

Obama reconsiders Indonesia military ahead of visit

AFP, Washington

The United States is looking to break a taboo and train an elite Indonesian force linked to past abuses, as President Barack Obama courts the world's largest Muslim-majority nation with a visit.

With its moderate form of Islam and democratization since the 1990s, Indonesia is increasingly seen in Washington as an ideal partner. Obama spent part of his childhood in Jakarta, giving him a propitious personal connection.

Ahead of Obama's trip next week, top officers from the so-called Leaky Amendment in 1997, which prohibited training to foreign military units involved in human rights abuses.

Ernie Bower, Southeast Asia director at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think-tank, said military ties were "absolutely fundamental" if the Obama administration was serious about transforming ties with Indonesia.

"Indonesia was going to be the India of the Bush administration -- a country with which they move to a whole new place because they understand it and put a real focus on it," Bower said, referring to former US president George W. Bush's drive to end decades of mistrust with New Delhi.

The talks with Indonesia come amid unease in some circles in Washington about the strong role of the military in the two historic US allies in Southeast Asia -- the Philippines and Thailand.

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said that the United States was discussing a re-engagement with Kopassus "that's in accordance with our laws, our values and advances our interests."

"Indonesia's democratic reforms over the past decade have been pretty remarkable and its greatly improved human rights record has enabled us to engage more broadly," Whitman said.

The United States ended overall sanctions on the Indonesian military in 2005, the same year that Australia resumed joint training with Kopassus.

But US rights advocates remain deeply uneasy about Kopassus and few expect a deal before Obama leaves on his trip to Guam, Indonesia and Australia on March 21.

Kopassus spearheaded the anti-communist pogrom in 1965 that killed up to

500,000 people. It was seen as a key force in the 1975 invasion of East Timor and the 1999 violence when the territory voted for independence.

Senator Patrick Leahy, who authored the 1997 law that bears his name, stood firm against training. He said that Indonesia must first bring Kopassus members to justice for past abuses.

"It is important that the people of Indonesia see that justice is possible, and that impunity for committing serious crimes is no longer acceptable," said Leahy, a member of Obama's Democratic Party from Vermont.

"Indonesia has made progress in its democracy and in curbing some of the excesses of its military. But the past must not be forgotten," Leahy said.

One compromise under consideration is for the United States to train only younger Kopassus members.

But T. Kumar, the international advocacy director of Amnesty International USA, said Indonesia should try senior officers involved in past wrongdoing.

"Kopassus has such a bad record that to hold no one accountable in a meaningful way sends the wrong message to others," Kumar said.

He called for Obama to meet survivors of the 1965 mass killings. The United States is widely suspected of supporting the pogrom, which future strongman Suharto launched in response to rumors of a communist coup.

As to whether the ministry sought help from the attorney general's office, the secretary said they requested the solicitor wing of the law ministry to take steps in this regard. "But I am not aware of what actions the solicitor wing or attorney general's office took."

Earlier in the afternoon, Shibir leaders held their first meeting at the same venue and decided to drive out activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League from different RU halls for restoring their stronghold on the campus.

After the violence, the attackers talked to Rajshahi city Jamaat Ameer Ataur Rahman, general secretary Abul Kalam Azad and assistant general secretary Siddik Hossain and went into hiding.

Meanwhile, the same court yesterday rejected the bail petition of Jamaat Ameer Ataur Rahman and 36 other Shibir men who were earlier arrested in connection with the RU violence.

Shibir cadres, confessed that he participated in the second meeting jointly held by Jamaat, Shibir men and outsiders in Islamia College of Binodpur on February 8 night that agreed to help Shibir.

As per the decision of the second meeting, Jamaat and Shibir leaders, activists in and around the campus including former Shibir leaders of different RU hall units, participated in and assisted Shibir men during the violence.

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Nazmul, also president of Bangladesh Petrol Pump Owners Association, said "Today's strike was successful as most of the petrol pumps remained closed."

The foreign minister said three agreements are expected to be signed between the two countries.

The agreements are: Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement, Framework Agreement on Shahjalal Fertiliser Factory and Agreement on Seventh Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge.

Dipu said the two countries will also discuss a number of projects including Second Padma Bridge, Eighth Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge, capacity building in agriculture sector, telecommunications and setting up of solar energy projects in Bangladesh.

Giving a preview of the visit, she said the prime minister would hold official talks with Chinese premier on March 18 at the Great Hall where she will be given a formal reception. The next day she will hold a meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao to discuss bilateral, regional and international issues.

Hasina will also meet the Chairman of China's National People's Congress. On her way back Hasina will visit Kunming to see for herself the proposed Chittagong-Kunming road and railway links. She will return home on March 21.

Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain, Industries Minister Dilip Barua, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and State Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Dipankar Talukdar will be in the 16-member official delegation.

Some eminent citizens, a business delegation and AL leaders will accompany her.

Replying to a question, Dipu Moni said the defence cooperation between Dhaka and Beijing has continued for a long time and this matter would also be discussed during the visit. Purchase of military hardware may also come up in the discussion.

"We want to strengthen bilateral ties and cooperation to reduce the current trade gap of about \$3.8 billion with China," she said.

Asked whether Bangladesh would seek Chinese support to resolve bilateral issues with Myanmar like settling maritime boundary and Rohingya repatriation she said, "This is not usual given the good relation between Bangladesh and China."

Bangladesh may request China to use her good offices to resolve the problems with Myanmar," she added.

She hinted that her government would not abandon the "look east" policy taken by the previous BNP government to improve relations with South East Asian countries including China. "They (BNP) took the initiative but did not execute it," blamed Dipu.

About China's access to Chittagong seaport, the foreign minister said the government wants to make Chittagong and Mongla seaports business hubs of the region.

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50 more trees

FROM PAGE 1 rights activist from the community, told The Daily Star over the phone.

His hired men, in three groups, cut the trees using handsaws, she said.

The trees felled on Saturday were still lying strewn in the place. "Elephants will be engaged in dragging the logs and it will destroy other smaller trees and the Paan Jum," said Talang.

"Khasia people feared an attack from the trader's hired musclemen roaming around the area," she said.

Following a writ petition filed by the trader Salim Uddin Mohalder, the HC bench on February 22 directed the forest department authorities and local administration to allow the tree felling as per an earlier work order.

In 2008, Salim bought around 4,000 trees from Nahar Tea Garden at a cost of Tk 1.5 crore. He had already felled 1,200 trees immediately following a government permit at that time.

Father Joseph Gomes, a religious leader of Khasia community, said a group of eight Khasia people led by Lutmon Pohlong arrived the capital yesterday morning.

They made preparation for an application to become a party to the case, as the plundering would deprive the indigenous people of their homestead and livelihood.

Environment and Forest Secretary Mihir Kanti Majumdar said he had instructed the department of forests to engage the department's law section to look into the matter and go for filing an appeal against the HC order.

As to whether the ministry sought help from the attorney general's office, the secretary said they requested the solicitor wing of the law ministry to take steps in this regard. "But I am not aware of what actions the solicitor wing or attorney general's office took."

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3 'Huji men' held

FROM PAGE 1 CNG-Auto-rickshaw and Mishuk Sramik Union as well as publicity secretary of Bhashantek Punarbanshan Prokalpa Sangram Parishad (BPPSP).

Sakhawat was also the former secretary of Dhaka city's central committee of Jatiya Party (Manju's) labourfront, the Jatiya Sramajibi Party.

Mishuk Sramik Union President FA Khan Firoz, also adviser of Dhaka City CNG-Auto-rickshaw Union, said that a Rab team picked Sakhawat up on February 16 from Bhashantek.

Firoz alleges that a developer of 'Bhashantek Rehabilitation Project' might influence Rab to arrest Sakhawat as he, under the banner of BPPSP, organised slum dwellers protesting their eviction from the project area by the developer.

BPPSP leaders also brought the same allegation against the developer at a press conference in the city on March 3.

The government awarded a work to the developer to construct flats for middle and lower income people after its decision in September 2003.

A team from the Rab intelligence wing captured the three men during a five-hour raid from 12:30 am yesterday at Krishimarket, Town Hall and Dhaka Uddyan in Mohammadpur.

Sources in Huji said that Idris was a member of Huji and Latif was a trainer of explosives of the banned militant organisation.

The two men were previously arrested for their involvement in various deadly attacks.

When they were released on bail they both absconded.

Commander Sohail, legal and media wing director of Rab, told a press conference at its headquarters in Uttara that the three arrestees are number 2, 20 and 22 accused in the case, which has 24 suspects.

Asked about Shakhawat, the Rab director said in primary

BNP visit

FROM PAGE 1 The party lawmakers Jafrul Islam Chowdhury, Abul Khair Bhuiyan, Ashrafuddin Nizam, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Annie and Nazimuddin Ahmed will join the team.

Our Khagrachhari correspondent adds: Two indigenous organisations yesterday declared that they would boycott the BNP parliamentary team in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) terming the party "fundamentalist" and "evil-force" for minor communities.

Sajek Bhumi Raksha Committee (SBRC) and Sajek Nari Samaj in a joint release, signed by SBRC leader Bijoy Kanti Chakma, also urged the government to conduct a judicial inquiry into the recent violent activities in CHT.

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interrogation Shakhawat admitted that he is a member of Huji.

He also that now only Moulana Monir remains at large.

Law enforcers started a fresh move to arrest all suspects accused of politically-motivated violence following instructions to do so from the home ministry.

Detained Idris is a relative of detained Huji Dhaka City unit president Moulana Abu Taher and Moulana Tajuddin, who supplied grenades that were used in the attack on an Awami League rally on 21 August 2004.

Idris is the brother-in-law of Arif Hasan Sumon, who is also an accused in the CPB blasts case.

Following the bomb attack, CPB President Manjurul Ahsan Khan filed a case with Motijheel police station.

A top Huji leader, Mufti Abdul Hannan, as well as several other members have been arrested for their involvement in the bomb blasts.

Two Indian nationals and Lasker-e-Taiba members have also been arrested and are currently on remand for interrogation.

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BCL leader

FROM PAGE 1 The clash left at least 20 BCL men injured. Both factions blamed one another for the incident that suspended the council.

The killing of Ripon followed stabbing and beating of BCL activists by their rival groups throughout the day, leaving at least three BCL activists wounded.

Sources said Ripon came under attack on his way to Jessore town from his home in Aranda. He was riding a motorbike along with Selim.

A gang stopped Ripon as he reached Bhekutia Bazar around 7:00pm.

They hacked him and dumped his body in the roadside pond. Whereabouts of Selim were not known as of 8:30pm.

Locals dragged Ripon from the water and took him to a local hospital where doctors declared him dead around 7:15pm.

"A group of five or six BCL activists, jointly led by Hafiz, Iqbal and Mikaveel, launched the attack," alleged Rabiul Islam, Ripon's uncle.

Sources said the attackers are the supporters of local lawmakers and Ripon was a supporter of local upazila parishad chairman.

Another group, loyal to a local ruling party lawmaker, stabbed Aziz, 50, an Awami League leader, in Rail Gate area of the town, yesterday noon.

The same group beat up Ajhar Hossain Swapon, joint secretary of district Jubo League and activist Monwar Hossain Joni in the morning.

Leaders and activists of Awami League, backed by an upazila parishad chairman, brought out a procession in the town protesting the attacks.

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ACC chief

FROM PAGE 16 blamed lengthy legal procedures for increasing corruption.

The ACC boss said financial crimes are on the rise because of "absence of any laws" and the use of sophisticated technology by the criminals.

He said the existing system does not permit the ACC to probe the financial crimes.

"An independent and effective judicial system is vital for eradicating poverty," he said.

Rahman stressed the need for a joint move by the judiciary and the ACC for freeing the country from corruption.

Replying to a query on the recent quashment of cases against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the ACC boss said, "substantial matters were there for the decision."

Manzur Elahi, a leading businessman, said: "A day will come when honest businessmen will be driven out of the market by dishonest businessmen."

Referring to the recent share market situation, he said: "Games are being played on the stock market as a result of which the small investors will be affected badly."

He said the Securities and Exchange Commission is keeping mum despite knowing all the things.

Elahi said the government's political will can root out corruption.

Former NBR chairman Badiur Rahman said corruption is accepted socially, which is very dangerous.

"Corruption is inevitable where there is a scope for the well-known thieves and criminals to go to parliament as lawmakers," he added.

Economist Muinul Islam alleged that former presidents Ziaur Rahman and HM Ershad were responsible for giving corruption an institutional shape.

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Police asked

FROM PAGE 16 report yesterday, although it was the deadline for submission set by the court earlier.

The same court on February 9 this year also cancelled Azfar Pasha's bail, and ordered his arrest as his bail guarantors had failed to produce him before the court.

However, another Adflame Director Dr Helena Pasha, and Manager Mizanur Rahman, both of whom are also accused of the same charge and are out on bail, were present at the court yesterday during the case's hearing.

The court yesterday also directed complainant of the case Drug Superintendent Abul Khair Chowdhury to appear before it to give his statement on April 19, as he was not present despite being required to do so.

On December 23, 1992 the Directorate of Drug Administration filed the case against five Adflame Pharmaceuticals officials for producing adulterated paracetamol syrup under the name 'Flammodol', which had been tested positive for the deadly chemical diethylene glycol.

The court framed charges against the accused on May 28, 1994.

The proceedings were, however, brought to a stop later in 1994 as the HC issued a temporary stay order, which was never challenged. Although two years ago, the HC had lifted the stay order, the Drug Court was unaware of the order until The Daily Star during its recent investigation revealed it.

Azfar Pasha, Helena Pasha, and Mizanur Rahman got their bail right after the case had been filed, and the other two accused Nigendra Nath Bala, and Md Noman have been absconding since then.

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CHT land survey

FROM PAGE 1 The minister said they are now working in line with the CHT peace treaty signed during the tenure of the Awami League government in 1997.

Since the formation of the commission on June 3, 1997, three retired judges served as its chairman until December 2007. But they could hardly make any noticeable progress in settling land disputes.

The land commission, which sat only once in the last decade, includes the chairman of the CHT regional council or his representative, the chairmen of three hill district councils, the circle chiefs and the divisional commissioner or his representative as its members.

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Developing world launched 'arms race': think tank

AFP, Stockholm

Developing countries have embarked on a dangerous "arms race" with huge sums ploughed into combat aircraft in unstable parts of the world in the past five years, a top defence think-tank has said.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said in an annual report to appear Monday that global arms sales had soared 22 percent in the period from 2005 to 2009 compared to 2000 to 2004.

Imports of combat aircraft accounted for 27 percent of the volume in the last five years.

"Orders and deliveries of these potentially destabilising weapon systems have led to arms race concerns in the following regions of tension: the Middle East, North Africa, South America, South Asia and South East Asia," it said.

According to the expert in charge of the report, Paul Holtom, resource-rich countries were setting the trend by using their earnings to build out their combat aircraft fleets.

"Neighbouring rivals have reacted to these acquisitions with orders of their own. One can question whether this is an appropriate allocation of resources in regions with high levels of poverty," he added.

In the case of South America, the institute found arms imports "were 150 percent higher during the last five years compared to the beginning of

the millennium.

"We see evidence of competitive behaviour in arms acquisitions in South America," said SIPRI Latin America expert Mark Bromley.

"This clearly shows we need improved transparency and confidence-building measures to reduce tension in the region."

Brazil is currently looking to buy 36 combat aircraft with the French-made Rafale, Sweden's Gripen and the US F/A-18 in the running for the contract.

South East Asia also saw a dramatic increase between 2005 and 2009 with Malaysia ramping up its arms imports by 722 percent, Singapore 146 percent and Indonesia 84 percent.

The increase in arms imports to Singapore made the island country the first member of ASEAN to make SIPRI's list of top 10 biggest arms importers since the end of the Vietnam war, giving the nation seventh place overall.

"The current wave of South East Asian acquisitions could destabilise the region, jeopardising decades of peace," said SIPRI Asia expert Siemon Wezeman.

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