

Putin to visit Turkey next week for Jerusalem, Syria talks

AFP, Istanbul

Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Turkey on Monday for talks with his counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Syria and the United States' recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the Turkish presidency said yesterday.

Putin will visit Ankara "at the invitation of" Erdogan, the presidency said in a statement, adding that the talks would focus on the latest developments on Jerusalem and the situation in Syria.

The Kremlin confirmed the visit, saying the two men planned to "discuss current questions of bilateral cooperation and above all the progress of joint projects in energy."

This appeared to be a reference to the TurkStream pipeline that is being built under the Black Sea to pump Russian natural gas to Turkey, and also to the Akkuyu nuclear power plant Moscow is building in southern Turkey.

It added that talks are also scheduled "on key international problems, including the situation in the Middle East and finding a solution in Syria."

The latest encounter between the two leaders comes at a time of intense diplomacy between Turkey and Russia, especially over Syria.

It will be their eighth face-to-face meeting this year.

Britain, EU

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scuppered a possible deal on Monday with their fierce opposition to wording they felt would divide the North from the rest of the UK.

Arlene Foster, leader of the pro-British DUP party, told Sky News she was "pleased" to see changes to the deal following their demands.

The deal commits both sides to respect the 1998 Good Friday agreement, which ended decades of violence between nationalists who want a united Ireland and Northern Ireland unionists loyal to Britain.

Under the agreement, London will find a way to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland "through the overall EU-UK relationship" but if this cannot be achieved, Britain will keep "full alignment" with the EU single market and customs union rules that are crucial to the Good Friday Agreement.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar welcomed the deal as "the end of the beginning", saying his government had "achieved all that we set out to achieve" and warning they would remain "vigilant" in upcoming negotiations.

On its divorce bill, previously the most contentious issue, Britain agreed to pay a settlement amounting to between 45 billion and 55 billion euros.

Concerning the welfare and social rights of some three million European citizens living in the UK after Brexit, as part of the deal Britain agreed to protect them with a mechanism to give EU citizens recourse to the EU's top court if they feel they are being treated unfairly.

TIME WARNING

Tusk however warned that there was "de facto less than a year" for trade talks as it has taken a year and a half since Britain's June 2016 Brexit referendum to settle divorce terms.

The former Polish premier, who deals with EU leaders, released nine draft guidelines on future relations so member states could approve them for next week's summit.

He said he would propose the "immediate" opening of talks on a transition period, which Britain has estimated at around two years, but warned Britain would have to "respect the whole of EU law, including new law" during that period.

That is likely to be a red line for pro-Brexit members of May's Conservative party.

Tusk said London must also respect budgetary commitments and judicial oversight during the transition period -- in which the remaining 27 European Union states will carry on meeting and making decisions without Britain having a say.

Britain will also have to collect EU customs tariffs and ensure all EU checks are performed on borders with third countries, according to a copy of the nine draft guidelines obtained by AFP.

Tusk called for more clarity from Britain on what kind of trade relationship it wants, but the bloc's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said London had left little room for manoeuvre.

He told a press conference that Britain's insistence on leaving the single market and customs union left the EU with no choice but to work on a post-Brexit free trade agreement modelled on the bloc's deal with Canada.

"It's not us, it's our British friends who are giving these red lines which close certain doors," Barnier said.

The run-up to the deal had caused fevered speculation, with Juncker's chief of staff Martin Selmayr finally tweeting a picture of white smoke -- the sign used by the Vatican to signify the election of a new pope -- after May's arrival.



Once you notice the steam and smell the delicious aroma, you know winter is here. With just a few days left to the Bangla month of Poush, the first month of the season, the vendors of Dhaka have started selling traditional *pithas*. In this photo taken in Motijheel yesterday, a man is steaming *Bhapa Pitha*, one of the winter favourites.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

BB, NY Fed plan to sue Manila bank

FROM PAGE 1

Officials from Bangladesh Bank and the New York Fed spoke about legal action against RCBC in a conference call last month that was also attended by two representatives from SWIFT, according to three sources in Dhaka who had direct knowledge of the conversations.

It was agreed that Bangladesh Bank would send a proposal on the suit to the New York Fed, they said.

"The aim is to file a case by March-April in New York," said one of the sources. "Work is on. Bangladesh Bank is likely to send something to the Fed soon."

The source said the idea was it would be a civil suit to recover the money, and that Bangladesh hoped the Fed and SWIFT would be joint petitioners.

Subhankar Saha, a spokesman for Bangladesh Bank, said he had no knowledge of any plans to sue RCBC

but that "efforts are on to recover the entire stolen money".

The New York Fed and SWIFT declined comment.

A source familiar with the New York Fed's thinking confirmed that Bangladesh Bank's external counsel raised the idea of filing a suit against RCBC in the call.

The New York Fed officials agreed to review any proposal Bangladesh Bank wrote up but they did not formally agree to a joint effort, and have not since worked on it nor heard from Bangladesh Bank, the source said.

There was no indication that the Fed would join the suit once it had received and reviewed the proposal.

ROGUE EMPLOYEES

RCBC has blamed rogue employees and Philippine prosecutors have filed money laundering charges against a former RCBC bank manager and four people who owned the bank accounts where the funds were sent, but are not

identifiable since the accounts were in fake names. They are the only people to be formally cited anywhere in the world in association with the crime.

Bangladeshi officials have cited internal RCBC documents, also seen by Reuters, to assert that the Filipino bank ignored suspicions raised by some RCBC officials when the money was first remitted to the accounts on Feb 5, 2016, and then delayed acting on requests from RCBC's head office to freeze the funds on Feb 9.

RCBC did not respond to requests for comment. But it has said in the past that it would not pay any compensation and that Bangladesh Bank bore responsibility for the theft since it was negligent.

RCBC was fined a record one billion Philippine pesos (\$20 million) by the country's central bank last year for its failure to prevent the movement of the stolen money through it.

Separately, a Bangladesh court has

sent "letters rogatory" to the United States seeking the findings of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) into the case, said the main police investigator in Dhaka.

Letters rogatory are documents used to obtain judicial assistance from foreign courts.

"We have questions for the Federal Reserve Bank, we want to collect the FBI report, what their findings are," Molla Nazrul Islam, a special superintendent of police in Bangladesh, told Reuters this week.

An FBI spokeswoman said the agency could not comment on ongoing cases.

A hacking group called Lazarus that is believed to have connections to North Korea has been linked to the Bangladesh cyber heist and some US officials said earlier this year that prosecutors were building a case against Pyongyang.

But no case has yet been filed.

Bangladesh on right track to earn \$5b

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Mahboob Zaman, former president of BASIS, said the country missed "the first train" of business process outsourcing (BPO) and other chances as well. But the country's ICT industry is now more capable and ready to face new challenges, and should not miss "the train of adopting new technologies".

Now, 120 Bangladeshi companies are exporting ICT products worth \$750-\$800 million to 35 countries, he mentioned.

"We need to increase our exports seven to eight times within the next three years if we are to achieve the target," said Zaman, also managing director of DataSoft Systems Bangladesh Ltd.

"We have a big number of work orders from other countries. But we

are unable to accept all of those for a lack of skilled manpower."

Zaman also stressed the need for adopting new technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial inelegance and robotics to help the industry grow further.

On the reasons behind the shortage of skilled manpower, Jabbar said it takes at least three years for a university to modify or update its syllabus, and new technologies hit the market even before the syllabus is changed.

The BASIS president noted that most of the local ICT companies cannot take part in government procurement due to various limitations such as failure to meet the requirement of having a certain annual turnover.

"If Bangladesh Bank had taken IT

support from a local company, it would have never fallen victim to cyberattacks," said Jabbar.

In February last year, hackers stole \$100 million (Tk 780 crore) from the BB's foreign currency account with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

In his key-note presentation, M Rokonzaman, a professor of electrical and computer engineering at North South University, said, "Around 800 million traditional jobs will be lost due to advancements in robotics by 2030, and Bangladesh needs to prepare itself to face that challenge."

He also estimated that Bangladesh's export earnings from the ICT sector would reach \$11 billion by 2028. But for that to happen, the country needs to make good preparations in various areas.

Rashad Kabir, managing director of Dream 71, a leading software company in the country, said, "Outsourcing alone will not be enough to achieve the target. We need to get involved in big government projects in other countries."

And to that end, Bangladeshi companies can target development countries like Myanmar and Afghanistan, he added.

Speaking on the occasion, Maldivian Defence and National Security Minister Thorik Ali Luthufi said they are very interested in taking digital solutions from Bangladesh as it has made significant progress in the ICT sector, compared to many other countries.

Abu Hena Mohammad Razee Hasan, deputy governor of the central bank, also spoke at the seminar.

Waste but not useless

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Talking to The Daily Star recently, Azad, in his 50s, claimed that he already invested around Tk 500 crore and wanted to expand the business further.

Azizu Traders was not built in one day.

Over the years, Azad's interests shifted from electronic equipment to electronic waste.

In 1984, he moved to Singapore with Tk 1 lakh. Later, he started to carry different electrical appliances in his luggage for selling them in Dhaka. After computers became popular in the 1990s, he joined a Singaporean firm to learn about the machine. He worked there till 1995.

The following year, he began collecting and exporting reconditioned computers to as many as 20 countries. But he found a good number of computers beyond repair or reuse.

It was then that the idea of recycling came to his mind.

He researched Singaporean companies that recycled e-waste. His interest in the work grew fast, and soon he learnt about the business from a local recycler. In 2003, the self-made man took his son Sidur to that country and engaged him in the venture. Sidur too learnt about the busi-

ness for three years.

In the meantime, Azad returned to Bangladesh and started collecting e-waste and exporting them to Singapore, working as a local agent for TES-AMM, a global leader in e-waste recycling.

On his return, Sidur first created a network of scrap traders and briefed them about the importance of e-waste.

He also gave advance to 300 such traders to collect and supply electronic waste, especially Printed Circuit Board, to their company.

Initially, it was a tiresome task and the father and son were able to collect only 10 tonnes of waste in seven months. That was many years ago. Now, they collect 50 tonnes every month.

Azad and Sidur exported e-waste to Singapore regularly between 2008 and 2014. That year, they started their own recycling plant on an 80,000 square-foot area in Fatullah. They also had their 130 workers trained by experts from Singapore.

The plant also recycles fibre, mixed metal, aluminium, lead, copper, plastic and other items.

Sidur, now aged around 30, said, "From the recycled waste, we make finished products for sale. We first

make copper wire from the waste and then produce plastic, aluminium products and other items."

Mohammad Jahangir, proprietor of Jahangir Traders, said they buy copper, silver, aluminum and other materials from Azizu Traders on a regular basis.

The company then melts down the metals and makes solid metal blocks out of them for supplying to different factories that make items like spoons and other utensils with them.

Abdur Rahim, owner of Junk Enterprise, an e-waste collector, said his company gathered all sorts of electrical goods and waste, including circuit boards, hard disks, CDs, cassettes, and LED monitors, through 68 scrap collectors across the country.

"We sell those to Azizu Traders. For example, we sell a tonne of mobile circuit board for Tk 9 lakh while RAM [random access memory] for Tk 15 lakh," he said.

Sidur said they buy per kg of mobile phone circuit board for Tk 800. For branded cell phone, it can be up to Tk 1,700.

By recycling e-waste, China produces around 80 tonnes gold every year, he claimed, adding that the sector had a huge potential in Bangladesh as well.

Azad said, "Everybody talks about environment pollution but no one really takes things upon themselves to minimise the problem. Recycling e-waste helps reduce pollutants significantly."

A 2014 study by the Environment and Social Development Organisation, an NGO, found that the generation of e-waste increased significantly in recent years and Bangladesh produced over 10 million tonnes of e-waste every year.

The study also claimed that an alarming 50,000 children were involved in collection and recycling of e-waste. These practices have led to illness and even deaths.

Azad said although their work protects the environment, the venture failed to attract government support such as low-interest loan and export incentives despite repeated attempts. "The government should extend all its support to us. We deserve it."

When Azad first shared his business idea with his relatives, they laughed at him. They thought he was wasting his money.

"But days have changed. It's a booming business and my relatives still can't believe what I have achieved from scrap," he said with a big smile.

BNP says

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BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

Addressing a press conference at the party chief's Gulshan office, he said, "Apologise for publicising false and defamatory information. Stop spreading false information against Khaleda Zia. Otherwise, we will be forced to take legal action against you [prime minister]."

The BNP leader said the PM's remarks were not only "baseless", but also "illegal and punishable".

Fakhrul called upon the PM to withdraw her comments immediately. "We strongly protest and condemn her comments. We call upon her to refrain from making such indecent remarks."

Speaking at a press conference at the Gono Bhaban on Thursday, Hasin alleged that the BNP chief laundered huge amount of money to Saudi Arabia. She said it was regrettable that the news was reported by the foreign press, not by the local media.

"It is very unfortunate that I have seen no interest on the part of the local media, except for two TV channels and two newspapers, to run the news," she said adding that "I don't understand why the [local] media is so weak towards the patrons of assailants and anti-liberation forces."

Fakhrul yesterday said no responsible media outlet can run such false and fabricated news.

He further alleged that making ill efforts to force the media to run imaginary corruption reports against Khaleda and her two sons only proved the PM's "political vengeance, meanness and shallowness".

Two suspects

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the criminals opened fire. The law enforcers fired retaliatory shots, triggering the "gunfight". Two of the criminals were hit by bullets.

Doctors declared them dead after they were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, he said.

The police official claimed that Al Amin and Saddam were involved in the killing of Siddik Hossen Munshi in his Banani office on November 14.

CCTV footage showed that four people entered the office of Munshi Overseas; shot dead Siddik and injured his three staffers, police earlier said.

The "shootout" happened two days after police named Al Amin and Saddam as murder suspects at a press conference, which was held to brief journalists on the arrest of another suspect Helal Uddin, who allegedly coordinated the murder.

Police also claimed that Helal and at least five others took part in the killing on the instruction of a former Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leader, who fled the country two years ago and is now leaving in Sweden.

Family of Saddam alleged that some people, identifying themselves as detectives, picked up Saddam, a resident of city's Rampura, from his father-in-law's house in Comilla on November 26.

Al Amin's family alleged that law enforcers picked him up from Tongi on December 2.

Both the families claimed that the two were innocent.

According to the families, Al Amin used to sell toys, while Saddam used to sell mosquito coils and candles.

Al Amin's wife Khadiza Begum told The Daily Star that his husband used to stay in the capital's Abdullahpur.

"Had he killed anyone, he would not have stayed at home," she said.

Ruma, an aunty of Saddam, said they went to the DB office on Minto Road in search of her nephew on information that he was picked up by detectives. But police denied picking him up.

"If he was not picked up by police, then who did it?" she said.

May faces hardliner backlash despite deal

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May scored a key success in clinching a Brexit agreement with Brussels yesterday but faced an immediate backlash from hardliners at home for making compromises.

"It's not Brexit," Nigel Farage, the former leader of the UK Independence Party and a major driving force behind last year's Brexit referendum, told BBC radio.

"A deal in Brussels is good news for Mrs May as we can now move on to the next stage of humiliation," he said on Twitter.

Boxed in by rival pro-Brexit and pro-EU factions within her own Conservative party, May has been at risk of being toppled ever since a general election in June in which she lost her majority.

The Sun earlier this week even reported a plot to oust her before Christmas and install her Brexit Secretary David Davis as prime minister.

While that threat may have receded for now, it has not gone away and May faces an uphill struggle getting parliamentary backing for the deal.