Sanctions 'disrespect' to Turkey

Says Erdogan as US, EU ready measures

REUTERS, *Istanbul*

President Tayyip Erdogan yesterday said US sanctions over Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 missiles would be disrespectful to a Nato ally, after sources said Washington was poised to take the step likely to further strain relations.

The report of imminent US sanctions targeting Turkey's defence industry over missiles comes as EU leaders at a summit discussed separate sanctions against Turkish officials over gas exploration in disputed parts of the Mediterranean.

Both developments -- examples of Erdogan's long-strained relations with Western allies -- have caused anxiety among investors. The US moves, earlier than expected and potentially wider in scope, are likely to have the greater immediate impact.

The lira tumbled nearly 2% after Reuters cited sources saying US sanctions are set to be announced as soon as today. The currency later rebounded as investors weighed up the impact.

"For America to get up and confront Turkey with a matter like CAATSA is disrespectful to a very important Nato partner," state-owned Anadolu agency cited Erdogan as saying.

In a later speech to officials from his AK Party, Erdogan took a more conciliatory tone, calling on both US and EU politicians to "break from the influence of anti-Turkey lobbies".

'Fix the future'

Calls grow for action ahead of today's Paris climate accord anniversary

AGENCIES

When the Paris Agreement on climate change was finalized after two weeks of fraught negotiations and years of past failures, diplomats hugged and shed tears of joy. They had haggled over verb tenses, cut deals, and in the end, brought 196 countries into the accord.

Five years later, governments are lagging far behind in implementing the deal, struck on Dec 12, 2015. Annual greenhouse gas emissions hit a new high last year. And climate change impacts are intensifying, from the thawing Arctic to raging wildfires in Australia and the US West.

The Paris Agreement aims to hold the rise in average global temperatures to "well below" 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, and preferably 1.5C -- a threshold beyond which climate impacts are projected to sharply intensify.

Emissions fell record 7pc in 2020: study

Pacific nations urge world to 'get serious'

Temperatures have already risen by more than 1C since pre-industrial times, and scientists say that the world's fossil fuel-dependent economies will have to undergo wholesale transformation to bring those goals within reach.

As delegates prepare for a one-day online UN climate summit today, negotiators point to signs of progress: rapid advances in renewable energy, growing appetite for greener investments, and pledges on emissions by the European Union and China. US President-elect Joe Biden has vowed to rejoin the accord.

At the summit on Saturday, diplomats will be watching for signs that countries are preparing to ramp up climate efforts ahead of a major round of UN climate talks in Glasgow due to take place in November 2021.

Perhaps the most encouraging sign for the Paris deal is the number of countries that have begun to pledge to slash carbon emissions to net zero -- meaning they will release only as much as they remove from the air -- by 2050.

Britain and the European Union adopted the target last year, and China - the largest emitter - surprised many in September by announcing of goal of net-zero by 2060. Subsequent pledges by Japan and South Korea mean more than 50% of global emissions are now under net-zero targets, UN officials say.

Pacific island nations on the frontline of climate change yesterday demanded the world "get serious" about saving the planet ahead of today's anniversary.

Fiji Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama told a virtual summit of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) that progress had stalled since the Paris climate agreement was signed.

The call came ahead of rare good news: Carbon emissions fell a record seven percent in 2020 as countries imposed lockdowns and restrictions on movement during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The fall of an estimated 2.4 billion tonnes is considerably larger than previous annual record declines, such as 0.9 billion tonnes at the end of World War II or 0.5 billion tonnes in 2009 at the height of the financial crisis, the Global Carbon Project said yesterday in its annual assessment. Emissions reductions were most pronounced in the United States (down 12 percent) and the European Union (down 11 percent).

NEWS IN BRIEF

US flies two B-52s over Gulf in message for Iran

The United States deployed two B-52 long-range bombers over the Gulf on Thursday in a show of force directed at Iran as Washington moves to cut its ground-level military presence in the region. The two bombers took off at short notice from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana for the non-stop, 36-hour mission to cross Europe and then the Arabian Peninsula to the Gulf, looping near Qatar while keeping a "safe distance" from Iran's coastline, US defense officials said. The flight was coordinated with US allies, and aircraft from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar flew with the bombers as they traversed the airspace, according to a US defense official.

Hariri killing: Hezbollah man gets five life terms in prison

The UN-backed Lebanon Tribunal yesterday sentenced a Hezbollah member convicted of conspiring to kill former Lebanese prime minister Rafik al-Hariri in a 2005 bombing to five terms of life imprisonment. Salim Jamil Ayyash was found guilty in August of homicide and committing a terrorist act over the deaths of Hariri and 21 others in the attack on Beirut's waterfront. The trial was conducted in absentia and Ayyash remains at large. Three alleged accomplices were acquitted due to insufficient evidence. Hariri's assassination plunged Lebanon into what was then its worst crisis since its 1975-90 civil war, setting the stage for years of confrontation between rival political forces.

Hong Kong media mogul charged under security law

Hong Kong media tycoon and Beijing critic Jimmy Lai was charged under a new national security law yesterday, accused of colluding with foreign forces, the latest pro-democracy figure targeted under the legislation. Lai, 73, is the most high-profile figure charged under the sweeping law, which has targeted the city's pro-democracy movement but brought a semblance of calm to the finance hub after months of often-violent protests. The city's new national security unit charged him "with one count of 'collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security'", police said in a statement. National security offences carry a maximum sentence of life in prison. Lai is the owner of Hong Kong's best-selling Apple Daily, a popular tabloid that is unashamedly pro-democracy and fiercely critical of authorities.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

'Don't play with fire'

Governor tells Mamata over attack on BJP chief in Bengal

NDTV ONLINE

West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, condemning Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's comments after an attack on BJP chief JP Nadda's convoy, asked her to withdraw them and warned her against "playing with fire".

Dhankhar this morning submitted a report to the central government on the "deteriorating" law and order situation in Bengal, after which the state's police chief and Chief Secretary have been summoned on Monday. "Yesterday, the leader of a national political party was blatantly attacked. And state actors were involved. Violators worked with the protection and immunity of the administration and the police. This is like a death-knell to democracy. I have written so in my feedback," he told reporters.

"Madam, please don't play with fire," he added.

Nadda's convoy was attacked with bricks, stones and sticks near Kolkata on Thursday afternoon. Some leaders were injured and cars were damaged in the incident.

"I asked them to prepare a detailed report and report to me. They came without any report, without any inputs. It is shameful. They are bureaucrats. They have a moral duty. I was shocked, and I was shamed. It was an extremely painful moment for Constitutional duty," Dhankhar said.

Chances of Brexit deal low

EU chief tells bloc as time ticks down to Sunday deadline

REUTERS, *Brussels/London*

Britain is now more likely to leave the European Union's orbit on Dec 31 without a trade deal than with an agreement, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told the bloc's 27 national leaders yesterday, an EU official said.

The United Kingdom quit the EU in January but remains an informal member until Dec. 31 when it will finally leave the bloc's orbit after 48 years. Both sides say they want a trade deal but negotiations are deadlocked.

After British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Thursday there was "a strong possibility" a deal would not be clinched, von der Leyen said the probability of a no-deal had risen.

"The probability of a no deal is higher than of a deal," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity about the message von der Leyen gave leaders at an EU summit in Brussels.

Johnson and von der Leyen have given negotiators until Sunday evening to break the impasse over fishing rights and allowing Britain to be punished if in the future it diverged from the bloc's rules.

"Situation is difficult. Main obstacles remain," the EU official said of von der Leyen's message. "To be seen by Sunday whether a deal is possible."

A no-trade deal Brexit would damage the economies of northern Europe, send shockwaves through financial markets, snarl borders and sow chaos through the delicate supply chains which stretch across Europe and beyond.

Negotiators seeking a new arrangement on nearly $1 trillion in annual trade are stuck on how much fish EU boats can take from British waters and how far the EU can tie Britain into its rules in the future.

While some EU diplomats have cast Johnson's rhetoric as theatrics intended to wrench out a deal and please his domestic Brexit supporters, British officials say London cannot accept the EU's demands and caution that a no-deal is on the cards.

Von der Leyen, speaking in Brussels, said it would be clear on Sunday whether the conditions for a deal had been reached. EU diplomats say the best case-scenario would be that talks continue past Sunday.

Hondurans take part in a new caravan of migrants, set to head to the United States, in Cofradia, Honduras on Thursday. Central American authorities began trying to break up the caravan of hundreds of Hondurans who set off for the United States to escape the impact of back-to-back hurricanes, testing efforts to stem immigration from the battered region.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Manmade mass now outweighs life on Earth

AFP, *Paris*

For the first time in history manmade materials now likely outweigh all life on Earth, scientists said in research detailing the "crossover point" at which humanity's footprint is heavier than that of the natural world.

The weight of roads, buildings and other constructed or manufactured materials is doubling roughly every 20 years, and authors of the research said it currently weighed 1.1 teratonnes (1.1 trillion tonnes).

As mankind has ramped up its insatiable consumption of natural resources, the weight of living biomass -- trees, plants and animals -- has halved since the agricultural revolution to stand at just 1 teratonne currently, the study found.

Estimating changes in global biomass and manmade mass since 1990, the research showed that the mass of human-produced objects stood at just three percent of the weight of biomass at the start of the 20th century.

But since the post-World War II global production boom, manufacturing has surged to the extent that humans now produce the equivalent of the weight of every person on Earth every week on average.

2020 likely marked the moment when manmade mass tipped higher than biomass, according to the study published in Nature.

Drawing on a host of industrial and ecological data, the study estimated human production accounts for roughly 30 gigatonnes annually.

At the current growth rate, manmade material is likely to weigh as much as three teratonnes by 2040.

'Bogus false claims'

States assail Texas bid to overturn US election at SC; Biden taps Susan Rice for domestic policy role

REUTERS, *Washington*

Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin on Thursday urged the US Supreme Court to reject a lawsuit filed by Texas and backed by President Donald Trump seeking to undo President-elect Joe Biden's election victory, saying the case has no factual or legal grounds and offers "bogus" claims.

"What Texas is doing in this proceeding is to ask this court to reconsider a mass of baseless claims about problems with the election that have already been considered, and rejected, by this court and other courts," Josh Shapiro, Pennsylvania's Democratic attorney general, wrote in a filing to the nine justices.

Texas filed the long-shot suit against the four election battleground states on Tuesday directly with the Supreme Court. It asked that the voting results in those states be thrown out because of their changes in voting procedures that allowed expanded mail-in voting during the coronavirus pandemic.

Trump's campaign and his allies already have been spurned in numerous lawsuits in state and federal courts challenging the election results. Legal experts have said the Texas lawsuit has little chance of succeeding and have questioned whether Texas has the legal standing to challenge election procedures in other states.

Biden, a Democrat, defeated Trump in the four states in the Nov. 3 election. The Republican president won them in the 2016 election.

The Texas lawsuit, Shapiro wrote, was adding to a "cacophony of bogus false claims" about the election.

Trump filed a motion with the court on Wednesday asking the justices to let him intervene and become a plaintiff in the suit filed by Ken Paxton, the Republican attorney general of Texas and an ally of the president.

The Texas lawsuit does not make specific fraud allegations. Instead, Texas said changes to voting procedures removed protections against fraud and were unlawful when the reforms were made by officials in the four states or courts without the approval of the states' legislatures.

Meanwhile, US President-elect Biden announced several administration picks Thursday, including Obama-era officials such as former national security advisor Susan Rice as White House Domestic Policy Council director and ex-chief of staff Denis McDonough as veterans affairs secretary.

Rice, who is Black, had been a contender for secretary of state. But she was expected to face intense opposition from Republicans in the Senate confirmation process over her role in the Benghazi crisis of 2012, and that prestigious cabinet position went to close Biden advisor Antony Blinken.

Most offenders go unpunished

FROM PAGE 1

The incident in Ghior is a perfect case in point.

The complainant mentioned the number of robbers in the case statement around 15 to 16. But the investigation officer (IO) submitted a charge sheet against 31 people, which the court found to be unbelievable.

The court said such a large number of people would not go to commit a robbery in a neighbourhood.

Then came the flaw in the confessional statements made by three of the accused under section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). The statements were not produced before court as per the provision of the Evidence Act by the prosecution.

The judge remarked that none of the three accused gave confessional statements involving themselves and those were not supported by any other witnesses' depositions. So, with such statements, no one could be proved guilty.

Though the prosecution named 19 witnesses in the charge sheet, they could produce only 11 during the trial.

None of the witnesses named any of the accused in their depositions. There was also no claim or proof that the suspects were accused or convicted in any other robbery cases, the court said.

LOW CONVICTION RATE

The PBI report, published by the specialised police unit in September last year, paints a grim picture of the reasons behind the low conviction rate in robbery cases.

PBI prepared the report after talking to judges and analysing 247 judgments delivered in as many robbery cases by 46 courts in district and metropolitan areas in 2016 and 2017.

It found that of the total 1,932 charge-sheet accused, only 11.75 percent were convicted.

Witnesses' absence in court, faulty and contradictory testimony by witnesses, failure of complainants and witnesses to identify the accused and recognise the arms used for committing offences -- all led to acquittals of the accused in 65 percent of the robbery cases that saw no convictions, according to the report.

The report also noted that the number of years it took to complete the investigation and trial in many cases led to acquittals as complainants and witnesses lost interest in giving depositions or gave faulty depositions due to the long delay.

An example is a street robbery case filed with Siddhirganj Police Station in October 1998.

While delivering the judgment in the case in August 2017, a Narayanganj court observed, "The overall review shows that the case had been going on for more than 20 years. During the period, none of the witnesses did turn up despite taking all procedures as per law."

The court further said, "Trial proceedings of any case cannot run for an endless period."

Eventually the accused in the case were acquitted.

In a judgment in a house robbery case filed with Araihazar police in Narayanganj in 1998, a court observed that the complainant and the victims of the robbery did not give depositions.

"So, the accused have the right to get acquitted as their involvement in the crime was not proved."

The PBI report, a copy of which was obtained by this newspaper, also found that 28.8 percent of cases led to acquittals due to faulty investigation.

In the cases studied, police took an average of one year and five months to complete their investigation -- with the highest being 11 years to complete a probe in a case while the lowest being 33 days.

Courts took an average of 10 years and 11 months to complete trials of the cases -- with the lowest time taken to complete a trial being seven months and the highest 27 years and nine months, the study revealed.

Khurshid Alam, who is also an ACC lawyer, said the prosecution has to take the responsibility. "The public prosecutors cannot avoid their responsibility as they often fail to prove the cases."

He said, "While the conviction rate is in the ACC cases is 77 percent, the prosecution cannot most of the robbery cases as they fail to seize evidence, recover looted goods and properly arrange test identification parades."

The PBI study also found flaws in seizure lists, test identification parades (TIP) and case statements, not scrutinising PCPR (previous conviction and previous record) of the accused, not arranging TIP of accused following due procedures, and not recording confessional statements of the accused under section 164 of the CrPC properly, among other reasons of the low conviction rate.

Taking to The Daily Star recently, PBI Chief and Deputy Inspector General Banaj Kumar Majumder said they used the research reports and findings during the training of sub-inspectors and inspectors who join PBI so that such mistakes are not repeated in investigations.

In its recommendations, the report suggested setting up of speedy trial tribunals in every district to dispose of cases quickly.

It asked the police to be more serious in producing witnesses before the court and ensure food and conveyance allowance for witnesses.

The report also suggested arranging training of investigators and trimonthly inter departmental meetings or workshops among investigators, investigation supervisors, magistrates and doctors.

[Our Manikganj correspondent Zahangir Alam Biswas contributed to this report]