

US offers to assist in manning sea borders

But rules out the idea of setting up military base; says Tifa not an issue for Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The US will assist Bangladesh in protecting its mineral-rich sea areas in the Bay of Bengal, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard A Boucher said yesterday.

But Boucher said the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (Tifa) provides some basics and principles for further discussions to see what further steps could be taken to improve bilateral trade and investment.

"Truly, it is not an issue for us right now; surely not an issue for Bangladesh," he said at a news briefing at the Zia International Airport, wrapping up his two-day official visit to Bangladesh.

The new administration in Washington and the new trade represen-



tative will review all standard agreements and negotiations, he said, adding that the modalities of the proposed cooperation in maritime patrol depends upon Bangladesh's requirement within the US ability.

"I think there is some interest in maritime patrol so that you can protect your

sea areas better. There are some areas where we can help their activities on what they tell us," Boucher said.

The US envoy, however, ruled out the notion of setting up any US military base in Bangladesh: "We are not looking at any base here. We have a lot of cooperation with different countries, different governments and agencies," he said in reply to a question.

The issue of cooperation in marine patrol came up for discussion for the first time in the backdrop of a row over oil and gas exploration by Myanmar authorities in Bangladesh's territorial waters in November last year.

Both Bangladesh and Myanmar had even moved war ships in the Bay to establish their claims. Diplomatic efforts

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US to help try war criminals

Boucher meets Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The US has assured Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of assisting her government in trying the war criminals.

Visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Richard A Boucher gave the assurance at a meeting with Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) yesterday, PM's press secretary Abul Kalam Azad told reporters after the meet.

"The trial of war criminals is not a political issue; it has become the demand of people of the country. Our parliament adopted a resolution unanimously to try war criminals," Azad quoted the prime minister as telling Boucher.

Hasina told the US assistant secretary that she herself

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Bangla Phone dying in neglect of BTRC

SHARIKH KHAN

The operations of Bangla Phone, a PSTN company that invested Tk 134 crore to set up its telecom network, has remained suspended for the last two years due to hostile stance of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) against the company and legal tangles.

The BTRC's is choking the company with its inflexible and stubborn stance and restrictions and non-cooperation. This led Bangla Phone to lay off 57 staffs recently. When the company started commercial operations in 2006 it had 251 staffs including some PhD holders and Buet engineers.

"A hundred more will lose jobs soon if such stagnation continues," says Managing Director of Bangla Phone Amjad Khan who is waiting for the BTRC to change its stance and empathise with the woes of the investor.

Bangla Phone, a public switch telephone network (PSTN) company and an investment of non-resident Bangladeshis, became the BTRC's eyesore in early 2007 as the company was found to be concentrating more on provid-

ing backend service to leading telecom operators with its 2000km optical fibre network rather than its subscription base.

The phone company only has 26 subscribers. Again, the base became handicapped as the company can no longer provide the necessary equipment to customers since mid 2007 as the BTRC stopped issuing no objection certificates (NOC) to the company for release of any imported equipment from customs.

While Bangla Phone claimed itself to be perfectly lawful in providing backend services, the BTRC took a hard stance believing that the phone company was doing business out of its jurisdiction.

Following a series of disputes, the BTRC on July 24, 2008, issued a letter to other telecom operators to stop using Bangla Phone's connections. This prompted Bangla Phone to obtain a three-month stay order on the letter.

In October, the High Court upheld BTRC's authority in issuing such a letter and asked Bangla Phone to submit fresh application to the BTRC for connectivity with other phone operators outside its PSTN licensed area.

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10 die as launch hits boat in Titas

Careless plying led to the accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

At least 10 women and children were killed and three others injured critically when a launch hit a motorboat in river Titas under Nabinagar upazila of the district yesterday noon.

Witnesses and police said the launch, ML Nusrat, was going to Bhairabnagar from Nabinagar upazila and struck the mechanised passenger boat coming from the opposite direction near Khajanagar village, about three kilometres off the upazila headquarters, around 12:00pm.

They said the accident occurred when the launch and motorboat were trying to cross each other at Khajanagar point where the width of the river happens to be narrower. Following the accident, the motorboat carrying 40 to 45 passengers capsized.

Nearby people, fishermen and police recovered 10 bodies from the river and rescued three others in a critical condition.

Eight of the deceased were identified as Eti Akter, 14, Josna Begum, 25, Rina Begum, 10, Nasima Begum, 30, Rojina Akter, 25, one-and-a-half-year old Ayesha, one year old Tahmina and eight-month old Tanjim. Identity of another woman aged around 40 and a four-month old baby could not be known.

Injured Rumana Begum, 40, Sohana Khatun, 45, and Tania Akter, 10, were admitted to Nabinagar Upazila Health Complex.

However, most of the motorboat passengers managed to swim ashore after the accident. They blamed the accident on the careless plying of the launch and motorboat.

While contacted, Md. Nehaj Uddin, the officer-in-charge of Nabinagar Thana, said the staff of the launch managed to escape the scene. A case was filed with Nabinagar police in this connection, he added.



Cars almost clog the street in front of North South University in Banani as commercial buildings on the street either do not have adequate parking space or are very strict about which vehicles get to use their space.

RETURN TO JS Opposition sits today for decision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP high command is still undecided on returning to the House proceedings after the speaker assured them of considering the opposition's demand for more front row seats in the parliament.

"M a d a m [BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia] wanted to know about the speaker's initiative and she seems unsatisfied with his assurance of considering our demand in the next session of parliament," BNP lawmaker Salauddin Quader Chowdhury told The Daily Star early today.

In a late night development yesterday, Speaker Abdul Hamid invited Opposition Chief Whip Joyal Abedin Faruq to his office and discussed the opposition demand.

Hamid also told US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard A Boucher yesterday that he has assured

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Pranab due today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Security, bilateral trade, border management and water sharing issues will top the agenda during Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee's daylong Dhaka visit today.

His visit will provide the first high-level contact between the

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Environment polluting industries to be shut

Warns state minister in parliament

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will close down the mills and industries responsible for polluting environment to save the nation from disaster caused by climate change, the state minister for forest and environment told the House yesterday.

In response to the lawmakers' queries, State Minister Mostafizur Rahman assured the House that the government would not make any compromise with the mills and industries, which are polluting the environment.

The state minister, however, urged the House to adopt a resolution unanimously to save the rivers from being polluted and the country from the disaster of pollution.

"It's not possible for me alone to do the task. The House should pass a resolution for it. The matters should be dealt with nationally," he said. Replying to a question, Mostafizur also said

one should think about the environment before establishing any mill or factory.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told the House that there is no shortage of fertilizer in the country.

She said the fertilizer distribution system will not be changed soon considering the current peak-season of paddy cultivation.

The minister, however, said the current system of fertilizer distribution is not flawless and efforts will be taken to make it flawless.

In reply to a query, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister GM Quader said the ministry is trying to collect small aircraft to ensure smooth operation of flights to all domestic routes.

The minister said the ongoing problems regarding flight schedules might be continued until 10 new aircraft join the fleet.

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Menon takes a swipe at DGFI role

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Workers Party chief Rashed Khan Menon yesterday blasted activities of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) in around last two years and demanded formation of a parliamentary body to investigate its "wrongdoings".

He was speaking in the House on the thanksgiving motion on the president's address.

Earlier, participating in the discussion, ruling Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil and presidium member Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir also raised the same demand.

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Zillur all set to be president

Only the AL leader submits nomination

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Veteran Awami League (AL) leader Zillur Rahman is going to be elected uncontested the country's next president as no one else has submitted nomination paper for candidacy in the presidential poll.

Chief Whip Abdus Shahid yesterday filed the application with the returning officer (RO) on behalf of Zillur Rahman for his candidacy as the party's nominee for the election.

Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda, who is the RO for the presidential election, received



only one application as of 4:00pm yesterday, the last date for filing nominations. He will scrutinise the application today.

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SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS Printers given 24-hr time for supply

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The task force for textbooks yesterday warned publishers of tough legal action if they fail to market all printed textbooks for the secondary level classes within 24 hours.

The warning came last night at an emergency meeting of the task force comprised of members of the law enforcement agencies and officials of the National Curriculum and Textbooks Board (NCTB) at its office.

The government recently formed the task force as per recommendations of the education ministry to solve the persisting crisis of textbooks of

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Plight of patients at DMCH

SHAFIQU ALAM

In a state of near unconsciousness, it was almost impossible for Merin to recognise the place she was lying at. She had to lie alone on a stretcher clinging to a mat with her brother gone in search of a space to get her sister 'hospitalised'.

The 17-year-old was admitted to Ward-35 of Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) on January 29 where there were 47 patients lying on the floor in addition to the 40 lucky patients who could manage to have a seat to lie on.

And there was no room even on the floor to accommodate Merin, compelling her worried family members to get a mat and grab a space.

The Daily Star photojournalist snapped sequences of the

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Patients are kept on the floor in front of the ward as it had 103 patients against a capacity of 40.

FROM LEFT...Unconscious Merin lies on a stretcher at ward-35 of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. After over an hour and a half, her brother manages some space for her on the corridor floor.

PHOTO: SHAFIQU ALAM