

North Korea demands security guarantees for nuke talks

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday demanded the United States provide security guarantees as a precondition to resuming deadlocked nuclear talks, dampening hopes for progress at a working-level dialogue expected in the coming weeks.

Negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington have been gridlocked since a second summit between the North's leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump in February ended without a deal.

The pair agreed to restart working-level dialogue during an impromptu meeting at the Demilitarized Zone dividing the two Koreas in June, and Pyongyang last week offered to hold those talks in late September, a move the US said was "encouraging".

But hours later, Pyongyang carried out the latest in a series of weapons tests.

A senior official from the North's foreign ministry said yesterday that "discussion of denuclearization may be possible when threats and hurdles endangering our system security and obstructing our development are clearly removed beyond all doubt".

North Korea has always insisted that security guarantees would be necessary as part of any deal -- but it has not generally demanded them as a precursor to negotiations.

The director-general of the department of US affairs, who was not named, said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency that working-level talks were expected to be held "in a few weeks".

More Palestinians find Israeli work despite conflict

AFP, Nilin

Economic growth in Israel and chronic unemployment in the occupied West Bank is seeing more Palestinians cross to the "enemy" side seeking work.

The numbers have almost doubled in five years and even another right wing victory in today's elections is unlikely to change that.

"All the governments came and went and we went to work, whether with a permit or by smuggling," 58-year-old construction worker Najji Mohammed said.

He has been working in Israel for nearly 20 years to support his nine-member family.

"No government has affected our work."

In the late afternoon at the Nilin checkpoint, west of the West Bank city of Ramallah, salesmen flog goods to the hundreds of Palestinians returning from a day's work.

Most didn't want to talk politics for fear of jeopardising their permits. Israel occupied the West Bank in a 1967 war.

More than 400,000 Israelis now live in the territory with roughly 2.7 million Palestinians, living in settlements considered illegal under international law.

The Jewish state began construction of a barrier cutting off the West Bank during the violence of the second Palestinian uprising, or intifada, and Palestinians need an Israeli permit to cross.

In 2015, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu formed a government seen as the most rightwing in Israel's history, around 45,000 Palestinians had Israeli work permits, according to official Palestinian figures.

175 Bangladeshi

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continues its crackdown on labour and residency violators, according to a report of Saudi Press Agency.

Saudi Arabia has been detaining people since November 2017 over violation of residential, labour and border security regulations.

A total of 3,790,173 people have been arrested, including over 2.95 million for residency violations, 583,602 for breaking labour laws and 247,220 for flouting border regulations, the report said.

The latest figures indicate that 544,521 people have been arrested since early June.

The report also stated that 940,100 expatriates have been deported to their respective countries since November 2017.

Angry bees

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The flight to Agartala in north-eastern India eventually took off more than three and a half hours late.

Kolkata airport authorities said they would scour the area. "After Sunday's incident, we have inspected the area for possible bee-nesting zones but failed to spot any. We will seek the state forest department's help," said Kaushik Bhattacharya.

Bees swarm when a queen bee leaves an existing colony to found a new home together with thousands of worker bees.



Pro-democracy activists peacefully protest at the Inland Revenue Tower in Hong Kong yesterday. Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests erupted into violence 100 days ago, plunging the former British colony into its most severe crisis since it reverted to Chinese rule in 1997. PHOTO: AFP

VC, family in a tight spot

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done with Jewel and Chanchal", Saddam added.

The faction led by Saddam and Taj is known to be loyal to Golam Rabbani, immediate-past general secretary of central BCL.

Amid a barrage of allegations, Rezwanul Haque Chowdhury Shovon and Golam Rabbani were removed from the BCL helm on Saturday.

The VC recently alleged that Shovon and Rabbani demanded "4 to 6 percent" in cuts from the Tk 1,445-crore project at the university. They went to her residence on August 8.

After initially denying to a number of media outlets, Rabbani admitted to The Daily Star that they indeed demanded their "fair share" from the VC, although he would not say how much.

He said they wanted money for their "Eid expenditure".

'EID SALAMI'

Saddam said, "At the August 9 meeting, Taj and I proposed a fifty-fifty share among the followers of central BCL president and general secretary. But Jewel and VC mam differed, saying, 'Chanchal is the general secretary and how can you deprive him?'"

"We said, 'Mam, Chanchal has no following.'"

"Later," he went on, "the VC and her family said: drop the topics of central BCL or tender.... Take it as Eid Salami. And that they would discuss further after Eid vacation."

"Finally, it was decided that the JU BCL president will get Tk 50 lakh, general secretary Tk 25 lakh and we will get Tk 25 lakh."

The next morning, Jewel and Chanchal "received the money", said Saddam and Taj, adding they tried to contact them over the phone. But Chanchal "refused to give them anything".

Saddam and Taj both contacted VC's son Protik, who told them that he would call Jewel and Chanchal. "Later in the afternoon, Taj and I received Tk 25 lakh from Chanchal in cash at the guest room of Shaheed Salam Barkat Hall."

Also, talking to reporters yesterday, Taj said, "We got Tk 25 lakh as per the meeting's decision."

Both Saddam and Taj said the investigators should check phone call records of the VC, her personal secretary and her son after the bidding over Tk 450-crore work began.

"Especially the phone call records between me, Taj and VC's son before and after August 9 -- all will be cleared," Saddam said, calling for a

probe.

Asked about the challenge the VC threw against the allegations, Saddam said, "She herself fixed at the meeting who will get how much. If she is denying this, she is lying."

Contacted, Jewel Rana, president of JU BCL, denied the allegation that any discussion over money-sharing took place at the meeting or later on.

"The issues relating to our internal problems were discussed at the meeting," he said, without going into details.

JU BCL Secretary Chanchal could not be reached for comments over the phone despite several attempts.

The VC's son Protik and her husband Akhter Hossain did not receive phone calls made by our JU correspondent.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Prof Farzana Islam claimed that the audio record on the so-called money sharing is fabricated. She called for an investigation into the matter.

Earlier, Golam Rabbani claimed that he and Shovon didn't receive any money from the JU authorities, rather Prof Farzana paid Tk 1.60 crore to the JU BCL leaders from the ongoing Tk 1,445-crore campus development project.

However, rejecting this claim, the

VC said Rabbani made a fabricated story of Tk 1.6 crore.

Challenging the former BCL general secretary to prove his claims, she said she would request the chancellor of the university, President Abdul Hamid, and the University Grants Commission authorities to look into the matter.

Also, in a press release, the JU authorities said no talks on "money-sharing" took place at the meeting. "The VC did not give money to anyone. Rabbani has made it up."

AUDIO LEAK

Meanwhile, an audio clip purportedly of mobile phone conversation between Rabbani and Saddam has been doing the rounds on social media since Sunday. A number of media outlets also picked it up.

During the six-minute audio clip, Saddam told Rabbani that Prof Farzana Islam and her family members distributed Tk 1 crore among leaders of the BCL JU unit.

He admitted having this conversation with Rabbani but could not say how it was leaked. He was heard saying he and his associates received Tk 25 lakh.

Saddam yesterday told The Daily Star he did not know where this money came from and that the VC would know.

Ex-Kashmir CM arrested

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Immediately after the detention of the sitting Lok Sabha MP, barricading came up on the Gupkar Road and concertina wire laid on the ground to regulate traffic.

The PSA has two sections -- 'public order' and 'threat to security of the state'. The former allows detention without trial for three to six months and the latter for two years.

Abdullah had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with his son

Omar Abdullah last month, days before the state's special status was withdrawn.

His detention was to ensure that he did not participate in any rally being organised by Vaiko in view of forthcoming United Nations General Assembly, some leaders of his party National Conference said, requesting anonymity.

After invoking of the PSA, the government has to constitute a committee which confirms the action.

The aggrieved party can represent their case in the High Court for quashing of the PSA.

The PSA is applicable only in Jammu and Kashmir. Elsewhere in the country, the equivalent law is the National Security Act (NSA).

Besides Abdullah, his son and former chief minister Omar and ex-CM Mehbooba Mufti, several other leaders have been under detention since August 5, when the government announced the abrogation of Jammu

and Kashmir's special status under Article 370 and the bifurcation of the state into the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

Abdullah had last addressed media while climbing a wall of his home on August 6 and said that he was pained at the Centre's decision on Article 370.

The Supreme Court asked the Centre and the Jammu and Kashmir administration to respond to the Vaiko's plea that Abdullah be produced before a court.

HC for judicial enquiry into OC's role

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Citing the writ petition, Nigar's lawyer Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua told reporters that an election to Puthia Motor Sramik Union was held on April 24 and Nurul contested the election for the post of general secretary.

The following day, the polls results showed that Abdur Rahman Patal was elected general secretary of the Sramik Union.

Nurul filed a case with a Rajshahi court on June 9 claiming that he bagged 602 votes against Patal's 520, but the latter was declared elected illegally.

The court on the same day issued an injunction, restricting Patal and three others from taking up the posts of the Sramik Union. The order was imposed on them on June 10.

Nurul went missing around 8:00pm that day and his body was recovered

from SS Brickfield in the morning the following day, Barrister Jotirmoy said.

Nigar filed the murder case on June 11 against eight people, including Patal. In the FIR of the case, she alleged that OC Shakil was involved in manipulating the election results in favour of Patal.

The petitioner's lawyer said police later submitted an FIR of the murder case to the trial court in Rajshahi,

dropping the names of the eight accused.

Citing the writ petition, Jyotirmoy said OC Shakil was accused in at least two criminal cases and there was an allegation against him of committing corruption, but he was not suspended yet.

Barrister Abu Bakar Siddique also appeared for the petitioner, while Deputy Attorney General Amit Dasgupta represented the state.

Trump hints at military action

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The Tehran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition is bogged down in a five-year war, claimed Saturday's strikes on two plants owned by state energy giant Aramco.

But US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pointed the finger squarely at Tehran, saying there was no evidence the "unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply" was launched from Yemen.

"The United States will work with our partners and allies to ensure that energy markets remain well supplied and Iran is held accountable for its aggression," the top US diplomat said. That drew an angry response from Tehran, where foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said: "Such fruitless and blind accusations and remarks are incomprehensible and meaningless."

The White House said on Sunday that Trump may still meet Iran President Hassan Rouhani at the UN meeting in New York next week, but Tehran said yesterday it did not think "such a thing would happen".

Baghdad, caught between its two main allies -- Tehran and Washington -- also denied any link to the attacks amid media speculation that the drones were launched from Iraq.

Saudi de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said the kingdom is "willing and able" to respond to this "terrorist aggression."

But a tit-for-tat strike on Iranian oil fields is "highly unlikely," Middle East expert James Dorsey told AFP.

"The Saudis do not want an open conflict with Iran. The Saudis would like others to fight that war, and the others are reluctant," said Dorsey, from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

GENIE IS OUT OF THE BOTTLE The attacks sent oil prices sky-rocketing yesterday, with Brent futures up \$12 -- or nearly 20 percent -- in the first few minutes of business, while WTI jumped more than \$8, or 15 percent.

It was the biggest rise since the 1990-1991 Gulf War.

Trump yesterday promised to supply oil to US allies after attacks on

the Saudi oil infrastructure.

"We are a net Energy Exporter, & now the Number One Energy Producer in the World," Trump tweeted.

"We don't need Middle Eastern Oil & Gas, & in fact have very few tankers there, but will help our Allies!" he added.

Saturday's explosions set off fires that engulfed the Abqaiq plant, the world's largest oil processing facility, and nearby Khurais, which hosts a massive oil field.

Saudi's energy infrastructure has been hit by the Houthis many times before, but this strike was of a different order, abruptly halting 5.7 million barrels per day (bpd) or about six percent of the world's oil supply.

"The genie is out of the bottle," said Bill Farren-Price, director of the London-based RS Energy Group.

"It is now clear that Saudi and other Gulf oil facilities are vulnerable to this kind of attack, which means that the geopolitical risk premium for oil needs to rise."

No casualties were reported but the

full extent of the damage was not clear.

Aramco also said it will dip into its reserves to offset the disruption. On Saturday, CEO Amin Nasser said that "work is underway" to restore production, but the incident could affect investor confidence ahead of Aramco's stock market debut.

The company would need weeks to reach full output again, Bloomberg News reported Sunday, citing unnamed sources.

Trump tweeted that he had "authorized the release of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, if needed, in a to-be-determined amount" that is "sufficient to keep the markets well-supplied."

Tehran and Washington have been at loggerheads since May last year, when Trump pulled the US out of a landmark 2015 deal with world powers that promised Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

Saudi Arabia has spent billions on military hardware but recent events have underscored the vulnerability of its infrastructure to attack.

Shampadak Parishad

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press freedom, developing professional journalism and strengthening the editorial institution.

Golam Sarwar was its founding president.

At Sunday's meeting, the parishad also decided to launch its official website, recruit new members, and organise seminars and other events on press freedom and other journalism-related issues.

The parishad plans to hold a seminar in the coming months on strengthening the future of the print media and its challenges.

It was also decided that the parishad will expand its activities and membership at the district level, added the press release.

Don't publish

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handout said, adding that if any doubt arises, the issue should be published after verifying from bench officers of the courts concerned and registrars of the High Court Division and the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

It said journalists should refrain from publishing reports that can be tantamount to contempt of the Supreme Court and can harm or there remains a possibility of tarnishing the honour of the judges. Print, broadcast and online media are requested to follow the matter very carefully, the handout added.

Media outlets are requested to follow the section 16 of Code of Conduct 1993 (amended in 2002) for journalists, formulated by Bangladesh Press Council.

Section 16 states, "It is the responsibility of the newspapers to publish news relating to case under trial and to publish the final judgment of the court to reveal the actual picture of issues relating to trial. But a journalist shall refrain from publishing such comment or opinion as is likely to influence an under-trial case, until the final verdict is announced."

On August 7, the HC bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan and Justice Mohammad Ali delivered a verdict following a writ petition. Based on the verdict, Bangladesh Press Council issued the handout.

'Robber' killed

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When police fired back in retaliation, a shootout ensued, the OC said, adding that two policemen were injured in the incident.

Rahim was shot during the incident and was taken to Rajbari General Hospital where duty doctor pronounced him dead, the OC said.

Police later recovered two firearms and nine bullets from the spot, the OC added.

TWO BODIES RECOVERED

Police recovered bodies of two youths from two spots in Cox's Bazar town early yesterday.

The dead are Raja Miah, 32, and Rifat, 25, police said.

Raja's body was recovered from Kata Pahar area adjacent to Kolatoli bypass road.

He was accused in 12 cases, including murder, extortion and drug cases, said Farid Uddin Khandaker, officer-in-charge of Cox's Bazar Model Police Station.

Rifat's body was recovered from Kobita Chattar area, he added.

Police also recovered yaba pills and firearms from both the spots, the OC said, adding that they were suspecting that a clash between two rival drug gangs is the reason behind the killings.

A sanctuary

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Bangla quite well.

"Bangla officers [peacekeepers] are good people," he tells this correspondent, "They help us in all kinds of situation."

Capt Tanjim Ahmed, who is in charge of the Bangla House, says 19 staff members stationed at the house provide assistance to around 1,000 UN peacekeepers.

"The house basically serves as a transit point for Bangladeshi peacekeepers and their equipment. Liaison with force headquarters and emergency services are also coordinated from here," he says.

Major Rehgir says, "It is a mission support centre. We have to go to the operation areas through here."

Troops also come here looking for respite from the stress of being in operations, he adds.

This place offers relief from the stress of being in the operation.

Just like the entire country, internet is quite slow in the building. The soldiers often face water shortage. But it still serves as a safe vacation house for the peacekeepers.

Soldiers go to the nearby shopping malls to get daily necessities or take walks on the bank of the Niger.

"Even the weather feels nicer at the Bangla House when compared to that of the operation areas," says Major Nishat Jahan, who is preparing to go to Bangladesh on leave.

One can get a fairly good idea of the culture and people of Mali while living in Bamako, she says.

In Mali, nothing feels more pleasant to a Bangladeshi soldier than this house which gives a taste of Bangladesh some 10,000 km away from home.