

US vows to move ‘heaven and earth’ to arm Ukraine

Moscow cites ‘real’ risk of nuclear war

AGENCIES

The United States yesterday vowed to move “heaven and earth” to help Ukraine win its battle against Russia’s unprovoked invasion, as allies from 40 nations met to bolster Kyiv’s defence against Moscow.

The meeting called by the US at its Ramstein airbase in southwestern Germany aims “to help Ukraine win the fight against Russia’s unjust invasion and to build up Ukraine’s defences for tomorrow’s challenges”, said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin as he opened the talks.

“Ukraine clearly believes that it can win and so does everyone here,” he added.

The US is already the biggest supplier of international military aid to Ukraine and Austin said Washington is “going to keep moving heaven and earth so that we can meet” Kyiv’s needs.

At the talks, German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht said Berlin has agreed to give the go-ahead to the delivery of used Gepard anti-aircraft tanks to Ukraine.

Lambrecht admitted that the Bundeswehr’s weapons stocks are limited, but said it will turn to the inventory of Germany’s armaments manufacturers, reports AFP.

Ukraine has been asking for heavy artillery and tanks to repel Russian forces trying to seize complete control of its vast southern plains and the eastern region of Donbas.

The war-ravaged country accused Russia of trying to create unrest in a Moscow-backed separatist region of ex-Soviet Moldova where recent blasts have raised fears of a spillover of the Ukraine conflict.

Meanwhile, Moscow accused Nato of engaging in a proxy battle against Russia by arming Ukraine, saying this had created a serious and real risk of nuclear war.



With Eid round the corner, people buy new notes in the capital’s Gulistan yesterday. Sale of fresh notes gathers pace ahead of the religious festival as people usually give children such notes as gifts for Eid. The bundles of new notes are sold at a mark-up of up to Tk 150.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Jaishankar may bring good news: Momen

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, expected to arrive tomorrow on a one-day visit, might carry good news, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said yesterday.

“He may bring good news and surprise us. We don’t know exactly what that is... he will give a special message...,” he told reporters at the foreign ministry.

Quoting Indian Foreign Secretary Harsha Vardhan Shringla, the Indian media on Monday reported that Jaishankar would carry an invitation letter from Indian Premier Narendra Modi for Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to visit India.

Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra will accompany Jaishankar.

“This is good news. Relations between India and Bangladesh are very warm. We want continuous engagement with our neighbours... I am very happy that the Indian foreign minister is coming to Bangladesh. I welcome him.”

Jaishankar will call on Hasina and then hold a meeting with Momen.

Asked what would be on the agenda, Momen said they would discuss the dates of meetings of the Joint Consultative Commission and the Joint River Commission, as well as the long pending Teesta water agreement, border killings, and India’s imposition of anti-dumping duty on Bangladesh’s jute, among others.

Momen didn’t give a direct answer to a query on whether he had any conversation with Jaishankar on the US sanctions on Rab during his visit to Washington DC in early April when the Indian foreign minister was also visiting the US capital.

Following the US sanctions on December 10 last year, Bangladesh sought India’s help for its withdrawal and got assurance from New Delhi that it would raise the issue with the US, said Momen.

Asked how right it was for Dhaka to seek New Delhi’s help over the issue, Momen said, “...We consult on various issues.”

On US Ambassador Peter Haas’ clear articulation that there is no scope for repealing sanctions on Rab without accountability, he said, “That’s ok. We have already taken some steps.”

The US spoke about accountability and Bangladesh has an in-built mechanism for that, the minister pointed out.

He made mention of the 2014 seven murder case in Narayanganj where Rab members were involved, and said a number of Rab officials were executed following a court verdict while many lost jobs and got demoted.

“Such information does not reach them [US]. Those who oppose us only talk of the killings, not its context.”

Asked if the US is satisfied with Dhaka’s explanation, Momen said, “May be not yet, but they will in the future.”

On the issue of “Chinese debt trap” that has come into discussion with regard to Sri Lanka’s financial crisis, Momen said, “We hear you [journalists] talk about the Chinese debt trap. But later we find out that the things you talk about are imaginary.”

He said Chinese loans account for only 5-6 percent of Bangladesh’s total foreign loans, while the majority of loans from multilateral organisations like World Bank and Asian Development Bank. A large chunk of bilateral loans comes from Japan.

“We are very cautious about taking loans. We don’t borrow if the loan is not beneficial.”

About the US Commission on International Religious Freedom’s annual report that expressed deep concern over “deterioration” in religious freedom in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries, he said there is no discrimination when it comes to religious groups in Bangladesh.

“There may be some incidents but the government takes action.”



S Jaishankar

Bottlenecks look ominous

FROM PAGE 1

Launch services to the southern region may also face immense pressure amid safety concerns with river traffic set to multiply ahead of Eid.

Usually, 85 to 90 launches operate from Sadarghat a day. The number could reach 210-220 during the Eid rush with 10 lakh people expected to travel by launch.

Traffic congestion on major highways and ferry terminals is common ahead of Eid when thousands of people travel to their hometowns.

With almost no Covid restrictions in place, a greater number of people are expected to leave the capital and other cities after two years of pandemic-induced lull, experts and passenger welfare associations said.

They estimated that over 1.2 crore people are likely to leave Dhaka ahead of the

Eid, which will be on May 2 or 3, said Prof Hadiuzzaman, director of accident research institute of Buet.

The shortage of transport is likely to force many to travel by vehicles that cannot legally carry people, like trucks and pickups, and on rooftops of launches and trains.

BOTTLENECKS Construction work for a dedicated bus corridor between Dhaka airport and Gazipur has been causing congestion for the last few years.

Heavy traffic may cause jams, said Suvenkar Ghosh, joint secretary of Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners Association.

The authorities opened three major flyovers on the 70km section from Joydebpur in Gazipur to Elenga in Tangail on Monday. This will, hopefully, improve traffic movement.

But road expansion works on the 190km section from Elenga to Rangpur are feared to cause choke points.

The Bangabandhu bridge is considered the gateway to 16 northern districts. Besides, vehicles heading for six southern districts also use this bridge.

On a typical day, some 18,000 to 20,000 vehicles use the bridge. Eid rush may take the numbers to 50,000-60,000, according to highway police.

Travellers and transport operators say gridlocks on the west side of the bridge affects traffic on the east side.

However, the authorities opened two lanes of the under-construction Nalka bridge yesterday. It will be an addition to the existing two-lane bridge, said Waliur Rahman, project director of the expansion work.

Besides, there is a plan

to divert some vehicles in Elenga to a bypass road to Bangabandhu bridge.

The vehicles heading towards Dhaka will be diverted to Bhuapur road from the east end of the bridge to avert congestion, he added.

“We have tried our best to give alternatives. The situation will depend on proper traffic management,” he said.

FERRY TERMINALS

On an average, 4,000 vehicles cross the Padma via the Paturia-Daulatdia route using 17 to 18 ferries every day, said Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) officials.

During Eid, the authorities will add two more ferries. The number of vehicles is likely to double and cause long tailbacks near the terminals.

On the Shimulia-

Kathalbari route, ferry services have been operated on a limited scale since ferries have collided with Padma bridge pillars at least four times last year.

From the usual 600-700 small vehicles on this route, the number of vehicles may range between 3,500 and 4,000 ahead of Eid, Faysal Ahmmad, manager (commerce) of BIWTC’s Shimulia office, said recently.

No decision was made as of yesterday to raise the number of ferries.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said all necessary preparations were made to ensure a smooth Eid journey for people.

Our correspondents in Munshiganj, Manikganj, Tangail and Pabna contributed to the report.

they will have to stop the work.”

On Monday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan at a programme in Teigaon said he had asked the city corporation and others concerned to find an alternative place for Kalabagan Police Station.

If a suitable place for the station cannot be found, a decision would be made later upon discussions, he said.

But no such move was found from organisations like the Dhaka South City Corporation.

At present, a rented building on 30 North Road is being used as the police station.

Edible oil supply crunch has begun

FROM PAGE 1

5 litres of edible oil from Shwapno’s 56 stores across the country.

“I think the edible oil crisis will be over after Eid,” said Al Mamun, senior operations manager of Shwapno’s Panthapath outlet, which sells about 200 litres of edible oil a day.

For the last few days, the store is selling 100 litres from refiners.

The refiners though maintain they are supplying oil as normal.

“We are not doing anything like that,” said Biswajit Saha, director for

corporate and regulatory affairs at City Group, a leading oil refiner and importer.

Mohammad Dabirul Islam Didar, head of finance and Accounts at Bangladesh Edible Oil Limited, which sells the Rupchanda brand soybean oil, echoed the same.

“After Eid, we will sit with the government to discuss the supply situation,” he added.

The government is taking steps to increase palm oil imports from Malaysia as an alternative to Indonesia, which is the world’s biggest

exporter of the edible oil, as well as soybean oil imports from other countries, said Shafiquezzaman, who is also the director-general of the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection.

Malaysia, which accounts for 31 percent of global palm oil supply, second after Indonesia’s 56 percent, is unlikely to be able to fill the gap created by Indonesia as it is facing a labour shortage.

“We have already approached India as an alternative market for sunflower oil,” he added.

each ward, there should be at least over a dozen parks and play spaces in a single ward.

The situation in Dhaka, unfortunately, is dismal.

According to the draft Detailed Area Plan, 25 out of 75 wards under Dhaka South City Corporation, and 10 out of 55 wards under Dhaka North City Corporation do not have a single park or playground.

Psychologists warn that the inadequate playgrounds and subsequent absence of physical activity negatively impacts the mental and physical growth of the children as they have no space to play and interact with friends.

Kalabagan police’s move to construct the building also goes against existing law and directives given by the High Court and city mayors.

According to the Playground, Open Spaces, Gardens, and Water Bodies Conservation Act

2000, no one can change the characteristics of a playground.

The HC in a judgment in 2014 gave a specific directive for the Deputy Commissioner’s office to take action against any encroachment on open spaces or playgrounds.

DSCC Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh recently announced he would build a playground in every ward.

However, before he could build one, an existing one is on the verge of obliteration.

The blatant refusal to respect public demands to save the playground as it is makes us wonder if no other place could be found for building their office. Do the local children’s future and wellbeing not matter to them anymore?

Even while construction continued yesterday, children of the area watched silently from a distance. One was suddenly heard saying, “Uncle...please stop the work.”

Khaleda’s graft case hearing adjourned

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday adjourned until June 13 the hearing on charge framing against Khaleda Zia and six others in the Barapukuria coal mine graft case.

A judge of the Special Judge’s Court-2 passed the order after a petition was filed with the court seeking adjournment, Khaleda’s lawyer Masud Ahmed Talukder told The Daily Star.

Khaleda is unwell and she was exempted earlier from having to appear at the court, said the lawyer.

Of the other accused, BNP leaders Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain were absent in the court, while two others were present.

On February 26, 2008, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station, accusing 16 people including Khaleda and 10 of her former cabinet colleagues over misappropriating Tk 159 crore.

The ACC pressed charges against the accused on October 5 that year.

ASI stabbed by suspect’s wife

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

An assistant sub-inspector of police was stabbed by the wife of a murder suspect in Bakerganj upazila of Barishal on Monday evening.

ASI Krishna Mitra was stabbed by Kulsum Begum when he went to her house in Bhatshala area to arrest her husband.

Kulsum was arrested and charged with attempted murder.

The injured officer, currently being treated at a hospital, said four other policemen who were with him at the time caught and disarmed the woman.

Sagar-Runi murder

probe gets 88th time

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked Rab to submit by June 7 the probe report in a case filed over the murders of journalist couple Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Debdash Chandra Adhikary passed the order after the Rab officer investigating the case failed to submit the report for 88th time yesterday.

Sagar, news editor at Maasranga TV, and his wife Runi, a senior reporter at ATN Bangla, were killed in the early hours of February 11, 2012 in their flat at the capital’s West Razabazar.

4 killed by suicide bomber in Pakistan

AFP, Karachi

A woman suicide bomber from a Pakistan separatist group killed four people, including three Chinese nationals, in an attack on a minibus carrying staff from the Confucius Institute at Karachi University yesterday.

The Baloch Liberation Army -- one of several groups fighting for independence in Pakistan’s biggest province -- claimed responsibility, saying it was the first suicide attack by a woman assailant.