

## Textiles lost free access

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be given in phases," Altaf said, adding that Bangladesh will get the chance to bargain for its textiles when the two follow-up meetings will be held in Geneva and Washington in 2006.

"Japan has already promised that it will not include Bangladesh's textiles in the three percent sensitive list," he said and pointed out that Bangladesh is getting duty-free and quota-free access to the European market under the GSP system.

The minister said Bangladesh will diversify its export basket in future with the help of developed countries and reduce dependence on readymade garment products.

Bangladesh is now paying 15.8 percent duties on its exports to the US which will be reduced gradually under the new WTO rules, he said. "Now we can export frog leg to aeroplane to all the developed countries without paying duty. Sky is our limit."

Dr Mostafizur Rahman said the US will finalise its list of 339 products, which will not get duty and quota-free access, through negoti-

ations. "There have been some opportunities to keep some of the textile products out of the list," he added.

**ALBLASTS ALTAF**  
Opposition Awami League yesterday blasted the commerce minister for failing to protect the country's interests in the just concluded sixth ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Hong Kong, reports BDNNEWS.

"The commerce minister has returned from the WTO conference empty-handed that indicates a grim future for Bangladesh," said Abdul Jalil, AL general secretary and former commerce minister, at a press conference at the party office.

He feared the readymade garment industry will face uneven competition in the years to come and it may spell large-scale disaster for the national economy.

AL leaders Tofail Ahmed, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Motia Chowdhury, Suranjit Sengupta and Obaidul Kader were also present at the conference.

## PM opens

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the telephone exchange by talking to President Iajuddin Ahmed from the exchange.

The exchange was constructed under a Tk 368 crore project launched to set up digital telephone exchanges in Chittagong, Khulna and Sylhet. The South Korean government provided \$30 million for the project while the Bangladesh government is providing Tk218 crore.

She said Bangladesh has come a long way to join the information superhighway through the submarine cable. "Experimental connection has already been given," she added.

Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman, Posts and Telecommunications Minister M Aminul Haque, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and South Korean Ambassador Park Seong-Ung also spoke.

The PM said the door for Bangladesh to enter the international arena would be opened soon after the setting up of 'national backbone network' for the information superhighway.

Giving some statistics of development works carried out by her government in the last four years, Khaleda Zia said the capacity of T&T Board was 6,85,000 lines in October 2001 which has risen to 11,19,000 in the last four years.

She said scope has been created for private entrepreneurs to invest in telephone services, including mobile phone. "This initiative is making a positive contribution in providing mobile phones to the

## Final talks

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that the FTA could come into force as scheduled on July 1 next year.

The FTA in Bimstec region is having three components -- Trade in Goods, Trade in Services and Investment. The member states signed the protocol for the framework agreement on the FTA on February 8, 2004 in Phuket, Thailand.

"Trade in Goods will be liberalised through progressive elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers. This will be done in two phases -- products will be identified as Fast Track and Normal Track categories.

For the Fast Track products, the non-LDCs (least developed countries) will eliminate tariffs for the LDCs by June 30, 2007, but among themselves by June 30, 2009. The LDCs will do so for the non-LDCs by June 30, 2011, but among themselves by June 30, 2009. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and Nepal are the LDCs within Bimstec.

For the Normal Track products, the non-LDCs will eliminate tariffs for the LDCs by June 30, 2010, but among themselves by June 30, 2012. The LDCs will eliminate tariffs for the non-LDCs by 2017, but among themselves by June 30, 2015.

The trade liberalisation programme in goods is set to commence on July 1 next year. Agreements for Trade in Services and Investment will begin to come into effect from January 1, 2008.

If the TNC can conclude negotiations at its 10th meeting in Kathmandu from today, the FTA agreement for Trade in Goods will be signed at the Bimstec Trade Ministers' Meeting early next year.

Officials said the Bimstec Ministerial Meeting, which concluded in Dhaka on Monday, has given necessary directions to the TNC to show maximum flexibility to conclude the negotiations.

Sources said all the seven member states of Bimstec have stressed timely implementation

people at cheaper prices," she added.

Khaleda Zia said the number of telephone was 58,000 in Chittagong when they (Four-party) came to power and the number has now become more than double with these new telephones.

"Building the infrastructure is not the last word," the PM said adding "It's very urgent to ensure appropriate utilisation of those for the progress and welfare of the countrymen as well as to make those available and profitable to people."

She said all cities and district headquarters of the country have already been brought under digital telephone system and 179 upazilas have digital telephone exchanges.

The prime minister said before they (Four-party) formed the government the internet facilities were only available in eight district towns and her government has expanded the internet network to 64 districts and 179 upazilas.

Underlining the importance of peace and stability to sustain development, she called for effective and active unity of the people to attain common goals.

"If we remain united, those who are involved in various evil attempts to halt the country's forward march will fail. We'll succeed and come out victorious, inshallah," she said.

She thanked the South Korean government and the people for their support in setting up the digital exchange in the port city. The newly installed telephone exchange has caller identity (Caller ID) facility.

of the FTA to boost intra-regional trade and investment and enhance economic efficiency and external competitiveness.

The TNC has already progressed a lot and finalised almost all the issues, including Rules of Origin, Sensitive Lists and Dispute Settlement Mechanism, paving the way for the Agreement on Trade in Goods to be effective as scheduled.

Bimstec provides a unique link between South Asia and Southeast Asia together having 1.3 billion people or 21 percent of the world population, a combined GDP of \$750 billion and a considerable level of complementarity due to geographical contiguity, differing levels of development and resource endowments.

A top official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said a study conducted in 2004 shows the potential of \$43 billion to \$59 billion trade under the Bimstec FTA.

The name Bimstec evolved from its original formation 'Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation' (BIST-EC) established on June 6, 1997 at the meeting of the foreign ministers of the four countries in Bangkok.

Later, Myanmar joined the sub-regional grouping as a full member at a Special Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok on December 22, 1997. The name of the grouping was consequently changed to 'Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation' (BIMST-EC).

Nepal was first granted observer status by the second Ministerial Meeting in Dhaka in December 1998. At the 6th Ministerial meeting in Phuket February 2004, Bhutan and Nepal became new members. The First BIMST-EC Summit was held in Bangkok on July 31, 2004.

In view of the admission of Nepal and Bhutan, the name of the grouping was changed to 'Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation' (Bimstec).

## Two robbers

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robbers at the Hasara Chaltatola on Dhaka-Maoa Highway at 6:00am and held two of them while the other two managed to flee. They then confined them in a primary school and informed the police.

A five-member police team reached the spot but failed to rescue the robbers from the angry mob, who lynched them.

Later, a larger team of police went to the spot and recovered the body of the two robbers.

OC of Sirajdikhan police station said the robbers planned to break into the house of Subal Haji.

Police later managed to arrest the other two robbers who escaped earlier.

## PM addresses

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also the chairperson of BNP is expected to address the grand rally. It will be her first address at Paltan Maidan in two years.

The party has set up eight reception centres at Sadarghat, Shampur, Jatrabari, Kamalapur Station, Mohakhali, Mirpur and Gabtoli Bus Terminals, Uttara and Noyabazar to greet BNP leaders and activists coming from across the country.

Two car parks have been arranged in Kamalapur Biswa Road area and Suhrawardy Udyan while four community centres have been rented for the participants from outside the capital. Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and Wasa will provide drinking water and toilet facilities for the rally-goers.

BNP Secretary-General and LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and DCC Mayor Sadeq Hossain Khoka yesterday visited the meeting venue.

The government has taken tight security measures for the rally. Alongside several hundred plainclothes policemen, members of Special Security Force (SSF), Armed Police Battalion, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) will stand guard in and around the venue since the morning.

The AL-led 14-party opposition alliance held a grand rally in the capital on November 22.

## 2 cops sued

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the cops and their informers of extorting Tk 5,000 and demanding more from him.

The accused are Sub-inspector (SI) Rezaul Karim of Mirpur Police Station, SI Wazullah of Detective Branch (DB) of police and the informers Babul, Babu and Tamanna.

Goni in the complaint said SI Rezaul, Babul, and Tamanna picked up his son Anwar Hossain in front of Sony Cinema and demanded Tk 25,000 for his release around 11:00pm on November 25.

As Goni refused to give the sum, they took his son to Mirpur Police Station.

The complainant said he gave the SI Tk 5,000 through Babul and Tamanna. But the cop forwarded Anwar to the magistrate's court, showing him arrested under section 75 of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Ordinance.

On December 17, SI Wazullah and Babu seized a rickshaw from his (Goni) garage and demanded Tk 30,000. Refused, the accused threatened to implicate him in a dozen cases with different police stations, the complainant added.

Following the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullah Baqui took the complaint into cognisance and directed the DB deputy commissioner (DC) to submit a report after an investigation.

## Tk 6,000cr

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after a meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Referring to the audit objections, Awami League (AL) lawmaker and committee member Faruk Khan said that the BCIC incurs a loss of about Tk 300 crore a year due to systems losses and irregularities.

The BCIC officials in a report informed the meeting that the corporation, which was set up in 1974 with 88 industries, currently has only 12 of those functioning.

"The rest of the industries are not run properly. A sub-committee was formed to investigate the causes," Faruk Khansaid.

About the losses, the BCCI officials said the corporation makes huge losses as it sells fertiliser at a price lower than the production cost. The parliamentary body also discussed the current stocks of fertiliser in the country.

The BCIC officials told the committee that they will produce 18.5 lakh metric tons of fertiliser and import 3.5 lakh metric tons while Kafco (Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company Limited) will provide another 3.5 lakh metric tons. The total demand for fertiliser stands at 28 lakh metric tons.

"We have yet to get the nod from the government to import the extra amount of fertiliser to face potential crisis," a senior official of the industry ministry told the meeting.

The parliamentary body decided to ask the home ministry and BDR and the coastguard to step up surveillance along the border areas to stop local fertiliser being smuggled out.

## Terror talks limp along on boycott

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with seven organisations out of 27 political parties and 15 professional bodies invited to the talks.

The invitees who have yet to take part in the dialogue are confused whether they will be able to speak freely during the talks, as the PMO is reportedly pressing them not to accuse Jamaat of having militant links.

The ruling BNP top brass appeared embarrassed after Krishak Samik Janata League of Kader Siddiqui on the first day of the dialogue accused Jamaat of harbouring the militants and demanding the prime minister expel them both from the government and the alliance.

The PMO had reportedly asked the freedom fighters scheduled to meet the premier Sunday not to level any accusation at Jamaat, sources said.

Some Islamic political parties might as well lambast Jamaat at the dialogue and suggest the prime minister purge the party from the government and the ruling alliance.

Khaleda Zia however at the talks with the journalist leaders on last Wednesday categorically said the ties between the components of the four-party alliance will remain intact and that they will contest the next election together.

About the implementation of the suggestions, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan on December 13 told journalists that they would first examine the suggestions and may implement some.

Khaleda on November 30 urged all political parties and eminent persons to sit in a dialogue to find ways to stop the bomb terrorism.

The officials at the PMO on December 6 and 7 dispatched invitation letters to some 43 organisations.

The Awami League (AL) led 14-party opposition alliance and pro-opposition professional bodies had rejected outright the invitations.

Khaleda met Krishak Samik Janata League and Bangladesh Medical Association on December 12, HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party and Council for National Agenda on December 13 and Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists and Dhaka Union of Journalists on December 14, Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh and Alem-Mashayekh on December 19.

The freedom fighters under the banner of Muktiyoddha Sangsad

## Pvt universities

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graduate programmes. For example, for a Bachelor of Science in computer science and engineering, the university charges Tk 22,300 while for a Bachelor of Arts in English it charges Tk9,900.

The per-semiter fees for 12 credits in Southeast University range between Tk 24,200 and Tk 12,000, depending on the subjects.

On charging extra fees to the students for the new campus building, Dr Hafiz GA Siddiqi, vice-chancellor (VC) of NSU, said 60-70 percent of students will not have any problem in paying the amount. "The rule should not be different for the other students," he said.

A new building is necessary and so it should be built, Siddiqi said, adding, "If it is really a problem for some students, I will request the governing body to consider their cases."

On the uniformity of the students' fees in the private universities, Dr Siddiqi said it is not possible in the "era of free economy".

Dr Shamsheer Ali, VC of Southeast University, however, thinks that there must be a framework for standard fees considering the socioeconomic context of the students.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Prof Asaduzzaman said he was in favour of uniformity in the fees. He discussed the matter with the VCs of

## 8 killed

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In another accident, Mohammed Mostafa, 28, son of Taher Patwari, Lama and Kabir were run over by several vehicles on the Rupashi Para-Lama road. Seven others were critically injured in the incident.

On December 18, one Fazal Ahmed, 60, of Naitong Para of Teknaf was killed in a head-on collision between two jeeps on the Kolkon-Cox's Bazar road, while five others were seriously injured. The injured were admitted to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital and CMGH.

Our correspondent in Gopalganj reports: Three persons died and around 50 others were injured in a fatal road accident on the Dhaka-Khulna Highway at Kashiani of the district.

Local people and police sources said a Bhatipara-bound bus from Gopalganj yesterday fell into the roadside ditch near Bhatipara petrol pump at Kashiani as its driver lost control.

Amjad Hossain, 55, of Kashiani, Emon Mondol, 40, of Lougharjap upazila of Munshiganj, and Achinta Biswas, 40, of Shaikupa upazila of Jhenidah died on the spot. The 50 injured, 33 were admitted to Faridpur Medical College and Hospital and Gopalganj Sadar Hospital, sources said.

have yet to get the new date for meeting with the prime minister.

"We don't know yet when we're going to meet her," Kabir Ahmed Khan, chairman of the Sangsad, told The Daily Star.

The apex body of the freedom fighters has drafted a set of proposals to table at the dialogue, but is under pressure not to accuse the coalition partner Jamaat of patronising the militants, sources said.

The other invitees who have been waiting for a schedule to attend the dialogue have not been contacted by the PMO since they responded to the invitations.

"The date for our meeting has not been finalised yet. The prime minister's office told us they will inform us after setting the date," Fazlul Haque Amini, chairman of Islami Oikya Jote (Amini), told The Daily Star.

Islami Oikya Jote (Izhar) Chairman Izharul Islam Chowdhury told The Daily Star that they have not received any letter from the PMO. "We are not informed whether any date for us has been fixed," he said. The chairman however said he would wait for two or three more days and then would communicate with the PMO.

Islami Shshantantra Andolon, which has long been accusing Jamaat of links to militancy in public, has not decided whether they will attend the dialogue.

"If we join the talks, we will obviously speak the truth and that is Jamaat is the patroniser of militancy," Ataur Rahman Arefi, information and research secretary, told The Daily Star recently.

**BIDTO POLITICISE?**  
Allegations of politicisation of the dialogue had been raised against the government after it described the prime minister's recent meetings with the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB) as parts of the national dialogue.

But both the organisations have declined to consider the meetings as dialogue, as they said they did not meet her by any formal invitation, rather on their own initiative.

They felt embarrassed as the government by its claim attempted to portray them as the ones having a leaning towards the ruling parties, though they are non-partisan organisations, they said.

The FBCCI delegation met the premier on December 4 while the

dialogue formally began on December 12. The NGO leaders met her to voice their concern over the militant activities in line with its board decision.

**CIVIL SOCIETY'S OBSERVATIONS**  
Talking to The Daily Star, former advisor to the caretaker government M Hafizuddin Khan said, "In my view, there is no alternative to talks in resolving such national crisis."

On reported pressure on the invitees not to implicate any party of the ruling alliance in the militancy, he said, "The dialogue should be held in an atmosphere congenial enough for the invitees to speak their mind. A dialogue can be meaningful only when the participants can share their opinion unhindered."

He suggested the government go on with dialogue at a faster pace. "Any dilly-dally is not desired and it will not help the purpose of the dialogue."

Referring to the reported precondition for attending the dialogue, Prof Mozaffar Ahmed said the dialogue must be held in an open manner and there should not be any condition imposed on the invitees. "It is not called dialogue if a condition is imposed on invitees."

"The talks cannot be fruitful if the issue is not discussed with an open mind. I think the government also understands that it would not bring any result."

Major General (retired) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury, another former advisor to the caretaker government, is also not optimistic about the outcomes of the dialogue.

"I don't think the discussion will be fruitful as all their [the government and the opposition] moves centre around the next parliamentary election," he told The Daily Star.

"Security is a very important national matter. The security of the people and the country cannot be ensured if it is politicised and used for narrow political gains. Sovereignty and security of the country will be in jeopardy if the power-centric moves of the political parties get the upper hand," he observed.

"Both the ruling and the opposition parties do not seem to be concerned about the security of the people. Rather it seems their priority is to manoeuvre the next parliamentary election to their favour," he added.

## 9 JMB men held

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the top ten JMB cadres, including district commander Abdullah Taslim. Twenty-one out of the 29 charge-sheeted accused militants of Tangail are still evading arrest.

Intelligence officials said once Taslim is arrested, all information about other militants can be extracted from him.

Meanwhile, the two JMB suicide squad members arrested in Sylhet last week were sent to the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) in the capital and a JMB commander of Pabna area arrested in Jajpura on Saturday was taken on a five-day remand yesterday.

Our Bandarban correspondent writes: Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel recovered two fake bombs from the office of Naikhongchhari upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) yesterday. Two youths--Kahir Uddin and Elias--were arrested in this connection.

Our correspondent in Narayanganj reports: Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) held Noor Hossain, 32, and Zafarullah, 24, from Farazikanda and Madanganj areas in the district.

The two were directly sent to the Rab Headquarters at Uttara in the capital, Rab sources said.

**PRO-JAMAAT OFFICIALS UNDER WATCH**  
BDNEWS adds: The intelligence agencies have started examining the activities of the pro-Jamaat officials, who, according to a high official in the secretariat, assist in conducting JMB activities. Their telephone conversations are also being recorded.

The officials who have been brought under extra surveillance also include tens of other senior officials, including 30 joint secretaries and a number of former deputy commissioners now posted in different ministries as deputy secretaries.

A number of UNOs who were earlier private secretaries to ministers and state ministers are also being watched.

Sources said the movement of intelligence officials in different government offices including the secretariat has increased recently.

BTRC Chairman and former home secretary Omar Faruque allegedly gave directives to the then district commissioner and superintendent of police of Rajshahi to cooperate with the JMB.

## Locals suspect

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Witnesses said Rajib covered at the Railway Officers Club seeing the assailants approaching towards him. It suggests he might have known the killers and their intention, they added.

Police are scrutinising the footage of the occasion videotaped that night to identify the killers.

Rajib's uncle Abdul Gafur yesterday filed a case against unknown men with Motijheel Police Station.

Police said Rajib was known as a criminal in the locality and was accused in at least 10 cases filed with Motijheel Police Station. He was also a charge-sheeted accused in seven cases, they added.

## Fertiliser supply

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bore, the country's main rice crop, due to the looming chemical fertiliser crisis, a meeting between Bangladesh Fertiliser Association (BFA) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) ended inconclusively yesterday with the latter passing the blame on the finance ministry for not releasing the long overdue subsidies.

The government introduced a 25 percent subsidy on imported fertilisers including triple super phosphate (TSP), murate of potash (MoP) and di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) in the last fiscal. Under the new arrangement fertiliser importers started selling their imported stock at a 25 percent rebate with guaranteed refunds from the government.

The importers received Tk 171 crore of the allocated Tk 271 crore rebate. The rest remains unpaid since last June.

BFA Chairman Kofilluddin Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday that approval for a chunk amounting Tk 60 crore has been lying with the finance ministry for months while agriculture ministry is scrutinising the bills for Tk 20 crore more and the deputy commissioners are yet to approve the remaining Tk 20 crore.

"We can no longer afford to provide the dealers and farmers with fertilisers at 25 percent rebate. Since the dues were not paid, importers are no longer interested to supply fertiliser," said the BFA chairman frustratingly, claiming to have written pleading letters to the finance minister, finance secretary, and even to the Prime Minister's Office to resolve the issue but to no avail.

Following the meeting with BFA delegates yesterday, Agriculture Minister MK Anwar told The Daily Star, "They are really in a cash crunch. I've repeatedly asked the finance ministry to clear the outstanding subsidies and even sent a demi-official letter to the finance secretary on December 15 but nothing has transpired so far."

Anwar claimed to have approved the subsidy bills several months ago

and said that he had sent them to the finance ministry. He also said he did not know what makes the ministry to continue sitting on the bills for so long. He asked The Daily Star correspondent to better inquire the finance ministry about the matter.

Finance Secretary Siddiquir Rahman Chowdhury quipped over the phone from his home, "Yes, the matter is under consideration," and refused to say anything more about the delay in releasing the subsidies.

Market sources said, as none of the 3,000 dealers across the country can afford to keep more than 50 tons of non-urea fertilisers in stock at a time, their stocks are depleting pretty quickly due to serious demand in this bore season.

The dealers fear that if the supply-stoppage continues for a few more days a serious shortage of fertilisers will occur forcing the farmers to count their losses in lost yields.

Market sources fear that due to non-realisation of the subsidies, importers would stockpile nearly four lakh tonnes of imported TSP, MoP and DAP in the warehouses and would start selling those without giving the 25 percent rebate.

A rise by 25 percent in fertiliser prices would mean that the farmers would have to pay Tk 850 for a 50-kg bag of MoP instead of Tk 595 that they pay now, for DAP they would have to pay Tk 1250 instead of Tk 841 and for TSP Tk 940 instead of Tk 700.

Our Jessore correspondent, Abu Bakr Siddique, reports that over 300 dealers and wholesale traders at the country's prime fertiliser market at Nowapara refrained from selling a single bag of fertiliser on Monday due to the supply stoppage called by BFA. Retail sellers of several districts including the northern part of the country who came to buy fertilisers from Nowapara wholesale market had to go back empty-handed.

Our Dinajpur correspondent Konkon Karmaker sent a dispatch last night reporting that local sugarcane farmers at Panchagarh staged a demonstration protesting price hike of chemical fertilisers and insecticides.

## US lists actions

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Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs John Anthony Gastright Jr told an online discussion on the current state of US-Bangladesh relations yesterday.

He also cautioned against those who believe the recent successes of the security forces in capturing senior JMBs figures have ended the terrorist threat.

"We welcome the recent arrests of senior JMB figures and the seizure of huge arms and explosives caches. But, note that most of the JMB's senior leadership remains at large and the actual impact of these developments on the JMB's operational capabilities is unclear," he said during the online discussion with a group of Bangladesh journalists.

Gastright listed some of the things that would constitute a full partnership between the USA and Bangladesh. These would include ensuring that "investigations of incidents run their full course, including investigating government officials, if applicable, and do not just end with the prosecution of low-level figures."