



LOCAL AND WORLD REPORT

FOCUS ON BREAKING NEWS THIS MORNING
IN BAHRAIN AND ACROSS THE GLOBE

US-Israel task force 'to tackle Iran threat'

WASHINGTON: A joint task force, codenamed Project Iran, has been set up by the US and Israel "for executing potential decisions to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, ballistic missiles and/or military bases in the Middle East", an intelligence website has reported.

It was set up during secret talks held in Washington between military top brass from the two countries to co-ordinate their operations against the Islamic republic, DEBKAFfile reported.

The website said Israel Defence Force's operations chief Major General Nitzan Alon, who was set to retire, has agreed to head the task force.

The move follows Iranian, Hizbollah and Shi'ite forces spearheading operations in Syria towards Israeli and

Jordanian borders and a recent threat by Iran to disrupt vital oil supplies from the Gulf.

The website said the US feared more hostile acts from Iran after President Donald Trump pulled out of a nuclear treaty and his subsequent crackdown on the Islamic republic.

'Project Iran' was set up during Israeli Chief of Staff Lt Gen Gady Eisenkott's talks with top US officials in Washington on June 29.

To meet multiple Iranian threats, four US-Israeli command groups were secretly established:

- The Nuclear Command Group covers key nuclear targets in Iran: weaponry, plutonium reactors, uranium enrichment plants and centrifuge

production sites.

- The Ballistic Command Group deals with Iran's ballistic missile stocks and launch sites, both surface and underground silos, as well as missile production plants and institutes for missile research and development.

- The Anti-Subversion Command Group deals with overt and covert operations against Iranian military and intelligence centres across the Middle East, especially in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, as well as responsibility for cyber warfare.

- The Economic Command Group covers US sanctions against Iran.

Maj Gen Alon will direct the four command groups.

Air strikes 'hardest blow' on Hamas since 2014 war

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday that Israel had inflicted its "hardest blow" on Hamas since a 2014 war with a wave of air strikes in the Gaza Strip and threatened to intensify them if necessary.

"In consultation with the minister of defence, the (military) chief of staff and the top security command of the state of Israel, we have decided on strong action against Hamas terrorism," Netanyahu said.

"The (military) has struck Hamas with the hardest blow since Operation Protective Edge and we will increase the strength of our attacks as necessary," he added, referring to Israel's 2014 operation in the Gaza Strip.

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Bahrain-India ties 'set to scale new heights'

By RAJI UNNIKRISHNAN

MANAMA: New links between Bahrain and India are expected to take bilateral economic ties to greater heights in the coming days, according to a senior Indian minister.

India and Bahrain share "a glorious past and a dynamic future", said Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj yesterday.

Confirming this, her Bahraini counterpart Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa said there were "opportunities" that could bring "still greater prosperity" for people from both sides.

The ministers were addressing an audience at the Indian Embassy's new headquarters in Seef, which was officially inaugurated yesterday by Ms Swaraj.

She is on a two-day visit to Bahrain to co-chair the second meeting of the India-Bahrain High Joint Commission (HJC) at The Ritz-Carlton, Bahrain, today.

The GDN reported on Friday that counter-terror co-operation, trade and investment are on the agenda of the HJC.

The first meeting of the HJC was held in India in February 2015, after it was established through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between India and Bahrain during His Majesty King Hamad's visit



■ Shaikh Khalid and Ms Swaraj with senior officials and dignitaries at the ceremony



■ Shaikh Khalid and Ms Swaraj addressing the event to India in February 2014.

"I am personally delighted to be here on the occasion of the inauguration of the new embassy, which is the testimony of the deep-rooted relations between Bahrain and India," she said.

"The two countries share a long history of friendship, lost in

the midst of time when a flourishing trade existed between the Indus Valley and the Dilmun civilisations.

"Bahrain was a transit point for the significant trade route for the export of spices, ivory, timber and gems from India and Bahrain for its part, also had substantial trade with India on its pearls and dates.

"India and Bahrain, in my view, are two countries which share a glorious past and a dynamic future.

"The traditional openness and goodwill, the high-level trust which the Indian community enjoys in Bahrain and the regular high-level visits between the two countries including the landmark visit of His Majesty King Hamad to India has brought us even closer, which has now arrived



■ The Foreign Minister welcomes Ms Swaraj on her arrival at Bahrain International Airport

at a new phase."

Ms Swaraj noted that the new embassy was "an embodiment of the historical and civilisational connect between the two countries".

The mission started functioning from its new \$7.43 million (BD2.8m) complex in Seef district in October last year, after hosting its first official event at the premises on August 15, marking 70 years of Indian independence.

The complex, built on 7,598sqm of land bought by the Indian government in 2005, comprises two buildings - the main chancery building, consisting of a ground and first floor, and a four-storey residential building.

"The state-of-the-art facilities in the new embassy would help us to serve the community better in the coming days," she said.

"The embassy has a fully facilitated trade office to further facilitate major commercial ties with renewed interest and positive sentiments among the business community in Bahrain."

This is Ms Swaraj's third visit to Bahrain in the past four years, ever since she assumed office, which was highlighted by Shaikh Khalid as a testimony of the "close and personal links,

in all levels between the two countries".

"The opening of the new (Indian) embassy comes as a testament to the strength and friendship between the two countries and it reflects, in particular, on the outstanding work done both here and in New Delhi brought to a happy conclusion," he said.

"Indeed it is particularly fitting that this inauguration be held during the visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister, reflecting the close and personal links, in all levels between the two countries, which was exemplified by the February 2014 visit of His Majesty King Hamad to India and in March 2013 and May 2012, the visits by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

"I am in no doubt with such personal engagements and guidance in the highest levels our valuable friendship will continue to develop and flourish, beginning with tomorrow's second joint bilateral commission.

"Our countries have so much in common and so many areas in which we can work productively together, to seize the opportunities and bring still greater prosperity and develop it into our people."

The ministers were taken for a tour of the embassy by Ambassador Alok Kumar Sinha.

"The embassy is a home away from home for all Indians and we are thankful to the rulers and leaders of this country for the freedom and peace that we enjoy," said Mr Sinha.

The event began with Bahraini Kathak dancer Khalil Al Ashar's performance of *Vande Mataram*, India's national song, followed by Sur Sangam - the Sounds of Friends, a fusion of Indian and Bahraini music.

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Expired veterinary medicine found in Isa Town suq

MANAMA: Expired medicine and other hazards were discovered in a traditional market during a surprise visit yesterday.

The Bahrain Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BSPCA) and animal welfare directorate of the Works, Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning Ministry officials conducted an inspection of the traditional suq

By GHAZI ALSHEHABI

in Isa Town.

Vendors selling birds were found to be storing expired medicines improperly.

"One of the most important things our veterinarian Hassan Al Hashim found was that expired medicines were being displayed in a way that exposed them to

the heat which can cause them to deteriorate," said BSPCA president Mahmood Faraj.

"Besides, the vendors did not possess the necessary veterinary licences to confirm their speciality in the area.

"Therefore, they were told to remove their merchandise and not offer them for sale in the market again."

Mr Faraj said they also found there

was no water in some of the bird cages.

However, the inspection team did not find any bird or animal that are prohibited from being sold, such as the Bulbul birds which were rumoured to be sold in the market.

The BSPCA president urged the vendors to send their recommendations to improve the suq which would be considered.