

### 3 Yemeni protesters killed

AFP, Sanaa

Three Yemeni protesters including a schoolboy were killed in fresh bloodshed yesterday, activists said, as police denied using poison gas on anti-regime demonstrations which raged across the country. Security forces in the impoverished country, a key US ally in the war against Al-Qaeda, fired bullets and gas at demonstrators camping at University Square, killing one and wounding many more, protest organisers said. Another protester was shot dead by a sniper in Sanaa as he headed with a group of other opposition partisans to the square, an opposition party member said.

### Govt seeks

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Meanwhile, five flights of Biman start operating from today to bring back the Bangladeshis from the Egyptian border with Libya. The cost of operating the flights by the national flag carrier will be borne by the Ministry of Expatriates Welfare. Officials of the ministry said primarily the ministry will manage the expense from a fund for the welfare of expatriates lying idle with the ministry. Besides, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) have taken an initiative to contribute to the repatriation programme by collecting funds from different trade bodies.

**IOM FEARS FUND CRISIS** International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the leading agency repatriating stranded Bangladeshis from Egypt and Tunisia borders, fears fund crunch unless more donors step forward immediately.

In a statement issued on Friday, IOM Director of Operations Mohammad Abdiker said, "About 6,000 people a day are still crossing into Tunisia and Egypt. If the majority continues to be Bangladeshis needing long haul charter flights to get home, the cost to repatriate them will far exceed our current resources. "If IOM does not receive more funding immediately, we will have to wind down the evacuation flights from Tunisia and Egypt, with grave consequences for migrants stranded in both countries."

IOM's mass evacuation of foreign workers from countries neighbouring Libya passed 21,000 till Friday. A quarter of a million people have fled Libya since the insurgency to topple the regime began in late February. The organisation has appealed for \$49.2 million to assist evacuation of around 65,000 stranded migrants caught up in Libya crisis. However, till March 11, it has received funds, pledges and in-kind donations totalling \$27 million from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. The UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department have also made major contributions.

In addition to covering the cost of travel for stranded migrants, the funding also covers food, water, shelter, medical care and medical travel assistance. **Ansar shot dead** **FROM PAGE 20** signalled the motorbike with three riders to pull over near Dylepotti on RN Das Road, one of them shot him in the chest. Ashraf added: "We had guns with us, but before we could return fire the bike sped off. We had set up the checkpoint to search crime suspects." Soon after the incident, Inspector General of Police Hassan Mahmood Khandker, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Benazir Ahmed and other top officials went to DMCH to see the slain Ansar's body.

## Dipu Moni

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country does not depend on others' happiness," she said when asked about the remarks of Robert O Blake, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs.

"Of course we want good relations with all our friends, but we must be respectful to our laws in our country," she told reporters at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport before leaving for Egypt to oversee repatriation of the Bangladeshis fleeing strife-torn Libya.

In an interview with the Financial Times on March 7, Robert Blake said the United States is troubled by the recent decision that saw Prof Yunus removed as managing director of Grameen Bank.

Dipu Moni said the government believes in the rule of law and never does anything contrary to the laws. "We will do whatever is necessary in the interest of the country and a renowned institution," she added.

She declined further comment on the grounds that the matter was sub judice.

Robert Blake in his interview said Nobel Prize winner Prof Yunus enjoys great respect in the United States for all his work to help the poor in Bangladesh.

He said US President Obama awarded Prof Yunus the Medal of Freedom in 2009 and the US Congress voted him a Congressional Gold Medal in 2010.

"We've heard from many members of Congress and other friends here about their concerns of what has been happening to Yunus. We ourselves have had similar concerns, and that's why I think we've been engaged," Blake added.

On another question, the assistant secretary said the US is troubled despite many conversations at all levels between the United States and friends in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the Nelson Mandela Foundation in a letter to Prof Yunus on March 9 has expressed its support to the Bangladesh Nobel laureate and Grameen Bank.

Signed by Achmat Dangor, chief executive of the foundation, the letter read, "We have noted developments in Bangladesh regarding Grameen Bank and its founder Professor Muhammad Yunus. We believe that the legacy of Grameen Bank and its 8 million families toward fostering peace and overcoming poverty serves as an important model throughout the world.

"We therefore wholeheartedly hope that the country's leaders will find a peaceful resolution to the current dispute so that Grameen Bank and Professor Yunus can continue their work."

**Below is the full text of Blake's interview with the Financial Times**

**QUESTION:** Ambassador Blake, some people might respond to the statements that the State Department made about its concern of the Bangladesh Bank's treatment of Dr. Yunus as interference in Bangladesh's internal affairs - a rather extraordinary statement to be made about one Bangladeshi company.

**ANSWER:** Why was it important to make this view known?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLAKE:** I'd say that Professor Yunus, Muhammad Yunus enjoys great respect in the United States for all of his work to help the poor in Bangladesh. I think NGOs like Grameen Bank and BRAC, really have global influence and their activities have really brought great credit to Bangladesh's reputation. President Obama awarded Muhammad Yunus the Medal of Freedom in 2009. The U.S. Congress voted him a Congressional Gold Medal in 2010. So he enjoys really quite strong respect. We've heard from many Members of Congress and other friends here about their concerns of what has been happening to Yunus. We ourselves have had similar concerns, and that's why I think we've been engaged.

**QUESTION:** But is it not an internal Bangladeshi affair?

**ANSWER:** Again, I don't want to make it sound like we're interfering too much. We have made it known that we support a resolution of the situation to preserve the integrity and the independence and the effectiveness of

Grameen Bank, but we have not sought to try to prescribe what that solution should be. It's really up to the government of Bangladesh and Grameen to work that out and we hope they can do so in an amicable and mutually acceptable manner.

**QUESTION:** But you've gone to the extent to say that you're troubled.

**ANSWER:** Yes. We are. Despite a great many conversations that we have had at all levels of our government with our friends in Bangladesh, I think there's been a deterioration in the situation. I think we're troubled particularly by this most recent decision in which Yunus was removed from his position as Managing Director of Grameen Bank.

**QUESTION:** How important is the relationship with Bangladesh? Many people say it's a strategically important relationship.

**ANSWER:** I'd say it's very important. Bangladesh is a moderate secular democracy that has a vibrant civil society and a history of religious and ethnic tolerance, and they are a partner of ours on many of President Obama's most important signature initiatives like food security, climate change, global health, and counter-terrorism. They're also a country that has really made quite important progress to reduce poverty and inequality. For example, the Prime Minister was awarded last year by the United Nations for the progress that Bangladesh has made towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. They've significantly reduced child mortality. They've reduced the number of chronically food insecure people. And they've reduced gender inequality both in their schools and in their labour force.

As you know they're also one of the major peacekeepers. But uniquely, they've sent the first all-female police unit of UN peacekeepers to Haiti last year. They've also I think made a lot of progress in relations with India, which is extremely important for us, particularly on this very important area of counter-terrorism.

So this is a country that's doing a lot of things right and a lot of things well. Some of their recent actions with respect to Grameen Bank are a little bit out of step with that, so we just felt as a friend that it was important to point that out and express our interest in seeing an amicable resolution of this.

**QUESTION:** Do you not worry that this might overshadow the larger relationship?

**ANSWER:** Again, I don't want to make any predictions about the larger relationship. I've just said all the important things that they are doing. But this is, again, just one area that has been of some recent concern and we hope that it can be resolved.

**QUESTION:** Just a couple more, if I may. First of all, is it your understanding that, is the Secretary going to try to talk to Professor Yunus in some way via videoconference now that he's no longer coming here?

**ANSWER:** I think she will try to talk to him. Most likely by telephone, but we haven't yet scheduled that [NOTE: the call was later confirmed and took place on March 8]. As you know, she was scheduled to meet with him tomorrow, but he decided to cancel his trip because of the legal challenge that he has filed in the Bangladeshi courts.

**QUESTION:** Is she planning on going to Bangladesh any time soon?

**ANSWER:** She has no immediate plans.

**QUESTION:** She's obviously known Professor Yunus from the days that she was in the Governor's Mansion in Arkansas with former President Clinton. How is her personal relationship with Professor Yunus going to play a role in this?

**ANSWER:** I think the Secretary does have, as you say, have quite a long and personal relationship with Muhammad Yunus, but I don't think that really colours our views on this. This is something that is of wide concern inside the United States government, and as I said earlier, Professor Yunus has a great many admirers, not only in the current administration but also in our Congress.

**QUESTION:** Ambassador Blake, thank you so much.

## Biman

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foreign ministry announced yesterday.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes, who reached Egypt yesterday, will be present at the Alexandria airport to see off the Bangladeshi workers.

Speaking at a press briefing, acting foreign secretary Mustafa Kamal said around 3,000 Bangladeshis, now at the border point of Al Salloum, Egypt, will be repatriated by Biman and chartered flights arranged by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Biman will operate five flights each week and engage an airbus and a DC-10 to carry the Bangladeshi expats.

The acting secretary said some 900 Bangladeshi workers from Egypt and another 1,798 from Tunisia were scheduled to return home yesterday.

As many as 13,429 Bangladeshis have so far been repatriated from Egypt and Tunisia border -- 3,287 by their employers and 10,142 by the IOM.

Meanwhile, Mustafa Kamal said some 27 more Bangladeshis from Libya reached the Egyptian border of Al Salloum yesterday.

He said Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes from Egypt will go to the Tunisian border of Rasjdjr where around 16,000 Bangladeshis are now staying. The foreign secretary would meet his Tunisian counterpart and convey the Bangladesh government's gratitude for giving shelter and food to the stranded Bangladeshis. Mustafa Kamal said the IOM is making all-out efforts to arrange repatriation of remaining 19,064 Bangladesh nationals from Egypt and Tunisia by March 21.

Director General of External Publicity Wing of the Foreign Ministry Shamim Ahsan and Director General (Consular) Sultana Laila Hasan were present at the briefing.

## Rejoinder

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it is my responsibility to protect the reputation of the institution and further its interests, which involves being aware of what is being said by all shades of opinion."

**OUR REPLY** We fully agree with the view of Muzammel Huq that his role is to uphold the prestige of Grameen Bank as its chairman. However, we found it very strange that he should circulate an email which has not only attempted to damage the reputation of Grameen Bank founder Prof Muhammad Yunus but also of the bank itself. Secondly, his claim that it was a personal email list is belied by the fact that it was addressed to top officials of national and international organisations with whom Grameen Bank has relationship of confidence and support. He signed the email as chairman which cannot make the email personal. He has also chosen to forward only an article that demolishes the credibility of the bank of which he is the chair.

## 8 drown

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grandchild Barsha, 12, of Nabipur village; Akter Hossain, 40, Aleya Begum, 35, and Selim Miah, 12, of Dilharipur; Faruk, 25, of Chhagaripara, and Abul Hossain of Jamalia Kadir village in the district.

Sub-Inspector Nasir Uddin of Narsingdi Sadar Police Station said the boat carrying some 30 passengers sank in the river near Sreenagar around 7:00pm.

Police with the help of locals recovered five bodies at night and three more yesterday morning. Divers of fire brigade from Dhaka also joined the rescue operation in the morning.

Police handed over the bodies to their relatives, said Deputy Commissioner of Narsingdi Amrito Baroi.

## No more death on border

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Initially the non-lethal weapons will be used in certain designated points along India-Bangladesh border on an experimental basis.

"If this succeeds in bringing down the number of fatalities, we will expand it further to cover the entire border," he added.

A joint statement issued after the meeting said, "On the issue of death of Bangladeshi nationals, both the sides agreed to take steps to reduce such incidents due to firing along the border."

"We want BSF to follow the rules of engagement by arresting and handing over to us any trespasser or anybody else involved in cross-border crime," said Maj Gen Rafiqul Islam, head of the 20-member BGB delegation.

He pointed out that movement of people across the border has been a 'complex' issue since the partition of the Indian sub-continent but firing is not a solution to it.

The BSF DG assured his counterpart of showing utmost restraint while dealing with cross-border crimes.

Appreciating BSF's stand, Maj Gen Rafiqul said there has been not a single incident of killing in BSF firing since

January 7 this year, after the killing of 15-year-old Felani on Kurigram border.

The two countries have no option but to go for tough action against drug trafficking and illegal movement of people across the border, observed the BGB chief.

Bangladesh will get 24-hour access to Tin Bigha corridor which connects Dahagram and Angapota enclaves in India with the mainland, he added.

Srivastava said the BGB delegation has assured India of taking effective steps to ensure there is no illegal movement along the border.

Referring to a controversy over building structures on Indian side within 150 yards of the border, the BSF chief said Bangladesh has agreed to allow India to undertake development work like construction of roads, culverts and bridges in the area with prior information.

"We will provide advance information to BGB on our developmental work and if they have any objection, we will sort those out. We will go ahead only if there is no objection," mentioned the BSF DG.

During the meeting the BGB team handed over to India a list of criminals and

anti-Bangladeshi persons, including those of Bangabhami movement and persons smuggling phensedylsyrup.

The Indian side also supplied Bangladesh with their list of miscreants involved in human trafficking and those helping passing of counterfeit Indian currency through Bangladesh from other countries.

Replying to a question if the BGB's list contained the name of Risaldar Moslehuddin, an absconding killer of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Rafiqul said his name was in a list handed over at home secretary-level talks in Dhaka sometime ago.

Both the sides agreed on major aspects of joint border management which awaits approval by the government of Bangladesh.

The two border forces have decided to enhance interaction between them through more field-level meetings and weekly sector commander-level contacts, said Srivastava.

In an apparent reference to arrest of several ULFA leaders last year, he said India has noted with appreciation the help from Bangladesh in bringing Indian insurgents to

justice. In another decision to boost the confidence of the two border guard forces, the BGB and BSF have decided to arrange a joint retreat ceremony on Benapole-Petrapole border. Modalities of the joint retreat were being worked out and it is expected to begin in a couple of months, noted the BSF chief.

A similar event is held every day on the India-Pakistan border at Attari close to the Sikh's holy town of Amritsar in the northern Indian state of Punjab.

As part of the ceremony, national flags are lowered and national anthems are played by smartly uniformed border guards at sunset every day.

According to Srivastava, Bangladesh has accepted a BSF proposal to send BGB officers for training at BSF facilities and the first team would be sent soon.

While Srivastava described the just-concluded BSF-BGB talks as the "most cordial till date," Maj Gen Rafiqul said the Delhi meeting was "much better" than the previous DG-level talks in Dhaka last year.

## 10,000 missing in port town

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Local authorities are trying to find their whereabouts with the help of Self-Defence Forces, NHK said.

Authorities here so far confirmed that around 7,500 people were evacuated to 25 shelters after Friday's quake, but they have been unable to contact the other 10,000, NHK said.

Tomohiko Kato, an official of the disaster bureau of Miyagi, told AFP that it had contacted at least 7,500 local residents at shelters and houses.

"But our monitoring operations have been hampered with debris and mud," Kato said. "Even helicopters can't approach some of the shelters. I'm afraid that it will take more time to finish our confirmation procedures."

Minamisanriku is one of the areas hardest-hit by the 8.9-magnitude earthquake which triggered a massive tsunami.

The scale of destruction was not yet known, but there

were grim signs that the death toll could soar, reports AP.

One report said four whole trains had disappeared Friday and still not been located. Local media reports said at least 1,300 people may have been killed.

**INTERNATIONAL RELIEF EFFORT**

Friday's tremor was so huge that thousands fled their homes from coastlines around the Pacific Rim, as far away as North and South America, fearful of a tsunami, reports Reuters.

Most appeared to have been spared anything more serious than some high waves, unlike Japan's northeast coastline which was hammered by the huge tsunami that turned houses and ships into floating debris as it surged into cities and villages, sweeping aside everything in its path.

"I thought I was going to die," said Wataru Fujimura, a

38-year-old sales representative in Koriyama, Fukushima, north of Tokyo and close to the area worst hit by the quake.

"Our furniture and shelves had all fallen over and there were cracks in the apartment building, so we spent the whole night in the car... Now we're back home trying to clean."

In one of the worst-hit residential areas, people buried under rubble could be heard calling out for rescue, Kyodo news agency reported earlier.

The international community started to send disaster relief teams on Saturday to help Japan, with the United Nations sending a group to help coordinate work.

The disaster struck as the world's third-largest economy had been showing signs of reviving from an economic contraction in the final quarter of last year. It raised the prospect of major

disruptions for many key businesses and a massive repair bill running into tens of billions of dollars.

Toyota Motor Corp, the world's largest carmaker, said it would suspend operations at all of its 12 factories in Japan today to confirm the safety of its employees.

Italy's National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology said the earth's axis shifted 25 cm as a result of the earthquake, and the U.S. Geological Survey said the main island of Japan had shifted 2.4 meters.

The earthquake was the fifth most powerful to hit the world in the past century. It surpassed the Great Kant quake of September 1, 1923, which had a magnitude of 7.9 and killed more than 1,40,000 people in the Tokyo area.

The 1995 Kobe quake caused \$100 billion in damage and was the most expensive natural disaster in history.

## Blast at nuke plant raises

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Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said there had been no major change in the level of radiation after the explosion because it did not occur inside the reactor container.

"The nuclear reaction facility is surrounded by a steel storage machine, which is then surrounded by a concrete building. This concrete building collapsed. We learnt that the storage machine inside did not explode," he told a news conference.

The blast at the Japanese nuclear facility came as plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co (Tepco) was working desperately to reduce pressures in the core of the reactor.

Earlier the operator released what it said was a tiny amount of radioactive steam to reduce the pressure and the danger was minimal because tens of thousands of people had already been evacuated from the vicinity.

**Cooling system failure** Nuclear reactors at four power plants in the earthquake-struck zone automatically shut down on Friday, reports BBC.

The cooling systems in several of the reactors at the two Fukushima plants failed. Without cooling, the temperature in the reactor core builds, with the risk that it could melt through its container into the building housing the system.

Pressure also builds in the containers housing the reactor. Tepco said it was pumping water into the Fukushima-Daiichi's number one reactor in a bid to cool it down.

**Worst mishap ever** A US nuclear expert yesterday said the accident at a Japanese nuclear reactor was one of the three worst in

history, and could become a "complete disaster" if it goes to a full meltdown.

"This is going to go down in history as one of the three greatest nuclear incidents if it stops now," Joseph Cirincione, the head of the Ploughshares Fund, said in an interview on CNN.

"If it continues, if they don't get control of this and... we go from a partial meltdown of the core to a full meltdown, this will be a complete disaster," he added.

Cirincione faulted Japanese authorities for providing partial and conflicting information about what was happening at the plant.

"The big unanswered question here is whether there's structural damage to this facility now... Are there other structural damages that may make a meltdown all but inevitable?"

Cirincione said the presence of radioactive cesium in the atmosphere after the plant was vented indicated that a partial meltdown was underway.

**Winds will blow possible radiation to Pacific**

Favourable winds will likely blow possible radioactive pollution from a blast at a Japanese nuclear power plant out over the Pacific Ocean, the French Nuclear Safety Authority said yesterday.

"The wind direction for the time being seems to point the (nuclear) pollution towards the Pacific," Andre-Claude Lacoste told journalists after the blast at the Fukushima No. 1 plant in the north of the country.

The explosion at the ageing plant raised fears of a possible meltdown a day after the facility's cooling system was damaged in Japan's massive earthquake on Friday.

The Japanese government has declared an atomic emergency and said tens of thousands of people living within 20 kilometres of the plant should leave.

**Japanese agency rates accident at 4**

Japan's nuclear safety agency rated an accident at an earthquake-hit nuclear plant at four on the international scale from 0 to 7, an official said today.

On the International Nuclear Event Scale, a level four incident means a nuclear reactor accident "with local consequences."

The 1979 Three Mile Island accident in the United States was rated five while the 1986 Chernobyl disaster was a seven.

It is on the same level as the worst nuclear incident Japan has experienced, matching the 1999 accident in which a critical nuclear reaction hit an uranium processing plant in Tokaimura resulting in a radiation leak.

"Right now we are considering the accident should be rated four," said the official of Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency.

The rating may be changed in accordance with the development of the condition, he added.

An explosion at Chernobyl's nuclear plant's fourth reactor in 1986 sent thousands of tonnes of toxic nuclear dust billowing across the Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. It was the worst civil nuclear disaster.

**Russia to review emergency response plans**

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin yesterday ordered a review of emergency response plans in the country's far east after a blast at a Japanese nuclear plant, RIA Novosti news agency said.

"The situation throughout the Russian Far East must be carefully checked and we must verify once more the availability of all means planned for in such situation," Putin was quoted as saying.

He was speaking after meeting with senior Russian nuclear and emergency officials.

## Obama stresses need to fight for women's equality

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama urged Americans yesterday to keep fighting for women's equality, despite progress made in this area over recent decades.

"Women are still more likely to live in poverty in this country," the president said in his weekly radio address.

He said that there were areas like mathematics and engineering where women were vastly outnumbered by their male counterparts.

"This is especially troubling, for we know that to compete with nations around the world, these are the fields in which we need to harness the talents of all our people," Obama said. "That's how we'll win the future."

The president's comments were timed to Women's History Month that is celebrated in the United States in March.

Obama reminded that one of his first acts as president was to sign a law allowing women who believe that they have been discriminated against in their salaries to have their day in court.