

INTERNATIONAL

WAR WITH US-ISRAEL

Iran's Shia allies step up strikes

REUTERS, Baghdad

Shia Muslim armed groups in Lebanon and Iraq are stepping up their role in the war with the US and Israel, showing the Iran-backed 'Axis of Resistance' can still wage attacks despite damage inflicted on the alliance during the Gaza conflict.

Groups that have long been armed and financed by Iran and loyal to its Shia Islamist rulers are now helping Tehran intensify the war around the region. Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Wednesday launched their first-ever simultaneous rocket barrage on Israel, with the Lebanese group firing 200 missiles.

Iraqi Shia members have also picked up the pace of drone and missile attacks on US interests in Iraq in the last 3-4 days, according to three Iraqi security sources.



Palestinian worshippers pray on a roadside after being barred from attending the final Friday prayers of Ramadan at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, yesterday. Israeli authorities imposed restrictions on large gatherings, leaving many faithful to observe the holy day outside the compound.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Putin's 'hand' behind Iran's drone tactics

Says UK defence secy

AFP, London

UK Defence Minister John Healey suggested on Thursday that Russia was influencing Iran's use of drone attacks in its war with the United States and Israel.

Healey said Russian President Putin's "hidden hand" may be behind some of the tactics deployed by Tehran in the Middle East conflict, which started when the United States and Israel struck Iran on February 28.

He told reporters that officials were analysing an Iranian-made drone that hit the UK's Akrotiri air force base in Cyprus on March 1 "for any evidence of Russian or any other foreign components and parts". "We will update you and appropriately publish any findings from that when we've got them," he said.

Why Trump's Arab allies are reluctant to join Iran war

CNN ONLINE

Since the Iran war began, Gulf states have faced a barrage of Iranian missiles and drones, leaving their leaders with an unenviable choice: anger their closest ally and security guarantor, or risk the wrath of a powerful neighbour they must live beside long after the war ends.

Over the weekend, Iran's Revolutionary Guards acknowledged that about 40 percent of its firepower had been directed at Israel, with the majority targeting its Arab neighbours instead. More than 2,000 projectiles have been fired at Gulf states.

Both sides in the conflict appear to be using strikes on the Gulf to their advantage. Iran hopes that hitting Gulf states will drive them away from Washington, while the US and Israel appear to be using the Iranian attacks to pressure Arab governments to join the war.

Kamal Kharrazi, a key foreign policy adviser to Iran's supreme leader, told

CNN that the strikes would continue in an effort to push Gulf states to persuade US President Donald Trump to step back from the conflict.

Last week, Trump told CNN that seeing the United States' Arab allies battered by Iran was the "biggest surprise" of the war, adding that the attacks prompted the Gulf states to "insist on being involved."

Yet Gulf Arab nations have repeatedly said they have no desire to join the war.

Republican senator and Trump ally Lindsey Graham has been the most explicit in pressing Washington's Arab allies to participate. After a trip to Israel, he questioned why the US should defend partners like Saudi Arabia that refuse to take part in what he described as a shared struggle against Iran. If they do not, "consequences will follow," he warned.

Regional leaders have largely avoided responding publicly to such pressure. But Dubai billionaire and business tycoon Khalaf Al Habtoor offered a glimpse of

the sentiment in the Gulf in a response to Graham's comments.

"We know full well why we are under attack, and we also know who dragged the entire region into this dangerous escalation without consulting those he calls his 'allies' in the region," he wrote on X, before deleting the post. Gulf states are deeply wary of being drawn into a wider war, the long-term consequences of which they may ultimately have to manage alone.

There is a sense in the Gulf that by going to war with Iran, the Trump administration prioritised Israel's security over that of its Arab allies, said Hasan Alhasan, senior fellow for Middle East policy at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"That distrust is likely to be a barrier to Gulf states joining an offensive action," he said. Relations with Tehran would eventually have to normalize, even if it takes decades to rebuild the "huge trust gap," a UAE official said.

Parliament must debate

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the benefit extended to American goods; Bangladesh will have to purchase some unnecessary goods from the US at higher costs, he said.

For instance, under the agreement, Bangladesh will have to purchase 14 aircraft from the American company Boeing.

Bangladesh's trade with other countries such as Spain, Russia and China may be affected due to signing of the deal as the US does not have warm relationship with these countries, said Muhammad, also the chairman of the platform.

Nearly 70 lakh people may lose employment, particularly in the rural poultry, dairy and related industries, as these sectors will be severely affected by the deal.

"It'll be an understatement if the agreement is described as a slavery deal. Because, it has left no room for autonomy. Autonomy persisted even in the colonial times, but here, it does not exist. It is an unjust and unfair trade deal."

The deal was signed ignoring the norms of the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, the free market economy and even without following the general rules of economics, he said.

"The economy will face a catastrophe if the deal is implemented -- although the foreign minister advocated in favour of this agreement."

So, the elected government should take the deal to the parliament for wider discussion and ultimately scrap it.

There should be punitive actions against the persons involved in the signing of the agreement, Muhammad added.

The Tk 40,000 crore invested in local poultry and dairy sectors will be the highest affected from the deal, said Maha Mirza, a researcher and rights activist.

The American government gives \$42 billion subsidy to its poultry sector, so Bangladesh's poultry sector will not be able to compete as a result.

"The language of the deal is aggressive, as if the Lord is ordering the subordinates," she said, citing the stipulation that Bangladesh will have to buy \$15 billion worth of LNG over the next 15 years from the US.

It is a double standard agreement and Bangladesh should cancel this agreement, she added.

"In the agreement, it is mentioned 130 times that 'Bangladesh will have to' but only six times that 'the US

will have to' -- this indicates that the deal was dominated by the US," said Moshahida Sultana, an associate professor at the University of Dhaka's accounting department.

The immediate past interim government cannot claim it as a success story as the deal will damage the economy, she said, adding that both Jamaat and the BNP were silent during the signing of the agreement.

Many issues are hidden in this agreement and all the issues have not been published yet, said Jyotirmoy Barua, a lawyer.

"The interim government has signed the agreement hurriedly and could not wait for the elected government. But the deal was supposed to be widely discussed in the Parliament before the signing."

In the constitution, there is no provision of interim government, but it was formed under a special situation. So the deal needs to be discussed in the parliament under the elected government for finalisation, Barua said.

The local pharmaceutical sector will be heavily affected by this agreement, he said.

"This is a lop-sided agreement with strategic risks of mandatory import obligation, pressure on domestic industries and public health and food sovereignty risks," said Golam Rasul, professor and chair of the department of economics at the International University of Business Agriculture and Technology.

Bangladesh must therefore examine this agreement not only as a commercial document, but as a long-term development commitment.

"Supreme Court ruling invalidates the deal's legal foundation -- Bangladesh must not ratify an agreement built on a collapsed basis," he added.

5 Bangladeshis

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The news outlet said preliminary reports from local authorities attributed the blaze to a gas leak.

It added that the HRCM is currently assessing the site to determine if any human rights violations contributed to the incident while emphasising the urgent need for improved safety standards in worker housing.

According to official estimates by the Maldivian authorities, as of December 2024, around 96,000 Bangladeshis were residing in the archipelagic country in South Asia, the local media had earlier reported.

India to hold off

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not authorised to speak to media.

A spokesperson from India's trade ministry denied any hold off in bilateral engagement. "It is reiterated that the two sides remain engaged for a mutually beneficial trade agreement," the spokesperson added, without offering details on formal signing of the deal.

A White House official said the US was continuing to work with India on finalising a deal.

Negotiations lost momentum after the US Supreme Court in late February struck down Trump's tariffs, the Indian government sources said, adding that there have been no substantive talks since, particularly as Washington has been preoccupied with the war on Iran. India never halted Russian oil purchases, only slowed them, and US officials are now urging New Delhi to increase buying to help ease a global energy crunch triggered by the conflict.

Complicating matters is a new US investigation into what it calls "structural excess capacity and production in manufacturing sectors" in 16 trading partners, including India.

"We are not in a hurry to sign any deal," said one of the sources. "The new investigation is a pressure tactic to force countries into signing deals after the court order. It's a spanner in the works."

India would instead largely take a "wait and watch" approach as US tariff policy evolves, the source said, noting that Trump dropped a 25% punitive tariff on India after saying New Delhi had agreed to curb Russian crude imports, while India only said it would diversify its supply base. The overall tariff on India was 50% earlier, among the highest in the world.

The latest probe has been launched under Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974. India plans to present its case to the Office of the United States Trade Representative if permitted, or await a ruling before considering options such as approaching the World Trade Organization, the source said.

The US ambassador to New Delhi, Sergio Gor, said Trump had multiple other tools to impose tariffs, including through 301.

"So, we fully expect the nations that we've made deals with to honour those deals," he told a conclave organised by the India Today media group yesterday.

"I think India will do that because ... it's not just about honouring it -- it's a win-win situation."

Following the Supreme Court ruling, Trump imposed a 10% tariff on imports from all countries through July 24.

Prices of meat jump before Eid

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Ramadan, said Mohammad Gofran, proprietor of Cumilla General Store at Kawran Bazar.

Raisins are going for Tk 850 to Tk 900 per kg, compared to Tk 700 earlier.

Pistachios now cost Tk 3,700 to Tk 3,800 per kg, up from Tk 3,200 to Tk 3,300 at the start of Ramadan.

The prices of cinnamon and cardamom have remained high for about a year, ranging between Tk 4,500 and Tk 5,500 per kg.

Egg prices have also risen by Tk 10 from last week to Tk 100 to Tk 120 a dozen.

Meanwhile, onion prices continued to decline, said Sajib Sheikh, a wholesale onion trader at Kawran Bazar.

Onions are selling for Tk 22 to Tk 28 per kg in the wholesale market, while the retail prices ranged from Tk 35 to Tk 45.

Potatoes are selling for Tk 10 to Tk 11 per kg in the wholesale market and

at Tk 15 to Tk 20 in the retail market, said Md Sabuj, a major wholesale potato trader of Bikrampur Bhandar at Kawran Bazar.

If the prices of potatoes and onions continue to fall this way, farmers may lose interest in producing them, which could lead to an abnormal price hike later.

The government should consider how to protect farmers from losses in prices of potatoes, onions and other agricultural products, he added.

Some vegetable prices have also dropped.

Cucumbers, which sold for Tk 100 to Tk 150 per kg at the beginning of Ramadan, and tomatoes, which sold for Tk 60 to Tk 80, are now selling at Tk 30 to Tk 60. The prices of brinjal and some other vegetables have also declined.

Loose soybean oil price has gone up by Tk 5 per litre, while the prices of bottled soybean oil, pulses, rice, salt, sugar and other essentials remain largely unchanged.

GAZA GENOCIDE CASE

US sides with Israel at UN's top court

AFP, The Hague

The United States will defend its ally Israel against accusations at the top United Nations court that it breached the Genocide Convention during its Gaza campaign, the court said yesterday.

Washington filed a so-called "declaration of intervention" at the International Court of Justice, which is examining the genocide case against Israel brought by South Africa.

"The United States affirms, in the strongest terms possible, that the allegations of 'genocide' against Israel are false," said Washington in its filing.

The US said South Africa's case was the latest in a series "to level false charges of 'genocide' against Israel" that it said had been going on for decades.

Such charges serve to "delegitimise the State of Israel and the Jewish people and to justify or encourage terrorism against them", Washington said.

South Africa brought its case before the ICJ in December 2023, arguing the Gaza war breached the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, an accusation Israel has strongly denied.



Nepal sells half-filled gas canisters

AFP, Mumbai

Nepal has started selling half-filled cooking gas cylinders to curb hoarding and panic buying, officials said yesterday, following import disruptions caused by the Middle East conflict.

The landlocked Himalayan nation of 30 million relies almost entirely on India for its fossil fuel needs.

About 90 percent of India's liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) passes through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic chokepoint where maritime traffic has largely stalled.

Silence, sorrow

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Ashraful said, "I have lost everyone -- my father, brother, wife, children, and niece. How will I bear the losses?"

Mujibur Rahman, caretaker of Mongla Graveyard where the nine victims from the family were buried yesterday afternoon, said, "I have been discharging duties here for around 17 years. I never dug so many graves at a time. This is a heart-wrenching incident."

Before the burial, the funeral prayers for the victims were held at Mongla Upazila Parishad ground around 2:30pm.

State Minister for Environment Shaikh Faridul Islam, Bagerhat-2 lawmaker Shaikh Monzurul Haque Rahad, senior government officials, and several thousands of people joined the prayers.

Following formal requests from the bereaved families, the authorities released the bodies from hospitals on Thursday late night without autopsies. Ten of them were at Khulna Medical College morgue and four at Rampal Upazila Health Complex.

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