



Migrants walk by the road that links Tapachula with Huixtla, during their journey towards the United States. The photo was taken in Tapachula, Mexico, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Dropping INF treaty would let US update its nuclear arsenal

AFP, Washington

The US scrapping of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with Russia could launch a new arms race, but will also allow the United States to update its nuclear arsenal, a publicly stated goal for the past year.

President Donald Trump announced Friday the US was suspending its obligations under the INF treaty as of Saturday and starting a process to withdraw in six months.

NATO has said that US allies "fully support" its withdrawal from the pact, and agreed that Russia's 9M729 ground-launched cruise missile systems violates the treaty.

A day later, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a tit-for-tat withdrawal from the pact to develop "new types of weapons," calling Washington's decision "unilateral and totally unprovoked."

The United States has complained about the alleged Russian violations for years.

But now it's also speaking openly about its chance to upgrade its arms stock.

When the United States unveiled its new nuclear policy in February 2018, it warned that it planned to buy two new weapons: a new type of low-power nuclear missile to be launched from a submarine, and a new type of nuclear cruise missile that would violate the INF agreement.

This new missile -- which would only come into service within a decade -- would only be a violation of the treaty if it were deployed, the Pentagon says.

It has always stressed that a research and development program was not prohibited by the 1987 treaty with Moscow.

So starting Saturday "we are no longer bound by the constraints of the Treaty," Johnny Michael, a Pentagon spokesman, told AFP Friday.

The 2019 US military budget provides funds for developing this new intermediate-range land-based missile and "we are still in the research phase," the spokesman said.

In fact, the Pentagon was already preparing its response to Russian missile 9M729, with a top range of 480 kilometers, Moscow insists.

But Washington, backed by NATO allies, says that Russian missile has already been tested on much greater distances.

Johns Hopkins University's Jeffrey Pryce argues that the INF treaty favors the United States because, while it prohibits all surface-to-air missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers, conventional or intermediate, anything fired from a submarine or dropped by a bomber, simply is not covered.

"Thus, the INF Treaty deprives Russia of a significant military capability, for which its size and location are strategic advantages," the former Pentagon official said on Twitter.

"The US, by contrast, has the world's most powerful navy and air force. And the INF Treaty does not restrict sea-launched or air-launched missiles."

According to figures from the anti-nuclear group Union of Concerned Scientists, the US nuclear arsenal holds 4,600 nuclear weapons, of which 1,740 are deployed and ready to be used at any time, and 2,922 stored.

Ten US Navy submarines armed with nuclear missiles are constantly patrolling the seas, the group said.

Russia has a similar number of nuclear warheads, but its nuclear submarines are in bad shape, as several accidents have shown in recent years.

China, keen to assert military supremacy in Asia, also has intermediate-range missiles. According to experts, 95 percent of Chinese missiles would violate the INF treaty if Beijing was a signatory.

Michael Krepon, of the Stimson Center, believes that "we're headed toward a new nuclear arms race."

"Any time your national defense budget is ten times bigger than Russia's and five times bigger than China's, you can afford an arms race. But arms races usually don't end well: even if you stay ahead of the competition, your security is diminished."

Those affected to be evaluated

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"How will she evaluate those students' exam papers? Will she give full marks to them? What will be the standard of evaluating the papers of those students? The minister didn't mention anything about that," he said.

In response, Dipu Moni said her ministry would welcome anyone who comes up with a better suggestion in this regard.

Earlier, opposition JP MP Mujibul Haque Chunnun, during a question-answer session, raised the issue saying the future of the affected students would be in danger due to the mistake.

On Saturday, examinees in at least 18 examination centres were given wrong question papers of the Bangla First Paper exam. They were provided with the questions according to the 2018 syllabus, which, like every year, was prepared for students who missed the previous year's exams.

The centres where the incident occurred are Madaripur, Chattogram, Jamalpur, Naogaon, Sherpur, Satkhira, Munsiganj, Gaibandha, Brahmanbaria and Bagerhat, according to media reports.

Meanwhile, at least 16 teachers, including six centre secretaries, were relieved from their duties for distributing wrong question papers over the last two days.

In Chandpur, four secretaries of four exams centres were relieved of their duties in Hajiganj upazila.

Hajiganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Baishakhi Barua told our local correspondent that six other teachers of different educational institutions were also relieved from their duties for the same reason.

In Madaripur, six teachers -- one

secretary, one assistant secretary, two hall superintendents and two assistant teachers -- were relieved from their duties, our local correspondent reports.

The teachers provided the previous year's Bangla first paper questions to 180 examinees, said Mohammad Obaidul Islam, deputy commissioner of Madaripur.

The students informed the teachers about the wrong question paper soon after the exam began but the teachers did not take any immediate steps in this regard, he said.

In Chattogram, punitive action was taken against one examination centre secretary.

Md Obaidul Haque, exam centre secretary of Patenga High School, also the acting head master of the school, was relieved from duty as he did not follow the instructions of the board.

Mahbub Hasan, exam controller of Chattogram Education Board, told The Daily Star that the secretary redistributed the question papers, around one hour after the wrong question papers were handed out, without the board being informed.

"He cannot distribute the question papers after the mistake on his own without informing the education board," said Mahbub.

"The decision of taking action against six other examination centre secretaries would be decided today [Monday]," he added.

Wrong question papers were given to examinees of at least seven centres under the board.

Yesterday, the education minister in the House said that examinees could not be affected due to the mistake of "certain invigilators and concerned secretaries" of the centres.

Contacted, Prof M Ziaul Haque,

chairman of Dhaka Education Board, said they were collecting reports from the upazila administrations as part of their primary investigation.

"We will analyse the reports and then form a probe body to investigate who are responsible and how many examinees were affected," he told this newspaper.

This year, a total of 21.35 lakh students from 28,682 institutions, have registered for the SSC exams.

A crime

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According to the complaint, the 24-year-old victim, a worker of an auto rice mill, went to a toilet adjacent to her home around 1:00am. On the way back, Fotik swooped up on her and tied her mouth with a towel. She was then raped at knifepoint.

A local arbitration tried to mutually reconcile the matter for Tk 30,000.

Elsewhere, another 10-year-old girl was allegedly raped by two youths in Charshivrampur area in Rajbari's Sadar upazila Friday afternoon.

The duo -- Milon Mollah and Rezaul -- took the girl to a nearby paddy field and raped her when she went out of her home to collect grass for domestic cattle, alleged the victim's father.

The father filed a case with Rajbari Sadar Police Station against the two, said Mohammad Abdulah Al Tayabir, sub-inspector of the police station, adding that the victim was undergoing treatment at Rajbari General Hospital.

Police arrested Milon early yesterday. [Our Rangamati, Bogura and Faridpur correspondents contributed to this report]

87 upazilas

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The decision was made at the 45th meeting of the commission held at the EC with Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda in the chair.

The EC secretary said the polls would be held in five phases.

The second phase of the election is slated for March 18, the third for March 24, the fourth for March 31 and the fifth for June 18.

The first phase of the local body polls will be held in all upazilas of Panchagarh, Kurigram, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat and Rangpur under Rangpur division, all upazilas in Jamalpur and all upazilas in Netrakona except Atpara under Mymensingh division, all upazilas in Sunamganj except Jagannathpur and all upazilas in Habiganj except Shayestaganj under Sylhet division, and all upazilas in Sirajganj, Joypurhat, Natore and Rajshahi under Rajshahi division.

Besides, the commission fixed March 4 for the election to the JS reserved seats.

The last date for submitting nomination papers is February 11, while that of withdrawal is February 16. The scrutiny of those will be held on February 12.

Egypt unveils more than 40 mummies

AFP, Tunah Al-Gabal

They are more than 2,000 years old but remain in "good condition": Egypt on Saturday unveiled over 40 mummies dating back to the Ptolemaic era at a burial site in the centre of the country.

Journalists clambered down a ladder and through an underground chamber beneath the sandy soil of Tunah Al-Gabal, 260 kilometres (160 miles) south of Cairo, to glimpse the recent finds.

Archaeologist Rami Rasmi told AFP that 12 children and six animals were among the more than 40 mummies, while the rest were adult men and women.

The remains were found laid on the floor or in open clay coffins in the crumbling chamber in Minya governorate.

While mummification is mostly associated with ancient Egypt, the practice continued under the kingdom founded by Ptolemy, a successor to Alexander the Great, which lasted from 323 BC to 30 BC.

The Minya graves, discovered during an excavation that started in February last year, are in a communal tomb "probably belonging to a petty bourgeois family", the antiquities ministry said.

Archaeologist Mohamed Ragab said two tombs were discovered nine metres underground and contained more than six rooms.

The presence of mummified pets -- mostly dogs -- showed how important they were for the dead.

"These animals were so dear to their owners that they buried them... in their tomb," Ragab said.

Shards of pottery and pieces of papyrus found at the site helped researchers to determine its date, the head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities Mostafa Waziri said.

Ancient Greek rulers reached the height of their power between the conquests of Alexander the Great and the rise of the Roman empire.

Yaba dealers using kids

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detaining two child mules in the capital's Mirpur and Babubazar areas on Saturday.

The arrestees are Lokman Hossain, 35, Md Ranju, 31, and Shahida Begum, 62.

Acting on a tip off, the detectives first arrested Lokman with 2,500 pills. Based on information given by him, the detectives detained Jasim, 13, and Shahjahan, 14, from Babubazar.

The police later conducted a drive in Mirpur's Shah Ali area and arrested two other suspects Ranju and Shahida with 1,500 pills.

The detained children were brought to Dhaka in a microbus, Suman Kanti Chowdhury, assistant commissioner of DB, told The Daily Star.

The police took the kids to the central police hospital in Razarbagh where an X-ray found yaba tablets in their stomach. They recovered 1,800 pieces of yaba from Shahjahan's stomach and

2,200 pieces from Jashim's, said the DB official.

Emdadul Haque, superintendent of Razarbagh Police Lines Hospital, said carrying tablets in the stomach in such a way is a serious health hazard for the kids.

During primary interrogation, the kids said the smugglers promised them Tk 15,000 if they could successfully deliver the pills, said AC Suman.

"They also said this was the first time they were bringing yaba in the capital. The smugglers also threatened them to do the job," he said, adding, they were verifying the kids' statement.

The DB official said Ranju was supposed to deliver the yaba pills to different areas in the capital while Shahida is the owner of the house where the kids were brought for defecation.

"We have information that several syndicates are using children, especially Rohingya children, for the yaba smuggling," said a high official of DB

requesting anonymity.

A case was filed with Shah Ali Police Station against the arrestees. It also accused absconding suspects Sabuj, 28, and Suman, 35.

A Dhaka court placed Lokman and Ranju on a two-day remand yesterday and sent Shahida to jail.

Mashiur Rahman, deputy commissioner (north) of DB police, told The Daily Star yesterday that the smugglers were adopting new techniques as the law enforcers had increased vigilance to stop yaba smuggling.

"We have received some clues regarding the syndicates and their mastermind and are now conducting drives to arrest them," he added.

Yaba smugglers in recent months have been found carrying the pills inside watermelons, jackfruits, tyres, petrol containers, mobile phones and inside books.

Amgram village in the upazila, said Kamrul Hossain, officer-in-charge of Madaripur Sadar Police Station.

Another motorbike rider Md Faruk, 31, was killed as a speeding truck run him over at Khaharol upazila in Dinajpur.

Faruk was sitting on his motorbike in Doshmail area when the truck ran him over, said Abdul Malek, in-charge of Dashmail Highway Police Outpost, quoting witnesses.

[Our Cumilla, Faridpur and Dinajpur correspondents contributed to this report.]

Road crashes claim 9 lives

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Chittagong Medical College Hospital. Of them, five were in critical condition.

Meanwhile, in Sitakunda upazila of the district, another bus hit a truck around 4:00am on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway, leaving one dead and three others injured.

The driver of the bus -- Anwar, 40 -- was declared dead when taken to Sitakunda Health Complex.

Elsewhere, in Cumilla's Monohorganj upazila, two people were killed and four injured as a CNG-run

auto-rickshaw collided with a lorry.

The dead are Sirajul Islam, 70, and Risad, 20, passengers of the auto-rickshaw.

Sirajul died on the spot while Risad died on the way to hospital, said Shakhawat Hossain, in-charge of Lalmai Police Outpost.

The accident occurred in Khila Bazar area of the upazila, he added.

Meanwhile, in Faridpur's Sadar upazila, a motorbike was run over by brick-laden truck, leaving the rider dead on the spot.

The dead is Gurudev Sarkar, 45, of

WW1 grenade finds

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police video showing bomb disposal officers packing the grenade in a drainage channel at the factory before blowing it up.

The grenade was eight centimetres (three inches) wide and weighed about one kilogram (two pounds).

"All the information to date suggested that the grenade was imported from France together with the other potatoes," Wong said.

The grenade is believed to have been left in a trench during World War I and accidentally gathered up with potatoes planted a century later in the former battlefield.

"If it was covered in mud, the grenade was likely to have been left behind, dropped by soldiers there during the war, or left there after it was

thrown," Hong Kong University military historian Dave Macri told the South China Morning Post.

"The ditch was then filled up and used as a growing field, and the explosive was tossed into the mix of harvested potatoes... and sent to Hong Kong."

Hong Kong police are used to dealing with old munitions, though more usually US bombs dropped on the city after it fell to the invading Japanese during World War II.

Last year the bomb disposal squad defused three large WWII bombs, two of which were found at a site in the busy Wanchai district where work was underway to build a new metro railway station.

Govt to shut door

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decisions would be implemented as the ride-sharing companies are yet to be registered with BRTA.

App-based ride-hailing services were launched in Dhaka in May 2015. Currently, more than two dozen companies are operating in the capital.

At the meeting, the ministry also directed the BRTA to register the companies as soon as possible and bring them under a regulation.

Earlier on January 9, the BRTA placed a proposal of giving the companies a deadline for fulfilling the conditions for registration as the operators, drivers, and riders could not be held accountable without any registration.

The cabinet on January 15 last year approved the "Ride-Sharing Service Guideline 2017", which was formulated to bring the companies under a regulation.

The guideline came into force on March 8.

Some 14 companies have so far sought registration from the BRTA authorities, but none of them has been able to fulfill the required conditions mentioned in the guideline, and as such they are still operating without registration.

Some of the conditions are associated with the passengers' safety and it would take time to meet those conditions as various stakeholders are involved in the whole process, said BRTA officials.

Nazrul said, "We have to bring them under registration first as now they are operating illegally and the

government is losing revenue."

"If they fail to comply with some of the conditions related to infrastructure, we will look into those issues later," he added.

Asked about the fixing of highest ceiling, the secretary said there should be a common ceiling for all the companies in order to ensure a "fair competition".

"Otherwise riders will go for a particular company," he added.

A company must have 100 vehicles for providing services in the capital, 50 in Chattogram and 20 in any other districts, according to the Ride-sharing Service Guidelines 2017.

OTHER DECISIONS

The meeting took some other important decisions, including the one that service providing companies have to take necessary measures to prevent drivers from reckless driving.

The ministry also directed the BRTA to ensure strict secrecy of passengers' personal information shared with the companies.

In another directive, the ministry asked the BRTA to examine a proposal that restricts the vehicles to be enlisted with more than one company.

The meeting also decided to prevent companies from making any provision that would force a driver to take more than usual number of trips at a given time.

BRTA spokesperson Mahbub-e-Rabbani said they would start implementing the decisions after receiving official directives from the ministry.