

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 Mokhlesur 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.



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.

Regarding 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 straightforward 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 Bangladeshi applied for British visa, of whom 61 percent were granted visas, he added.

He told the journalists that on an average, 30 Bangladeshi 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.

WEATHER TODAY

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 Barisal 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

ETV CASE

Govt seeks modification of HC order

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday filed an application seeking modification of the High Court's interim order that directed Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to allocate state-run BTV's terrestrial facility to Ekuhshey Television (ETV) for airing its programme.

On March 7, a HC division bench, comprising Justice Syed M Dastagir Husain and Justice Mamnoon Rahman passed the interim order pending a writ petition filed by ETV chairman Abdus Salam.

ETV resumed its terrestrial telecast on March 30, a day after the BTRC regularised its VHF frequency, which was shut down four years and eight months back following the Supreme Court orders that upheld a High Court verdict declaring the licensing process of ETV illegal.

"The matter will come up as an application tomorrow before a High Court motion bench," Deputy Attorney General Syed Afsar Jahan told UNB after filing the application yesterday.

The government decided to seek modification of the High Court order that was allegedly obtained by ETV by suppressing facts, said an official source.

ETV, the first private-sector television channel with terrestrial facility from the state-owned BTV, went on air officially on April 14, 2000.

Uneasy calm at Sylhet Agri University

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

An uneasy calm has been prevailing on Sylhet Agricultural University campus as the authorities and students took hard stands on their respective positions over the newly introduced semester arrangement.

About 300 students of the university took out processions on the campus and held rally yesterday for the second day to raise their demand for immediate withdrawal of show cause notices issued on three of their fellow students.

They had been demanding for revising the recently proposed semester arrangement.

Mahbubur Rahman, Yunus Ali and Shahin Miah had been asked to show cause within seven days (from Monday) as to why they were provoking general students for undue agitation.

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Obituary

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

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-janezat at Bangabandhu National Stadium and Moghbazar Chowrasta Jame-Mosque.

Another report from Thakurgaon adds: Train communication on Thakurgaon-Dinajpur route remained suspended for three days following the derailment of a number of bogies of two trains on Sunday and Monday.

On information, a salvage train from Laksam rushed to the spot and pulled off the bogies. The train communication on the route resumed at about 3:30pm.

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