

US declares Afghans as major ally

REUTERS, Kabul

Washington declared Afghanistan a major non-Nato ally yesterday, a largely symbolic status reinforcing its message to Afghans that they will not be abandoned as the war winds down.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the decision, made by President Barack Obama, during her unannounced visit to Kabul where she met President Hamid Karzai on the eve of a major donors' conference in Tokyo which will draw pledges for aid.

The status upgrade may help Afghanistan acquire US defence supplies and have greater access to US training as the Afghan army takes more responsibility for the country's security ahead of the 2014 withdrawal of most Nato combat troops.

"Please know that the United States will be your friend and your partner. We are not even imagining abandoning Afghanistan. Quite the opposite," Hillary told a press briefing with Karzai before jetting off to Tokyo.



Afghan President Hamid Karzai shakes hand with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during a press conference in Kabul yesterday.

Obama's decision meets a pledge he made on a visit to Afghanistan this year to upgrade Kabul to a special security status given to only a limited number of US partners -- including close allies like Israel and Japan -- which are not members of Nato.

Participants at the Tokyo meeting are expected to commit just under \$4 billion annually in development

aid for Afghanistan at today's meeting, though the central bank has said the country needs at least \$6 billion a year to foster economic growth over the next decade.

This is on top of the \$4.1 billion committed annually by Nato and its partners for Afghanistan's security forces, pledged at a Chicago summit in May.

US officials with Hillary declined

to say how much aid the United States would pledge, which has significantly reduced aid since the peak year of 2010 when more than \$6 billion was given, two thirds from Washington.

Transparency International ranks Afghanistan as one of the world's most corrupt nations and despite Karzai's recent campaign to tackle graft within government, a high-level corruption case is yet to be prosecuted.

There is also growing fear among ordinary Afghans that the vacuum of cash could lead to greater insecurity.

Comparisons are frequently being drawn to the Soviets' 1989 humiliating defeat after a decade of fighting mujahideen insurgents. When Moscow stopped giving aid a year after the Soviet Union collapsed, in 1992, civil war engulfed the country.

US officials may be reluctant to cite a specific pledge because the sum actually given is ultimately controlled by Congress, which holds the US government's purse strings. Enthusiasm for foreign aid has generally waned in Congress

PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar nabs 20 pro-democracy activists

AFP, Yangon

At least 20 student leaders were detained in Myanmar yesterday, ahead of a rally to commemorate a 1962 suppression of a student movement, an activist said, in the biggest crackdown of its kind since the dissolution of the junta.

The detentions raise questions about the true extent of Myanmar's reforms since it dropped outright military rule last year in favour of a quasi-civilian government led by reformist president Thein Sein.

Yesterday's anniversary of the bloody 1962 crackdown on students protesting against military rule in Yangon University was expected to draw veteran activists as well as younger pro-democracy supporters.

Spineless leaders are on the rise

Says Mamata on Facebook

IANS, Kolkata

The number of "so-called political leaders having no spines" is growing, a post on West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's Facebook profile said yesterday.

The post on the popular social networking site also urged the youth to stand up.

"Nowadays, I'm not surprised when I see growing numbers of so-called political leaders having no spines. In my opinion, it has become a potential area of doing research work on this aspect," the post read.

The post said lack of ideals, courage and links with roots of common people had led to leaders becoming weak and afraid to fight for the cause of common people and reveal the truth.

"Let us dedicate ourselves for the common people. I appeal to the young generation to awake, fight, stand up and instill a spirit of mind without fear," read the post which has received over 600 likes and 200 comments.

Banerjee and her Trinamool party have consistently defied the Congress party, forcing a series of embarrassing policy U-turns on everything from rail fares and petrol prices to foreign investment in the retail sector.

She has also defied the decision of ruling UPA government, of which her Trinamool Congress is a major ally, on presidential candidate.



US drone kills 21 in Pakistan

PTI, Islamabad

A US drone targeted a militant compound in the restive North Waziristan tribal region, killing at least 21 insurgents in the first such attack since Pakistan reopened Nato supply routes to Afghanistan.

The CIA-operated spy plane fired two missiles at the compound in Datta Khel area near the Afghan border last evening.

TV news channels quoted their sources as saying that 21 militants were killed. Foreign fighters were among the dead.

The strike destroyed the compound, witnesses said. Datta Khel is considered a stronghold of Hafiz Gul Bahadur, the commander of a Taliban faction accused of sending militants across the border to fight foreign troops in Afghanistan.

It was also the second drone strike in North

INDIAN PRESIDENTIAL POLL

Sangma's camp raises fresh allegations against Pranab

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

In more acrimony in the run up to Indian presidential poll, opposition candidate P A Sangma yesterday sought the Election Commission's intervention for a fresh probe into his objections against the candidature of UPA nominee Pranab Mukherjee, levelling new allegations that he was still holding two more offices of profit.

After the meeting with Chief Election Commissioner V S Sampath, Janata Party President Subramanian Swamy, who was part of the delegation, claimed Mukherjee continued to hold two more offices of profit - as vice president of Birbhum Institute of Engineering and Technology and chairman of Rabindra Bharti Society which forms the Rabindra Bharti University in Kolkata.

The EC has asked them to submit a written application by tomorrow evening.

The delegation also raked up the issue of Mukherjee's allegedly fabricated signature on his letter of resignation from the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) and its acceptance.



Pranab Mukherjee

P A Sangma

Mukherjee has denied the charge and said he resigned from ISI on June 20, a week before he filed his nomination for presidential elections.

Pranab Mukherjee's camp hit back at opposition-backed candidate P A Sangma for raking up fresh allegations against his candidature saying the campaign was being "vitiated".

"This only proves that the campaign for the highest office in the country is being vitiated," said Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal, who is also the authorised representative of Mukherjee.

Delay in repair makes 2 bridges

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closed for six hours every day during the 15-day deck repairs. Then there would be a time when the bridges would be closed to traffic for a few days straight.

"The authorities will face a stiff challenge to handle the traffic when the bridges remain closed for several days at a stretch," said Amanat, adding that the engagement of the army would be helpful in this regard.

On an average 30,000 vehicles, including goods-carrying trucks and lorries ply the Dhaka-Ctg highway daily.

The problem could have been easily avoided had the bridges been dual carriage-way. The repairs could have been done keeping two lanes open to traffic.

Apart from diverting traffic, the government would have to deploy a good number of ferries and boats

so that vehicles and people could cross the Meghna river during the repairs.

The detour for the Dhaka-Chittagong traffic would be D h a k a - B h a i r a b - Brahmanbaria-Mainamoti-Chittagong. This means people would have to travel an extra 90km.

Three Bailey bridges and some stretches on the detour need to be repaired for a smoother ride, the RHD Superintendent Engineer Shahabuddin Khan of Dhaka Zone told The Daily Star. He said the repairing works of the Bailey bridges and roads had already started.

Communications Minister Obaidul Quader in December last year identified the bridges as risky. He said the bridges might collapse anytime. Later, while visiting the bridges, he blasted the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) officials for the poor condition of the bridges.

In 2009, the communications ministry repaired the damage to the expansion joints, hinge bearings and the decks of the bridges. But those got damaged again within a year due to plying of overloaded vehicles.

Since then experts had been insisting on an urgent repair of the bridges.

It took the communications ministry a year to take up a Tk 150 crore project to repair the bridges. The RHD in February floated a tender but none of the five bidders qualified for the job.

"We decided to float a second tender to find an eligible bidder by relaxing some of the criteria. But the government suddenly gave the job to the army," said an RHD official.

The army was in the process of appointing an international firm for the repairs. Buet's experts and Japan International

Cooperation Agency officials were helping them in this regard.

Director General of Special Works Organisation (East) of the Bangladesh Army Col Abu Sayed, who is supervising the repair works, said they had already contacted several Japanese companies. "We are hoping to select a company soon," he said.

He said some steel and rubber plates had been placed on the badly damaged points of the bridge as a temporary measure to check further damage.

Sources said of the Tk 150 crore, Tk 20-30 crore would be spent for repairs of the decks while the rest would be spent on the piers.

However, it is still unknown exactly when the repairs of damage done by the riverbed scouring would begin.

Amanat, however, said it would begin immediately after repairs of the decks are

another Nagorik Oikya leader, said people have been waiting for a change in politics since the restoration of democracy in 1991, but it has not happened yet.

Former AL lawmaker SM Akram, another leader of the forum, said, "Awami League in its election manifesto pledged to bring about a positive change in the country but in reality, it is doing the opposite."

"We all should do something to save people from the two parties that have ruled the country by turns since 1991."

"If BNP comes to power, we will not be able to live in this country. The same thing will happen if Awami League returns to power in the next polls. That is why we need to create an alternative platform for people," said Akram, also former president of Narayanjang

Affected people

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hour-long clash left around 20 injured including three securitymen.

The agitating locals then set the Uttara 3rd phase site office of Rajuk ablaze before Turag police reached the spot.

As a unit of Tongi Fire Service and Civil Defence rushed to the scene, the agitators attacked two firefighting vehicles, said Zakir Hossain, senior station officer of Tongi fire service.

While one of the vehicles started backing up, it got stuck in a pothole on the road and the attackers

vandalised it, he added.

The attack left five firemen including driver Aslam Hossain injured.

Later police from Uttara and Turag stations rescued the firefighters and vehicles. The injured received first aid.

Zakir filed a case in this connection with Turag Police Station in the evening.

Contacted, Md Nurul Huda, chairman of Rajuk, claimed they have already handed over the plots to the affected local people as per rules.

"We finished handing over the plots last year. A

local union parishad chairman instigated some people to launch the attack against Rajuk," he complained.

The city planner has reclaimed a big area of land from illegal occupancy by a group of businessmen in Uttara Sector-10, opposite to Ahsania Mission Cancer and General Hospital, around six months ago and developed it by filling earth, maintained Huda.

The businessmen, said Rajuk chief, are pursuing a court case over the ownership of a market opposite to the hospital.

Roads left in a bad shape

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The excavation work in the rainy season has made driving unsafe, said Khokon. To negotiate the distance between Jatrabari and Gulistan, it now takes two hours longer.

"I have to walk around one kilometre every day along the muddy and greasy road to take my daughter to school," said Rabeya Chowdhury, a resident of Swamibagh. Her daughter Mariha Chowdhury, a playgroup student at Moitri Kindergarten in Wari, used to go to school by rickshaw.

Contacted, Ashiqur Rahman, project director of Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover, said a recent meeting at the

Prime Minister's Office had decided to relocate all the utility lines by June 15. But the Titas Gas undertook their work on June 12.

"We are now digging the road from Bangabhaban to Jatrabari and it will take two more months to complete," said Jasim Uddin, project manager for the rehabilitation of Titas Gas supply lines.

Asked about doing the job in the rains, he said they were ready to do it two years ago, but the project authorities have caused the delay.

The construction of around 10 km-long Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover is expected to end in July next year.

MINDLESS ROAD-DIGGING MOUNTS SUFFERINGS

Many roads in other parts of the capital are also in appalling condition due to careless digging by several utility service providers.

The roads include Darussalam Road, Mirpur Technical to Shyamoli, Mirpur-10 to Agargaon and Tibet intersection in Tejgaon Industrial Area to National Shooting Federation.

Sources at Dhaka Wasa said it has been digging the road stretching from Chankharpool to Buet to lay water supply pipes. The commuters and residents, therefore, have to suffer.

The water supplier has

dug up around 26 km road in the capital this year.

Besides, Power Grid Company of Bangladesh has built trenches from Mirpur-14 to Shyamoli via Mirpur-10 and Agargaon to lay electric cables.

Dhaka south and north city corporations are responsible for repairing the roads.

Ahmed Ali Shah, superintendent engineer of Dhaka North City Corporation, said they have already started the repair works and will complete it at the earliest.

"We are not repairing part of the road stretching from Technical intersection to Shyamoli due to a request from Wasa, as they will check their supply lines later," he added.

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<div data-bbox="1308 2597 1673 2664" data-label="List-Group"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Application opens: July 10, 2012 ■ Application closes: July 30, 2012 </div> <div data-bbox="1198 2667 1791 2695" data-label="Text"> <p>■ Written test: Friday, August 03, 2012 (10.30am-11.30am)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1095 2698 1888 2755" data-label="Text"> <p>[Years of work experience, academic achievement and written test score will be considered for admission]</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1369 2777 1610 2806" data-label="Section-Header"> <h3>Application Procedure</h3> </div>
<p>Prescribed application form for admission will be available at the EMBA office or at www.juniv.edu. A filled-in application form along with (i) A Bank Draft/Pay-Order (from any bank) of Tk. 800/- payable in favour of 'EMBA, Faculty of Business Studies, Jahangirnagar University,' (ii) Two copies of attested passport-size photographs, and (iii) Attested copies of all academic certificates, mark-sheets, and work experience, if any, must be submitted to the EMBA office.</p> <p>For further information, please contact EMBA office, FBS, JU or call at 7791045-51 Ext: 1671, 01676829017 (Ms. Nigar Sultana), 01718054760 (Mr. Probal Dutta) and 01925063070 (Abdul Mazed) during 10.00am to 05.00pm seven days a week.</p>	<div data-bbox="1598 3094 1922 3122" data-label="Text"> <p>Coordinator, EMBA Program</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1598 3126 1940 3154" data-label="Text"> <p>Faculty of Business Studies (FBS)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1011 3126 1105 3154" data-label="Text"> <p>GD-2711</p> </div>