

Obama calls leaders, slams 'deplorable' WikiLeaks

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama called Turkey's prime minister and Mexico's president on Saturday to discuss the "deplorable action" by WikiLeaks, and said the cable releases should not harm bilateral ties.

"The president expressed his regrets for the deplorable action by WikiLeaks and the two leaders agreed that it will not influence or disrupt the close cooperation between the United States and Turkey," the White House said, referring to Obama's call with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Obama also telephoned his Mexican counterpart Felipe Calderon, and the pair "agreed (WikiLeaks') irresponsible acts should not distract our two countries from our important cooperation," according to a readout of the call.

Turkey in particular has been in the spotlight in the wake of the documents dump, which included 7,918 cables from the US embassy in Ankara, the post with the most cables in the leaked stash.



Supporters of WikiLeaks demonstrate in Amsterdam, on Saturday. The sign on the left reads: "Can the world work without leaking, without Wikileaks?", the sign in the centre: "Julian's place is not a jail cell. Wikileaks keep on!"

US 'tried to stop missile delivery to Venezuela'

REUTERS, Washington

The United States tried to stop delivery of Russian anti-aircraft missiles to Venezuela in 2009 amid concerns it could pass them on to Marxist guerrillas in Colombia or Mexican drug gangs, The Washington Post said yesterday, citing diplomatic cables from WikiLeaks.

Venezuela, where President Hugo Chavez heads a strongly anti-American government, received at least 1,800 of the SA-24 shoulder-fired missiles from Russia, the Post said, citing UN arms control data.

Secret US cables said Washington was concerned about the acquisition by Caracas of Russian arms, including attack helicopters, Sukhoi fighter jets and 100,000 Kalashnikov rifles, the newspaper reported.

It quoted a US State Department cable on Aug. 10, 2009 to embassies in Europe and South America as saying Russian arms sales to Venezuela totalled "over \$5 billion last year and growing." Concern about Spanish plans to sell aircraft and patrol boats to Venezuela were also cited in the cable.

Russia reported to the UN Register of Conventional Arms earlier this year the purchase totalled 1,800 missiles, the Post said. US Air Force General Douglas Fraser said publicly this year Venezuela could be buying as many as 2,400 of the missiles, the newspaper said.

Singapore's Asian allies 'corrupt, incompetent'

AFP, Singapore

Singaporean diplomats think the leaders of some close Asian allies including neighbouring Malaysia are corrupt, incompetent or stupid, cables from WikiLeaks revealed yesterday.

Confidential diplomatic notes given by the whistle-blower website to Australia's Fairfax media group contained unflattering assessments of key figures in Malaysia, Thailand, India and Japan.

"A lack of competent leadership is a real problem for Malaysia," permanent secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bilahari Kausikan, reportedly told US Deputy Secretary of Defence for East Asia David Sedney.

As a result, "the situation in neighbouring Malaysia is confused and dangerous" and there is a "distinct possibility of racial conflict", according to the cable dated September 2008.

Such conflict would see ethnic Chinese flee

Malaysia and "overwhelm" Singapore, Bilahari was quoted as saying.

Another official, Peter Ho, reportedly described Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak as "an opportunist" who "would not hesitate" to be critical of Singapore if "it is expedient for him to do so."

Bilahari was also reportedly critical of the Thai government, labelling fugitive former premier Thaksin Shinawatra "corrupt" along with "everyone else, including the opposition".

In a 2009 memo, Singapore's ambassador-at-large Tommy Koh -- known for being mild-mannered and eloquent in public -- was uncharacteristically blunt in his assessment of regional heavyweights Japan and India, the documents reveal.

"Koh described Japan as 'the big fat loser' in the context of improving ties between China and ASEAN," a leaked cable detailing a meeting between him and US officials stated.



Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim gestures while sitting with his wife Wan Azizah Ismail in Kuala Lumpur on August 9, 2010. Singapore leaders believe Ibrahim had sex with a male aide in a honey trap set by his enemies, according to US cables leaked yesterday.

US 'aware of' Kenyan arms shipments

BBC ONLINE

The US government has been aware of Kenyan arms shipments to Southern Sudan for years, the latest diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks reveal.

The cables show that US diplomats under President Barack Obama asked Kenya to stop the shipments in 2009.

Kenyan officials reacted with anger because the government of President George W Bush had not objected to their support for Southern Sudan.

Wikileaks has so far released more than 1,100 of 251,000 secret US cables.

Many of the cables from the US embassy in Nairobi describe conversations about the Kenya-bound freight ship Faina that was seized by Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden in September 2008.

The Ukrainian vessel, released after five months for a \$3.2m ransom was packed with weapons, including more than 30 tanks.

The Kenyan government publicly rejected accusations that the load on the Faina was an arms shipment for the Southern Sudan's army, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

However, cables published by the New York Times show that US officials knew that the arms on the Faina were originally heading for Southern Sudan and were aware of Kenya's engagement in Southern Sudan.

Kosovo holds historic polls

BBC ONLINE

Kosovo is holding its first parliamentary election since unilaterally declaring independence from Serbia almost three years ago. The ethnic Albanian majority and small Serb minority remain largely estranged, more than a decade after a Nato-led conflict broke Belgrade's control.

Serbia has not recognised Kosovo's independence and most Serbs are expected to boycott the elections.

The EU says the election is important for Kosovo's hopes of entry.

During the campaign, institutionalised corruption and the dire state of Kosovo's economy have consistently topped lists of voter concerns.

Opinion polls have suggested that the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) of the outgoing Prime Minister, Hashim Thaci, is in the lead but is unlikely to win an outright majority.

Its former junior coalition partner, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), is mounting a strong challenge.

Polls were due to close at 1900 (1700 GMT) yesterday. An early election had to be called after the LDK pulled out of Mr Thaci's government in October in a row over its then leader, Fatmir Sejdiu, who was also Kosovo's president.

After Mr Sejdiu stepped down as president, he was ousted from the LDK leadership by the mayor of Pristina, Isa Mustafa. Another party, the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, has been weakened because its leader, former rebel Ramush Haradinaj, is being retried by the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

Among Kosovo's most daunting challenges are an unemployment rate of 45% - even higher among young people - and one of the weakest economies in Europe.

Suu Kyi to 'persevere' for dialogue with junta

AFP, Tokyo

Myanmar's democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has vowed to remain patient in seeking dialogue with military rulers following last month's controversial poll that has kept them in power.

"I think the credibility of the government does not depend on statistics. It depends on the will of the people. It depends on the genuine support of the people," she said in a recent interview with Japan's public network NHK broadcast yesterday.

"And we have to wait to find out how genuine that is."

The democracy icon has spent most of the past 20 years locked up but was freed from her latest seven-year stretch of confinement on November 13.

She was under house arrest during the November 7 election, Myanmar's first in two decades, that was widely criticised by democracy activists and Western governments as anything but free and fair.

Sugarcane sale

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The prime minister opened the programme through sending SMS by mobile phone to 40 sugarcane growers.

She talked to the sugarcane growers through online video chat in Natore from her office.

From now on, some 2.5 lakh growers across the country will no more depend on middlemen to sell their sugarcane to the mills and they will get fair price as none will get chance to do corruption.

Under the new e-purji system, the growers will be issued permits through SMS while the information on bills will also be sent to the growers through

SMS.

"From now on, the farmers will get the purji within seconds," the prime minister said.

Regarding the investment in small and medium industries, Hasina said Bangladesh is still an agriculture-based country. "So investment in larger volume is a must for sustainable development," she said.

The prime minister directed the authorities concerned to introduce multi-purpose economic activities of the state-owned sugar mills to save these from getting ruined.

Hasina also requested the researchers to produce seeds of sugarcane which will produce

quality of higher quantity and sugar.

Besides, she said the government has taken initiative to setting up two sugar refineries, second distillery and compost fertiliser factory at Keru and Company.

Industries Minister Dilip Barua, A2I programme's project director Nazmul Islam Khan, UNDP's Resident Representative in Dhaka Stefan Priesner, Chairman of Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation Ranjit Kumar Biswas and sugarcane growers' representative Akram Hossain Mia also addressed the function.

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