

Pompeo to visit Bangkok, commit to Southeast Asia

AFP, Washington

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will recommit the United States on a visit to Bangkok to supporting the development of Southeast Asian nations in the face of a rising China, an official said Thursday.

Pompeo will travel to the Thai capital for the July 29-August 3 ministerial meeting of the Asean bloc and will lead talks on the Lower Mekong Initiative, said Mark Clark, a US official in charge of the region.

The initiative was launched 10 years ago by then secretary of state Hillary Clinton as a way to promote coordination and economic growth in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam — several of which have increasingly close ties with China.

"When ministers and our secretary meet in Bangkok in early August, we will highlight what we have achieved over the past decade and recommit to our joint efforts supporting the people of the Mekong," Clark told a conference on the Mekong River region at the Meridian International Center in Washington.

Clark, an acting deputy assistant secretary of state, voiced concern that China has tried to "steadily salami-slice its way to control" in the region.

He accused China of pressuring countries to join its massive Belt and Road initiative, although he said the United States was not trying to force countries to pick sides.

"What we do champion, however, is the right of countries to have choices to think carefully before they march off on what looks like a tempting road to easy financing but which might become a one-way route to overdependency," he said.

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Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 12

New York times, quoting a law enforcement official.

During meetings with an undercover federal agent, Alam expressed support for the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in New York as well as the militant group Islamic State, according to the complaint. He also discussed using an explosive suicide vest in an attack.

"As alleged, Ashique Alam bought illegal weapons as part of his plan to kill law enforcement officers and civilians in a terrorist attack on Times Square," US Attorney Richard Donoghue, whose office brought the charges, said in a statement.

Alam was expected to appear in US District Court in Brooklyn later yesterday.

With its millions of visitors each year, Times Square, often called the crossroads of the world, has been targeted by at least two bombers in recent years, despite its heavily-fortified police presence.

On May 1, 2010, police thwarted an attempted car bomb in Times Square, defusing a crude device made out of firecrackers and propane gas tanks.

A Pakistani-born US citizen pleaded guilty to the plot, admitting that he had received bomb-making training from the Pakistani Taliban and that the group, known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Paki-stan had funded the plot. He was sentenced to life in prison.

In December 2017, a Bangladeshi man set off a homemade pipe bomb strapped to his body in a crowded underground pedestrian tunnel near Times Square. The man, Akayed Ullah, was convicted of six criminal counts, including use of a weapon of mass destruction and support of a terrorist organisation.

On Friday morning, it was business as usual in Times Square, with a bustle of people on their way to work and tourists beginning to stream into the area.

Kate Fan, a 28-year-old charity worker visiting from her home in Guangzhou, China, said that she heard about the incident but still felt safe.

"We hear a lot of stories about New York being unsafe, but we feel like people sometimes exaggerate safety issues," she said.

Man sent to jail

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Kishore, a leader of the minority community.

A few hours later, Fuad's men came from Dhatma village and swooped on them. They took Fuad along with them and had him admitted at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Godagari police OC Zahangir Alam said police had arrested Fuad from the hospital later that night. Quoting the detainee, he said, "Fuad said the indigenous people stabbed his genitals."

Asked about this, Joy said the mob did not use any weapon while giving Fuad a beating.

"The victim filed a case against Fuad the same day. Tension has been growing between the Oraos and the Muslims in the villages since then," the OC told this paper.



Children playing cricket on a street near the Police Headquarters in the capital's Fulbaria. The road remains heavily congested almost every day, but it wore this empty look yesterday as most people are yet to return to the city after Eid vacation. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Biman pilot

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Meraj said Capt Fazal flew the flight BG-125 to Doha. But after landing, he noticed that his passport was not with him.

He informed the matter to Biman station manager in Doha and contacted his Dhaka headquarters right away, it said.

He then checked into Hotel Arix inside the airport. A day later, the Biman authorities sent his passport to Doha on another flight, it added.

"After getting the passport, Capt Fazal Mahmud passed the Qatar immigration following regular procedure."

The Biman authorities decided that he would fly back to Dhaka on June 10.

Capt Fazal is staying in Hotel Crown Plaza in Doha with other crew members.

In its gazette, the Cabinet Division yesterday said a four-member body headed by Additional Secretary of Cabinet Division Nasima Begum was asked to submit its probe report to the cabinet secretary in three work days.

WHAT CAPT FAZAL SAYS

"I never made such a mistake in my life. But the incident was unexpected and it happened due to an unintentional mistake," he told this correspondent.

"The Qatar immigration authorities didn't detain or ask me anything... as I didn't cross the immigration check-post."

He added that he had mistakenly left his small bag with his passport at the flight operations office at the airport.

Asked how he crossed the immigration at HSIA without his passport, Capt Fazal said the immigration officials took his finger print but they didn't ask for his passport.

"After landing in Doha, I looked for my passport but couldn't find my bag. Then I contacted with the station manager of Biman at the airport in Doha. I also talked with Biman's Dhaka office. Later, my passport was sent to me."

"After getting my passport on June 6, I completed the immigration formalities at Doha airport [and went outside]."

Bees link symbols

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"We take it for granted once we've learned our numbers as children, but being able to recognise what 'four' represents actually requires a sophisticated level of cognitive ability."

He added: "Humans have over 86 billion neurons in our brains, bees have less than a million, and we're separated by over 600 million years of evolution."

"Discovering how such complex numerical skills can be grasped by miniature brains will help us understand how mathematical and cultural thinking evolved in humans, and possibly, other animals," Dr Dyer said.

The discovery could also point to new types of computing that can replicate the bee's highly efficient approach to processing, according to the study published in Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences.

The bees were trained to enter Y-shaped mazes in which they learned

to match a character with a number of elements. In each case, if they made the correct choice they were rewarded with a treat.

They were then tested to see if they could match the character to the same quantity of other elements. A second group was trained in the opposite approach, matching a number of elements with a character.

While both could grasp their specific training, the different groups were unable to reverse the association and work out what to do when tested with the opposite (character-to-number or number-to-character).

"This suggests that number processing and understanding of symbols happens in different regions in bee brains, similar to the way separate processing happens in the human brain," said Dr Scarlett Howard at RMIT.

"Our results show honeybees are not at the same level as the animals that have been able to learn symbols as numbers and perform complex tasks."

Joy of Eid

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One hundred litchis were sold at Tk 350 last year. A week ago, the price was Tk 250, and it fell to Tk 100-150 ahead of the Eid. Mangoes, which used to bring Tk 1,800 every maund were sold for Tk 1,000-1,200 before the festival.

At Edolpur village, many litchi farmers had to go back home from the local market without selling enough to cover their Eid expenses.

Since Rajshahi region is one of the major suppliers of paddy, litchi and mango, their falling prices have hit the farmers hard ahead of Eid.

At Haripur village of Poba upazila, almost every vacant corner was seen filled with piles of freshly-harvested paddy.

When this correspondent called out Shahjahan Ali, a share cropper of the village, he came out of home clipping the buttons of his fading grey shirt.

Asked how he spent his Eid, a distressed Shahjahan said, "Eid bears no meaning for farmers. This is just like any other day."

The only difference was he bought vermicelli and a fish for his family.

Shahjahan harvested 11 maunds of paddy, and buyers offered him no more than Tk 600 per maund.

"If I sell one maund, I can buy 1kg of beef. There would be no money left to buy the spices needed for cooking it," he said.

"And if I sell all the paddy, what will I eat for the rest of the year?"

He is also waiting for the price to increase, and limited the family's celebrations only to a sweat dish of vermicelli and fish curry.

Other share croppers of the village had similar stories to tell.

At Edolpur village, 25km from Rajshahi city, this correspondent saw Ba-by Khatun, wife of farmer Shahjahan Monu, frying gourd on Eid day.

"I cooked chicken and polao. Now I'm frying the gourd to add another dish," she said, talking to this correspondent.

She was clad in a red cotton sari while her school-going daughter wore a cheap red-white dress.

"My husband bought us the clothes in last Eid. These dresses still look new

because we seldom wore them. He couldn't buy us any new dress this year."

The family got 10.5 maunds of paddy this season. Baby Khatun said, "If we could sell some of it at a fair price, our Eid would be joyous."

Unlike Allam or Monu, Soiyabur Rahman is a fairly solvent farmer of the village. He, too, held off sales and stacked 52 maunds of paddy on the courtyard.

The farmer had to borrow Tk 20,000 for Eid expenses because he went broke after marrying off his only daughter just ahead of the festival.

A distraught Soiyabur said, "Low prices have broken the backbone of paddy farmers. I'm afraid whether I would cultivate paddy anymore."

Saudi Arab

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In 2011, Qureiris and 30 other children rode their bikes through a city in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province to protest the country's poor human rights record.

According to the news network, which has seen footage of the protest, Qureiris held a megaphone while he cycled and shouted: "The people demand human rights!"

Qureiris has also been charged with throwing Molotov cocktails at a police station in Awamiya, also in the Eastern Province, from the back of a motorcycle driven by his activist older brother, Ali Qureiris. The exact date of this alleged incident is not known.

Saudi police killed Ali Qureiris at a protest in 2012.

Murtaja Qureiris is also charged with turning his brother's funeral into a protest march against the regime.

Qureiris was arrested retrospectively for those alleged incidents in 2014, when he and his family were traveling to Bahrain, CNN reported. He has been detained ever since.

He has spent at least 15 months of his nearly-five-year detention solitary confinement.

Qureiris also alleges that Saudi officials forced him to make a confession under duress, then proceeded to use it against him in court. It's not clear when he made the reported confession, or what it contains.

If Qureiris is executed he will become the fourth teenager to be killed in 2019, after three teenagers — all under 18 — were executed on an execution spree across the kingdom announced on April 23, in which 37 people were killed.



Israeli security forces take position during a weekly demonstration by Palestinians against the expropriation of their lands by Israel in the village of Kfar Qaddum, near Nablus in the occupied West Bank. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: AFP