

New Trump-era US-China dialogue set for June 21

AFP, Washington

The first meeting in a much-touted new diplomatic and defense dialogue between the United States and China will take place in Washington on June 21, the State Department announced Thursday.

North Korea's nuclear weapons program is likely to top the agenda for next week's talks, which follow Pentagon chief Jim Mattis's assurances to Asian allies that the initiative will not compromise US opposition to China's activities in the South China Sea.

President Donald Trump -- who frequently denounced China on the campaign trail -- has turned to Beijing to help pressure Pyongyang, with Mattis arguably his most important statesman on the issue.

Mattis and US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will host Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi and General Fang Fenghui, Chief of the People's Liberation Army's Joint Staff Department, along with other officials from both sides, the announcement said.

The meeting aims "to expand areas of cooperation while narrowing differences on key diplomatic and security issues," the State Department added in a statement.

Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to the dialogue during their talks in April at the Republican billionaire leader's Mar-a-Lago weekend retreat in Florida.

After meeting with Xi, Trump -- who once accused China of "raping" the US -- praised its leader as a "good man," saying it would be inappropriate to put pressure on Beijing while Washington is seeking its help with Pyongyang.

Mattis directly addressed the North Korea issue during a major Asia-Pacific defense summit earlier this month, calling its nuclear ambitions a "threat to us all," in an appeal for international unity.

It is "imperative that we do our part each of us to fulfill our obligations and work together to support our shared goal of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula," Mattis said at the event in Singapore.

"The Trump administration is encouraged by China's renewed commitment to work with the international community toward denuclearization," he added.

Mexican journalists demand justice in colleague's murder

AFP, Mexico City

Murdered Mexican journalist Javier Valdez's widow, children and colleagues led protests Thursday to mark one month since he was gunned down in the street, condemning the lack of progress in the investigation.

Valdez, 50, was shot a dozen times in broad daylight on May 15 outside the offices of Riodoce, the newspaper he co-founded in the violent western state of Sinaloa.

A veteran crime reporter, award-winning author and longtime AFP contributor, he is the highest-profile journalist yet to be murdered in Mexico, where more than 100 of his colleagues have been killed since 2000.

The crime drew international outcry and forced President Enrique Pena Nieto to publicly address the issue for the first time.

But one month on, Valdez's colleagues are unimpressed by the results of the president's promises to fight impunity, in a country where more than 90 percent of these cases remain unpunished.

One journalist pulled an ambush protest on Pena Nieto as he delivered a speech to media executives on his government's commitment to a free press.

"Enough bloodshed," read a banner held up by journalist Alvaro Delgado of the newsweekly Proceso.

Hundreds of journalists and activists held protest marches in Sinaloa's capital, Culiacan, and Mexico City's historic center. Smaller protests were held in several other cities around the country.

In Mexico City, protesters carried pictures of murdered and missing journalists and read out the long list of their names.

One group unfurled a large Mexican flag with the green and red replaced by black. Its insignia read: "The state is dead."

The investigation into Valdez's death shows little progress.

Speaking at the protest in Culiacan, Valdez's widow, Griselda Triana, voiced outrage at the authorities' "incompetence."

"The few times they've approached me to tell me about their progress on the case, the truth is that you can tell they're useless," she said.

"I ask myself if I haven't crossed paths with Javier's murderers this month in the street," she told reporters.

Dhaka-Aricha-Khulna

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days before and after the Eid, he said.

Shafiquel, however, admitted that four landing stations at Daulatdia were vulnerable.

"Big ferries are already having difficulties at these landing stations," he added.

Faruk Talukder Sohel pointed out that besides the lack of landing stations and ferries, there was a syndicate at the terminal that allows trucks to cross the river during the Eid in exchange of money.

The authorities need to stop this, he added.

Najmus Sadat, deputy commissioner of Manikganj, said they would be alert and take action if they found any such syndicate.

Azmal Hossain, deputy general manager of BIWTC, said usually 3,000 to 4,000 vehicles cross the Padma using the ferry ghat every day and the number would multiply during the Eid.

Handling the traffic will be a big challenge, he said.

After going across the Padma, the

holidaymakers heading to Jessore and Khulna will have to take a detour through Jhenidah as an iron bridge at Shimakhali Bazar in Shalikhha of Magura on Jessore-Dhaka collapsed five months ago.

The construction of another bridge is yet to be completed.

Shamsul Islam, the driver of a bus, said it takes around an hour longer to go to Jessore from Magura.

People of southern districts also use the Dhaka-Mawa highway. Gridlocks may occur in the absence of proper management of ferry and launch services at Shimulia and Kathalbari ghats.

Bad weather may also contribute to the tailbacks, a staff of the ghat said.

Dhaka-Chittagong

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often takes 15 to 16 hours to cross the distance during Eid holidays, mainly because of the traffic congestion at these two points and accidents involving overloaded vehicles at several other points of the highway.

Dhaka-Sylhet

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on the Shahbajpur bridge in Brahmanbaria's Sarail. After several cracks developed on the bridge, a

bailey bridge was constructed over the Titas river there. Vehicles move slowly on that bridge as it starts to shake whenever a heavy truck crosses it.

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which eat up a large portion of the road space, further halt the traffic flow. The increased number of vehicles during holidays will only cause congestions, our Mymensingh correspondent reports.

6 found guilty

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These are the latest convictions in a long-running case that at its outset involved 189 defendants.

One of the most high profile, Yakub Memon, was executed in 2015 -- a decade after he was convicted under controversial anti-terror legislation that is no longer on the statute books.

The attack also embroiled Bollywood star Sanjay Dutt, who served time for buying weapons from gangsters accused of orchestrating the bombings before walking free last year.

MUMBAI BLASTS CASE TIMELINE
March 12, 1993: Within an hour, a total of 13 bombs exploded throughout Mumbai. Most of the bombs were planted in cars and scooters. The explosions killed 257 people and injured 713.
April 19, 1993: The Crime Branch arrests actor Sanjay Dutt at Mumbai airport on charges of possession of an AK-56 rifle, a 9mm pistol and ammunition.
April 28, 1993: Dutt confesses about possession of arms and later destroying it.
May 5, 1993: The Bombay High Court grants Dutt an interim bail.
November 4, 1993: Over 10,000 page-long primary charge-sheet filed against 189 accused, including Dutt.
April 10, 1994: The TADA court discharges 26 accused, while charges against the remaining 163 framed.
April 19, 1994: Trial begins.
October 14, 1994: The Supreme Court grants bail to Dutt, which was cancelled by the trial court in July.
November 20, 1994: Dutt takes back his confession.
June 13, 2006: Gangster Abu Salem's trial separated.
September 12, 2006: The court pronounced four members of the Memon family guilty and acquits three. It announced death penalty to 12 other convicts and 20 are given life imprisonment.
July 31, 2007: Dutt gets six years rigorous imprisonment.
August 20, 2007: Sanjay Dutt appeals to the Supreme Court.
November 1, 2011: The SC begins hearing on appeals filed by Dutt and 100 other convicts as well as the state.
March 21, 2013: The SC upholds death sentence of Yakub Memon, transfers death sentence of 10 convicts to life imprisonment and also upholds life imprisonment of 16 out of 18 convicts. The court declares five year jail term to Dutt and asks him to surrender within four weeks.
July 21, 2015: The SC rejects Yakub Memon's petition.
July 29, 2015: President and Maharashtra Governor reject Yakub's second mercy plea.
July 30, 2015: Yakub Memon hanged at Nagpur central jail. SC rejects a last-minute plea seeking a 14-day stay on his execution.
February 25, 2016: Sanjay Dutt walks free from Yerwada jail.
May 29, 2017: The TADA court announces June 16 as the date for pronouncement of judgement on trial against Abu Salem and other six accused.

SOURCE: LIVEMINT

MALAYSIA'S 1MDB SCANDAL US moves to seize another \$540m

AFP, Washington

The US has acted to seize another \$540 million in assets, including a luxury yacht, allegedly bought with money stolen from Malaysia's multibillion-dollar 1MDB fund, a move Kuala Lumpur slammed on Friday as headline-seeking.

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak is battling allegations that huge sums were looted from the state fund he founded, in complex overseas deals that are being investigated by authorities in several countries.

The latest move by US federal prosecutors compounds court cases launched last year in which Washington sought to confiscate more than \$1 billion allegedly embezzled by businessmen with political connections in Malaysia -- bringing the total amount US officials say was stolen to \$4.5 billion.

"This money financed the lavish lifestyles of the alleged co-conspirators at the expense and detriment of the Malaysian people," acting US Assistant Attorney General Kenneth Blanco said in a statement.

In court papers filed Thursday in Los Angeles, federal prosecutors said that in 2014, Malaysian businessman Jho Low stole \$850 million from funds borrowed from a syndicate of banks, ostensibly to repay options on bonds issued in an earlier stage of the scheme.

Be our trade

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Hasina mentioned that Bangladesh was establishing 100 "special economic zones" (SEZs) across the country and already allocated special economic zones exclusively to China, India and Japan on G2G basis.

Bangladesh is also developing a number of hi-tech parks, she said.

"Our knowledge industry, ICT and related sectors are also expanding rapidly. Shipbuilding is another fast-growing industry in Bangladesh, by making world-class light to medium sized ocean-going vessels," she said.

The PM said Bangladesh made a significant progress in the areas of poverty alleviation, attaining food security, improving health and sanitation, women empowerment and expanding social safety programmes.

Hasina mentioned that PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), which offers services in auditing, accounting and consultancy, in its February 2017 report predicated Bangladesh to be "one of the three fastest growing economies globally over the next three decades".

"The strength of Bangladesh economy was globally recognised. We have achieved a growth rate of 7.24 percent this year," she said.

She said Bangladesh was a success story in the ready-made garment sector. "We're now the 2nd largest garment exporter in the world. Like the RMG sector, other sectors are making significant progress as well."

About the development of the pharmaceutical sector, Hasina said the pharmaceutical products of Bangladesh were now being exported to 83 countries, including the USA.

"We're fast emerging as a major global hub for high quality, low-cost generic medicines, including Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients," she told her audience.

Hasina pointed out that Bangladesh became self-sufficient in food despite its small land area compared to its vast population.

According to Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the PM said, Bangladesh was among the top 10 global producers in horticulture, inland fisheries, rice and potato. Agricultural innovation, led by small and marginal farmers with appropriate government support, was the key to

this success.

Swedish Minister for Enterprise and Innovation Mikael Damberg spoke on the occasion.

A memorandum of understanding between Sweden-Bangladesh Business Council, Stockholm, and Nordic Chamber of Commerce and Industries was also signed to strengthen cooperation in the areas of trade and investment.

The MoU was inked in the presence of Hasina and the Swedish minister for enterprise and innovation.

In another development, two leading Swedish companies -- Investor AB and ABB Sweden -- have expressed their keen interest to work for the development of Bangladesh's RMG and power sectors.

The offer came when President of Investor AB Jacob Wallenberg and Vice-President Marcus Wallenberg and CEO of ABB Sweden Johan Soderstrom separately met Hasina at Grand Hotel.

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters after the meetings.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque, Bangladesh Ambassador to Sweden Golam Sarwar and Swedish Ambassador to Bangladesh Johan Frisell, among others, were present at the meetings.

Snake-like

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firing a jet of air.

A snake-like robot (pictured) that measures 26 feet (8 metres) and is covered in short brush-like hairs has been built to probe disaster zones by Japanese scientists. The bizarre machine can climb over walls and rubble and has been designed to reach trapped people

Professor Satoshi Tadokoro, a researcher from Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan, who worked on the project, said the rescue robot can stretch beyond the capabilities of a human being.

He said the machine can search inaccessible areas of collapsed homes after earthquakes and carry out checks on whether infrastructure is safe.

Professor Tadokoro and his team were inspired by a number of recent disasters that have struck their nation, including the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

UK opens criminal probe

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where some of the survivors are being housed, as anger grows among local residents about allegations that fire safety concerns were ignored for years.

The government has ordered a judge-led inquiry into Wednesday's disaster, which is under pressure to act quickly.

"Something's gone wrong here, something's gone drastically wrong," Communities and Local Government Minister Sajid Javid told BBC radio.

Javid said inspections of similar buildings had been ordered, with particular attention to the modern cladding used to beautify and add an insulation layer to ageing concrete and steel structures.

"We need to do whatever it takes to make people that live in those properties safe: that's either make the properties safe or find some other accommodation, it has to be done," he said, adding that survivors from the tower would be re-housed in the local area.

Opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has called for houses in the area to be "requisitioned" for survivors.

Prime Minister Theresa May has come under criticism for not meeting residents when she visited the site on Thursday to talk with emergency workers.

She met with injured survivors in hospital yesterday.

Locals yelled questions at mayor Sadiq Khan when he walked through the neighbourhood yesterday.

"How many children died? What are you going to do about it?" a young boy asked Khan, as the mayor tried to stop tensions rising further.

The fire forced residents to flee through black smoke down the single stairwell, jump out of windows or even drop their children to safety.

One of the victims was named as Mohammed Alhajali, a 23-year-old Syrian refugee, who came to Britain in 2014 with his brother.

"Mohammed undertook a dangerous journey to flee war and death in Syria, only to meet it here in the UK, in his own home," the Syrian Solidarity Campaign said in a statement.

Alhajali, who lived on the 14th floor, was a civil engineering student at West London University.

"His dream was to be able to go back home one day and rebuild Syria," the campaign group said.

Questions are growing about how the flames spread so quickly, engulfing the tower's 120 apartments in what fire chiefs said was an unprecedented blaze.

The focus of criticism is on the cladding fitted to external walls of the 1974 tower as part of a £8.7 million (\$11 million, 9.9 million euros) refit completed last year.

According to media reports, the cladding had a plastic core and was similar to that used by high-rise buildings in France, the United Arab Emirates and Australia, which had also suffered fires that spread.

The Times reported that the type of cladding used on the building was banned in US buildings taller than 40

feet (12.2 metres) because of fire safety fears.

It said the company that manufactured the cladding also made fire-resistant models that cost fractionally more than the standard version.

Harley Facades, which fitted the panels, said in a statement: "At this time, we are not aware of any link between the fire and the exterior cladding."

In addition to debate over the cladding, questions have also been raised over why there was no sprinkler system in the Grenfell Tower which could have helped stop the fire spreading, or any central smoke alarm system that would have woken sleeping residents.

ILO

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that the legislation conforms to ILO standards.

The committee has been asked to complete an initial draft by August.

Both the TCC and the RMG Tripartite Consultative Committee (RMG TCC) will be supported by the ILO which will act as their secretariat, according to a report of the Committee on the Application of Standards.

The recently adopted and published standard operating procedures for registration has already been implemented which reduced the timeframe for resolving issues concerning registration and the Bangladesh government should also cut the registration rejection rate, said the report.

A transparent remediation strategy with a timeline was to be developed and shared with the committee by the end of August, the report added.

2 killed in blast in Cameroon

AFP, Yaoundé

Two civilians have been killed in a suicide attack in Cameroon's restive Far North, an area regularly targeted by Boko Haram jihadists, local sources told AFP early Friday.

The incident, which took place on Thursday evening, saw a female bomber entering Limani on the border with Nigeria and blowing herself up "behind the town's public school," a source close to the security services said.

"There were three people killed: two civilians and the bomber," the source said. Details of the attack were confirmed to AFP by a member of the local vigilance committee.

In recent weeks, the restive Far North region has seen a resurgence in Boko Haram attacks after months of relative calm.

Last week, a soldier was killed in an attack in Kolofata, 20 kilometres (12 miles) west of Limani, and in early June, nine civilians died in a double suicide bombing in the same town.