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TRANS-COM ELECTRONICS

US to increase funds for governance in Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

The US government is going to significantly increase fund and assistance in Bangladesh in 2009.

This was conveyed to the Congress by US Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard A Boucher while appearing before the US House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee on South Asia on Wednesday, according to a message received in Dhaka yesterday.

Boucher and Mark S Ward, senior deputy assistant of administration for the Asia of USAID, appeared before the sub-committee for hearing on "US assistance to South Asia: Is there a strategy to go with all that money?"

Boucher said: "In anticipation of a transition to a democratic government in Bangladesh following elections scheduled for December, our 2009 budget requests

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Scant supply leads to drug price hike

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

Prices of a number of drugs including inhalers, eye drops, oral saline and contraceptives have risen tremendously in recent times when people are already struggling to cope with rising prices of essentials.

Drug retailers are not selling the drugs at maximum retail price (MRP) printed on the drugs with the excuse that the supply of the drugs are scarce and they are buying the drugs at higher prices from sources other than the manufacturers, alleged frequent users of the drugs.

Scant supply has led to the price increase of some drugs including oral re-hydration saline, inhalers of Sulbutamol group, Afimol and CipraA eye drops manufactured by ACME laboratories and Amdol Plus tablets made by Beximco

Pharmaceuticals, said retailers.

Afinol or CipraA that used to be sold for Tk 13 each is now being sold for Tk 25 as the manufacturer of the drugs cannot ensure the supply as per demand, the retailers added.

For the same reason, the price of Sulbutamol inhalers has increased by at least Tk 40 above its MRP, a number of drugstore owners said.

"Inhaler is an essential drug for me as I can't start my day without it. So I have to buy this drug at any cost - regardless of its price," said 58-year-old asthma patient Yasin Ahmed.

"I was quite lucky to get it after scouring at least five drugstores for it," said Ahmed with a tone of relief.

The price of Multivit Plus by Square Pharmaceuticals has gone up from Tk 30 to Tk 33 while a box of 20 sachets of oral re-hydration saline (ORS) made by SMC now

sells for Tk 70 as opposed to its previous rate of Tk 60.

The latest deterioration of diarrhoea situation in the country has fuelled the price increase of ORS, speculated the retailers.

The price of saline infusion set even rose from Tk 6 to Tk 13 a piece - soon after the government banned its import to promote various local manufacturers including JMI Bangla.

A drug accessories importer seeking anonymity said, "The fact of the matter, however, is, these local companies are deliberately manufacturing too few of the infusion sets to raise its price, making the patients victim of their greed."

The retail price of Femicon or Minicon, oral contraceptive pills manufactured by Social Marketing Company (SMC), has also

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US envoy hopes for all-party election

UNB, Dhaka

US Ambassador in Dhaka James F Moriarty yesterday expressed hope that general elections in Bangladesh would be held in such a way that all political parties could participate.

Talking to reporters after an hour-long meeting with Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, the envoy termed positive the chief adviser's announcement that the election will be held in the third week of December.

"We welcome any step towards democracy. We want to see the country moves to an election," Moriarty said.

Asked about lifting of the state

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RU VC Prof Altaf removed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University (RU) Vice Chancellor (VC) Prof Altaf Hossain was removed yesterday for his alleged involvement in corruption in recruiting 545 university teachers and employees during the BNP-Jammat alliance government, education ministry sources said.

According to Section 11(2) of the Rajshahi University Act 1973, Pro Vice-Chancellor Dr Mamunul Keramat would temporarily act as new VC in addition to his present position, said an education ministry handout.

Campus sources said faculty deans, department chairs, and senior teachers thronged the campus residence of the removed VC after the ministry handout reached the university at around 6:45pm yesterday.

Prof Altaf later called an emergency meeting with faculty deans and high university officials at his residence.

He later told the press that the government took the decision in the greater interest of the nation.

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CA opens CHT mobile network

UNB, Dinajpur

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday formally inaugurated mobile phone network in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) by talking to his two special assistants from here.

During his visit to the CHT on March 27 this year, the CA had assured the people over there that the three hill districts - Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban - would be brought under the mobile phone network.

Within six weeks of the assurance, the CHT has been connected with the modern communication system of mobile phone.

The CA, who came to Dinajpur to inaugurate Boro harvest and

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Floating garbage and water hyacinth get stuck at a sluice gate near Rampura Bridge obstructing flow of sewage out of the capital. The photo was taken yesterday.

Politicians doubt reform success

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The efforts of electoral and political reforms made so far are unlikely to be successful as the issues could not be discussed at grassroots level due to the nationwide ban on politics, politicians and civil society members said yesterday.

Under the state of emergency, politicians were under "different threats" that compelled them to remain indoors and prevented freedom of thought, they said, adding that the period did not have a congenial environment for reforms.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Chairman Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, however, said the nationwide ban on politics has been lifted and the political parties should use whatever time they now have before the polls to consult their grassroots-level supporters and make the reforms a success.

The observations came at a roundtable styled "Progress of Reforms" organised by Shushashoner Janney Nagorik (Shujan) at Cirdap Auditorium in the capital.

"I cannot think how there would be reforms... Political leaders are under threats from [army] majors. Thus there cannot be any reforms," said Awami League (AL) leader Advocate Rahmat Ali.

The next parliament may not pass the ordinances being promulgated now, he said, adding that all reforms are based on the constitution but the very basic rights enshrined in the constitution have

not been ensured.

The rate of corruption has not gone down, rather it has increased manifolds during the period of emergency, Rahmat Ali said.

Inam Ahmed Chowdhury, adviser to former premier Khaleda Zia, said BNP leaders who are making an effort for reforms came under heavy pressures from a faction of the party.

"This is unfortunate that the reforms issue has not been taken seriously, rather the term 'reform' became a matter of joke to many people," he said.

Jatiya Party leader Sheikh Shahidul Islam said it is essential that political parties change their mindset and their "conflicting political culture", but these reforms are not possible confining people and politicians in rooms.

"It will not work if political parties are compelled to accept reforms," he said, adding that different parties have different reform processes and these processes require freedom. "Political reforms would have progressed much more if politics was allowed earlier."

Former ambassador Mohammad Zamir said reforms are not possible when political leaders' existences are threatened. There has been no discussion among people over reforms in the political process, he said.

There must be opinions of grassroots level people, he said, adding that reforms discussed with only the top-level leaders of parties will not do.

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Terror threat from South Asia still top US concern

AFP, Washington

The United States has poured nearly 40 billion dollars in aid to South Asia since the September 11 attacks but the terror threat from the region remains a top problem, a congressional hearing was told.

"South Asia is arguably the place from which America faces the greatest terrorist threat," said Gary Ackerman, the head of the House of Representatives panel on issues relating to the region that includes Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Chairing a hearing on US foreign assistance to South Asia, he said that since 2001, Washington spent 38.67 billion dollars on the region but "we are no closer than we were when we began to a peaceful, stable, secure South Asia."

The lawmaker was critical of the administration of President George W. Bush for lacking what he called an effective strategy to contain the terrorism threat from the region.

"While the president and his administration don't seem very adept when it comes to strategy, either having one or implementing one, the Bush administration is very good at spending money, lots of it and mostly on guns," he said.

Since the United States was attacked on September 11, 2004, South Asia has become second only to the Middle East in terms of US military assistance, he said, questioning the achievements of the aid.

Over the past six years, he said,

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Accounts of 12 suspected heroin smugglers frozen

A CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

The Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) in Jessore asked different local banks to freeze bank accounts of 12 individuals suspected of smuggling heroin and transferring of crores of taka illegally through telephonic transfer (TT) system.

Hafizur Rahman, director of the DNC, told The Daily Star yesterday, "We have requested the banks to check the assets of the 12 businesspeople and their family members."

"We also requested the banks to suspend all financial activities [of the accounts] until the court

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Sector commanders start meetings with political parties today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sector Commanders' Forum (SCF) will start formal view exchange meetings with different political parties today seeking pledges that the parties will not form any electoral alliance with war criminals and anti-liberation war elements.

A platform of the commanders who led the country's Liberation War in 11 sectors, SCF will also ask for commitments from the parties that they will take initiatives to try the war criminals once they come to power after the election.

As part of the process, the SCF is

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Dhaka asks Yangon to allow smooth entry of aid workers

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday requested Myanmar government to receive international aid for the cyclone victims and allow unimpeded entry of aid workers to that country.

"We've very good relations with Myanmar. We've already used our good offices for the Myanmar people," Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury told the news agency in the afternoon.

He said Bangladesh was requested by certain member-states of the United Nations to use her good offices to take up with Myanmar authorities the matter of unimpeded access of the aid personnel to that country.

It was learnt that Dhaka sent its request to the Myanmar authorities through the Myanmar permanent representative in New York.

Earlier in the day, US Ambassador in Dhaka James F Moriarty met the foreign adviser

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This place under Buriganga bridge at Badamtoli in Old Dhaka was used for stockpiling huge quantities of Indian rice. But, now the place is mostly empty with only a small number of sacks of Boro rice. The photo was taken yesterday.

Tk 350cr food depot project planned

Big procurement needs big storage

SHAMIM ASHRAF

The government is embarking on a Tk 350 crore-project to construct more food depots and increase the capacity of the existing ones in the northern part of the country, home to the major rice produce, in the coming fiscal year.

The capacity of the depots in Rajshahi division remains only 4 lakh metric tons, whereas the government this year has set a procurement target of 9.06 lakh metric tons for Boro paddy and rice from the region.

The total targeted procurement of Boro between April and August this year is 12 lakh metric tons.

As an immediate solution to the problem, the food and disaster management ministry has instructed government officials to

repair the fertiliser depots of BADC (Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation), which are lying unused.

"We've already started selecting spaces for the new depots," Food and Disaster Management Adviser AMM Shawkat Ali told The Daily Star yesterday confirming the government move to start a new project.

Once built, the new depots will increase the storage of the northern region depots by 2 lakh metric tons more, the food adviser estimated.

The government would not acquire any land for the new depots since the process would require a long time. The new depots will be built on available lands beside the existing food depots and

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25 killed in Lanka's restive north

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops smashed rebel bunkers and traded fire with guerrillas across the island's north, leaving at least 25 people dead in total, the defence ministry said yesterday.

The ministry said security forces carried out "limited operations" in the regions of Mannar, Wel Oya, Vavuniya and Janakapura on Wednesday, as troops tried to advance further into rebel territories in the north.

Elsewhere, unidentified gunmen shot dead two civilians in the eastern seaport district of Trincomalee, on Wednesday, the military said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) did not comment on the ministry's latest casualty claims.

Since January, government troops claim to have killed 3,663

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Frantic race to save lives in quake zone

Death toll may cross 50,000, says China state television

AFP, Yixiu

China said yesterday that over 50,000 people had likely died in the devastating earthquake that hit its southwest as time runs out to save survivors buried in the rubble of broken communities.

Experts said the search-and-rescue operation was entering its most crucial phase yet four days after the 7.9-magnitude quake struck, with the chances of finding survivors diminishing by the hour.

"The deaths are estimated to be over 50,000," state television said, citing figures from the national quake relief headquarters.

The epic scale of Monday's quake is becoming clearer as teams hike into the remote epicentre in Sichuan province, where whole towns were levelled.

"If there are some survivors under such conditions, it would be a matter of luck, or a miracle," said Zhang Zhouhui, vice director of the state-run China Earthquake Disaster Prevention Centre.

Yet amidst the tragedy, miracles did occur.

In Yixiu, a town at the epicentre, rescue workers pulled an 11-year-old girl out of the rubble 68 hours after the quake demolished her school, an AFP reporter who made it into the stricken commu-

nity witnessed.

Rescuers were sifting through the debris when they heard a voice.

"It's wonderful, she's alive!" a delighted onlooker shouted as the girl was pulled out on a stretcher and given a small cup of water.

China has rebuffed most foreign offers to send rescuers, but said Thursday it would accept a Japanese team flying in with sniffer dogs.

"Most people are saved in the first three or four days," Willie McMartin, director of the British-based charity International Rescue Corps, told AFP in Hong Kong where his team is trying to get permission to enter China.

"People can survive up to 15 days, but that is when you are talking about miracles, and miracles do not happen very often."

Sichuan officials upped the confirmed death toll there to more than 19,500, but several tens of thousands more are missing or entombed in debris.

As the military ramped up its rescue efforts with more troops and aircraft, a new threat emerged from creaking dams and reservoirs shaken by the quake.

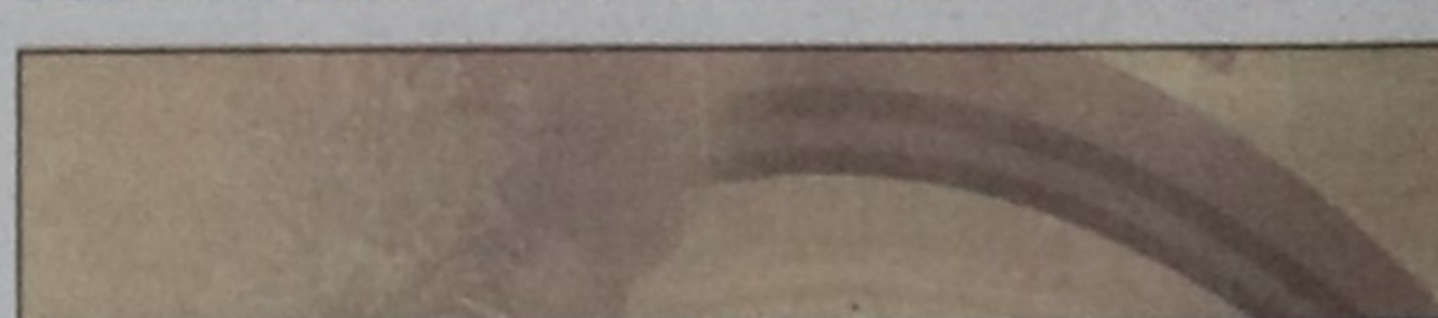
State-run television said authorities had found "dangerous situations" at more than 400

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