

Bill Gates eyes flight to space

AFP, Undated

The world's richest man Bill Gates is considering a possible flight into space, a Russian cosmonaut said from International Space Station yesterday, citing Gates' colleague, current space tourist Charles Simonyi.

"Charles said that Bill Gates is also preparing to visit space," cosmonaut Fyodor Yurchikhin told journalists during a video link-up from the space station, broadcast on state television Rossiya.

Religion-based

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paper based on a recent study, former ambassador and Bilias director Wali-Ur Rahman said there is no other alternative but to restrain militancy to upholding the spirit of Liberation War, good governance and strengthening of democratic culture.

Rahman added that even during the state of emergency, Jamaat is still continuing its clandestine activities to spread religion-based politics through 42 organisations.

Jamaat at present controls around 60 per cent mosques and mosque-based educational facilities in the country. The party has already set up at least one madrasa in every village to provide Islamic education, Rahman pointed out.

He also added that Jamaat has established a strong network of followers across the country by investing a huge amount of money in the transport sector. Besides, it has organised a large number of party activists through mosques and madrasas in villages all over the country.

Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat, has made a strong presence in five universities and 12 colleges in the country. Dhaka University is their next target. Shibir has also been spreading its control in rural areas with the help of Islamic NGOs. It even opened up operational cells in different parts of the country to organise militant activities, he added.

Though the law enforcement agencies are trying to bring the militants behind bars, the policy makers should put their emphasis on capturing patronizers as well as financiers of militancy, the speakers said.

They also stressed the need for timely action against the militants with a specific strategy while upholding the constitution.

Among others, Dr Syed Anwar Husain of University of Dhaka, Ambassador Arshaduzzaman, Abdul Ahad Chowdhury of MuktiJodha Sangsad and Kamrul Hasan Khan of Peshajibi Samannay Parishad also spoke at the meeting.

US for polls early

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The envoy said the US supports the present activities of the caretaker government, but at the same time expects that fundamental and human rights are respected and the due process of law is followed for those arrested on charge of corruption.

Butenis said as they want proper investigations into the killing of former finance minister SAMS Kibria and the grenade attacks on an Awami League rally in Dhaka and the trials of the perpetrators, they also demand appropriate investigations into the killing of journalists in Khulna and the trial of their killers.

She mentioned the names of journalists Harun-ur-Rashid, Manik Saha, Humayun Kabir and Sheikh Belaluddin who were killed in terrorist attacks in Khulna and praised their courage in seeking the truth.

Butenis said press in Bangladesh is vibrant and without courageous newspaper reporting about human rights abuses and corruption, those evils would continue to spread unchecked.

Khulna Press Club President Makbul Hossain Mintu Alhaj Niamat Ali, Sahabuddin Ahmed, Abu Hasan, Ferdousi Ali and Shaheb Ali,

"So the next time someone will be with Bill Gates. For me this is the biggest surprise of our flight."

Space Adventures, the US-based company that organises the trips, said it had heard nothing from the Microsoft chairman about a possible flight.

"Space Adventures has had no contact with Bill Gates," spokeswoman Natalya Dedovets told AFP. Simonyi, Yurchikhin and fellow cosmonaut Oleg Kotov docked at the International Space Station on Monday, after a flight that cost the former Microsoft engineer 25 million dollars (19 million euros).

Simonyi is scheduled to return to Earth on April 20 together with the current ISS team -- Russia's Mikhail Tyurin and American Miguel Lopez-Alegria -- while the two Russian cosmonauts will stay on for a 190-day shift in orbit.

Simonyi, who made his fortune at Microsoft, is the fifth tourist to travel to the ISS, following the United States' Dennis Tito in 2001 and Greg Olsen in 2005, South Africa's Mark Shuttleworth in 2002, and a US citizen of Iranian origin, Anousheh Ansari in 2006.

Space Adventures plans to expand its offerings next year to include a 100-million-dollar trip around the moon and a 100,000-dollar budget option: five minutes of sub-orbital space flight.

White House unable to fill position of new war chief

AFP, Washington

The White House is unable to find anyone willing to fill the high-powered job of Iraq and Afghanistan wars coordinator, with at least three retired four-star generals turning down the position, the Washington Post reported yesterday.

President George W. Bush is creating the job to coordinate civilian and military aspects of the two conflicts, the Post said, and whoever fills it will have the power to order other agencies to act.

But, despite the job carrying the title assistant to the president, one of the highest ranks in the White House, at least one candidate turned it down saying it would be difficult to work alongside powerful, dominating war hawk Vice President Dick Cheney.

"The very fundamental issue is, they don't know where the hell they're going," retired Marine Gen. John Sheehan told the Post.

Nor'wester kills 1 in Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A nor'wester coupled with heavy rain swept over the port city yesterday afternoon, killing a garment worker and uprooting a number of trees.

The dead was identified as Sourav Barua, 20, of Top Man Garments of Imam Group at Mansurabad under Double Mooring Police Station.

Sourav was struck by lightning as he was taking lunch in a tin-shed room on the rooftop of the garment factory during the storm.

He was rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

Four vehicles in South Khulshi Residential Area were damaged as a boundary wall collapsed on them during the twister

The downpour caused water-logging in Laidighir Par, Sirajuddoula Road, Rahmatganj, Amtali, Wassa Intersection, Prabartak Moor, Chawkbazar and Badurtala areas.

The low-lying areas in the city went under knee-deep water.

Waiting for son

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101 women, were released on bail yesterday from Dhaka Central Jail.

The accused were arrested in different bailable cases in the last 16 days but they could not file bail petition following the second amendment to the Emergency Power Rules 2007 on March 21, which suspended the right to bail for those accused of offences under the Penal Code.

The restriction was removed in the third amendment to the Emergency Power Rules 2007 on April 8 and hearing on bail petitions in different cases filed under the Penal Code started in Dhaka courts from Monday.

Many of the released accused yesterday said they faced a lot of trouble because of overloading inside the jail.

"We severely faced lack of food and water supplies and scarcity of space. The temperature inside the jail also rose tremendously," said a released accused.

Sources said around 11,000 people have been detained in Dhaka Central Jail against its capacity of 2,682 people.

Vehicular movement suffered a terrific jam in front of the jail because of the heavy rush of relatives of the accused.

Police reform

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concrete decisions if the proposals come within a short time in line with the ongoing police reform project.

The police reform project, which is already underway, will be completed soon, according to an official.

About the demand for increasing the facilities for police that involves financial support, the CA urged the top police officials to come up shortly with their specific proposals and assured them that the government would consider those after proper examination.

He also reminded them of the government's resource constraint and said the police will have to be made professional, transparent and service-oriented so that they themselves could feel proud of their services.

Communications Adviser Maj Gen (retd) MA Matin, Cabinet Secretary Ali Imam Majumder, Home Secretary Abdul Karim and Inspector General of Police (IGP) Noor Mohammad also spoke on the occasion.

Cases against

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case-filing process against the suspects that includes politicians and top business men, sources added.

Under the section 165 of the Income Tax Ordinance, the minimum punishment for submitting fabricated income tax statement is three months' detention, which can go up to three years' imprisonment or fine or both.

The punishment for concealing income related details under the section 166 is from three months' to five years' imprisonment or fine or both.

The punishment under the section 164 of the ordinance is one-year jail or fine or both for non-compliance of the income tax rules.

Following the caretaker government's move against top graft suspects of the country, the NBR in early March asked all banks to freeze the accounts of these 55 people, who hold at least 40 times more money in their bank accounts than the amounts declared in their tax statements.

The NBR chairman revealed last month that the undisclosed bank deposits of these people totalled around Tk 119 crore.

Heavy fighting in Sri Lanka kills 21

AFP, Colombo

Heavy fighting between government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels in northern Sri Lanka has left 21 people dead on both sides, the defence ministry said yesterday.

The clashes erupted when rebels launched mortar attacks against military positions late Tuesday across a front line at Omanthai, the main crossing point between government and Tiger-held territory.

The ministry said in a statement that one government soldier was killed and four others wounded, adding that intercepted rebel radio communication showed that 20 members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed in the military retaliation.

The Omanthai crossing was shut for the second day straight day yesterday following the heavy shelling, officials in the area said.

The military said the Tigers were shelling government positions to obstruct the transport of supplies across the front line.

BMTF asked

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each box will weigh 3 kg and the size will be similar to those used in previous elections.

Each box will cost Tk 1,800 to Tk 4,000 depending on the quality of plastic used. Boxes used in previous polls cost Tk 985 each.

The BMTF authorities also informed the CEC that they are capable making 2,50,000 transparent ballot boxes within 12 to 15 months.

"The time, required for preparing the ballot boxes, has no connection with fixation of the polls schedule," the CEC said reiterating that they will not take time more than 18 months for reforms.

The International Red Cross this week expressed concern over a sharp rise in civilian deaths in the northern and eastern regions.

On Saturday, suspected Tiger rebels blew up a passenger bus in the northern district of Vavuniya, killing eight people and wounding 25.

Over 4,000 people died between December 2005 and the first week of March 2007, including 675 civilians and 1,040 security personnel, according to defence ministry figures.

The LTTE has waged a 35-year campaign for independence that has claimed more than 60,000 lives.

Hasina

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bringing charges against her.

"If they [caretaker government] think that they can intimidate me by filing cases, then they would be living in a fool's paradise," Hasina said to BBC Bangla Service last night, from her current location in Florida in the United States.

"As they are bringing charges against me, I would come back soon," the AL chief said adding that she had already asked her political secretary to make arrangements so that she can return home as early as possible.

She also hinted at curtailing her visit to her ailing daughter at Florida.

"I trust the people of my country. They know whatever I do is in their interest and for their benefit," Hasina said.

"The government thinks that it can intimidate me, but it forgot that members of my party successfully fought against another military government," she added.

Spirited anti-graft

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As of now, a good part of the evidence gathered against the top graft suspects does not appear to have enough legal weight. But the taskforce members believe that they will come up with major graft cases in a short time.

Another major hurdle to this drive is that the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has not yet been able to function properly.

The caretaker government had taken a number of reform measures to make the anti-corruption body an effective organisation, but the ACC now has the newly formed National Coordination Committee to content with, which has created confusion among the field level investigators about the ownership of any particular investigation.

The chiefs of the ACC and the coordination committee have been repeatedly saying there is no conflict between the two bodies as they were complementing each other.

The coordination committee was formed in February and its legal coverage was given in March.

ACC Chairman Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury in March said, "I believe that the government has set up [the coordination committee] because of the enormous volume of [anti-corruption related] work."

After the state of emergency was declared on January 11, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed took oath as the chief of caretaker government on January 12. The government then announced that its key goal was to hold a free and fair election and to do that it will have to undertake measures to ensure a level playing field. The government identified corruption as the biggest enemy of such a free and fair election and the nation.

With this note, the government started its highly spirited anti-corruption drive amid widespread support, even from the political parties themselves, although this drive primarily busted a number of top political leaders.

To make this drive effective, the government reconstituted the ACC and appointed competent personnel.

As part of the drive, the government published two lists of 100 high profile graft suspects. Of them, 50 were asked to submit their wealth statements and 35 of them complied.

So far, 40 of the suspects have been arrested.

The ACC had initially said it would attach the properties of the 15 suspects, who had not filed their wealth statements, and file cases against them. But no property was attached so far while cases were filed against only four of them for non-submission of wealth statements.

Other than these cases, the ACC as of now has filed cases against only 15 suspects who are now in jail. All of these cases are related to inconsistencies between their wealth statements, their known sources of income and their visible

wealth.

None of these cases reflect the initial spirit of the anti-corruption drive. The anti-corruption taskforces themselves are not much convinced with many of these 15 cases as they feel that not all of them have enough legal weight.

In addition, extortion cases were filed against Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, former prime minister Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman and his friend Giasuddin Al Mamun. A few other small-scale cases were also filed against some political leaders.

Although the government has put 40 graft suspects behind bars for two months, investigations against some of them has started only very recently, sources said.

Many people expressed dissatisfaction with the investigation saying different intelligence wings, including those in the defence, already had a lot of files related to graft of political bigwigs.

"Yet when the real investigations started, these files were either not used properly or they were found to be inadequate," said a taskforce member. "For instance, the intelligence has audio recordings or intelligence reports on a certain person's graft. But these do not stand as solid evidence in the courts," he added.

Many feel that the taskforces are not actually getting proper cooperation of the administration which has all the files that could reveal many instances of corruption. Many officials are themselves involved in corruption and they know how to mislead the investigators.

On the other hand, a few officials in the administration said it is not the lack of cooperation but the wrong focus of the inexperienced investigators that is delaying the whole process. "If they look for evidence at wrong places, how can anyone tell them that they are doing wrong things?" said a high official.

"The problem with the investigations is that the taskforces are formed with personnel from both the defence and civil administrations. The perspective of these two administrations are completely different and they do not act in a unified manner," said a defence taskforce official.

Another defence taskforce official pointed out that the graft suspects turned out to be more sly than they were initially thought.

"Most of them have deposited their money abroad. They did not keep much asset at home. So, it has become very difficult for us to collect the evidence," he said. "But every crime leaves its footprints. We are tracking these footprints and we have made progress. It will take some time but we will succeed," he added.

4 killed in clashes in Somalia

AFP, Mogadishu

At least four civilians were killed yesterday in renewed clashes in the Somali capital between Ethiopian forces and Islamist fighters that a shattered a ceasefire, residents said.

There was sporadic gunfire and heavy mortar shells around a stadium in southern Mogadishu, where the two sides recently fought the worst battles seen in the Somali capital in 15 years, leaving as many as 1,000 dead.

"The fighting is going on in our neighbourhood and around four people have been killed, one of them is a young boy. They were civilians killed stray bullets," said Gure Ahmed Olow, a resident of Sagar district in northern Mogadishu.

Another resident, Sahal Mohamed, said: "We cannot go outside to check on the casualties because stray bullets are flying all over. I have seen three wounded civilians, two of them are from the same family and the third one is a neighbour".

Residents saw Ethiopian and Somali troops reinforcing in Sagar area, where the rival sides also fired heavy artillery.

The new fighting, which erupted overnight shattered a week-old ceasefire announced by elders from Mogadishu's dominant Hawiye clan after talks with Ethiopian military commanders.

The resumption of clashes came hours after the Ethiopian army refused to meet Hawiye elders for routine peace negotiations unless insurgent commanders were present.

"We are very worried and it is clear that the shaky ceasefire has broken because heavy fighting started overnight," said Abdulkadir Mohamed, a resident in Tofik in south Mogadishu.

"I was sleeping when heavy gunfire broke out. Everyone woke up and fled from the area because stray bullets were hitting everywhere," he added.

Mohamed Hussein Welhyie, a resident near the stadium area, said: "We ask the warring sides to stop the fighting because it will increase the casualties and only bring damage."

Last month's heavy fighting erupted when Ethiopian forces launched a crackdown on suspected insurgents in the Somali capital.

Somalia has lacked an effective central government since the ousting of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991 touched off a power struggle that exploded into inter-clan warfare.

Tensions have risen again since Ethiopian forces helped the UN-backed transitional government to oust Islamists from Mogadishu at the start of the year. The Islamists have since vowed a guerrilla war against the Ethiopians.

The Islamist chief Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed said Monday that Ethiopia wanted to "wipe Somalia off the world map" and that the presence of its troops in the lawless nation had heightened the Somali sense of nationalism.

Ethiopia's arch-foe Eritrea, which has rejected accusations of fanning the Somalia conflict has called for an immediate pullout of foreign troops, including 1,500 African Union peacekeepers from Uganda, saying their presence was worsening the situation.

Ex-BNP MP's

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Anti-Corruption Commission, National Board of Revenue and Bangladesh Road Transport Authority raided Mirza's house in the afternoon and found the car in his garage. officer-in-charge of Sudharam Police Station said.

As Mirza failed to produce necessary documents for the car, they seized the vehicle and brought it to the Sudharam Police Station.

None was arrested in this regard as of 8:00pm.

Contacted, Shahjahan, also the president of Noakhali district BNP, said that he had borrowed some cash from Mirza keeping the car as collateral.

Meanwhile, an official of Mirza's industries said that as Shahjahan had no garage, he kept the car in Mirza's garage.

Tigers

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26. Keeper Nixon parried the ball after he failed to grasp it and Strauss took care of the rest.

Things got worse for Bangladesh as Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammad Ashraful and Aftab Ahmed all followed in quick succession.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Rahim completely missed the line of an Andrew Flintoff straight delivery while Ashraful and Aftab edged good deliveries from Anderson.

Aftab again looked in good form but fell for only 10. Hero of the last match Ashraful nicked a good out-swing from Anderson having faced six balls for his one.

Panesar was brought on and he gave his captain immediate rewards as he took the wickets of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (13 off 47 balls) and Mohammad Rafique (0 off 4 balls).

Seamer Mahmood and left-armer Panesar took three wickets each while Anderson took two for 30.

England remained unchanged from their seven-wicket defeat against Australia in Antigua on Sunday, while Bangladesh brought back vice-captain Shahriar Nafees in place of Javed Omar from their team which upset South Africa by 67 runs in Georgetown, Guyana last week.

Hasina, Nizami

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In Jamaat, 9 leaders and workers other than Nizami face similar accusations. They are former minister and Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, Senior Secretary General of Jamaat Quamaruzzaman, Central Nayabe Amir Mokbul Ahmed, Assistant Secretary General ATM Azharul Islam, Dhaka City Unit Amir of Jamaat Rafikul Islam, Paltan Unit Amir ATM Sirajul Islam, Islami Chhattra Shibir President Shafikul Islam Masud and its General Secretary Zahid Hossain, and President of Dhaka University Unit of Chhattra Shibir Shishir Monir.

Although the violence took place over five months ago, the charge sheet against Hasina, also a former prime minister, came just three days into the filing of an extortion case against her, which AL dubbed as a conspiracy to tarnish her image.

Investigators submitted the charge sheets in both cases to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka showing 91 people as prosecution witnesses.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mir Ali Reza yesterday fixed April 22 for the hearings on the acceptability of the charge sheets. The court will also decide whether arrest warrants will be issued against Hasina and two other accused -- Mohammad Nasim and Kiron Alais Abdul Malek -- and whether their properties will be confiscated.

Prior to the takeover of power by the caretaker government on October 28, seven people were killed in a fierce clash between activists of AL-led 14-party coalition and Jamaat-e-Islami in Paltan area. A day later Workers Party and Jamaat filed separate cases in connection with the same incident with Paltan police station.

In the case filed by Jamaat, complainant ATM Sirajul Islam, amir of the Paltan unit of the Islamist party, mentioned that on directives from AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu the other accused killed five Jamaat activists and injured several others.

In the first information report (FIR) however the complainant had not named Hasina as an accused but the charge sheet had the AL chief as an accused, who had just been sued on Monday in connection with an extortion of TK 3 crore.

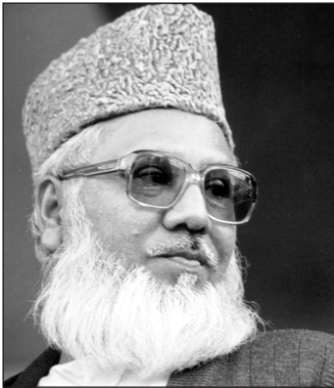
Hasina, who is now in the US, expressed her determination to return home much earlier than scheduled to fight the extortion case.

The investigation officer (IO) put Hasina's name at no 31 on the list of 46 accused as he claimed that the AL chief had been found to be involved in the incident.

At the very end of BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government's rule, Hasina called her party activists to march to Dhaka with oars and sticks to take control of the streets of the capital. Following her call, her party activists gathered in the city sparking the violence of October 28, the charge sheet said.

In the charge sheet, Hasina and AL leader Mohammad Nasim, who is now in jail, and another AL activist were shown as fugitives. The IO requested the court to issue arrest warrants against the accused 'fugitives' and to confiscate their movable and immovable properties.

Interestingly again, police dropped from the charge sheet the names of 16 accused which had been on the FIR including the



names of AL presidium members Abdur Razzak and Tofail Ahmed as the allegations brought against them by the complainant had been found to be false.

The 45 persons who were charged along with the AL chief include AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, former home minister Mohammad Nasim, General Secretary of Dhaka City AL

Among the accused, Roymohon Shil, Omar Faruk, and Suman are now in jail custody in connection with the case.

The accused who were granted bail earlier by the High Court are Jalil, Maya, Nanok, Ashraf Hossain Talukder, Siddiqi Najmul Azam, Rasel, Mojibur Hossain, Belayet Hossain, Abu Sayed, Bashir Ahmed, Shahriar, Jahangir Alam, Roton, Sheikh Mostainbillah, and Mukul.

The charges brought against Hasina and her colleagues are for unlawful assembly, inflicting injuries ranging from minor to grievous on people, murder, attempt to murder, and for aiding and abetting criminal activities.

CASE AGAINST JAMAAT

The IO of the case, AKM Idris Hossain, sub-inspector of the Detective Branch of police, pressed charges against 10 Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhattra Shibir leaders for the killing of a Workers Party activist Rassel Ahmed Khan.

On October 28 last year, activists of Jamaat and its student front Chhattra Shibir gathered in front the north gate of Baitul Mukarram and launched an attack on AL-led 14-party coalition activists while they were passing through the area. The attack sparked a fierce battle between the rival political activists. During the battle, Shibir activists were found shooting bullets from firearms.

Their rivals also reportedly launched a counter attack with oars and sticks.

In connection with the case filed by Workers Party leader Kamrul Ahsan, charges were brought against the accused for unlawful assembly, inflicting injuries on people, murder, and for aiding and abetting criminal activities.

The accused are former minister and Jamaat Amir Matiur Rahman Nizami, former minister and Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, Senior Secretary General of Jamaat Quamaruzzaman, Central Nayabe Amir Mokbul Ahmed, Assistant Secretary General ATM Azharul Islam, Dhaka City Unit Amir of Jamaat Rafikul Islam, Paltan Unit Amir ATM Sirajul Islam, Islami Chhattra Shibir President Shafikul Islam Masud and its General Secretary Zahid Hossain, and President of Dhaka University Unit of Chhattra Shibir Shishir Monir.

Among the accused, only the name of Zahid Hossain had not been in the FIR, but his involvement was found during the investigation.

US offers further

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"We have asked the ministries concerned to send concept notes to identify areas that require assistance," ERD Secretary Aminul Islam Bhuiyan told reporters after the meeting.

"We will sit with the US government representatives after we receive and compile the concept notes from the concerned ministries," Bhuiyan added.

The ACC informed the meeting that they lack the necessary technology to create a databank, which prevents ACC officials from effectively tracing and prosecuting financial crimes, said Bhuiyan.

He said the government does not plan on creating another organisation to specifically fight financial crimes, rather the existing mechanisms within the Bangladesh Bank and the NBR would be strengthened for quickly investigating and effectively dealing with financial crimes.

In the letter that was sent at the end of February, Butenis proposed meetings between appropriate officials from the US embassy and the Bangladesh government to support the anti-corruption efforts.

"We are particularly interested in identifying, concrete, short-term actions to support the investigation and, as appropriate, prosecution of corruption suspects," Butenis wrote in the letter.

Recalling her country's experience, Butenis said, "An inter-ministerial approach is essential to ensure that all relevant areas of expertise are involved in what can sometimes be very technical and tedious criminal investigations."

She cited the example of the role of forensic accountants in tracing the movement of funds along the corruption ladder, so that 'true owners' of various assets can be identified and then be produced before the court.

Appreciating the government's ongoing anti-corruption drive, Butenis said, "We also welcome your Government's pledge to remove 'black' money from political life, and are watching with interest the recent