

# US wants consensus

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On a question about current confrontational political situation in Bangladesh, he said, "We want to see the two leaders and the two parties work together putting aside partisan interest, and ensure the interest of the people. We hope they will figure out how to ensure free, fair and participatory elections."

"Our position is clear that Awami League and BNP would reach an agreement," Blake said when asked about the debate over the process of holding the next general election.

Speaking at the briefing in Jatiya Press Club, the US official urged the government to ensure space for free media and vigorous non-governmental organisations.

In this context, he referred to his meeting with civil society representatives who expressed concern to him over shrinking of space for their activities, particularly about the draft NGO law. He urged the government to talk to civil society members to address their concerns.

However, he expressed satisfaction as the NGO Affairs Bureau is soliciting views from the civil society on the legislation, and as it welcomed visit of an independent American expert to provide views on the legislation.

About the US's latest position on Grameen Bank, Blake said, "In all my meetings I emphasised the importance of Bangladesh's finding an

eminently qualified successor to Dr Yunus as managing director of Grameen Bank, who can preserve the integrity and effectiveness of the bank and the interests of its shareholders."

Referring to his yesterday's visit to a Grameen Bank site, he said he saw wonderful impact on health, education and livelihood of the poor people. "It's an example for other countries also," he said.

On a question about progress regarding signing of the Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement (TIFA) with Bangladesh, he said the USA and Bangladesh are close to signing the deal, currently they are discussing various impediments to boosting bilateral trade and investment.

Blake said this agreement is very important because the volume of two-way trade is increasing and now stands at more than US\$6 billion.

On human rights situation in Bangladesh, he said last year the situation was poor, and challenges are still there. He urged the government to take steps to improve the situation, and its reputation outside the border.

Asked about the current India-Bangladesh bilateral relation, Blake said, "We are encouraged by the progress that has been made through highest level bilateral visits, and both the countries are working together. Such cooperation between Bangladesh and India would

not only benefit the two countries but also the countries in the region."

On a question about torture and killing of innocent people of Bangladesh at the border by the Indian security forces, he said, "I learnt the highest level of Indian government regrets these incidents. Overall trend is positive and the number of such incidents is going down."

He welcomed the signing of an agreement today between General Motors and Summit Group to set up a 250 MW power plant in Bangladesh.

Blake appreciated the progress made in US-Bangladesh relations in the fields of cooperation in counterterrorism, and partnership in various development activities.

He also appreciated Bangladesh's participation in President Obama's global initiatives on food security, improving global health, combating the effects of climate change, and expanding engagement with the Muslim world.

About the return of US Peace Corps to Bangladesh, he said the Bangladesh prime minister welcomed the US suggestion that the Peace Corps send an assessment team to explore the possibility of returning.

US Ambassador in Dhaka Dan Mozena, Press and Information Officer Patricia A Hill, and others were also present on the occasion.

# Food dept's Jan 27

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division assistants in food department.

It has directed the food department to hold a fresh written test, according to a press release.

The date for the fresh test will soon be announced, said officials of the food ministry.

The ministry took the decision after a committee formed on the exam day to investigate the rumour of question paper leakage found the allegation to be true.

The three-member probe committee submitted its report to food ministry Secretary Barun Deb Mitra on Sunday with a set of recommendations including that for cancellation of the test held last month.

The committee identified poor security condition in Islamic Foundation press, where the question papers were printed.

According to the probe report, Institute of Business Administration of Dhaka University prepared the question paper while 11 officials of the food department and 35 staffs of Islamic Foundation were involved in printing, packaging and distribution of those.

The probe committee, however, could not find out who among these people were involved in the question paper leakage.

Some 2.18 lakh candidates appeared for the written test on January 27 for 428 sub-assistant food inspector posts while 30,000 others for 503 lower division assistant-

cum-computer operator posts.

Soon after the written test began, authorities concerned found similarity between the set of questions distributed in the exam centres and the set that police had recovered early that day.

The law enforcers detained 10 people from Kurigram and Dhaka a few hours before the test began for their alleged involvement in the question paper leakage.

A case was filed with the Rajarhat Police Station in Kurigram in this connection.

The food ministry yesterday also instructed the director general of the food department to provide necessary support for the investigation into the case

# Blake goes

**FROM PAGE 1**  
important example of women's empowerment for other countries to follow, said Robert O Blake, assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs.

"I think the progress the women have made in Bangladesh towards reducing poverty and child mortality, and raising incomes has helped to not encourage extremism and radicalism in Bangladesh."

The Nobel-winning Grameen Bank is one of the main contributors to Bangladesh's success in reducing poverty very rapidly, said the US official.

He made the remarks during a visit to a Grameen Bank centre at Noyapur village in Narayanganj yesterday.

"Everything that all of you [Grameen Bank borrowers] have achieved is a wonderful and powerful example for women and families in other countries."

Poverty in Bangladesh declined from 40 percent to 31.5 percent between 2005 and 2010, according to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

Grameen Bank has lent more than \$10 billion to 83 lakh people, mostly rural women, since its inception in 1983. Its microfinance model has been replicated at home and abroad.

During the hour-long visit, the US official talked to Grameen Bank borrowers and got to know how they had been using collateral-free loans to improve their economic condition.

Blake asked them how loans were taken and paid back. He also visited their homes.

The US official later told reporters that he felt very energised having spent the time with Grameen Bank borrowers and learnt their success stories.

"I see how Grameen Bank has really changed their lives and given them an opportunity and hope. Everybody here is optimistic about their future. They live a healthy life. They have education and livelihood."

"Everybody feels like they have a great future ahead. I really congratulate Grameen Bank. This is a wonderful story."

"We want that there is a new leadership who will be capable and independent and can ensure the integrity and effectiveness of Grameen Bank so that all of these people [borrowers] can continue to benefit from its many programmes."

In May last year, the top post of Grameen Bank fell vacant after its iconic founder Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus resigned following a defeat in a legal battle with the government.

Asked whether Dr Yunus' absence will affect Grameen Bank's activities, he said, "I think the most important thing is: look ahead and make sure there is the best possible candidate to replace Prof Yunus."

He said the US would always be a supporter of Grameen Bank and Prof Yunus.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is a strong supporter of Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank, said Blake.

The US diplomat congratulated Grameen Bank borrowers on their success and hard work. "You are really an inspiration for me and people all over the world."

Dan Mozena, US ambassador to Bangladesh, and Mohammad Shahjahan, acting managing director of Grameen Bank, were also present.

Blake is on a three-day Bangladesh tour. He will take part in a series of events aimed at expanding bilateral relations.

# Summit seeks US help

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Muhammad Aziz Khan said his company has arranged a \$ 275 million balance-sheet financing with help from local banks like Trust, Brac, Janata, Islamic and others for the power project. The plant is scheduled to come into operation within 10 months.

"We believe we will complete the project one month ahead of the schedule," he said at the ceremony, attended by the prime minister's energy adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury and US Assistant Secretary of State Robert O Blake, among others.

Drawing attention of the US assistant secretary, Aziz Khan noted that besides the Meghnaghat project, Summit has signed contracts for two 341 MW power projects in Bibiyana. US company GE will supply gas turbines for both the projects worth

\$ 250 million. The World Bank (WB), IFC and other multilateral donors had

committed \$ 300 million, but the loan is yet to be approved.

As the US is a major stakeholder in the WB, I would urge you to lend us support so that we get this loan soon," Aziz said.

Last year, Summit signed contracts with the government for setting up the Meghnaghat and two Bibiyana plants and supply power at a very low rate of around US 3.32 cents. As per the agreements, Summit should complete financial arrangement by this month and proceed with the construction. Although Summit was initially assured of financing by the WB and other multilateral donors, it has not been able to do so for any of these three projects till now.

At the signing ceremony, Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury expressed his hopes that Summit would overcome all its problems and the government would be fully supportive for implementation

of the projects.

Tawfiq said the government has already added around 3,000 MW of power in the last three years. A couple of thousands MW more will be added in the next two years. "We are determined to be successful," he said.

Robert Blake noted that yesterday's contracts are not just about trade and job but also about ensuring energy security. Summit will generate around 1,000 MW of very cheap power, including that from the Bibiyana projects. "This will help investment. Presently investment is suffering due to power shortage. This will end," he said.

Blake mentioned that in just one year, US exports to Bangladesh have doubled.

State Minister for Power Enamul Huq, President and chief of GE India John L Flannery and US Ambassador Dan W Mozena, among others, were present at the signing ceremony.

# 3 killed in 'gunfight'

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Nizam Bahini, and Jafar, 30, Rab said.

Another robber with bullet wound fled the scene, said Naimuddin, sub-inspector of Swandip Police Camp in Urir Char, who participated in the 11-hour-long drive.

On a tip-off, a joint team comprising members of Rab-11 and Coast Guard led by Rab's Lt Col Mohammad Mostafa raided Char Balua Island under Char Elahi union around 4:00am and besieged the robber den, Rab sources said.

Sensing presence of law enforcers, the gang members opened fire, prompting them to retaliate. At one stage of the gunfight, three robbers were caught in the line of fire. Two of them died on the spot while another succumbed to his wounds on way to hospital, Rab stated.

The operation ended around 3:00pm, Lt Col

Mostafa said.


After the gunfight, two revolvers, one locally-made pistol, two sawed-off rifles, two LG and four machetes were recovered from the spot.

The Coast Guard, however, in a statement claimed two robbers including Joyal were killed while another arrested during the operation that took place around 10:00am.

The statement also said the area was under their strict surveillance and the Coast Guard hoped that the operation would play effective role in eliminating robbery and establishing peace in the area.

Companyganj police recovered the bodies in the evening and sent to Noakhali Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

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