

INTERNATIONAL

Iran leadership humiliating US
Says Germany's Merz, urges quick solution to crisis

REUTERS, Berlin

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz yesterday said Iran's leadership was humiliating the United States and getting US officials to travel to Pakistan and then leave without results, in an unusually abrupt rebuke over the conflict.

Merz also said he did not see what exit strategy the US was pursuing in the Iran war, comments that underlined deep divisions between Washington and its European Nato allies, which had already been festering over Ukraine and other issues.

"The Iranians are obviously very skilled at negotiating, or rather, very skillful at not negotiating, letting the Americans travel to Islamabad and then leave again without any result," he said during a talk to students in the town of Marsberg.

"An entire nation is being humiliated by the Iranian leadership, especially by these so-called Revolutionary Guards. And so I hope that this ends as quickly as possible," he added.

US President Donald Trump has harshly criticised Nato allies for not sending their navies to help open the Strait of Hormuz during the conflict. The waterway has remained virtually shut, causing market turmoil and unprecedented disruption in energy supplies.

Merz reiterated that Germans and Europeans were not consulted before the US and Israel started attacking Iran on February 28, and that he had conveyed his scepticism directly to Trump afterwards.

"If I had known that it would continue like this for five or six weeks and get progressively worse, I would have told him even more emphatically," Merz said, comparing it to previous US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.



A woman cycles past a sculpture at Chitgar Lake, an artificial recreational lake and park officially known as the Lake of the Martyrs of the Persian Gulf, in northwestern Tehran. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Kim reaffirms support for Russia's 'sacred' Ukraine war

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has reaffirmed Pyongyang's support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, vowing to help Moscow achieve victory in its "sacred" war, state media reported yesterday.

Pyongyang has sent missiles, munitions and thousands of troops to assist Russia in Ukraine, and analysts say Moscow is sending financial aid, military technology, food and energy to the diplomatically isolated country in return.

A string of high-level Russian officials have visited North Korea in recent days, with Defence Minister Andrey Belousov meeting Kim on Sunday, according to official statements.

North Korea "will as ever fully support the policy of the Russian Federation to defend the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and security interests", Kim told Belousov, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

Kim expressed "belief that the Russian army and people would surely win a victory in the just sacred war", KCNA reported.

Both sides said their delegations had discussed deeper military ties, with Belousov saying Moscow was ready to sign a cooperation plan covering the period from 2027 to 2031.

Kim, Belousov and Russian parliamentary speaker Vyacheslav Volodin also attended the opening ceremony of a memorial complex honouring North Korean soldiers killed in Ukraine.

In a speech, Kim paid tribute to their "unrivalled bravery, mass heroism, indomitable fighting spirit and noble sacrifice", KCNA said.

He took part in a ceremony to bury the war dead, recalling their "last heroic moments" and covering the remains of a soldier with earth.

The inauguration also included a concert,

a fireworks display and an air force flyover, KCNA reported.

North Korea and Russia signed a military treaty in 2024, obligating both states to provide military assistance "without delay" in the event of an attack on the other.

The opening of the memorial coincides with the first anniversary of Moscow's recovery

of parts of Kursk, a region in Russia where Ukraine launched a major counteroffensive starting in mid-2024.

North Korean soldiers were deployed in the area to help beat back the Ukrainian advance.

Russian President Vladimir Putin praised the "extraordinary bravery and genuine devotion" of North Korean troops in a letter to Kim that was published by KCNA.

Seoul estimates about 2,000 North Koreans have been killed in the Ukraine war.

North Korean troops are said to have been instructed to kill themselves rather than be captured in battle.

Only two North Korean soldiers have been

taken alive and are currently in the custody of Ukrainian authorities.

In contrast with its ties with Russia, North Korea has called South Korea its "most hostile" adversary despite Seoul's efforts at engagement.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung yesterday said that it was "the destiny of both

the South and the North to make the flowers of peace bloom".

He vowed to act "proactively" to restore trust with Pyongyang, adding: "We hope the North will trust the sincerity of our government and respond in kind."

Lee's comments marked the anniversary of the 2018 inter-Korean summit, at which Kim and South Korea's then-president Moon Jae-in memorably crossed into the other country's territory.

The summit yielded a declaration to work towards an official end to the Korean War, but was later suspended as bilateral tensions rose again.



EU extends Myanmar sanctions by a year

REUTERS, Brussels

The European Union yesterday extended its sanctions against Myanmar until at least May 2027, in an effort to maintain pressure on the country's military rulers more than five years after their coup toppled an elected government.

The measures include asset freezes, travel bans and an arms embargo for 105 individuals and 22 entities.

"The EU reiterates its strongest condemnation of the actions taken by the Myanmar military since the 2021 coup," the EU said.

It called for an end to all violence and the release of people who have been arbitrarily detained.

Earlier this month, coup leader Min Aung Hlaing was elected as president of Myanmar after an election denounced by Western governments as a sham to perpetuate military rule.

The United Nations says at least 3.6 million people have been displaced since the coup, and the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners has verified nearly 8,000 killings and close to 31,000 arrests, with more than 22,000 people remaining in detention.

Fulfil polls pledge

FROM PAGE 1 and perceived affiliations, adding the arrests, made under the previous administration, appeared to be retaliatory.

CPJ also raised serious humanitarian concerns.

It said Shyamal Dutta has documented cardiac conditions and severe sleep apnea that remain unassessed in custody; Mozammel Babu, who underwent major invasive surgery for prostate cancer in late 2023, has not received required follow-up care; and Farzana Rupa was held for two weeks in November 2024 in a "condemnation cell" reserved for death-row inmates.

In the letter, CPJ described its appeal as one made "in a spirit of constructive engagement", noting that the first months of the new administration had offered "encouraging signals on press freedom".

Citing protections under article 39 of the constitution and Bangladesh's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, CPJ urged authorities to consider dropping the charges and allowing the journalists to return to their families.

Pending that outcome, it called for immediate access to necessary medical treatment in coordination with the home ministry.

CPJ said a resolution of the cases would be received internationally as a clear signal of the reforms pledged by the government

and would strengthen goodwill surrounding Bangladesh's democratic transition.

It also expressed willingness to engage directly with the minister and proposed a visit to Dhaka later this year to discuss broader press freedom issues.

The letter was signed by Kunal Majumder, Asia-Pacific Programme Coordinator at CPJ, and copied to Attorney General Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed, and Information Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon.

Ex-owners

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provisions will rehabilitate those who put the entire banking sector at risk with scams and bad loans.

The applicants are led by Maj (ret'd) Dr Md Rezaul Haque, former chairman and sponsor shareholder of SIBL.

Rezaul, who chaired SIBL's board until October 30, 2017, was joined by sponsor shareholders Hakim Md Yousuf Harun Bhuiyan, MD and chief mutawalli of Hamdard Laboratories Waqf, and Sultan Mahmood Chowdhury.

The other applicants are former shareholder director Afia Begum and shareholder Md Zabedul Alam Chowdhury.

Contacted, Bangladesh Bank spokesperson and Executive Director Arief Hossain Khan said the application "might have been submitted, but has not yet reached the relevant department".

The application argued that the merger initiative did not adequately consider the "distinct operational realities and financial condition of SIBL, particularly as the primary issue related to liquidity stress rather than fundamental insolvency".

The applicants said SIBL's governance was disrupted due to external influence between 2017 and 2024, when significant changes in control and management structure weakened the institutional foundation of the entity.

SIBL was under the control of the Chattogram-based business house S Alam Group, which allegedly took over the entity through coercion.

The applicants have proposed a strategic recovery roadmap and requested eight years, including a two-year grace period, to repay nearly Tk 11,000 crore owed to Bangladesh Bank at the bank rate.

SIBL was merged with First Security Islami Bank, Union Bank, Global Islami Bank, and EXIM Bank into Sommito Islami Bank. The merged entity received its licence in December last year after the government and Bangladesh Bank injected Tk 35,000 crore in capital and provided additional liquidity support.

Third Terminal opening delayed

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ORAT, which will last between six months and a year," said Air Vice Marshal Mostafa Mahmood Siddiq, chairman of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB).

"We expect to inaugurate the Third Terminal about six months after the test run begins," he said during a views-exchange meeting with members of the Aviation and Tourism Journalists' Forum of Bangladesh at the CAAB Headquarters.

Highlighting the risks of rapid transition activities, he said, "Studies by global experts show that around 74 percent of airport transitions have failed. That's why we are proceeding cautiously to avoid any disruptions after launching of the terminal."

Asked about the deal with the Japanese consortium, the CAAB chairman said, "The agreement will be fair. We will ensure everything necessary to safeguard the national interest."

Although both sides have reached consensus on several issues, some gaps still remain, he added.

After around one

and a half year's pause, Bangladesh and Japan resumed talks in March after the BNP government took office in February.

Key issues under discussion include embarkation fees, upfront payments, and revenue-sharing arrangements.

The Japanese consortium includes Japan Airport Terminal Company, Sumitomo Corporation, Nippon Koei, and Narita International Airport Corporation.

The terminal has remained non-operational since its soft launching on October 6, 2023, by then Awami League government.

On several occasions, then CAAB authorities said the terminal would be fully operational by the end of 2024.

But the terminal remained non-operational due to disagreements over management and revenue-sharing between CAAB and the Japanese consortium.

The AL government decided in principle to operate and maintain the terminal by a Japanese consortium under a public-private partnership.

The Japanese company will be responsible for the operational activities of the terminal and CAAB will be in charge of security.

The terminal, with its spectacular aesthetic design, cost over Tk 21,300 crore to build. The government contributed Tk 5,000 crore, with the rest of the amount coming from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) in the form of loans.

Upon fully-fledged operation of the terminal, HSA's annual passenger and cargo handling capacity is expected to double. The annual passenger handling capacity would be 24 million (including the old terminals).

At present, the airport can handle eight million passengers and 5,00,000 tonnes of cargo each year.

In another development, Biman, along with a second ground-handling operator, will be appointed at the Third Terminal to deliver better services and introduce competition in ground-handling.

"The second operator will be engaged from the very first day of the

terminal operations..." the CAAB boss said.

He added that the Japanese consortium, led by Sumitomo Corporation, will have the prerogative to select as a key constraint.

Outstanding dues owed to power-importing entities stand at Tk 56,000 crore, he said.

Compounding the fiscal burden, the ongoing Middle East crisis has already cost the country an additional \$2 billion in energy expenditure, forcing the government to manage its resources with extreme caution.

Reflecting on the structural woes inherited by his ministry, he said: "Every time I have taken charge of this ministry, I have had to start from a deficit - in 2001 and again now in 2026. Unnecessary projects were executed, whose financial liabilities we are now bearing."

He noted a stark mismatch between installed capacity and actual demand: while national electricity demand stands at 18,000MW, installed generation capacity was expanded to

30,000MW in previous years. Despite the surplus capacity, raw material shortages have left many plants idle, yet the government continues to pay for their upkeep, he said, citing the Rupsha power plant in Khulna as a case in point.

The plant has been dormant for three years after a plan to supply it with Bhola gas failed to materialise.

Mahmood identified renewable energy, particularly solar, as the most viable exit from the current crisis.

The government has set a target of generating 10,000MW of solar power within five years.

"Prime Minister Tarique Rahaman wants work to begin today, if possible," he said, adding that land scarcity remains the chief obstacle to large-scale solar deployment.

To address this, the government has decided to lease state-owned khas land to the private sector for solar plant construction, alongside offering tax incentives to

Load shedding to ease next week

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"A complete halt, however, is not possible at this moment," he said, citing mounting financial strain as a key constraint.

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