

'Sale Of Integrated Air-Defence System To India By US Disturbing'

Agencies

Islamabad: Pakistan on Thursday termed the sale of integrated air-defence system to India by the US as "disturbing", saying it would further destabilise the "already volatile region".

The US has approved the sale of an Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) to India for an estimated cost of USD 1.9 billion to modernise its armed forces and to expand its existing air defence architecture to counter threats posed by air attacks.

Foreign Office spokesperson Aisha Farooqi told reporters during her weekly media briefing here that Pakistan saw the advance notice issued by US Defence Security Cooperation Agency, notifying the State Department's approval of Foreign Military Sale to India of IADWS.

"Sale of such sophisticated weapons system to India at this time is particularly disturbing as it would further destabilise the already volatile region. The US decision would disturb the strategic balance in South Asia with serious security implications for Pakistan and the region," she said.

"The international community is fully aware of India's aggressive policy designs against Pakistan and threatening statements of Indian political and military leaders. South Asia cannot afford an arms race and conflict. It is

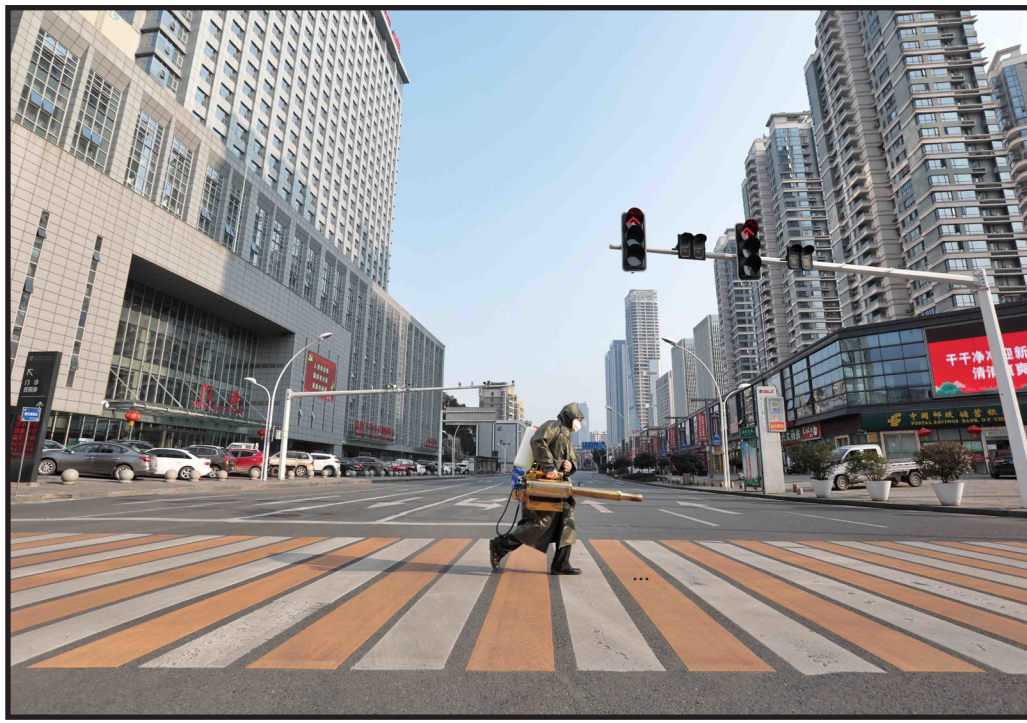
therefore incumbent upon international community to prevent further destabilization of the region," she added.

Commenting on US President Donald Trump's maiden visit to India later this month, she said he offered mediation on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute on several occasions and "now was time to fulfill the promise".

"We hope to see those offers being translated into practical actions. We hope that the dispute of Jammu and Kashmir will be raised during President Trump's visit to India," she said.

She alleged that India committed 272 ceasefire violations along the Line of Control this year, killing three civilians and wounding 25 others. She also warned that Pakistan would respond most effectively and immediately to any Indian provocation.

To a question about the upcoming meeting of the Financial Action Task Force in Paris where Pakistan will present its case to escape from being blacklisted, she said that Islamabad's efforts were widely acknowledged. "We are certainly hopeful and working closely with our partners in the international community in this regard," she said. The FATF in October last decided to keep Pakistan on its 'Grey List' for its failure to curb funneling of funds to terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad.



Foreigners Stranded In Wuhan By Virus Tell Of Fear And Rations

Agencies

BELJING: Hunkered down at the epicentre of China's virus epidemic and cut off from the world, the remaining foreigners in Wuhan are eking out a life in fear.

A coronavirus outbreak that has killed more than 1,300 people and locked down the central Chinese city has left thousands of foreigners trapped as authorities impose an unprecedented quarantine. "We want to go back. We can't survive any more," said Gaurab Pokhrel, a Nepali doctoral student in Wuhan and one of 200 from his country yet to be evacuated.

He said food was in short supply and foreign students were competing with locals at the few stores that were open.

As of Monday, 27 foreigners in China had been infected with the virus—22 of whom were in quarantine, officials said. Two of those have died—an American and a Japanese man.

While many have managed to escape on government chartered planes, a dwindling group of the unlucky—or in some cases hardy—remain, either adapting to life or still seeking a way out.

They told AFP of their plight via phone, email, text messages and social media.

Rugia Shaikh, a Pakistani post-doctoral researcher stranded at Wuhan's Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, said most students at the school were confined to their dormitories, watching TV.

She said the university was providing students with essential commodities, but at double the usual price.

"We are fed up of eating the same food—boiled rice and vegetables—over and over again. The only physical activity we have is a walk on the terrace, and that exposes us to the risk," Shaikh said.

"Last week I went to Walmart. It was the first time I had gone out in weeks. It was scary [..] Since I came back I have been counting the days until I was very sure I didn't have any virus."

No plans for evacuation
She added that while many Pakistani students wanted to leave, there were risks in returning to the country.

"We are worried about how the authorities are going to treat us when we go back to Pakistan—some students who went back told us the officials treated them very badly," she said.

Authorities say more than 500 students from Pakistan are in Wuhan, but they have not announced any plans for an evacuation effort.

Unlike many countries, Islamabad has maintained flights to and from other cities in China. The health ministry justifies the move with assurances that all passengers are screened on landing in Pakistan.

Yemen too has no plans to evacuate its 115 nationals from the virus-hit city.

Fahd Al Tawili, a 31-year-old Yemeni under quarantine at the China University of Geosciences, said conditions were desperate.

"Everybody's being evacuated except us. The latest are the Sudanese," he said.

"When we are allowed to go out, the few shops open are crowded and we have to wait in line for a long time to make rare purchases." He said Yemen's government had turned a deaf ear to requests to leave, and financial aid promised to scholarship holders had not been sent.

Another Yemeni student, a 23-year-old studying at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, said students were living in "total terror for fear of being infected".

Bangladesh last week evacuated 312 people, mostly students, and planned a second flight for another 171 until pilots for national carrier Biman refused to fly for fear of catching the virus.

Senate Curbs Trump's Ability to Wage War on Iran

Agencies

Washington: The United States Senate backed legislation on Thursday to limit President Donald Trump's ability to wage war against Iran, rebuking the president after a strike against an Iranian military commander and Tehran's retaliation last month raised fears of broader regional conflict.

The measure, authored by Senator Tim Kaine, says Trump must win approval from Congress before engaging in further military action against Iran. Eight Republicans joined with Democrats to pass the resolution by a 55-45 vote. Kaine and other supporters said the resolution was not about Trump or even the presidency, but instead was an important reassertion of congressional power to declare war.

While Trump and other presidents "must always have the ability to defend the United States from

send a signal of weakness to Iran and other potential adversaries, Kaine said the opposite was true.

"When we stand up for the rule of law—in a world that hungers for more rule of law—and say 'this decision is fundamental, and we have rules that we are going to follow so we can make a good decision,' that's a message of strength," Kaine said.

Republican Senator Mike Lee agreed. Lee supports Trump's foreign policy, including towards Iran, but said Congress cannot escape its constitutional responsibility to act on matters of war and peace.

"What the American people and the entire world will see from the debate we're about to have in the Senate is that there is abundant support for the United States taking tough positions with regard to Iran," Lee said Wednesday. "And as part of that, we want to make sure that any military action that needs to be authorised



imminent attack, the executive power to initiate war stops there", Kaine said. "An offensive war requires a congressional debate and vote."

Trump veto expected if House passes

The Democratic-controlled House passed a separate, non-binding war powers resolution last month. The House could take up the Senate resolution later this month, said House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer.

Two-thirds votes in the House and Republican-run Senate would be needed to override an expected Trump veto.

Answering a claim by some of Trump's supporters and Trump himself that the measure would

is in fact properly authorised by Congress. That doesn't show weakness. That shows strength."

The principle of congressional approval is established for an important reason, Kaine said.

"If we're to order our young men and women... to risk their lives in war, it should be on the basis of careful deliberation by the people's elected legislature and not on the say-so of any one person," Kaine added.

Trump disputed that, arguing in two tweets Wednesday that a vote against Kaine's proposal was important to national security and pointed to the January 3, Trump-ordered drone attack in Iraq that killed Iran's top general, Qassem Soleimani.

Soleimani Assassination Helped All Muslims Know Worst Enemy: Nasrallah

Agencies

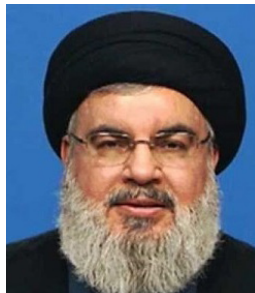
TEHRAN (IQNA) - Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah's secretary general said assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and his companions helped all Muslims know their worst enemy.

"The Americans must know that they have crossed all red lines and changed regional equations by assassinating Lt. Gen. Soleimani. The event has pitted the axis of resistance and regional nations against the United States," Sayed Hassan Nasrallah—in a televised interview broadcast from the Lebanese capital city of Beirut on Thursday night.

Nasrallah added that the killing of the top Iranian commander helped the entire Muslim Ummah to know their worst enemy, the Great Satan—an epithet for the United States of America.

He then lauded Iran over firing a salvo of ballistic missiles at US military bases in Iraq in relation for the January 3 assassination of Lt. Gen. Soleimani in an airstrike near Baghdad International Airport. The Hezbollah chief further noted that the resistance front has scored impressive achievements following the martyrdom of the top Iranian commander.

"The influence of Lt. Gen. Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis—the second-in-command of



Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), is now felt more than ever among us," Nasrallah said, according to Press TV.

He highlighted that his presence on the field gave him a clear picture of the developments unfolding, stressing that the axis of resistance could improve its defense capabilities thanks to the strenuous efforts made by the late Iranian military commander.

"Lt. Gen. Soleimani helped Hezbollah drive Israeli forces out of southern Lebanon (in the wake of the Israeli military's 33-day war on the Arab country in the summer of 2006). Iran helped Lebanon defend itself against the Israeli invasion. Hezbollah has been cooperating with the Quds Force since late 1980s," Nasrallah pointed out.

The Hezbollah secretary general also praised the late Iranian military commander's personality, saying his political weight was much more significant than his military one.

Virus cases spike as China changes diagnosis method

Agencies

BELJING: China on Thursday reported a sharp spike in deaths and infections from a new virus after the hardest-hit province of Hubei applied a new classification system that broadens the scope of diagnoses for the outbreak, which has spread to more than 20 countries.

Japan reported its first death, a woman in her 80s who had been hospitalised since early February. She is the third confirmed fatality outside of China, after deaths in the Philippines and Hong Kong.

The new diagnostic ap-

proach came on the same day that Hubei and its stricken capital, Wuhan, replaced their top officials in an apparent response to public criticism of how authorities have handled the epidemic.

The death toll in China reached 1,367, up 254 from the previous day. The number of confirmed cases jumped 15,152 to 59,804. The unusually large increases were due to the change in Hubei's approach.

The total now includes more than 13,000 cases of clinical diagnosis in Hubei, which appears to include those based on a doctors' analysis combined with lung im-

aging, as opposed to waiting for laboratory test results.

In breaking down the large number of new cases in China, National Health Commission spokesman Mi Feng said Hubei had adopted a revised diagnosis and treatment plan aimed at accelerating the identification and treatment of patients.

That adds a "clinical diagnosis case" classification to identify suspected cases who appear to have pneumonia so that patients can be accepted as soon as possible and treated as confirmed cases, Mi said, adding that should reduce severe illness and mortality.

NEWSMAKERS

Narayana Murthy's son-in-law Rishi Sunak named new British finance minister

In a massive elevation, Indian-origin politician Rishi Sunak was appointed the UK's new finance minister on Thursday by Prime Minister Boris Johnson in an extensive Cabinet reshuffle amid reports of serious differences within Downing Street.

The 39-year-old son-in-law of Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy will join Priti Patel on the top government bench, after she held on to her post as Home Secretary.

Outside the Treasury office soon after his promotion, Sunak told reporters he was "delighted to be appointed" Chancellor and had "a lot to get on with".

Pakistani-origin Sajid Javid resigned as Chancellor in a shock move in one of the biggest shake-ups since Johnson won a thumping majority in the December 2019 General Election.

According to sources close



to the former Chancellor, he refused to give in to Johnson's demand to get rid of all his special advisers at No. 11 Downing Street for the advisory teams of No. 10 and 11 Downing Street to work more closely aligned as one team.

It followed reports of growing tensions within Javid's team and the Prime Minister's Chief

Special Adviser Dominic Cummings.

Javid is replaced by Sunak, who was until now Javid's junior as the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and seen as a rising star within the Cabinet.

Sunak is set to move into No. 11 Downing Street, next door to the Prime Minister's office as he takes charge of the second most important government position as the finance minister.

He will have to hit the ground running as the UK Budget is due to be tabled next month. The Prime Minister and Chancellor are traditionally seen a double act in British politics, working close together and also living as neighbours on Downing Street.

"The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the appointment of Rt Hon Rishi Sunak as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Downing Street said in the official announcement.

Porn movie shot at holy site outrages Myanmar

Outrage is growing in Myanmar after the emergence of a 12-minute porn video shot in Bagan, the country's best-known tourist hotspot and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) heritage site of thousands of hallowed Buddhist pagodas.

The video was posted on a porn site by two users, who describe themselves as a 23-year-old Italian couple with piercings and tattoos.

According to the site, the pair boasts more than 81,000 subscribers and over 35 million video views since they joined 11 months ago.

But the couple's naked antics against one of Bagan's ancient pagodas have been less than well-received in Myanmar, with condemnation spreading online.

The video in question had

been viewed nearly a quarter of a million times by Thursday evening—but had registered twice as many dislikes as likes.

Managing Director of New Fantastic Asia tour company, Tun Tun Naing, questioned what seemed to



be "negligent" security at Bagan's sites and called for action.

Mandalay Chairman of the Union of Myanmar Travel Association Myo Yee added his voice to the rising clamour, saying the case was bad news for an industry hit hard by coronavirus woes.

WhatsApp now has 2 billion users globally

Over 25 per cent of the world's population—or two billion people globally—now uses WhatsApp.

In February 2018, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg had said WhatsApp had 1.5 billion monthly active users (MAUs) who are exchanging nearly 60 billion messages on a single day.

India is among the biggest markets for WhatsApp. In July last year, WhatsApp had said it has over 400 million users in India.

The Facebook-owned company on Wednesday said WhatsApp supports more than two billion users around the world, and asserted that its platform is secured with end-to-end encryption by default.

"We know that the more we connect, the more we have to protect. As we conduct more of our lives online, protecting our conversations is more important than ever," it said in a blog.

Last year, WhatsApp had received flak after an Israeli spyware was allegedly used to target journalists, lawyers and human rights activists through its platform.

In fact last week, Communications Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad had slammed WhatsApp saying identification of message originators remained an outstanding concern with the messaging platform.