

Russia's Syria stance won't change

US okays Patriot, troops to Turkey; Damascus pounded after blasts

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday said that it had not changed and would not change its controversial stance on Syria, after a top Russian diplomat said the defeat of the Syrian regime was possible.

In a bid to play down claims of a sudden about-turn in Russian policy, the foreign ministry irritably insisted the diplomat had made no special commentary for the media.

"We have never changed our position (on Syria) and we never will," foreign ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said.

Deputy Foreign Minister Bogdanov said at a meeting of the Public Chamber oversight body on Thursday that the Syrian regime "is losing more and more control" and it was not excluded that President Bashar al-Assad could lose the conflict with the rebels.

The United States swiftly welcomed Bogdanov's comments, saying it appeared Moscow was "finally waking up to the reality".

It is not clear if Bogdanov -- who is also the Kremlin's special envoy for the Middle East -- was aware that his remarks were on the record and would be reported by Russia's news agencies.

Russia has so far refused to turn against Assad's regime despite the conflict, which according to rights groups has killed 42,000 people since March last year.

Moscow has been seen by the West as a staunch ally of Assad's regime since opposition rebels first launched their bid to topple him in March 2011.

With China, it has vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions,



Patriot missiles

backed by the United States, aimed at imposing sanctions.

Meanwhile, the United States will deploy two Patriot missile batteries to Turkey along with 400 troops to help defend its ally against potential threats from neighbouring Syria, US officials said yesterday.

US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta issued the order before landing at the Incirlik airbase in Turkey after a visit to Afghanistan, his spokesman said.

Turkey is a "very strong ally" and the US government is prepared in the context of Nato to support the defence of Turkey," Little said.

Germany and the Netherlands also have agreed to provide advanced "hit-to-kill" Patriot weapons, which are designed to knock out cruise and ballistic missiles

as well as aircraft.

The move coincides with rising fears the Syrian regime may resort to using chemical weapons against rebel forces and after Assad's army unleashed Scud missiles in recent days.

US and European leaders have warned the Assad regime not to use its arsenal of chemical arms, calling it a "red line" that would trigger international military action.

Turkey has vowed to defend its territory after cross-border artillery fire wounded civilians and following the downing of one of its fighter jets.

On the ground, Syrian regime forces yesterday bombarded southern districts of Damascus a day after two deadly car bombings, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

On Thursday at least 135 people -- 77 civilians, 31 rebels and 27 soldiers -- were killed across the country, the Observatory reported.

N Korea marks rocket success with rally

AFP, Seoul

Hundreds of thousands of North Koreans rallied yesterday in the freezing cold to revel in the country's rocket launch as South Korea voiced concern that its rival could follow up with a third nuclear test.

The enormous rally in central Pyongyang came two days after the launch of the rocket and just ahead of Monday's anniversary of the death of new leader Kim Jong-Un's father.

The West fears the launch has taken the nuclear power a step closer to firing intercontinental ballistic missiles across the planet.

North Korea is already under international sanctions for conducting two nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, which both came after long-range rocket launches, and South Korea said history could be repeating itself.

Unbowed, North Korean state media said Kim, who is in his late 20s, had personally signed off on firing the three-stage rocket and had declared his regime's "unshakable stand" that the programme will continue. Kim stressed the need "to launch satellites in the future... to develop the country's science, technology and economy", according to the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) as it gave new details of the launch.



Thousands of people yesterday gathered in Kim Il-Sung Square in Pyongyang to celebrate the successful launch of the Unha-3 rocket carrying the satellite Kwangmyongsong-3 on December 12.

PHOTO: AFP

IAEA hopes nuke deal with Iran soon

AFP, Vienna

The chief UN nuclear inspector yesterday said after "good" talks in Tehran that he expects to reach a deal with Iran in January on outstanding issues over its controversial atomic programme.

"We have agreed to meet again on 16 January next year, where we expect to finalise the structured approach and start implementing it then shortly after that," Herman Nackaerts of the International Atomic Energy Agency said.

"We had good meetings," he told reporters at Vienna airport after the meeting in Tehran, adding that Parchin, a military base at the centre of the IAEA's investigation is "part of the structured approach."

Parchin featured in a major IAEA report issued in November 2011 summarising what it says is "overall, credible" evidence that until 2003, and possibly since, Iran conducted weapons research.

Because the bulk of the information in the report comes from foreign intelligence agencies, Iran has said it is either forged or related to non-nuclear work.

Thursday's meeting between Nackaerts's team and Iranian officials was the latest in a string of what have up till now been fruitless talks this year between the Iranians and the IAEA, the latest in August in Vienna.

The West suspects Iran is using its nuclear programme as a cover for developing atomic weapons, charges Tehran denies.

Fake prophet arrested

AFP, Kutai Timur

A man who allegedly claimed to be an Islamic prophet and tricked his male followers into allowing him to have sex with their wives and daughters has been arrested, Indonesian police said Friday.

The 48-year-old was detained on the island of Borneo after several followers reported he had told them to pay him money or organise sexual relations with relatives to purify them of their sins, a police spokesman said.

"According to the followers' reports, if they can't afford to pay the money, they have to let their wives or daughters sleep with him as an alternate way to go to heaven," Kutai Timur district police spokesman Ketut Cakri told AFP.

He had spread "deviant" Islamic teachings through his cult for at least five years, Cakri said, and could be jailed for fraud and blasphemy in the world's biggest Muslim-majority country.

Susan Rice ends bid to succeed Hillary

BBC ONLINE

Susan Rice, the embattled US ambassador to the United Nations, withdrew herself from consideration to replace Hillary Clinton

as secretary of state in the face of sustained Republican attacks over her handling of the Benghazi consulate attack.

Her withdrawal means that John Kerry, Massachusetts senator and former presidential candidate, is almost certain to be nominated to be America's top diplomat.

In a letter to the president, Rice said her confirmation process would be "disruptive and costly", NBC News said.

Rice has been at the centre of Republican criticism over the Obama administration response to a deadly attack on a US consulate in Libya.

In a letter to President Barack Obama, Rice said that she was "highly honoured" to be considered for the post of secretary of state and was "fully confident that I could serve our country ably and effec-



tively in that role".

But Rice, 48, said the prospect of congressional opposition to her possible confirmation was behind her decision to withdraw from consideration.

"That trade-off is simply not worth it to our country," she added, saying "The position of Secretary of State should never be politicised."

Obama said in a statement: "I deeply regret the unfair and misleading attacks on Susan Rice in recent weeks." He added that her decision to withdraw from consideration reflected strength of character and an ability to rise above politics.

Kerry issued a statement strongly defending Rice, saying: "I've defended her publicly and wouldn't hesitate to do so again because I know her character and I know her commitment."

"She's an extraordinarily capable and dedicated public servant. Today's announcement doesn't change any of that."

PAK MINISTER IN DELHI No credible evidence to arrest Saeed: Malik

PTI, New Delhi

Notwithstanding pressure from India, Pakistan's Interior Minister Rehman Malik yesterday gave no indication of action being taken against 26/11 mastermind Hafiz Saeed, saying there was no credible evidence to arrest him.

"We have no love lost for Hafiz Saeed. If I got the information today before I leave from here, I will order his arrest," Malik told reporters on his arrival in New Delhi on a three-day visit during which the visa agreement signed by the two countries in September will be operationalised.

Malik said there has been lot of propaganda and there has been lot of pressure on Pakistan. "I have been receiving dossiers with only information," Malik said, adding Saeed had been arrested on three occasions.

New Delhi has conveyed its strong concerns over Saeed being allowed to roam freely in Pakistan and also indulge in provocative anti-India rhetoric.

Malik said a mere statement of LeT terrorist Ajmal Kasab, who was executed on November 21, about Saeed's involvement in the 2008 Mumbai attacks could not be the only evidence to nail Saeed. "It needs further corroboration," he added.

"I will make public official documents from the court's judgement where Hafiz Saeed has been declared innocent," he said.

He said Pakistan was still investigating and if there is some evidence, necessary action will be taken.

On the issue of terrorism, Malik said non-state actors had been playing havoc with the relationship between the two countries, both facing the scourge for many years.

The minister said he had come with a message of peace and wanted to move in a positive direction.



Pak asks Interpol for Musharraf's arrest

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan has sent a second letter to Interpol asking it to arrest former President Pervez Musharraf, who had been declared a fugitive by an anti-terrorism court for failing to cooperate with investigators probing the 2007 assassination of Benazir Bhutto.

The Federal Investigation Agency, which is probing the assassination, attached arrest warrants for Musharraf and some pieces of evidence to the letter, which was sent to Interpol on Thursday.

The Interpol office in France had earlier returned a similar request by the FIA as no evidence against Musharraf had been provided.

The evidence sent with the letter on Thursday includes a statement by US Journalist Mark Siegel and records of emails sent by Musharraf to former premier Bhutto, the website of The Express Tribune reported.

BCL embarrasses

FROM PAGE 1

months" and "regained public sympathy" following Jamaat-Shibir's countrywide attack on police has been ruined because of Chhatra League.

In these circumstances, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the leaders of her party's associated bodies to remain alert so that none can infiltrate into their organisations with a plot to tarnish the image of the government.

"We are in power. People of vested interests will try to change their political colour and engage the party in different anti-organisational activities. Remain careful about it," said Hasina, also the chief of AL and its different associated bodies.

The PM was addressing a discussion marking Martyred Intellectuals Day in the capital.

AL's two influential associated bodies Jubo League and Swachchhasebak League reportedly kept their

workers away from the street showdown during the BNP's hartal on Tuesday and Thursday after Bishwajit was killed by Jagannath University unit BCL men.

Jubo League Chairman Omar Faroque Chowdhury said they had directed their party men not to be violent in any circumstances during the opposition blockade and hartal.

He said maintaining law and order is the task of police and government and he believes his organisation's prime duty is to create public opinion in favour of the government and the party through good work.

Talking to The Daily Star, he urged all the associated bodies of AL to give up violent acts for which the government might earn a bad name.

He also opined that bi-data should be taken and investigated before making anyone leaders in the AL's associated bodies. The Jubo League chairman said his organisation will leave no

room for anybody found to have committed crimes.

Swachchhasebak League President Mollah Md Abu Kawser said they don't believe in street violence unlike some organisations.

Its organising secretary, Khairul Hasan Jewel, said they are on alert after the incident (killing of Bishwajit) and maintaining careful attitude in their political activities.

He demanded immediate arrest and punishment to the culprits of Bishwajit killing.

Jewel, also a former BCL joint secretary, said if anyone within any organisation commits a crime, it is not the responsibility of the organisation to save the person. The organisation rather should hand over the criminal to law enforcers.

AL Deputy Office Secretary Mrinal Kanti Das termed sad the killing of Bishwajit by BCL men. He said the PM has directed law enforcement agencies to show zero tolerance for the killers.

Modi misleading in name of development

Says Sonia Gandhi

IANS, Gandhinagar

Breaking into Gujarati to ask people to vote for her party, Congress president Sonia Gandhi said yesterday that the Narendra Modi led government was misleading people in the name of development and making false promises.

Campaigning for the second phase of Gujarat election to be held Dec 17, Gandhi blamed the state government for not utilising funds provided by the central government under various projects.

Addressing a rally in Kalol town of Gandhinagar district, she spoke briefly in Gujarati and said people should vote her party to power.

"The Gujarat government is misleading people in the name of development. Congress doesn't make empty promises like others and we will implement all that we promise if voted to power."

Asserting that the state government had failed to achieve overall development, Gandhi said: "Unemployment rate is high in the state and over 20 lakh people are homeless."

The counting of votes will be held Dec 20.





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