

US isolated over China-led bank

AP, Washington

US resistance to a Chinese-led Asian regional bank has left it isolated among its Asian and European allies and given some heft to China's frequent complaints that Washington wants to contain its rise as a world power.

South Korea, one of America's closest friends in Asia, announced Thursday it will join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, or AIIB, which is intended to help finance construction of roads and other infrastructure. Beijing has pledged to put up most of the initial \$50 billion in capital for the bank, which is expected to be set up by year's end.

The US has expressed concern the new bank will allow looser lending standards for the environment, labour rights and financial transparency, undercutting the World Bank, where the US has the most clout, and the Asian Development Bank, where it is the second-largest shareholder after Japan.

But since Britain broke with Washington two weeks ago and

announced it was signing up for the AIIB, the floodgates have opened. France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland quickly followed. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Tony Abbott heavily hinted Australia would also join.

While Japan, which has tense relations with China, is still holding out, the Obama administration appears increasingly at odds with sentiment in the very region where it has striven to forge closer ties for the past five years. India and all 10 members of Southeast Asia's regional bloc are among the more than 30 governments that have so far sought to join the bank before a March 31 deadline.

That has prompted handwringing among Asia-watchers in Washington. Many policy experts have been urging for months that the US has a better shot at reforming the new bank from inside the tent than outside.

"By maintaining their distance from the bank, American and Japanese responses seem problematic at best and churlish at worst," wrote Jonathan Pollack, a specialist on East Asia at the Brookings Institution.

"It is a small-potato issue that is making the United States look weak at a time when US influence in the region is otherwise quite strong," said Elizabeth Economy, director for Asia studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

China has been revelling in Washington's unease.

After the European nations signed up, a commentary in the official Xinhua news agency began triumphantly: "Welcome Germany! Welcome France! Welcome Italy!"

Writer Tian Dongdong accused the US of "sour grapes" and hypocrisy, noting that President Barack Obama has urged a rising China to shoulder more international obligations.

Australia's Mandarin-speaking former prime minister, Kevin Rudd, said Tuesday the emergence of AIIB was part of China's geopolitical reaction to "the door being slammed in its face" over increasing the voting quotas of developing countries at the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, currently skewed in favour of the US.

19 bombs seized in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police and BGB in a joint raid recovered a time bomb, eight crude bombs, 10 petrol bombs and five bullets from the roof of a building in Fatikchhari upazila early yesterday.

Police said on secret information, a joint team of the forces raided the house in Salekpur village around 4:30am.

They found the explosives and bullets in an abandoned condition on the roof of the one-storey building owned by one Khorshed Alam, said Syed Alam, sub-inspector of Fatikchhari Police Station.

Nobody was arrested. "We are investigating to know why the explosives were kept there and who are involved with the incident," said the police official.

A general diary was lodged with the police station.

Respect rights of workers

HRW asks factory owners

STAR REPORT

Human Rights Watch yesterday said German apparel and footwear brands should promote workers' rights in their global operations by publicly disclosing the factories producing their products.

"German clothing brands should promote respect for worker rights and safety by making their global supply chains transparent," said Wenzel Michalski, Germany director at HRW.

In a recent report, "Work Faster or Get Out: Labour Rights Abuses in Cambodia's Garment Industry," HRW documented lax Cambodian government enforcement of labour laws and the need for apparel brands to improve their monitoring and compliance.

For the report, disclosed yesterday, the New York-based rights body examined labour practices in factories producing products for Adidas, Armani, Gap, H&M, Joe Fresh, and Marks and Spencer, among others.

The lack of transparency was evident following the collapse of Rana Plaza on April 24, 2013 in Dhaka, which housed a number of garment factories, killing more than 1,100 workers and injuring thousands more, the HRW said.

Get united

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-- Annisul Huq for Dhaka North City Corporation and Sayeed Khokon for Dhaka South City Corporation.

Hasina asked all to put aside disputes and differences and work to ensure victory of the AL favourites, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif, who attended the meet, told The Daily Star.

According to another meeting source, the PM said it would be wrong to assume that the candidates will easily come out winners because of the ruling party's support. She asked her party colleagues to keep in mind that the BNP is in the race.

The party's Dhaka city unit Leaders and presidents and secretaries of its thana, ward and union units were present at the meeting, followed by a dinner hosted by the AL chief.

Senior AL leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Mahbul Alam Hanif, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, among others, were present at the meet.

On February 26, Hasina decided to back former FBCCI president Annisul Huq and Sayeed Khokon, son of late Dhaka mayor Mohammad Hanif, as mayor candidates.

At yesterday's meeting, the AL chief directed senior party leaders to pick candidates for councillor elections. In this regard, she warned that consequences would not be good if any AL leader take part in the polls violating party decision. And no rebel would get any party post.

She said, "There's no alternative to unity in facing the anti-liberation evil forces."

Hasina told the meeting that there are committees comprising central and city leaders to finalise the councillor candidates. She soon would sit separately with the AL leaders of DSCC and DNCC areas.

Before concluding the meeting, the AL chief also urged city unit leaders to stay alert to "subversive acts, anarchy and terrorism by the BNP-Jamaat alliance" to maintain democracy, peace and development, according to the meeting sources.

At least four thana unit leaders, who are also councillor aspirants, spoke at the meeting. They said the party should back dedicated leaders who have proven themselves, especially during the rules of the past caretaker administration and BNP-Jamaat alliance government.

After the meeting, the PM sat separately with senior leaders.

"We discussed strategies to win in the polls," Hanif said, when asked.

Coming out of Gono Bhaban, both Annisul Huq and Sayeed Khokon told reporters that if elected, they would work for the welfare of people.

Tender floated

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the work by June or July if we get a techno-commercially sound bidder," BIFPCL Deputy Managing Director UK Bhattacharya told this correspondent recently.

Upon getting the job, the firm is supposed to finish the work in 41 months, he said.

Some interested parties already collected tender documents from the BIFPCL Eskaton office in the capital, and the BIFPCL would make arrangements for them to visit the project site, said Bhattacharya.

According to tender documents, the BIFPCL sought bids from eligible bidders for constructing the plant's two units -- 660MW each -- by arranging bank or debt financing through Export Credit Agency (ECA).

Initially, it was estimated that the project would need an investment of \$1.7 billion. Of the amount, 30 per cent would be funded by the BIFPCL and the rest by a single or multiple international financiers.

The BIFPCL is yet to get funds for the project.

Asked whether the company is struggling to manage funds, BIFPCL Managing Director Vijay Shanker Tamrakar said they were not facing any problems over funds.

"Many bidders are showing their interest and we have asked them to consult with their respective ECA

before submitting the bidding documents," he told this correspondent recently.

On the concerns of environmentalists, the Unesco and international organisations, Tamrakar claimed the plant would not cause any harm.

"The environment would rather improve as we are planting around half a million trees in the area," he said.

The company lost a promised fund around three months before it floated the tender. It was expecting to receive \$55 million from Norway as partial fund for the project.

But the Norwegian government backed off over environmental concerns following the recommendations of the Norwegian council on ethics. The council had referred to "strong concerns" voiced by the Unesco.

Many environmental organisations at home and abroad have expressed concerns that the plant's waste containing toxic metals such as arsenic and mercury would harm the mangrove forest.

Aimed at meeting Bangladesh's growing energy demand, the project is already more than a year behind the schedule. It was supposed to be in operation by December 2018.

The plant would require around eight million tonnes of coal a year, which would be imported from Australia or Indonesia, said BIFPCL officials.

40 hrs inside

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Taher told us that he was a truck helper and had gone to Chittagong port in his truck some three to four days before getting stuck inside the container. He had an altercation with the driver, who at one stage pushed him into the container and locked the doors from outside," Jahirul said.

Dr Prakash Chandra Mondal of the hospital said the man was under close observation.

Sub-Inspector Manjoor Elahi of Mongla Police Station said they would interrogate Taher once his condition

improved.

Belayet Hossain, officer-in-charge of the police station, said Taher was probably a drug addict as some heroin was found in his pocket.

"He could not say when and how he got inside the container," he said after police visited Taher at the hospital.

Kazi Golam Moktader, director (traffic) of Mongla port, said the container ship came to the port from the Philippines via Chittagong.

"He was inside the container for about 40 hours," Moktader said, adding that Taher was perhaps a port worker.

Militants spreading wings

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JMB has been mobilising its operatives in different parts of the country. They are taking advantage of the ongoing political unrest to reorganise and gain in strength, investigators added.

"Courts, police stations, cops and political offices or mid-ranking politicians may be their targets," a leading investigator told The Daily Star recently.

"We have reasons to be worried. The most crucial of them is that we completely lost track of some high-profile [fugitive] JMB operatives," he said.

Zahidul Islam alias "Boma" Mizan, Salahuddin Salehin and Sohel Mahfuz are top among them, as they have the ability to make explosive devices and reorganise the banned outfit. Of them, Boma Mizan and Salehin were snatched from a police van by fellow militants last year, when the two were being taken to court from prison.

JMB leader Anwar Hossain Faruk, believed to be the mastermind behind the film-style ambush in Trishal, also poses a threat.

All of them were believed to be hiding in India but reportedly fled the country in the face of drives by Indian police. Some investigators believe they returned to Bangladesh and were hiding somewhere. But police failed to trace them.

According to some investigators, JMB is not yet a threat as an organisation but the fugitives are capable of carrying out destructive acts. They can also be used for political purposes, especially in the current situation.

"If they are in Bangladesh, they will not sit idle. They are highly motivated and can make bombs and explosives and know how to explode those," said one investigator, on condition of anonymity.

"There is every possibility of terror acts when most of the law enforcement agencies are engaged in containing political violence and petrol bomb attacks."

He said strong vigilance system could work as a deterrent.

Recently, Border Guard Bangladesh seized some explosive gel in Tamabil area of Sylhet. The same brand of gel was found in JMB's possession in India. "We can't neglect this connection," said the investigator.

Amid political chaos, an incident of a mobile device explosion in a Dhaka court went unnoticed. It happened on March 4, the day a court issued an order for searching BNP chief Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office.

"No one was hurt in the blast as there was no splinter in it. But it is a signal," the investigator said, adding that the mobile set was kept in a room and was exploded by calling to the number.

Another worrying matter is the Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) that JMB operatives manufactured in India. Some of those were meant for Bangladesh and might well be in the country now, fear investigators.

Referring to the 2005 countrywide coordinated bomb attacks and JMB men's ambush in Trishal last year,



Nabin Sajib

investigators said no one thought those possible, but the militant group carried those out successfully.

"There should be a dedicated surveillance mechanism.... Someone should be responsible and hold accountable for this," said Al Mamun, the additional police super.

Mufti Mahmud Khan, legal and media wing director of Rab, said yesterday that militancy could not be eliminated fully.

Rather, the discovery of ammunition, including grenades, and the arrest of four JMB operatives from the capital's Dakkhin Khan in Uttara yesterday indicate that the group is planning a large-scale attack, he said while briefing the media about the arrest.

Although the government has succeeded in arresting and trying a significant number of militants over the last eight years, about 300 more are out of the police dragnet. Most of them are JMB operatives and pose threats of terror attacks, according to investigators.

Between 2007 and 2014, 478 JMB men have been tried in 177 cases. Of them, 51 top leaders of JMB have been sentenced to death, 178 given life term and 245 jailed for different terms, official records show.

Ansarullah Bangla Team is another militant group that is actively operating in the country.

Thailand's junta chief considers martial law replacement

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's junta chief Friday said he was considering lifting martial law, but only after passing a new order to replace it.

Speaking to reporters during a trip to the beachside resort of Hua Hin, former army chief turned Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha said he had already drawn up a replacement provision.

"I have prepared for it already to be used after the martial law," he said.

"If I lift the martial law, you all will know," he added.

It is the first time Prayut has indicated a potential lifting of martial law, which bans political gatherings of more than five people and outlaws criticism of the junta.

Critics, businesses and Thailand's western allies have called for martial law to be lifted. It was imposed two days before the military takeover that followed the ousting of Yingluck Shinawatra's democratically elected government after months of often violent street protests.

But Prayut did not elaborate on what the new order would look like.

Under the interim charter the generals signed off on after seizing power, the junta already has sweeping powers to make widespread unilateral decisions.

Prayut has vowed to return power to an elected civilian government but only once reforms to tackle corruption and curb the power of political parties are codified in a new constitution.

Abbas joins race

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boycott the polls if the Election Commission fails to ensure a congenial atmosphere for us," a senior BNP leader said.

"There's no doubt that we want to contest the elections. But ... many of our prospective candidates have not got bails yet and many are still hiding fearing arrest ... The government has to ensure equal opportunities for all sides," BNP Standing Committee Member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman said.

Nazrul Islam Khan, another member of the BNP's highest policy forum, told the BBC Bangla last night if the party feels that the polls will be free and fair, then it will support one candidate in each of the three city corporations. "And others will withdraw their nomination papers."

Apart from Abbas and MA Salam, BBNP's International Affairs Secretary Asaduzzaman Ripon; Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, assistant organising secretary of the party's city unit; and pro-BNP teachers' leader Selim Bhuiyan bought nomination papers in the last two days for the DSCC mayoral polls.

Abbas is facing at least 73 cases, most of which were allegedly filed on political grounds, and has been in hiding for some time now, fearing arrest.

In Dhaka North, the BNP has already lent support to businessman Abdul Awal Mintoo, also an adviser to

BNP chief Khaleda Zia, for the mayoral polls scheduled for April 28.

However, some BNP leaders want that the party should back Mahi B Chowdhury, joint secretary general of Bikalpodhaka Bangladesh and son of former BNP leader AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, if Mintoo cannot contest the election, a source close to Khaleda Zia told this paper.

Key ally Jamaat-e-Islami has assured the BNP of providing "all-out support" to the BNP-blessed candidates in all three city corporations as it will not contest in the mayoral races. However, Jamaat-backed people will contend for some councillor posts, according to BNP insiders.

MANJUR QUILTS, COLLECTS NOMINATION FORM

In Chittagong, M Manjur Alam yesterday resigned from the post of city mayor, a day after the local BNP announced to support him as its mayoral candidate in the city polls.

Manjur, an adviser to Khaleda Zia, submitted his resignation to Kaji Mohammad Shafiqul Alam, chief executive officer of Chittagong City Corporation, around 3:30pm and then collected the nomination paper.

As per electoral laws, an incumbent mayor has to resign before taking part in fresh mayoral polls.

Senior BNP leader Abdullah Al Noman, who accompanied Manjur when he bought the nomination

paper, told the press that people would vent their frustration and anger, which arose as they could not exercise their franchise in the last national elections, through ballots this time and make Manjur winner by a wide margin.

Manjur said he would submit the nomination on March 29, the last date for filing nomination for the polls.

'KHALEDA POSITIVE' Pro-BNP professionals led by Prof Emajuddin Ahmed met Khaleda Zia last night at her Gulshan office.

Emerging from there, Emajuddin said, the party will contest the elections if a "level-playing field" is ensured. "The BNP chairperson is waiting to see the steps the government and the Election Commission take to create a congenial atmosphere."

"We had discussions with Khaleda Zia about the upcoming city polls. The BNP is positive about taking part in the polls, but it is yet to finalise its candidates for Dhaka city corporations," UNB quoted the former VC of Dhaka University as saying.

The professionals under the banner of "Shoto Nagorik" entered Khaleda's office around 6:30pm and stayed there for around two hours. Supreme Court Bar Association president Khandaker Mahbub Hossain, ex-DU teacher Mahbub Ullah, former DU Pro-VC AFM Yusuf Haider and journalist Mahfuz Ullah were, among others, present at the meeting.

EC serves

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48 hours as they reportedly violated the election rules," Mihir Sarwar Morshed, returning officer for Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), said.

A total of 63 candidates were served show cause notices since the announcement of polls schedule, he added.

Md Shah Alam, returning officer for Dhaka North City Corporations (DNCC), said the EC yesterday issued show cause notices to 16 candidates for allegedly breaching the election code of conduct.

Elections to Dhaka and Chittagong city corporations will be held on April 28.

House built

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always thought it was impossible to do. When Hamidullah lost his second son, who tragically passed away at age 18, he decided to build the house in the boy's memory. So he started the search for suitable materials.

To construct the 99-square metre house, Hamidullah collected over 12,000 empty champagne bottles over the course of three years. Some he purchased at a rouble apiece, and others were donated by nearby restaurants.

"When I started to build, I hadn't even imagined that there are so many different kinds of bottles of champagne," he said. He discovered that the bottles not only varied in colour, but also quality.

The bottles he finally collected were of different shapes and sizes, so he used a special glass cutter to cut the tops off to the same size.

Hamidullah is now so well-versed with bottles that he has become an expert of sorts -- he can identify the diameter of any bottle correctly, down to the millimetre!

He made use of these bottles as one would bricks, stacking them up around a solid foundation.

From the outside, the bottles give the walls a unique green texture and finish. From the inside, it pretty much looks like a regular house.

Hamidullah assures that the house is quite strong and expected to stand for at least 100 years! In fact, he has built it in such a way that if some of the bottles break, they can easily be replaced.

Interestingly, the house cost five times less than it would to build a cottage with regular materials.

Hamidullah gave away his architectural masterpiece to his eldest son, as a wedding present.

Co-pilot hid

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The German investigators said they had not found a suicide note or "any indication of a political or religious" nature among the documents secured in Lubitz's apartment. "However, documents were secured containing medical information that indicates an illness and corresponding treatment by doctors," Ralf Herrenbrück, a spokesman for prosecutors in Düsseldorf, said in a statement.

Germany's Federal Aviation Office said yesterday that a medical certificate issued to Lubitz that allowed him to fly noted that he had a medical condition, although it did not specify whether it was related to a psychological issue.

Investigators have been combing through Lubitz's background, including whether he might have had a history of depression or psychological problems. They are looking into Lubitz's family background, and whether he had financial troubles or difficulties in his personal relationships.

Lubitz, 27, is believed to be responsible for slamming Germanwings Flight 9525 into a mountainside in the French Alps on purpose, killing all 150 on board, while en route from Barcelona, Spain, to Düsseldorf. Prosecutors are examining several theories, including that the crash was a suicide or a mass murder.

On Thursday, the French prosecutor leading the investigation said the evidence from the cockpit voice recorder suggested that Lubitz, a former flight attendant with a passion for flying, had locked the pilot out of the cockpit and deliberately set the plane on its lethal descent.

The crash claimed victims from more than a dozen countries, including Germany, Spain and the United States.

Carsten Spohr, the chief executive of Lufthansa, the parent company of Germanwings, said on Thursday that Lubitz had passed the company's health checks with "flying colours."

But he said there had been an instance six years ago when Lubitz took a break from his training for several months. He said that if the reason was medical, German rules on privacy prevented the sharing of such information.

Form meets pedigree

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In their last 12 one-dayers at the MCG going back five years, Australia have won all but two and they are unbeaten at the ground in their last six encounters.

Crucial to New Zealand's chances of lifting a first World Cup is, perhaps, how their potent new ball attack of Trent Boult and Tim Southee handle the change of conditions on the drop-in wicket.

Consensus has it they will get less of the swing they have used to such devastating effect back home and will have to adjust the length of their deliveries.

Australia expect that to play to their advantage the same way New Zealand benefited in the one-wicket victory at

Some international airlines responded to the crash by introducing new rules requiring that two crew members always be present in the cockpit, after the French prosecutor revealed that Lubitz had locked the plane's pilot out of the cockpit before starting the deadly descent. The airlines that said they were instituting a two-person rule in the cockpit included Air Canada, easyJet and Norwegian Air Shuttle.

All German airlines will introduce that requirement, the German aviation association said yesterday.

Thomas Winkelmann, the head of Germanwings, however, expressed doubt that such a rule would have prevented Tuesday's crash.

Investigators are still trying to understand why the pilot left the cockpit, although most airlines allow it during noncritical phases of flight. The French prosecutor, Brice Robin, said it was reasonable to assume the pilot left the cockpit to use the toilet.

Members of a flight crew would typically use a numeric code to open the door if someone in the cockpit could not or would not let them in. The pilot would have known the code, Spohr said. However, the co-pilot could have activated a switch that prevents the door from opening for five minutes, or he could have found some other way to block the door, Spohr said.

Robin said that the Germanwings flight had begun prosaically, with polite exchanges between the two pilots as the flight began its course to Düsseldorf.

However, about a half-hour into the flight, he said that Lubitz appeared to have locked out the pilot of the plane and did not let him back in, prompting the pilot to demand access. Investigators, citing the plane's voice recorder, said they could hear the sound of someone trying to break down the door.

Robin said the plane's voice recorder showed that Lubitz was breathing normally in the moments leading up to the crash, indicating that he had deliberately crashed the plane.

Eden Park -- the only defeat for Michael Clarke's side.

Australia have a potent bowling attack of their own in the rampant Mitchell Starc and Mitchell Johnson, with the older Johnson looking close to his best with two key Indian wickets in the semi-final.

It has largely been a World Cup more notable for batting, though, and both sides have quality all their way through their line-ups.

The fearless aggression shown by New Zealand opener Brendon McCullum and Martin Guptill has been a sight to behold for cricket lovers everywhere.