

Richard Boucher due next month
Polls, counter terrorism main agenda for talks
DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Several key issues, including the next general elections, will figure high on the agenda of discussions between Richard A Boucher, the newly appointed US Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, and the government and opposition leaders during his visit to Bangladesh next month.

This will be his first visit to Bangladesh since his appointment on February 21 to the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, which was expanded to include the nations of Central Asia shortly before his confirmation.

A highly placed source at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told The Daily Star yesterday that the discussion would also focus on strengthening bilateral economic ties, cooperation in fields like counter terrorism, security and strengthening of democratic institutions and combating militancy, extremism and corruption etc.

The Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs deals with US foreign policy and US relations with the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Boucher recently visited Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

Over the course of his career, Boucher served as the Department of State's spokesman or deputy spokesman under six Secretaries of State.

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Hasina vows to reveal her own, MPs' wealth

Demands similar action from ruling parties; asks civil society to name corrupt and criminal MPs, candidates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon the civil society to make public the names of incumbent and aspiring lawmakers, who were involved in crimes and corruption, and have become rich overnight by pocketing development funds.

Addressing the Jubo League grand rally in the city's Paltan Maidan, the Awami League chief volunteered to disclose the asset accounts of herself and lawmakers of her party.

"I am giving words, I will give accounts of my own wealth as well as that of my MPs, if you want. The people who are in power now should do the same. You have the right to know how much money they have earned in the last four-and-a-half years, how much wealth they had before coming in power and how much they have now," the leader of the opposition in parliament told the huge public gathering.

She asked the civil society to take wealth account of the prime minister and her family members -- how much they had four-and-a-half years ago and how much right now.

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A partial view of the Jubo League grand rally at Paltan Maidan in the capital yesterday. Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina [inset].

100 hurt as BNP men, cops clash with Jubo League members

Haji Selim, 15 policemen, 4 journos among injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 100 people were injured yesterday afternoon as a group of BNP cadres and then police locked horns with a few thousand Jubo League members and supporters at Lalbagh in Old Dhaka.

Local Awami League (AL) leader Haji Selim, some 15 policemen, and four journalists were among those wounded in the three-hour clashes. Witnesses said the skirmishing erupted at about 2:45pm when a Jubo League procession led by Haji Selim came face to face with a group of over 100 alleged associates and supporters of local BNP lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu at Chaukbarazar Crossroads.

According to a pre-planned schedule, members and supporters of the main opposition AL and its youth wing from Lalbagh and the adjacent areas, including Hazaribagh and Kamrangirchar, were to assemble in Azad Playground before marching toward Paltan to join yesterday's Jubo League grand rally.

But, BNP men had occupied the playground beforehand. To avoid any confrontation, the AL and Jubo League members assembled in Lalbagh Shahi Masjid area, instead of the playground. From there they

were marching towards Paltan through Chaukbarazar when they confronted Pintu's men.

After a heated exchange of words, the BNP cadres pounced on the opposition men and then both sides engaged each other, wielding sticks and hurling bricks, locals described. Soon two crude bombs went off.

After about five minutes of the scramble, the BNP men retreated. But, the furious Jubo League members ran amok, setting fire to two motorbikes, damaging some three-wheelers, a vehicle of Dhaka City Corporation and a rickshaw-van, ransacking several shops, throwing bricks at police, and burning banners, torn cloths and paper boxes in the compound of Lalbagh Police Station.

A few hundred police led by Dhaka Metropolitan Police (South) Additional Deputy Commissioner M Shahriar Rahman then went into action lobbing about 300 teargas shells at the agitators, who pelted the law enforcers with bricks and stones.

The two sides chased and counter-chased, when police too threw stones at the demonstrators. Police also charged baton, and discharged salvos of rubber bullets and pellets to scatter the opposition mob.

The roads in Chaukbarazar and Urdu Road areas were littered with spent teargas shells and bricks.

Police held about a dozen of Jubo League activists from the spot. During the pitched battle 15 to 20 policemen were hurt. Twelve of them were admitted to Rajarbagh Police Lines Hospital, Lalbagh police said.

At least 40 injured demonstrators took first aid at Dhaka Medical College and Mitford hospitals.

Jubo League leaders alleged police and BNP activists attacked their people in Water Works Road, Urdu Road and Jail Road areas. They claimed about 300 AL and Jubo League leaders and workers, including the joint secretary of Dhaka City Awami League, were injured in the police actions and the attack by Pintu's men.

They also accused police of firing rubber bullets on their leaders and activists, which police denied.

Talking to The Daily Star last night Nasiruddin Pintu said the allegations against him were baseless. "The AL supporters created a law and order situation that necessitated police intervention. They

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Police fire teargas shells to disperse a Jubo League procession in the city's Lalbagh area which was heading for yesterday's grand rally at Paltan Maidan.

2 outlaws killed in 'crossfire'

STAR REPORT

Two top leaders of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho) were killed during separate incidents of 'crossfire' with the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police in Jhenidah and Khulna early yesterday.

In Jhenidah, PBCP cadre Azizul Haque alias Killer Aziz, 46, was killed during a shootout between the police and his accomplices at Bora village in Jhenidah sadar upazila, says our Magura correspondent.

Chudanga police arrested him at his house on Monday morning and handed him over to Jhenidah police for interrogation.

Following leads extracted from him, police took Aziz to Bora village at about 1:35 am to recover illegal arms. As they reached the village, Janajuddho operatives opened fire on them prompting the law enforcers to retaliate, police said.

Azizul got caught in the 'crossfire' when he attempted to flee from the police van during the half an hour-long shootout, police said. He died on the spot.

Two constables were also injured during the gunfight.

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Criminalisation of politics, political row allowed rise of militants: WB

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The World Bank (WB) says criminalisation of politics and a confrontational relation between the two major political parties of the country have allowed extremist religious groups to indulge in the recent series of violent incidents in Bangladesh.

"The dependence of political parties on muscle power leads to the criminalisation of politics and increasing political violence," the WB says. "More recently, extremist religious movements have taken advantage of the discord in the secular political leadership through a series of violent incidents," it adds.

Analysing the overall political atmosphere of Bangladesh, the WB in its latest "Country Assistance Strategy" report points out, "The political environment may become more difficult as the country approaches its fourth consecutive democratic elections, which should take place in early 2007."

The report identifies the political use of civil servants, high election expenditure of candidates and the absence of intraparty practice of democracy as some of the root causes behind corruption as well as obstacle to flourish of democracy.

Chalking out on what basis the WB and its three major development partners will provide aid to Bangladesh until 2009, the report expresses the WB's intention to work with the government along with the development partners to improve the poor political governance.

Although there have been some achievements in the recent past, those were offset by marked failures in governance that arises mainly from bad politics, the report observes.

"The state of political competition is unhealthy. Political power is concentrated in two major parties, led by rival families that have dominated Bangladesh's politics since independence. This has discour-

aged the emergence of intraparty democracy," the report says.

Terming Bangladesh's political system a "highly centralised" one, it says, "In the absence of elected regional governments that exercise real political power, a change in power at the centre leaves virtually nothing for the losers."

"The patron-client nature of politics feeds the bitter relations and lack of trust between the two dominant political parties," the report adds.

It points out, "Parliament has been ineffective in its role as a check on the executive" while the opposition prefers to mobilise public support in the streets and through hartals.

Terming the formal legal mechanisms that regulate campaign financing activities ineffective, the report observes that elections in Bangladesh cost far more to contest than the candidates are

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Contempt law aims to protect top officials

Jurists say

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Eminent jurists yesterday strongly denounced the draft contempt of court law saying the government is framing this law apparently to protect certain top bureaucrats facing contempt charges.

"Questions arose in my mind whether this law is being framed on suggestions of the top bureaucrats now facing contempt charges, and in their interest," said Dr Kamal Hossain. "This law is supposed to

protect the judiciary. But it seems the law is being framed to protect the bureaucrats."

Rokanuddin Mahmud, vice chairman of Bangladesh Bar Council, said, "The government has approved this law when some top bureaucrats are facing contempt charges for hindering separation of the judiciary."

Law Commission Chairman and former chief justice Mostafa Kamal declined to make any comment, saying he is yet to see the draft law.

The cabinet-approved contempt of court law provides for a six-month imprisonment or a fine of Tk 5,000 or both as the maximum penalty for contempt of court. Under the existing law of 1926, the highest penalty for this is six months in prison or a fine of Tk 2,000 or both.

Besides framing a new contempt of court law, the government is also amending the Public

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ATTACK ON JOURNOS

Writ petition filed in HC for judicial probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) yesterday filed a writ petition in the High Court pleading for a judicial enquiry by a high court judge into the police attack on journalists in Chittagong Divisional Stadium on April 16.

In her petition, BNWLA leader Salma Ali also urged the judicial probe committee to look into the previous atrocities of the law enforcers on the innocent people, especially on women in the last one year.

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ELECTORAL REFORMS

14-party sit-in beside PMO today amid ban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) and its allies seek to stage a sit-in outside the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) today to press home the demand for electoral reforms while a ban on gathering around the PMO takes effect from midnight.

Amid 'indiscriminate arrests and police harassment', the AL led 14-party opposition combine at a meeting at the office of Bangladesh Workers Party yesterday decided to

defy the ban and stage a peaceful sit-in programme from 11:00am to 1:00pm.

Addressing a huge gathering of her party's youth front, Jubo League, on city's Paltan Maidan, AL President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the ruling coalition will not be able to escape public outcry by clamping bans or unleashing the police after opposition activists.

The government on Monday imposed the ban to be in effect for

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POLICE ATTACK ON JOURNOS

Boycott of Test match coverage continues

Journos reject one-member probe body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Boycott of the second test match between Bangladesh and Australia by the media entered its third day yesterday.

The journalist community in Chittagong vowed to continue the boycott until the government mete out exemplary punishment to the accused Deputy Commissioner

(port) Ali Akbar Khan and other

police personnel involved in the attack on journalists at Chittagong Divisional Stadium on Sunday.

Journalists here yesterday demonstrated by wearing black ribbons and by holding a joint protest rally at Chittagong Press Club (CPC) where some fresh demands were announced.

The demands are: terminations of DC (port), Sergeant Anwar,

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Supplementary duty on sugar withdrawn

UNB, Dhaka

The government has decided to withdraw 20 percent supplementary duty on sugar in a bid to keep its price stable and its supply normal in the domestic market.

The decision was taken considering the interest of the consumers amid the recent price-hike of sugar in international market and shortage of supply.

Earlier, Infrastructure Development Service Charge (IDSC) and Advance Income Tax (AIT) have been waived for sugar import.

The government hopes supply and price of sugar in local market will become stable with the withdrawal of the supplementary duty, said an official handout.

