

US to support

FROM PAGE 1 with Bangladesh police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) to eliminate terrorism. He also met with Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia and discussed how to strengthen democracy in Bangladesh.

Today Boucher is due to hold meetings with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad and the foreign minister about forming the South Asian anti-terrorism task force and a deal on the proposed Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (Tifa) between Bangladesh and the United States.

"Since international terrorists incline to operate internationally, the international community can get organised and cooperate with each other to prevent extremism," he told reporters after meeting with Sahara Khatun.

The US envoy, who arrived in Dhaka early yesterday, said the US will extend all kinds of cooperation to Bangladesh to prevent terrorists from using its soil.

"We are trying to help the [Bangladesh] government in improving its services and we look to help the government about the quality of policing and Rapid Action Battalion and its actions," he added.

Asked if they are planning for any such joint task force with Bangladesh, Boucher said there is already a lot of cooperation between the two countries and that cooperation will continue. "We are looking forward to expanding that cooperation," he said.

Congratulating Bangladeshi people for the good election on December 29, he said he came here to talk to the new government about how to work together.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, State Minister for Home Sohel Taj said, "It was basically a courtesy call, but we discussed how we can take forward the existing cooperation between the two countries."

He said the US has expressed willingness to give assistance to law enforcement agencies, coast guard and Bangladesh Rifles.

Asked about the joint anti-terrorism regional task force, he said, "We will do everything possible to combat terrorism and ensure security of the country and its people."

Taj said the present government is committed to ensuring human rights, social justice and free media and at the meeting Boucher proposed organising special training for the law enforcement agencies on protecting human rights.

Sohel Taj said they are emphasising human rights so that the law enforcement agencies do not violate human rights.

Today Boucher will also hold a luncheon meeting with Foreign Secretary Tuhid Hossain at state guesthouse Padma and discuss an entire range of bilateral issues.

US Embassy officials said Boucher is to meet top government officials, parliamentarians, business people and members of civil society, engaging in consultations with the newly elected government on a broad range of regional and bilateral issues.

This is the first high-level visit by an American dignitary after installation of the new governments in both Dhaka and Washington in January.

Boucher will wind up his Bangladesh trip by holding a press conference at the Zia International Airport in the afternoon.

US must rethink policies for reconciliation: Iran

AP, Munich

Iran sternly dismissed decades of US policies targeting Tehran and declared Friday that the new American administration had to admit past wrongs before it could hope for reconciliation.

The comments by Iranian parliamentary speaker Ali Larijani at an international security conference in Munich appeared to be the most detailed outline yet of Tehran's expectations from President Barack Obama's administration.

"The old carrot and stick policy must be discarded," he said, alluding to Western threats and offers of rewards to coax Iran to give up nuclear activities the West views as threatening. "This is a golden opportunity for the United States."

Obama has said the US is ready for direct talks with Iran in efforts to overcome concerns that its nuclear programme could be used to develop atomic weapons. Tehran denies that and insists its aims are peaceful.

The former US administration refused one-on-one negotiations with Tehran on the issue unless it made significant nuclear concessions beforehand.

There was no immediate US reaction to Larijani's comments.

Vice President Joe Biden was due the conference Saturday and was expected to try to muster more European troops for Afghanistan. But there is no sign that general European favour for the new US administration has overcome the reluctance of some allies to contribute more soldiers.

4 mortar shells

FROM PAGE 16 Thanchi upazila, BDR sources told. Nobody has been arrested so far in this connection.

BDR personnel of Boli Para BDR zone seized three mortar shells from Jurgirampara Zhiri under the same upazila on January 11.

About 230 security personnel including 30 commando soldiers launched a combing operation at remote areas near the Bangladesh-Myanmar and Bangladesh-India borders. The operation is still on, the sources said.

Road blocked

FROM PAGE 16 students of controlling speed of the vehicles by setting up two speed breakers on the road at the both ends of the college. He also assured them o. setting up bus counters near the college for facilitating its students.

Following the assurance, the students lift the barricade at 12:30am, said Officer-in-Charge of Darussalam police station Abdur Rahman.

Bangladeshi

FROM PAGE 16 Jatabari, Dhaka, had been running his business in South Africa for a year and a half. His younger brother Kamal Hossain is also staying in South Africa.

Jaasim Uddin Bhuiyan said robbers had also attacked the shop six months ago and injured Iqbal.

Iqbal left behind his wife Sumi Akhter.

Sumi, who lives in Dhaka, demanded punishment of the culprits and immediate steps to bring Iqbal's body home.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 1 them are not implemented as per the schedule set by the operator, branding and managing of the hotel only after completion of renovation works etc.

It may be further added that BSL always intended to do the renovation in phases keeping the hotel in full operation -- a condition not accepted by the hotel management companies.

BSL, in no way, intends to downgrade the hotel's status to a 3 star hotel as mentioned in the report. In view of stringent conditions given by different hotel management companies, the management of BSL, after much deliberation, decided to manage the hotel under franchise arrangement.

BSL has invited proposals from operators with experience in operation and management of running franchises of 5 or 4 star brand hotels of international repute.

As per the eligibility criteria stipulated in the document inviting proposals for management of the hotel of BSL under franchise arrangement, a 3 star hotel cannot participate in the bid.

Since the last date of submission for proposals for management of the hotel is upto 18th February 2009, the question of selecting a particular company for management of the hotel at this stage does not arise at all.

OUR REPLY

All the information that the BSL claimed in the rejoinder has already been published in our report.

Reinvestment and renovation is an essential part of the global hospitality business, and if the situation demands the partial or complete shutdown of the hotel for a period, that is also a part of this business.

We therefore, stand by our report.

Barefoot

FROM PAGE 1 The rule is not applied for men, who were seen all wearing sandals.

Though the authorities often slap a fine of Tk 50 on workers for being late or absent, female workers are not allowed to wear sandals in a strange attempt to prevent them from dodging duty.

"If the workers go out in sandals, it will bring dust which is threatening for our products," said Abdul Mannan Bepari, security man of the factory.

Director (Production) of the industry Nurul Huda said, "We have not issued any such order. And I have found the workers are accustomed to walk barefoot."

Tk 60cr

FROM PAGE 1 for a long time. Later he was granted clemency under general amnesty.

Although evidence of Rafique's appeal to the government made in 1974 claiming himself to be a Pakistani citizen was unearthed, a high official in the district administration said the case remained cold because both former deputy minister for land Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu and ex-BNP MP Noor Afroze Begum Iyoti sided with the deceased.

Jamaat warns

FROM PAGE 1 venting deep concern at the hasty move of the Awami League government.

The Jamaat leaders at the meeting said taking advantage of the corridor, the Indian government would send military convoys to the Seven Sisters on the east where secessionist movement is gaining ground. In that case, secessionist groups would launch attack on Bangladesh leading to the security threat.

The meeting also said the issue of corridor in the name of transit could not be linked merely with economy. It is linked with the security of the nation.

Pointing to the past records of Indian attitude towards Bangladesh, the meeting said India in 1997 during the Awami League regime, had agreed to give Bangladesh transit facility to Nepal. But the agreement had been cancelled within a week raising the plea of its security.

Besides, India has not yet given the Tin Bigha corridor under the 1974 Indira-Mujib agreement. It raised barbed wire fencing along the border taking Bangladesh an enemy, refused exploration of oil-gas within the Bangladesh maritime territory and forcibly occupied South Talpatty Island.

All this has raised genuine doubt in the minds of the people about the sincerity of India, the meeting added.

One teacher

FROM PAGE 16 Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), a private research organisation, in its annual report-2008 titled 'Primary Education Halkhata' recommended slimming down long holidays -- during the two Eid festivals, summer vacation and Ramadan vacation.

At present in government primary schools, pupils get 9 days as holidays during the two Eid festivals, 15 days as summer vacation and 20 days off in Ramadan. The report suggested 7 days for the two Eids, 5 days in summer and 10 days for Ramadan.

The reports also recommended that each lecture be of 50-minutes to one-hour duration. At present, teachers at different schools say that they only have 25 to 35 minutes allocated for each class.

The National Curriculum and Textbooks Board routine puts only the sixth period of a school at 25 minutes while it states 40 minutes each for the three main subjects of Bangla, English and Mathematics.

In light of the situation, the Primary and Mass Education Ministry has recently introduced the concept of a local calendar.

Badrul Alam Tarafdar, secretary in charge of Primary and Mass Education, told The Daily Star, "Upazila education officers, in consultation with teachers, students and guardians can change the academic schedule and class routines so that students get sufficient contact hours in a school."

The reality at schools remains very harsh.

Azizul Islam, head teacher of Shalmara Govt Primary School at Harinchara union

under Nilphamary district manages class-III and class-V at the same time each day due to lack of teachers at his school.

The double shift school has three rooms and only two teachers for 260 students. Class-I and Class-II students attend school in the morning while students of classes III, IV and V come during the day shift.

Mohammad Wahiduzzaman Miah, head teacher of Senpara Porbota Govt Primary School at Pallabi under Dhaka Metropolitan Area said that it is ridiculous to expect proper teaching from a teacher who has to teach a topic to more than 70 students at a time and also check their achievements within just 25 minutes.

"Our school has 1200 students and the teacher-student ratio is 1:76. We don't have any teachers on specialised subjects as music or fine arts though these subjects are in the curriculum," he said.

"That's the reality," he pointed out.

Nazrul Islam Khan, the immediate past director general of DPE, said that it is quite impossible to manage increased contact hours between teacher and pupils in schools running double shifts due to financial limitations of the government.

Considering the facts, academicians and experts think the new government would find it a great challenge to implement its election manifesto regarding primary education -- especially to reach cent percent enrolment by 2010 and cent percent literacy rate by 2014.

Sylhet gas scraps

FROM PAGE 1 "But earlier this week, ignoring the board's directive, the SGFL once again made the bidding criterion in such a way so that an incompetent party can be accommodated in the tender," said a source. The criterion says that the bidder would be qualified for the project if it has implemented such a project through an ICB -- both inside or outside the bidder's home country," said a Petrobangla official.

The first tender for this fractionation plant project was floated in May 2005 but it fell flat. The project was re-tendered in January 2006 and drew offers from Sinopec, Thermo Designs and Astra-Evangelista. The project consultant had disqualified both Astra-Evangelista and Sinopec as non-responsive and recommended Thermo Designs of Canada.

The project consultant had identified 50 major deviations in Sinopec's offer and categorically said this company technically does not qualify for such a complex project. But oddly enough, the SGFL awarded the project contract to Sinopec, represented by Saho International, at a cost of Tk 113 crore in December 2007. But the deal ultimately fell flat as the company demanded an increase of project cost and a host of other legal benefits.

The third tender for the project was floated on September 21 last year with an estimated cost of Tk 157 crore, and it drew five bids from China Tianchen Engineering Corp and Hainan Hairan Hi-Tech Energy Co of China, Hyundai Engineering Co of Korea, PT Istana Karang Laut of Indonesia and Kudoz Consulting of the Netherlands.

At that time, as per the board's directive, the SGFL had included a criterion, among many others, that the bidder must have five years' experience in installing and operating a MHTE plant.

The SGFL qualified three bidders -- Hyundai, Hainan and Istana. Of them, Hainan did not fulfil the five years' experience criterion, as the company was created in January 2004, and it fell 17 days short of the required experience on the bid closing day of December 14 last. Istana provided a provisional certificate instead of an experience certificate while Hyundai provided a handover certificate instead of an experience certificate.

While seeking the board's approval of the bid, the SGFL said Hainan had considerable experience in constructing gas process plants, the bidder's work experience may be accepted if the experience requirement is relaxed. It added that both Istana and Hyundai also had their shortcomings and therefore the experience criterion may be relaxed.

But the board felt that Istana's provisional certificate or Hyundai's experience certifi-

cate are both valid documents to prove their experience. On the other hand, Hainan's experience did not cover the five-year criterion.

Both Istana and Hyundai remain valid bidders without relaxing the criterion.

The chairman of the board then blasted the SGFL chief for seeking a change of the criterion and observed that such kind of questionable handling has caused repeated tendering for the same project. Two years have been wasted and the SGFL incurred tremendous financial losses.

A board member said, "The MSTe is a very high tech project and we need offers from good companies who have required experience outside their home countries so that they cannot provide forged documents."

After the meeting, the SGFL went back to the drawing board, but once again framed a criterion so that a certain Chinese company represented by a local business lobby can qualify in the bid. A strict criterion like a company winning a project through an international tender bid outside its home country would eliminate that Chinese company which only has experience in its home country.

Govt to build

FROM PAGE 1 the spots including the Ghum Dhum point where Bangladesh also plans to set up a railway station.

He said the government has sent proposals to Myanmar government to this effect and is awaiting a response to start planning and other physical mobilization.

Local MP Abdur Rahim Badi who accompanied the minister said the former Awami League government initiated the project 10 years ago and now it will implement the project.

The minister said the government is putting top priority to developing the road and railway communication in this part of the region. This is needed to develop the region as the strategic transit point for goods, business and closer people to people connectivity, he added.

He said the government is planning to spend up to Taka 21,00 crore in developing the communication system in the region. It will be part of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's far-reaching plan to create a digital Bangladesh, he said.

The minister said Bangladesh government is looking forward to opening a new horizon in the area of trade, people to people connectivity and economic development of the region that will extend up to China in the east.

It will be the new economic zone to benefit all three countries of the region, he said suggesting it will not only develop tourism of the region but also boost up the socio-economic development using the Chittagong port.

BNP to play

FROM PAGE 1 should be healthy debates in parliament.

Asked if they had discussed the much-talked about issue of Tifa (Trade Investment Framework Agreement), he replied in the negative.

Replying to a query about a case in a US court concerning bribery involving Khaleda's son Koko, he said they did not talk about the matter. However, he added, all cases would be dealt with fairly and as per the law.

Shamsar Mobin Chowdhury, BNP chief's adviser on foreign affairs, told reporters that relations between the US and Bangladesh were stable during the BNP-led alliance rule.

He mentioned that Boucher said the US got proper cooperation from the then Bangladesh government in counter-terrorism efforts.

"They [Khaleda and Boucher] have talked about how democracy in our country could be strengthened. Mr Boucher stressed the need for working together," added Shamsar Mobin, also former foreign secretary.

On enquiries from the former prime minister, the assistant secretary of state said the US wants a solution to Israel-Palestine problem, and hopefully a significant breakthrough would be achieved soon under the leadership of President Barack Obama.

Appreciating Obama's inaugural speech, Khaleda said she hopes the changes he has promised would materialise, added.

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain, chairperson's foreign affairs adviser Reaz Rahman and US Ambassador in Dhaka James F Moriarty were present at the meeting.

3 Chinese

FROM PAGE 16 fitter Xu Zhen Bing, 26, were retrieved from the tank at Chittagong Port yesterday, sources in the Chittagong Port Radio Control said.

Assistant General Manager Aminul Alam of RY Shipping Ltd, the local agent of the tanker, said, "The three men while cleaning tanks in the vessel fell into a sloped tank around 1.00pm Friday and died within a few minutes due to lack of oxygen."

He said garbage is usually stored in the sloped tank that requires routine disposal otherwise it turns into an airtight chamber.

Sources said the bodies were kept in the Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) morgue and the Chinese embassy and relatives of the victims were informed of the matter. The bodies will be handed over to the relatives and embassy officials soon, they added.

PM to hear

FROM PAGE 1 Church Parishad and Kotalipara Baptist Mission also met the prime minister at her office yesterday.

Mahbubul Haque Shakil, deputy press secretary to the prime minister, said the prime minister patiently heard all their problems and assured them of solving them.

He said National Church Parishad leaders urged the prime minister to make the Christian Marriage Act time befitting.

Gopalganj district Mukti Joddha Command Council leaders during their meeting with Hasina alleged that the council is now under the clutches of pro-BNP-Jamaat leaders and requested the prime minister to take steps in this regard.

Pak claims

FROM PAGE 1 Minister of State for external affairs Anand Sharma says Pakistan is using diversionary tactics to delay investigations.

Sharma said, "It would have been better if Pakistan had not used diversions and deflections in the first place. There is no point showing the red herring now. Everyone knows who the attackers are and where they come from. They have been named not only by India but by UN security council as well."

RU tense

FROM PAGE 16 They said BCL would be destroyed if BCL tries to drive away Shibir from the campus.

While parading the campus streets, Shibir men blocked all the streets, causing sufferings to students, teachers and passers-by.

BCL RU unit president Ibrahim Hossain Moon strongly criticised Shibir for staging showdown with outsiders. Shibir has no right to use truck, loud speakers and motorbikes during class hours, he added.

Police officer Rabindra Nath Roy, in charge of the campus, confirmed that Shibir staged the showdown with huge outsiders on the campus.

Pro-JSD Chhatra League, Chhatra Mithree and other left leaning student and cultural organisations criticised Shibir for bringing huge number of outsiders on the campus.

4 Gaza tunnels

FROM PAGE 16 Tuesday in which hardline leader Benjamin Netanyahu is favoured to win.

Sporadic rocket fire and airstrikes have accompanied indirect negotiations between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers on the terms of a cease-fire. Israel wants guarantees that weapons smuggling into Gaza will be halted. Hamas seeks an end to a 20-month border blockade of Gaza by Israel and Egypt.

Meanwhile, Hamas expects to see an agreement with Israel over the reopening of border crossings into the Gaza Strip "within the next few days," a spokesman for the Islamist movement said on Saturday.

"If the Egyptian efforts are successful at this time, we expect to reach an agreement within the next few days," Fawzi Barhum told AFP.

His comments came as a delegation including senior Hamas official Mahmud Zahar left Gaza for Cairo for top-level talks about a lasting truce in the territory.

Egypt has been acting as a mediator between Israel and Hamas to try to broker a lasting truce which would satisfy the Jewish state's demand for an end to weapons smuggling and the Islamist's demand to reopen Gaza's borders.

It was the first time Zahar had been seen in public since Israel's massive 22-day war against Gaza's Islamist rulers which ended with both sides calling separate ceasefires on January 18.

Barhum said the talks were over an agreement "to end the siege, stop the aggression and reopen the crossings."

"If we receive convincing answers from Israel, through

National Poetry

FROM PAGE 16 The festival that used to be held on the first two days of February, will be held on the 18th to the 20th of the month this year, to give invited poets from abroad a chance to experience the observance of International Mother Language Day on February 21, said Rabiul Hussain, convener of the festival committee.

Rabiul said around 50 poets will be coming from different parts of India and a number of expatriates from the US, UK and Australia will also be in town on the occasion.

The spirit and motto of 1971 liberation war, of establishing a secular and art friendly Bangladesh, will be the tone of this year's festival.

Habibullah Siraji, president of JKP, urged the government to declare any suitable day of February as national poetry day.

"Poets from ethnic minority communities will also participate in the festival, and we are trying to give it an international dimension, as it is quite known all over the world now," he said.

JKP will also arrange a painting session on February 20, where painters will paint pictures based on the themes of selected poems.

The new titles include *Matir Kachhi Manusher Kachhe* of Shaikh Siraj, *Ghar Jamai*, *Priyatama of Mostafa Kamal*, *Chaitrer Valobasha of Nirmulendu Gun*, *Buddha Bikkhur Prem of Biprodas Barua*.

Lanka war

FROM PAGE 16 The rebel leader's whereabouts were not known after the air attack on Friday, which the defence ministry said killed at least 11 rebels.

Colombo has rejected calls from foreign governments and agencies to halt its offensive against the LITE to avoid civilian casualties, saying it is on the verge of victory.

Sri Lanka has also resisted calls for a "no fire period" to allow civilians to get out of the conflict zone, while rights groups and foreign governments have accused the Tigers of holding civilians as a human shield.

The defence secretary is leading the government's crackdown against the Tigers, who lost their mini-state last month in the face of the military offensive that has pushed the rebels back to a narrow strip of land.

His comments came after he threatened to expel aid agencies, diplomats and foreign journalists seen as supportive of the LITE.

UN agencies have said there are 250,000 civilians trapped by the fighting in the northeast of the island, but Rajapakse, the younger brother of President Mahinda Rajapakse, said there were fewer than 100,000.

Military officials have said some 7,500 civilians have crossed over to the safety of government-held areas this year.

On Friday, a stone-throwing mob attacked the office of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Sri Lanka's capital,

Egypt, we expect to reach an agreement in the next days," he reiterated.

Israel, which controls all crossings except Rafah, which is controlled by Egypt, has kept the densely-populated strip closed to all but essential supplies since June 2007 when Hamas seized power, ousting forces loyal to Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas. "There was some question about guaranteeing the truce and how the Rafah crossing will reopen and today we expect to have an answer from our Egyptian brothers," Barhum said.

The fact that Zahar himself was attending the talks showed how important the truce was to Hamas, he said.

"It is very important for Hamas to see these Egyptian efforts succeed," he added.

Weekend sees

FROM PAGE 16 of people during holidays. Participation of youths and children is significant in the fair this year, he added.

Children enjoyed Shishu Prohor (specially dedicated to children) from 11:00am to 3:00pm in last two days. Another Shishu Prohor will be held on February 27.

The trend of newly published books also showed that the children and youths are getting more priority this year. The number of juvenile literature published in the first seven days of this year was twice than the same period of last year while the number of scientific books was four times higher than that of last year.

Fifty books on juvenile literature were published in the first seven days of the fair and 27 scientific books were also published in this period.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid and eminent writer and educationalist Muhammad Zafar Iqbal went to the book fair.

Muhith bought some books from different stalls while Nahid attended a publication ceremony of his book titled *"Shikha Niti o Annanya Proshongo"*.

Young readers and children stood in a queue to manage an autograph of writer Zafar Iqbal when he entered the book fair.

A total of 606 new books were published in the first seven days of the fair compared to that of 522 in last year.

A total of 99 new titles arrived at the fair yesterday. The new arrivals include 10 novels, six story collections, nine essay collections, 16 books of poetry, 14 children's books, 11 scientific books, four biographical books, three science fictions, two books on liberation war and six travelogues.

The new titles include *Matir Kachhi Manusher Kachhe* of Shaikh Siraj, *Ghar Jamai*, *Priyatama of Mostafa Kamal*, *Chaitrer Valobasha of Nirmulendu Gun*, *Buddha Bikkhur Prem of Biprodas Barua*.

as Colombo accused the agency of inciting panic over civilian deaths from the fighting.

Government spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella said the ICRC had placed an order for 35,000 body bags to be used in the northeast.

ICRC spokeswoman Sophie Romanes confirmed an order for body bags but rejected the figure provided by Rambukwella.

"We help in the transfer of bodies of combat