

State of emergency cannot remain for long

Butenis tells Rajshahi chamber leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*

US Ambassador in Dhaka Patricia A Butenis yesterday told Rajshahi businessmen that the state of emergency was necessary to tackle the chaotic political situations but it cannot remain for long.

She was speaking at a meeting with the leaders of the business community at Rajshahi Chamber of Commerce and Industries (RCCI). "I think it (state of emergency) is not viable and democracy should be the ultimate destination", Rajshahi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) Director Kabirur R Khan quoted the US envoy as saying while seeking the opinions of the businessmen.

Bangladesh seems to be back on track and there should be a time frame for holding elections, she added.

"We told her that we are happy with the current government activities that are helping speed up economic progress", said RCCI President Hasen Ali.

RCCI Directors Khondokar M Hafiz and Fazlur Rahman were also present at the meeting.

Earlier, Butenis visited Sarada Police Academy in the morning where she delivered a speech for trainee police officers and teachers.

Academy Principal Mokhesur Rahman said the US envoy spoke on developing the academic curriculum and use of modern equipment

in training.

Butenis also called on Rajshahi Divisional Commissioner Anis Uddin Manjur at his office. They discussed about economic development, smuggling, trafficking, security situations and terrorism in the region.

The US envoy enquired about people's feelings on current emergency situations in persons and expressed her concern about trafficking.

She also visited Barendra Research Museum (BRM) and the bank of the river Padma.

Rajshahi University Vice Chancellor Prof Altaf Hossain and senior RU teachers accompanied her while visiting the RU-run BRM.

"I find amazing, amazing collections, you should all be very proud of what you have there (BRM)...the beautiful sculptures of Hindu, Buddhas and some Muslim period pieces... These are just among most beautiful pieces in the world I am sure", said the US envoy on her BRM visit.

Meanwhile, the government is taking some 24 BRM treasures to France for giving these a global exposure in an international fair at Guimet Museum in Paris later this year.

Butenis is scheduled to meet a number of political figures and visit Rajshahi University and a local NGO today.



PHOTO: STAR

Members of the joint forces conduct a raid on the house of Awami League leader Sheikh Abdullah at Gulshan-1 in the city yesterday.

12 acquitted of charges of being JMB militants

UNB, *Natore*

The district judge's court yesterday acquitted 12 young men of the charges of being JMB cadres and their involvement in anti-state activities.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Zebunnessa passed the order setting free the accused, 10 in the dock - all aged between 18 and 24. Two others remained fugitive after securing bail earlier.

Pronouncing the verdict, the judge observed that the prosecution has failed to prove the JMB identity of the accused when they admitted in confessional statement to the magistrate that they are followers of Ahle Hadith movement.

Besides, deposition of all the 25 prosecution witnesses failed to prove that the accused were involved in any anti-state activities.

The young men, all hailing from different parts of the district, were picked up from Sadhupara Ahle Hadith Mosque in Natore town at dead of night of January 31, 2005.

Yunus leaves for China today

Bss, *Dhaka*

Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus leaves Dhaka for China today to attend the annual summit meeting of Boao Forum for Asia.

A special aircraft, sent by the organisers of the summit, will carry Dr Yunus from Zia International Airport (ZIA) to Hainan, an island province of China, where the summit will take place.

Heads of the government of different countries in Asia, high level businesses executives, experts and scholars will attend the summit.

Prof Yunus will make the inaugural speech at the summit. Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China Wu Bangguo, President of the Philippines Gloria Arroyo, Prime Minister of Pakistan Shaukat Aziz, Chairman of Microsoft Corporation Bill Gates and former president of the Philippines Fidel Ramos, among others, will also speak at the opening session.

During his visit to China, Prof Yunus will also attend a reception to be accorded by BFA Young People's Group on April 20 on his winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

He will also hold talks with deputy chairman of the People's Bank of China, chairman of the Chinese Banking Regulatory Commission and leaders of the Chinese Microfinance Association in Beijing to discuss the launching of Grameen Trust's microfinance operation in China.

Chinese Central Bank offered a banking license to Grameen Trust to start a Grameen programme in China in October last year.

Obituary

Alhaj Bashir Ullah, a retired deputy general manager of Sonali Bank, passed away at Bangladesh Medical College Hospital on Monday at the age of 83, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, one son and five daughters.

He was buried at Martyred Intellectuals Graveyard at Mirpur.

His kulkhwani will be held at his 2/A4, 54, New Eskaton Road residence after Asr prayers tomorrow.

Moshiur Rahman Musa



Moshiur Rahman Musa, a freedom fighter and eminent sports organiser, passed away due to a cardiac arrest at Parkview Hospital in the city on Monday at the age of 53, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, two daughters and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

He was buried at Azimpur Graveyard yesterday with state honour after namaz-e-janezas at Bangabandhu National Stadium and Moghbazar Chowrasta Jam-e-Mosque.

'Restore Proclamation of Independence to Constitution'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday demanded official observation of historic Mujibnagar Day commemorating the formation of Bangladesh's first government-in-exile at Baidyanathola in Meherpur on April 17, 1971.

They said it would not have been possible to achieve victory in the War of Liberation if the Mujibnagar Government was not formed with Tajuddin Ahmed as prime minister.

The discussion was organised by the Committee to Eliminate the Killers and Collaborators of the Liberation War at Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA) auditorium in the city with Justice KM Sobhan in the chair.

Committee Vice-president Prof Muntasir Mamun said former law minister Moudud Ahmed had deleted from the constitution the Proclamation of Independence announced by the Mujibnagar Government on that day.

It should be restored and those involved with such heinous act

should be punished, he said.

Justice Sobhan said the Proclamation of Independence is a constitutional document and those who had removed it must be brought under sedition charge.

Acting president of the committee Journalist Shahriar Kabir urged the caretaker government to form a commission and tribunal to bring the war criminals to book.

He said dispute has been created over the declaration of independence only to distort the real history of the Liberation War.

Pointing to Jamaat-e-Islami Party, Chairman of Bangladesh Heritage Foundation Wali-Ur Rahman said, "Those who opposed the Liberation War are still very strong and we should fight them intellectually."

Air Vice-Marshal (ret'd) AK Khondokar, Lt Col (ret'd) Abu Osman Chowdhury, former cabinet secretary of Mujibnagar Government HT Imam and Simin Hossain Rimi, daughter of Tajuddin Ahmed, also spoke.

Romania keen to support petroleum, energy sectors

UNB, *Dhaka*

Romania is willing to provide training and technical support to petroleum and energy sectors as there is ample scope for increased cooperation between the two countries.

Newly appointed Romanian Ambassador Vasile Sofinetti said this when he presented his credentials to President Iajuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday.

The envoy said Romania will also increase educational exchange programmes for the students of Bangladesh in Romania.

Iajuddin thanked the Romanian government for recognising Bangladesh just after independence in 1972 and termed the relations between the two countries as excellent.

He also hailed Romania for joining the European Union and hoped that Romania would play a greater role in increasing trade facilities for Bangladesh with the EU.

Underlining the need for enhancing economic cooperation between the two countries, he said the existing bilateral trade between the two countries is not significant. "There is a great

scope of widening the volume of trade between the two countries," he said.

Inajuddin suggested exchanging visits of business delegations between the two countries and sought Romanian investment in Bangladesh as a very congenial investment atmosphere is now prevailing here.

He said Romania might import world class pharmaceuticals, garments, melamine, ceramic and leather goods from Bangladesh at very competitive prices. "Both the countries should explore all the avenues of cooperation for the mutual benefits," he added.

Iajuddin offered Romania to utilise Bangladesh skilled and unskilled manpower for its development.

The president stressed the need for people-to-people contact for further enhancing bilateral relations and requested the Romanian government through the envoy to open a full-fledged embassy in Dhaka.

He underscored the importance of increasing student-teacher exchange programmes between the two countries.



PHOTO: STAR

British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury speaks at a press conference at his Baridhara residence in the city yesterday.

British envoy welcomes timeline for election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury yesterday welcomed the timeline for election in the country, saying that the chief adviser's announcement that the election will be held by the end of 2008 is 'encouraging' overall.

"Like all others in Bangladesh, we welcome the timeline and hope very much that it will be achieved," he said at a press conference at his Baridhara residence in the city.

It is up to the people and the politicians of Bangladesh to decide whether the 18-month period for preparations for the election is too long or too short, he said in reply to a question.

The high commissioner said it is agreed that the efforts of the present government are geared towards not only holding a free election, but also defining a new baseline for future democracy and good environment.

About the UK's aid to Bangladesh, he said their aid is not conditional; so it will not be hampered during the tenure of the interim government. However, he said they look forward to better governance and a corruption-free country.

The agreements on aid issues are made with elected governments, but during this government the arrangements will be on interim basis, Anwar Choudhury said.

Asked about the present investment environment, the British high commissioner said there is less corruption now and the bureaucracy is more efficient, which is evident in the improved services in the Chittagong port.

He also said that there has been a slight improvement in economic activities, but not much significant. It is hoped that in the changed context the commercial and business activities will be more vibrant, he added.

Referring to Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury's visit to the UK, he said the adviser will meet the British foreign secretary and discuss the political situation and the issues of governance, corruption and climate change.

Death anniversary

Today is the first death anniversary of senior journalist Reza Quamrul, says a press release.

On the occasion, a milad and a doa mahfil will be held at his residence in Gopalganj town.

Relatives, friends and admirers have been requested to attend the milad and pray for salvation of the departed soul.

UK to introduce new visa process from April 25

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The UK government is going to introduce a new visa application procedure, including collection of biometric data of visa applicants from April 25 to curb fraud in immigration process.

The new system will involve collecting digital photograph and fingerprint of Bangladeshi visa applicants using high-tech scanners, said British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury at a press conference at his residence in the city yesterday.

Bangladesh will be the first in South Asia and 64th country in the globe where biometric system is being introduced with no additional cost and no extra time, he added.

"The new system will help genuine Bangladeshi applicants. It will protect them from identity fraud and help us to recognise genuine applicants so that we can facilitate their legitimate travel to the UK more easily," said the high commissioner.

"The technology is nothing to be scared of and I think Bangladeshi people will feel comfortable with it very quickly. It's straight forward and clean. The images will be securely stored in a database in the UK and strictly protected by UK data-sharing legislation," said Choudhury.

It will also make easier to pick out those who abuse the system, he said, adding, "I think Bangladeshi applicants will understand and share our desire to stamp out fraudulent applicants."

Under the new system, applicants will have to go in person to visa application centres located in Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong to submit their

applications, along with biometric features, said the high commissioner, adding that the call centres will remain open round the clock and call the applicants in a week if they are granted visas.

He said the applicants may pay the visa fee through Brac Bank prior to submission of the applications to reduce waiting time.

"This will also strengthen the control of the UK's borders and its migration policy," he added.

A traveller who will be granted visa with biometric features will not have to submit the same features in 10 years, said the high commissioner.

Only the diplomats will not be required to submit biometric features for travelling to the UK, he noted.

Deputy Director of Visa Services John Varney said the new system will quicken the visa issuance process for genuine Bangladeshi applicants probably within one week.

In 2006, around 45,000 Bangladeshis applied for British visa, of whom 61 percent were granted visas, he added.

He told the journalists that on an average, 30 Bangladeshis are sent back every month from the UK for fraudulent practices in immigration procedures.

Varney said the biometric system will also be introduced in Nepal and Sri Lanka soon and in India and Pakistan gradually.

"We shall introduce the new system in all the countries of the world by 2008," he added.



Thundershowers likely

UNB, *Dhaka*

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions and at one or two places over Chittagong, Khulna and Bansal divisions in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 35.4 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 20.2 degree Celsius at Patuakhali.

The sun sets in the capital at 6.21pm today and rises at 5:34am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	32.4	25.2	63	69
Chittagong	32.5	24.5	78	74
Rajshahi	33.5	25.1	90	61
Khulna	34.1	24.8	74	55
Barisal	34.2	23.6	88	63
Sylhet	31.2	22.3	91	61
Cox's Bazar	32.3	23.8	69	68