitution, and even a state of emergency does not support such laws.

She asked her counsels to file writ petition against her arrest and urged the people to protest any illegal activities of the government.

FAMILY MEMBERS MEET HER

Family members and relatives yesterday visited Hasina for the first time at the special jail.

Sheikh Razia Naser, Sheikh Khadiza Khanam, Sheikh Shelly Jaman, Sahana Yasmin Shampa and Farmina Khanam entered the special jail at 4:25pm and came out at 6:00 pm.

They however avoided the press.

AL LEADERS VISIT WAZED MIAH

AL leaders yesterday visited ailing nuclear scientist Dr Wazed Miah, husband of Hasina, at Square Hospital in the capital.

They demanded immediate release of the AL chief, saying she should now stay beside her husband.

The government will have to bear all responsibility of the consequences of not allowing Hasina to look after her husband in his present health condition, they said.

The AL leaders who visited Dr Wazed included Sajeda Chowdhury, Abdul Matin Khoru, Advocate Sahara Khatun, Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin and AKM Jahangir Hossain.

"Condition of Dr Wazed is not good," Sajeda told reporters later.

Khosru said although the present government is a non-partisan one, it is behaving cruelly.

Dr Wazed is suffering from heart problems, diabetes and high blood pressure. He was shifted to Square Hospital from Bangladesh Medical College Hospital on Thursday night.

More interactions

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Advisers since January 14 to June 30. Of them, 115 have already been implemented while the remaining 90 are at various stages of implementation.

It was also apprised that 14 ordinances were given final approval in the council meetings during the period, and nine of those were promulgated. "The rest of the ordinances are under the process of promulgation," according to the Chief Adviser's Press Secretary, Syed Fahim Munaim.

Nine advisory committees were either constituted or reconstituted in between January and June.

The decisions taken by the government include delegation of financial and administrative powers aiming to further increase dynamism of the administration, updating the laws and rules and regulations, formulation of citizens' charter in all utility service-providing organisations and quick settlement of various incomplete matters, including pension cases.

Chaired by the chief adviser, all advisers and secretaries concerned attended the meeting at the CA's office.

Jamuna flows

FROM PAGE 1
upazilas inundated and at least 1.20 lakh people marooned, our Netrakona correspondent reports.

Newly affected unions are Krishnapur, Khalajuri Sadar, and Nagar of Khalajuri upazila, Kaital and Binni of Madan upazila, Jaria of Purbadhal upazila and Magan of Mohanganj upazila, Netrakona WDB sources said.

Around 155 educational institutions were forced to close as they were deluged by flash flood.

Water levels of the Someshwary, Magra, Kongsha and Dhanu, the four major rivers of the district, continued to rise. The Dhanu was flowing 59cm, Someshwary 31cm, Kongsha 19cm and Mogra 17cm over their danger levels, Netrakona WDB sources said.

Around 35 metres of Netrakona-Kalmakanda road was washed away at Gutarabazar and Rajarabazar under Kalmakanda upazila yesterday morning. One kilometre of the Shingan-Ranikong road went into the gorge of the Someshwary yesterday noon. The river also devoured 20 dwellings in Shingan area yesterday morning.

Many flood-affected people have taken shelter on nearby higher lands and flood shelters, while some are marooned in their houses.

The flood situation in Rangpur has deteriorated as the water level of Teesta rose at Mornea, Kolkond and Lakhmitari unions under Gangachara upazila, our correspondent in Rangpur reports. At least 8,000 families of the newly flooded 12 villages of the upazila were marooned.

The Teesta embankment at Kochua is at serious risk of being washed away as the river has changed its course. Bangladesh Army and locals are placing sandbags at three vulnerable points of the embankment.

Executive Engineer of Rangpur WDB Akmal Hosen said locals and the army placed 14,000 sandbags at Kochua point to protect the embankment but they are still worried whether it would hold.

The Teesta in Nilphamari is flowing 15cm over the danger level at Teesta Barrage in Dalia, our correspondent in Nilphamari reports.

Around 10,000 flood-affected peoples are passing their days in miseries. WDB officials at Dalia said the water level might rise even further if India opened all the gates of Gojala Doba Barrage.

A small boat capsized around 1:00pm in Teesta near Tapur Char in Dimla upazila with 14 people on board. Chairman of the union concerned told The Daily Star that locals managed to rescue every one of the 14.

The district administration allocated 15 tonnes of rice and 25 more cartons of biscuits yesterday in addition to Friday's allocation.

Rising water level of the Jamuna left over 30,000 people marooned yesterday at 32 villages

Moitree Express

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said yesterday that they would discuss frequency of trips and security fencing.

"We will raise the topic of the frequency of trips again and we expect to finalise the date for starting the regular rail service," he said adding that the delegation members would hold meetings among themselves on board the train.

Meanwhile, following Bangladesh's objection to India's proposal of building security fences from the border to Gede point, India has sent a revised plan to Bangladesh. Home ministry is scrutinising it at present.

At the meeting in Dhaka, India proposed two trips per week, which will operate from Kolkata to Dhaka on Saturdays and from Dhaka to Kolkata on Sundays. Meanwhile, Bangladesh wanted at least four trips a week.

AE Ahmed had observed that it is not possible to operate four trips a week, since the proposed service would require dedicated rail lines, which is not there right now.

Belayet Hossain, director general, Bangladesh Railway, told The Daily Star, "Though India was insisting on two trips a week, we did not agree. We would try to increase the frequency."

The other issues both sides discussed at that time were fares and immigration and checking. The one-way fare for the train service was fixed at \$8 for regular coach seat, \$12 for AC chair and \$20 for AC sleeping berth for the 536km journey. All customs and immigrations procedures will be carried out at Dhaka Cantonment Station and India's Gede Station.

The non-stop train service will link Dhaka's Cantonment Station with Kolkata's Chitpur Station.

A passenger train service between the two cities was introduced towards the end of the Awami League government in July 2001. One train had run on a trial basis, but the service was cancelled after the BNP-led coalition came to power.

The domestic credit rose by 16.25 percent in July-May in last FY and the increase was 21.61 percent during the same period of FY 2005-6.

Of the total domestic credit, the public sector share is about 26 percent.

The credit flow of four NCBs has decreased by 2.7 percent in January-May period of the year, but the picture was totally different last year. The credit flow of the NCBs increased by 3 percent in January-June in 2006.

The credit flow of 30 private commercial banks (PCBs) has increased by 3.6 percent in January-May this year, while the increase was 11.8 percent in January-June last year.

The flow of nine foreign commercial banks (FCBs) increased by 4.6 percent in January-May, which witnessed 13 percent growth in January-June last year.

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