

RIGHTS CONCERNS Aid package to Philippines withheld: US

AFP, Manila

The United States said yesterday it had withheld a major aid package to the Philippines because of significant concerns about the rule of law under President Rodrigo Duterte, days after he boasted about personally killing people.

The announcement is one of the sharpest responses by the United States to Duterte's drug war, which has claimed more than 5,000 lives in less than six months.

The US embassy said the Philippines had missed out on a second aid grant under the Millennium Challenge Corporation, after an initial five-year package worth more than \$430 million expired in May.

"This decision reflects the Board's significant concerns around rule of law and civil liberties in the Philippines," embassy spokeswoman Molly Koscina said in a statement emailed to AFP.

The US government set up the Millennium Challenge Corporation to promote economic growth and reduce poverty around the world.

However countries can only qualify if they "demonstrate a commitment to just and democratic governance, investments in its people, and economic freedom," according to the corporation's website.

The United States has been a vocal critic of the war on drugs, with President Barack Obama in September urging Duterte to prosecute it "the right way".

The criticism has severely strained ties between the longtime allies, which are bound by a mutual defence pact.

Duterte has branded Obama a "son of a whore" and told him to "go to hell", while seeking to establish closer ties with US rivals China and Russia.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation announced on Wednesday that new grants had been given to Burkina Faso, Sri Lanka and Tunisia.

China puts weapons on islets

Says a US think tank citing new satellite imagery; Beijing calls construction of defence facilities normal; Australia slams militarisation move

AFP, Washington

New satellite imagery shows China has apparently installed "significant" defensive weapons on a series of artificial islands it built in the South China Sea, a US-based think tank said Wednesday.

Beijing has created seven islets in the Spratly Islands in recent years, built up from much smaller land protuberances and reefs.

Although Beijing has said it does not intend to militarise the contested waters of the South China Sea, ongoing satellite imagery has shown the installation of military equipment and longer runways.

The latest images, released by the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI), show a series of hexagonal structures now in place on each of the seven islets.

They appear to be large anti-aircraft guns and close-in weapons systems (CIWS), the AMTI said.

Such systems are designed to take out incoming missiles and enemy aircraft.

"These gun and probable CIWS emplacements show that Beijing is serious about defence of its artificial islands in case of an armed contingency in the South China Sea," said AMTI, part of the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"Among other things, they would be the last line of defence against cruise missiles



A recent satellite image shows what CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative says appears to be anti-aircraft guns and what are likely to be close-in weapons systems on the artificial island Hughes Reef in the South China Sea.

PHOTO: REUTERS

launched by the United States or others against these soon-to-be-operational air bases."

AMTI director and Southeast Asia expert Greg Poling said watching the Chinese military build-up was like seeing pieces of a jigsaw puzzle come together.

China now has air bases, radar and communications systems, naval facilities and

defensive weaponry in place.

"I also would expect we will see antiship cruise missiles," Poling told AFP.

"You are beginning to have these interlocking rings of defense around these islands, (extending) China's ability to project power to the south."

The South China Sea issue has been brewing for years, with China, the Philippines,

Putin, Abe hold hot spring meet in Japan

AFP, Nagato

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday bunkered down for talks to try and resolve a territorial dispute that has prevented their countries from formally ending World War II hostilities.

Abe is hosting Putin at a hot spring summit in his ancestral city of Nagato in the hopes of achieving a breakthrough over the territory off Japan's northern coast seized by Soviet troops in 1945.

The four islands are known as the Southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan, and the dispute has been a thorn in relations for more than seven decades.

Abe would like to seal a deal as soon as possible because the islands' ageing Japanese former residents are dwindling in number.

Despite months of preparation, however, the outlook is not good, with both sides recently damping down expectations of

major progress.

The two leaders shook hands before sitting down for their first meeting during the two days of talks, with Abe welcoming Putin to his hometown.

"I think the summit today and tomorrow will bring a big contribution to the development of ties," Putin said.

Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said that Putin and Abe had dismissed aides and went into "one-on-one discussions" to try and make progress on the issue of negotiating a peace treaty.

Japanese media said that the two leaders were meeting with only interpreters present.

Lavrov also said that Putin suggested the two countries re-establish meetings between their defence ministers.

"The prime minister responded positively" to the suggestion, Lavrov said.

Putin has said he wants to end the "anachronism" of the two countries not having a World War II peace treaty.

WWII ISLAND ROW



Israeli youths push a water tank as they construct a temporary barrier in the Jewish settler outpost of Amona in the West Bank, yesterday. Residents of the wildcat Jewish settlement rejected a proposal to leave voluntarily, raising fears of violence as an evacuation deadline nears.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Austria MPs vote to seize Hitler birth house

AFP, Vienna

Austrian MPs voted late Wednesday to expropriate the home where Adolf Hitler was born, ending years of bitter legal wrangling with the current owner over the infamous building's future.

A large majority approved the new law, which was submitted by the government earlier this year in a bid to stop the dilapidated house in the northern town of Braunau am Inn from becoming a neo-Nazi shrine.

Local resident Gerlinde Pommer -- who has been renting the premises to the Austrian state since 1972 -- will receive compensation under the legislation.

It is not yet clear what will happen

with the yellow corner house at Number 15 Salzburger Vorstadt Street, located right in Braunau's historic centre.

In October, Interior Minister Wolfgang Sobotka announced it would be "torn down" to make place for a new building to be used by a charity.

He said the decision was based on recommendations from an expert committee.

But several of the 13-member panel were quick to deny that the commission had backed Sobotka's push to bulldoze the place where Hitler was born on April 20, 1889. "A demolition would amount to negating Austria's Nazi past," the experts said in a joint statement in October.



Beijing issues red alert for air pollution

AFP, Beijing

Beijing issued its first air pollution red alert for 2016 yesterday, as choking smog is expected to cover the city and surrounding areas in north China during the next five days.

From 8:00 pm today, half of Beijing's private cars will be ordered off the road, with an odd-even number plate system in force, according to a notice posted on the official website of the Beijing municipal government.

Construction sites will be closed, and some industrial plants and enterprises will limit or stop production, the notice added.

"Enterprises and public institutions can adjust office time or ask employees to telecommute," the notice said.

Russia thwarts IS attacks in Moscow

AFP, Moscow

Russia's federal security service said yesterday it had thwarted a series of attacks by Islamic State militants in Moscow, detaining four people.

"Four members of the terrorist group were detained" during raids yesterday, the FSB security service said in a statement.

"The militants were preparing the terrorist attacks on direct orders of a Turkey-based emissary of the Islamic State international terrorist organisation, who has been put on an international wanted list by Tajikistan," the statement said.

The FSB did not identify the suspect in question but said the four people detained were citizens of Tajikistan and Moldova.

The group was "planning to carry out a series of high-profile terrorist attacks in Moscow using powerful homemade explosive devices."

An AFP employee at the scene of the FSB operation in southern Moscow saw a block of apartments cordoned off for several hours as special forces stood by.

Obama allows Iran sanctions renewal

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama allowed US sanctions against Iran to be renewed yesterday, but in a surprise move declined to actually sign the legislation that brings the sanctions into force.

"The extension of the Iran Sanctions Act is becoming law without the president's signature," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said in a statement.

The president, who had previously been expected to sign the measure, symbolically let slide a midnight deadline to ink his name on the legislation -- which he has called unnecessary -- meaning the 10-year sanctions renewal will automatically become law.

Under the Iran nuclear deal signed in July 2015, world powers agreed to lift international sanctions in exchange for curbs to Iran's nuclear program.

Obama has said that passage of the US sanctions renewal would make no difference to the agreement because the White House will continue to suspend all the sanctions linked to Iran's nuclear program.

The language in the nuclear agreement makes it unclear whether renewing the sanctions -- and keeping the nuclear ones suspended -- amounts to a violation.

"This administration has made clear that an extension of the Iran Sanctions Act, while unnecessary, is entirely consistent with our commitments in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)," Earnest said, referring to the nuclear deal by its formal name.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani on Tuesday ordered the country's scientists to start work on nuclear-powered ships in response to the expected renewal of sanctions, criticizing the US move as a breach of the nuclear accord.

International analysts said the announcement was likely just a bluff, since it would be an extremely costly effort for little strategic gain.

NEWSIN brief

Colombia pardons 110 FARC rebels

AFP, Bogota

The Colombian government has pardoned at least 110 FARC rebels as part of a peace deal to end a 52-year conflict, the justice minister said Wednesday. The pardons, as well as an amnesty law currently before Congress, apply only to "political crimes" and not more serious offenses such as killings, rape and torture. Justice Minister Jorgo Londoño told a press conference.

India's SC bans liquor shops on highways

AFP, New Delhi

India's top court yesterday ordered the shutdown of all liquor shops along state and national highways, in a bid to reduce drunk driving in a country where road accidents kill 17 people every hour. The Supreme Court directed authorities to stop granting licenses to highway liquor shops with immediate effect and said all existing registrations would be cancelled by March 31, 2017, setting a deadline of April 1 for their closure.

34 asylum seekers return from Germany

AFP, Kabul

A group of 34 Afghan asylum seekers arrived in Kabul yesterday after being deported from Germany, the first such batch to be sent back after their applications were rejected. The Afghans arrived on a chartered flight from Frankfurt, following an Afghan-German deal earlier this year aimed at curbing the influx of migrants into the European nation.

Bahrain adjourns trial of opposition leader

AFP, Dubai

A Manama court yesterday adjourned the trial of Bahraini opposition leader and rights activist Nabil Rajab for a fourth time and rejected calls for his release, judicial sources said. The sources said defence lawyers argued for the release of Rajab, who attended the hearing, saying he was innocent of charges of having "insulted" Bahraini and Saudi authorities.

জনকল্যাণে রাজস্ব

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আয়কর মেলা (০১-০৭ নভেম্বর, ২০১৬), আয়কর সপ্তাহ (২৪-৩০ নভেম্বর, ২০১৬) ও আয়কর দিবস ২০১৬ তে অংশ গ্রহণকারী সম্মানিত করদাতাগণকে মহান বিজয় দিবসের আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন।

জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড তার সকল সম্মানিত করদাতাগণকে ৪৫ তম মহান বিজয় দিবসের আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা জানাচ্ছে। বিজয়ের এ মহান মাসে জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড অত্যন্ত আনন্দের সাথে জানাচ্ছে যে, ইতোমধ্যে ই- টিআইএন সিস্টেমে নিবন্ধিত করদাতার সংখ্যা ২৫,০০,০০০ (পঁচিশ লক্ষ) গত ০৭ ই ডিসেম্বর ২০১৬ তারিখে অতিক্রম করেছে, যা ১৪ ই ডিসেম্বর, ২০১৬ তারিখে ২৫,৪২,০০০ (পঁচিশ লক্ষ বিয়াল্লিশ হাজার) এ উন্নীত হয়েছে।। গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকারের মাননীয় অর্থমন্ত্রী জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ডের এ অসামান্য অর্জনের জন্য সম্মানিত করদাতাগণের ভূয়সী প্রশংসা করেছেন। আপনাদের আয়কর প্রদানের সহিষ্ঠা ও জাতীয় রাজস্ব ভান্ডারকে সমৃদ্ধ করার অংশীজন হওয়ার প্রবল আকাঙ্ক্ষা জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ডের এ ঐতিহাসিক অর্জনকে সম্ভবপূর্ণ করেছে। একজন সম্মানিত করদাতা হিসেবে ই- টিআইএন সিস্টেমে নিবন্ধিত হওয়ায় রাজস্ব পরিবার আপনাদের সকলের প্রতি কৃতজ্ঞতা জ্ঞাপন করছে।

আপনারা নিশ্চয় লক্ষ্য করেছেন যে, জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড তার সেবাসমূহকে পর্যায়ক্রমে ই-সেবায় রূপান্তরিত করে সম্মানিত করদাতাদের দোর গোড়ায় পৌঁছে দিতে নিরলসভাবে কাজ করে যাচ্ছে। এ প্রয়াসের অংশ হিসেবে গত ১ নভেম্বর ২০১৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখ হতে Online Return Filing ব্যবস্থা চালু করা হয়েছে। ইতোমধ্যে যে সকল সম্মানিত করদাতা আয়কর মেলা ও সার্কেল অফিস থেকে অনলাইনে আয়কর রিটার্ন দাখিল করার লক্ষ্যে ইউজার আইডি ও পাসওয়ার্ড গ্রহণ করেছেন এবং অনলাইনে আয়কর রিটার্ন দাখিল করেছেন জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড তাঁদেরকেও আন্তরিকভাবে ধন্যবাদ জ্ঞাপন করছে। জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড দৃঢ়ভাবে বিশ্বাস করে সম্মানিত করদাতাগণ Tax Online পদ্ধতির অধিকতর ব্যবহার এবং এর সুফল সম্পর্কে পরিচিত জনদের অবহিত ও উদ্বুদ্ধ করার মাধ্যমে ডিজিটাল এনবিআর বিনির্মাণে সহায়ক ভূমিকা পালন করবেন।

করদাতাগণ কর সংক্রান্ত যে কোন প্রয়োজনে সংশ্লিষ্ট সার্কেলে যোগাযোগ করলে কর কর্মকর্তাগণ কাঙ্ক্ষিত সেবা প্রদান করবেন। এছাড়াও অনলাইনে রিটার্ন দাখিল সংক্রান্ত তথ্য, সেবা ও পরামর্শ গ্রহণের জন্য অফিস দিনে সকাল ০৯ টা থেকে অপরাহ্ন ০৫ টা পর্যন্ত নিম্নোক্ত নাথারে কল করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা যাচ্ছে।

Tax online হেল্প লাইন নাম্বার (০২)৫৫৬৬৭০৭০

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দেশ হবে স্বনির্ভর

জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড।