

## CHINA PRESIDENT IN US

HR should be upheld: Obama  
'New progress' in ties with US: Hu

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama yesterday urged Chinese President Hu Jintao to uphold human rights in his country, saying it could prove key to China's future success.

"The United States welcomes China's rise as a strong, prosperous and successful member of the community of nations," Obama said at a ceremony to welcome Hu to the White House.

But straying into the contentious issue of human rights, Obama added: "History shows that societies are more harmonious, nations are more successful and the world is more just when the rights and responsibilities of all nations and all people are upheld."

"Including the universal rights of every human being," Obama added.

Meanwhile, Chinese President Hu Jintao said yesterday he could see "new progress" in his country's ties to the United States as he was welcomed to the White House by US leader Barack Obama.

"Since President Obama took office with concerted efforts of the two sides, our cooperation in various fields has produced fruitful results and our relations have achieved new progress," Hu said.

"This has brought a real benefit to our two peoples and contributed greatly to world peace and the development."

He added Beijing was hoping for further

progress in future, and urged the two nations to seek common ground despite any differences.

"Under the new circumstances and in the face of new challenges, China and the United States share broad, common interests and important common responsibilities," Hu added.

Meanwhile, the United States and China have agreed export deals worth \$45 billion dollars on the margins of President Hu Jintao's US state visit, a senior Washington official said yesterday.

"We will be announcing that \$45 billion of US export deals have been concluded, supporting 235,000 US jobs," the official said.

The total includes deals worth \$25 billion spread over 70 contracts and 12 US states and a massive contract for Boeing.

"The Chinese government will announce that it will approve the purchase of 200 Boeing aircraft, with an estimated value of \$19 billion dollars," the official said.

Chinese businesses have descended on the United States to coincide with Hu's four-day visit, inking agreements with US titans Alcoa, General Electric, Honeywell, Westinghouse and Caterpillar.

The deals span sectors as diverse as agriculture, gasification, railways and hybrid buses.



US President Barack Obama welcomes Chinese President Hu Jintao (R) during a State Arrival ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, DC yesterday. Tibetan supporters protest against the visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao outside of the White House in Washington, DC.

PHOTO: AFP

## Trial not fair

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was formed, which sentenced Taher to death.

Col Taher was executed around 4:30am on July 21, 1976 at Dhaka Central Jail. It was General Zia's regime.

The HC bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and Justice Sheikh Md Zakir Hossain summoned the deputy commissioner of Dhaka to appear before it today to state whether his office has any record on the trial and the execution.

In his submission, Fazlur said he reached the jail around 3:00am on the said day when Taher was taking tea. Taher asked him if he wanted some tea, but he replied in the negative.

"The jailer of Dhaka Central Jail asked Col Taher, who was very normal and calm, whether he knew he would be executed in a very short time. He said he had realised it when a Moulana administered Taoba (to admit and repent wrongdoings) to him in the evening," Fazlur recalled.

He also told the court that Taher gave him two cigarette pipes and a letter containing a poem to be sent to his elder brother Arifur Rahman. "I told him that being a magistrate I cannot carry those, and as per the rules, he has to send those through the jailer," he said.

Replying to a query of the court, Fazlur said a few

lines of the poem he remembers said: sinners and torturers will be buried under the heavy stone of sins.

According to his submission, Taher at first refused to wear a mask before going to the gallows, but later agreed on request of the officials present.

Taher asked the officials to tie his legs with ropes properly, as his legs were trembling as he was walking to the gallows.

Fazlur went to the jail because a magistrate, a civil surgeon, a superintendent of police or an officer of same rank, and the jailer have to be present at the gallows as per law. "Taher was kept hanging for more than half an hour, and I left the scene before the surgeon checked his body," he told the court.

The bench also recorded statements of Md Mokbul Hossain, a then sub-divisional magistrate, and Abdul Hye Majumder, a then habildar of the army, who was sentenced to prison by the military tribunal.

Mokbul Hossain submitted that he is unaware if Taher had made any confessional statement before the magistrate, as he had not received any evidence on it.

Abdul Hye said Ziaur Rahman had insisted on his being the approver in the case against Taher, but he refused the proposal.

## AL sees it as wakeup call

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learn from the municipal elections."

He said the party will have to analyse whether price hike of essentials, and deterioration of law and order played any role in the outcome of the polls.

The Daily Star yesterday talked to two senior ministers, who are also policymakers of AL, to know their views on the poll results. But they declined to make any comment on record.

One of them however said, on condition of anonymity, that they will soon sit with AL President also Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to discuss the party's next course of action to improve the situation.

The party chief will also sit with the organisation's rank and file soon to discuss elaborately organisational weak points for which the party could not secure expected results in the polls. Some leaders will also be deputed to deal with the loopholes to avert such losses in the upcoming union parishad elections to be held in March or April, party sources said.

A policymaker said Hasina, also the leader of AL parliamentary party, will discuss the issue with her deputies at the parliamentary party's meeting during the upcoming

parliament session.

AL -- which assumed office on January 6, 2009 after sweeping the December, 2008 parliamentary election -- did not expect to see BNP-backed candidates winning more mayoral posts than the candidates supported by itself, just two years into the government's tenure.

In a primary analysis, AL found that in most of the municipalities where candidates of its choice were defeated -- its ministers, lawmakers, and district and upazila unit leaders at those places violated party command and supported rebel candidates of their personal choice.

Many central leaders expressed astonishment at the defeats of AL supported candidates in many municipalities under the constituencies of stalwart AL ministers. In those cases, the party noticed internal conflict as the cause of the losses, the sources said.

The observations came from the last several days' meetings of AL senior leaders, who also voiced concerns about those local level leaders who did not carry out commands of the central leadership.

Some of the AL leaders observed that unruly activities of associated and front organisations

like Chhatra League and Jubo League also had a negative impact on voters who would otherwise vote for AL backed candidates. They said the problem must be corrected for securing a better result in the upcoming union parishad polls.

AL Organising Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim told The Daily Star that the poll results did not meet their expectations. As a reason for such unexpected results he pointed out that many AL ministers and lawmakers backed rebel candidates instead of party supported ones for their own interests.

He said a cabinet minister is still backing a rebel candidate in Madaripur municipality where the election will be held on January 27 following a High Court order. Nasim said the minister had been asked to stop backing the rebel, but he did not pay any heed.

Nasim said stern organisational actions will be taken against those party members who violated party commands, no matter whether they are ministers or lawmakers. There are many ways of taking organisational actions other than expulsion and issuance of show cause notices, he added.

## 40 hurt

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procession protesting alleged irregularities in Tuesday's polls in which a BNP-backed mayoral candidate lost to the Awami League-backed candidate by 112 votes.

A clash broke out and police used 30 rubber bullets and lobbed 15 tear-gas canisters.

Locals said a police contingent led by the officer-in-charge of Nabiganj Police Station went to Hajari Community Centre around 4:00pm and asked the protesters to stop their rally and marching in a procession.

At one stage police resorted to charging truncheons.

The protesters vandalised a police van and had the contingent of police pinned down.

On information, another contingent of police reached the scene and fired about 30 rubber bullets to free the surrounded policemen. It aggravated the situation and the agitators chased the police into the police station. They also pelted them with brickbats and police resorted to tear gas.

Among the injured, bullet-hit pedestrians Mahmud Miah, 40, and Mamun Miah, 30, were admitted to Nabiganj Upazila Health Complex.

Deputy Commissioner of Habiganj Mahmud Hasan told The Daily Star over the telephone that the situation was now under control. He said the police had to fire rubber bullets and tear gas to bring the situation under control.

BNP-backed mayoral candidate Abdus Shahid Golap claimed that ruling party men took control of Sinimpur School polling centre around 10:00pm Tuesday and manipulated its result that eventually cost him his victory.

NEWS IN  
brief

## Top US senator: Hu is a 'dictator'

AFP, Washington

Democratic US Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has branded Chinese President Hu Jintao a "dictator" -- then quickly regretted the remark -- as Hu paid a state visit to the United States.

Reid, who turned down a White House invitation to attend a state dinner in Hu's honor yesterday, was scheduled to meet with the Chinese leader at the US Capitol on Thursday along with other senior US lawmakers.

"I am going to back to Washington and meet with the president of China. He is a dictator. He can do a lot of things through the form of government they have," Reid told KSNV television in his home state of Nevada on Tuesday.

## Swiss order freeze on Gbagbo's funds

AFP, Geneva

Switzerland decided yesterday to block any funds held in the country by Ivory Coast strongman Laurent Gbagbo, Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey said.

The government "has decided to block any possible funds of Ivory Coast president Laurent Gbagbo with immediate effect," said Calmy-Rey, who is also serving as Swiss president this year.

With the move, the government prevents Switzerland's financial centre from serving as a refuge for any possible "illegally-obtained assets owned by Gbagbo" and his entourage, added Swiss authorities in a statement.

## Berlusconi laughs off sex scandal enquiry

AFP, Rome

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi laughed off an enquiry into his bawdy sex life and relationship with an underage girl as magistrates struggled to get permission to search his offices for evidence against him.

Allegations that the prime minister hand-picked prostitutes for wild parties and paid to have sex with the underage girl, known as Ruby, left Italy reeling this week and sparked fierce criticism from the Church and opposition parties.

## Tunisian FM leaves Egypt, skips Arab summit

AFP, Cairo

Tunisian Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane left Egypt yesterday before the start of an Arab economic summit which he was due to attend, an airport source told AFP.

"The Tunisian foreign minister arrived in Cairo from Sharm el-Sheikh at 01:00am and left Cairo airport at 10:00am for Tunisia," the source said.

Morjane was due to attend the Arab Economic, Social and Development summit in the Egyptian Red Sea resort.

## Jordan Islamists want to limit power of king

AFP, Amman

Jordan's Islamist opposition yesterday urged constitutional amendments to curb the king's power in naming government heads, arguing the premiership should go to the leader of the majority in parliament.

"We want constitutional amendments that would limit the king's power in appointing whoever he wants to head a government without any constitutional restriction," said Zaki Bani Rsheid, a head of the powerful Islamic Action Front (IAF).

"The leader of the majority in parliament should become prime minister, or get elected directly by the people," he told AFP.

## Treated like slaves

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looked extremely worried. The young men constantly looked back at the ship nearby that took the lives of at least four of their colleagues less than 24 hours ago.

The front side of the gigantic Pranam was badly burned and twisted metal rose from its hull. It strongly bore the evidence of the huge blast that could be heard from as far as two miles away.

Jashim, the top security man of the company, remained loyal to his employer. He said accidents might happen anytime anywhere, but a vested quarter is trying to destroy the ship-breaking industry in Bangladesh.

"Our owner always looks after the workers. He will duly compensate the relatives of the victims who died

yesterday," he added.

About a mile away in Bogula Bazar, a crowd of men and women gathered at Rana Ahmed's tin-roofed rented house. Rana, 21, was one of the four men killed in Tuesday's blast. His mother, having lost one of her four children, was numb and speechless. His father had gone to fetch their son's body from Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Neighbours, all scratching a livelihood from one or the other of 100 ship-breaking yards in Sitakunda, converged at the house to console the family. "The blast was so huge that nearby houses shook violently and family crockery fell off the shelves," said Rana's elder brother Raju Ahmed.

"As soon as the blast occurred, my mother ran out

to the street calling out my brother's name," Raju said.

"Somehow she anticipated that something bad had happened to Rana," Raju said. "Within minutes we knew three people including Rana were taken to the hospital."

But at the Sitakunda ship-breaking yards there is no thumb rule for the compensation of the injured or dead workers. "If a case is filed following an accident, the labour court realises the money from the employer and hands it over to the victim," said a lawyer in Chittagong.

"But the procedures are painstaking and time consuming," he said, adding, "In many cases we never know about the accidents inside the restricted and well-guarded yards."

A few yards away from Rana's house another victim Liton lived in a Tk 800-a-

month house with his wife and daughter. At around 10:00am the family had left for CMCH to bring back their loved one's body.

"Liton was an experienced cutter-man and a very hard worker. We do not know how his wife and child will survive," said Abdul Quddus, a welder of another ship-breaking yard.

The most vivid description of the blast came from the maternal uncle of Rana, who was in the vicinity at that time. He said the explosion was so big that it shook the earth as if a tremor hit the area.

"I looked at the source and saw debris flying and most surprisingly I saw a human flung to the sky," he said.

The person who was thrown 100 metres away by the blast was Miraj, a teenage boy who joined the

company just three days earlier.

Miraj's brother-in-law Babul, who works as a security guard at a nearby yard, received his body at around 12:00noon yesterday and was on his way to Char Fashion, Bhola for burial.

"The owner gave us Tk 28,000 for the transport cost," said Babul.

Another victim Jubayed Hossain was assisting Liton cutting the ship. His elder brother was on his way to Netrokona with his brother's body yesterday.

"My brother joined MAK just over two months ago. I do not know what I will tell my parents back home," said Junayed.

According to media reports, 30 workers were killed and 16 maimed in Sitakunda ship-breaking yards in the last 21 months.