

# US to move

FROM PAGE 1  
there, up from about 50 percent now, while maintaining six aircraft carriers in the region.

The US defence secretary, speaking at an annual security forum in Singapore, also sought to dispel the notion that the shift, after more than a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, was designed to contain China's emergence as a global power.

He acknowledged differences between the world's two largest economies on a range of issues, including the South China Sea.

"We're not naive about the relationship and neither is China," Panetta told the Shangri-La Dialogue attended by senior civilian and military leaders from about 30 Asia-Pacific nations.

"We also both understand that there really is no other alternative but for both of us to engage and to improve our communications and to improve our (military-to-military) relationships," he said. "That's the kind of mature relationship that we ultimately have to have with China."

Some Chinese officials have been critical of the US shift of military emphasis to Asia, seeing it as an attempt to fence in the country and frustrate Beijing's territorial claims.

China has downgraded its representation to the Shangri-La Dialogue from last year, when Defence Minister Liang Guanglie attended and met then-US Defence Secretary Robert Gates. This year the Chinese military was represented by the vice president of the Academy of Military Sciences.

Panetta, by contrast, was accompanied by General Martin Dempsey, the military's top officer as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Admiral Samuel Locklear, the head of the US Pacific Command.

The US Defence Secretary was at the start of a seven-day visit to the region to explain to allies and partners the practical meaning of the US military strategy unveiled in January that calls for rebalancing American forces to focus on the Pacific.

The trip, which includes stops in Vietnam and India, comes at a time of renewed tensions over competing sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, with the Philippines, a major US ally, and China in a standoff over the Scarborough Shoal near the Philippine coast.

**FLASHPOINT**  
Panetta met Philippines Defence Secretary Voltaire Gazmin on the sidelines of the

conference and discussed areas of future cooperation, including maritime awareness and cyberspace, and called for peaceful resolution of the South China Sea dispute.

The South China Sea is a flashpoint but, with about 90 percent of global trade moving by sea, protecting the teeming shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca is equally vital.

"Maritime freedoms cannot be the exclusive prerogative of a few," Indian Defence Minister AK Antony told the forum. "We must find the balance between the rights of nations and the freedoms of the world community."

Overlapping maritime claims -- often fuelled by hunger for oil, gas, fish and other resources -- are compounded by threats from pirates and militants, delegates said.

Panetta also met Korean Defence Minister Kim Kwan Jin and Japanese Defence Vice Minister Shu Watanabe on the sidelines of the conference. They issued a statement saying North Korean provocations like its April missile launch "pose a serious threat to the peace and stability" of the region and the world.

Panetta said he was committed to a "healthy, stable, reliable and continuous" military-to-military relationship with China but underscored the need for Beijing to support a system to clarify rights in the region and help to resolve disputes.

"China has a critical role to play in advancing security and prosperity by respecting the rules-based order that has served the region for six decades," he said.

Under the plans Panetta announced yesterday, the Navy would maintain six aircraft carriers assigned to the Pacific. Six of its 11 carriers are now assigned to the Pacific but that will fall to five when the USS Enterprise retires this year.

The number will return to six when the new carrier USS Gerald R Ford is completed in 2015.

The US Navy had a fleet of 282 ships, including support vessels, as of March. That is expected to slip to about 276 over the next two years before beginning to rise toward the goal of a 300-ship fleet, according to a 30-year Navy shipbuilding projection released in March.

But officials warned that fiscal constraints and problems with cost overruns could make it difficult to meet that goal. US Senator John McCain told a news conference he was concerned about the decline

in the size of the US fleet.

"At some point - and I think we may be at that point - we are not going to be able to carry out the kinds of commitments to the region that the secretary outlined in his speech," said McCain, a top Republican senator on defence issues.

Panetta underscored the breadth of the US commitment to the Asia-Pacific region, noting treaty alliances with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia as well as partnerships with India, Singapore, Indonesia and others.

He said the United States would attempt to build on those partnerships with cooperative arrangements like the rotational deployment agreement it has with Australia, and is working on with the Philippines.

Panetta said Washington would also work to increase the number and size of bilateral and multilateral military training exercises it conducts in the region. Officials said last year the United States carried out 172 such exercises in the region.

**Hillary**  
FROM PAGE 20  
to competition for vast oil reserves.

Experts here estimate the value of the Arctic's untapped oil alone -- not including natural gas and minerals -- at \$900 trillion, making it a huge prize for the five countries that surround the Arctic if they can reach it.

And with climate warming opening up some 46,000 square kilometres a year that had once been bound in ice, the region is expected to burst open, not just with oil exploration but with East-West trade along a more accessible northern route.

Returning from a tour of the Arctic coastline aboard a Norwegian research trawler with scientists and government officials, Hillary told reporters that she learned "many of the predictions about warming in the Arctic are being surpassed by the actual data."

"That was not necessarily surprising but sobering," she said.

The United States wants to see that change managed by the Arctic Council, an advisory group composed of the Arctic's closest neighbours, even as other countries, among them China, are drawn to the region for oil, gas and trade.

"A lot of countries are looking at what will be a potential for exploration and extraction of natural resources, as well as new sea lanes, and are increasingly expressing interest in the Arctic," Hillary said.

# Politics puts police

FROM PAGE 20  
Former IGP Ismail Hossain stressed the importance of qualified supervisors to establish the chain of command in the department.

"Many senior officers have no quality to supervise a team due to lack of training. The government should take the issue seriously and facilitate necessary training." And the training has to be modernised, he said.

"Police should be trained on present-day problems like human rights violations and oppression of women and children," the former police chief said, adding that only increasing the number of police posts does not lead to police reforms.

"The police department lacks the necessary budget to do its daily work. It is not possible to rid the department of corruption without understanding its problems," he

said.

Lawyer Shahdeen Malik said political failure, indemnity related to Operation Clean Heart in 2003 and lack of reform initiatives have led to the current situation in the force. He suggested forming a police reformation commission.

Prothom Alo Joint Editor Abdul Quayum moderated the roundtable. It was attended by its Editor Matiur Rahman, among others.

# No US navy base in Ctg

FROM PAGE 1  
belated response to the Indian news.

"The Government wishes further to state in unequivocal terms that there has been no such discussion at any level between Bangladesh and the USA, including during the recent visit of the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton," a ministry press release said yesterday evening.

"I can tell you that this story is without foundation. The [US] Ambassador [to Dhaka] attended Secretary Clinton's meetings with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, and he confirms that there was no mention of building bases, moving the Seventh Fleet, or anything else of like nature," US embassy spokesperson Patricia A Hill told The Daily Star.

Times Now, a Mumbai-based 24-hour English news channel, on Thursday aired a news item that said the United States wanted to park its Seventh Fleet in Bangladesh in its strategic interests.

The Times of India website carried a written version of the TV report.

Worried by the increasing presence of Chinese naval bases in the South China Sea, America now eyed a counter strategy as it wanted an overall presence in Asia, right from Japan to its Diego Garcia base in the

Indian Ocean, it said.

By parking the Seventh Fleet at a Chittagong base, the report said, the US would be able to keep an eye on China and have a strategic post in Asia as it pulled out of Afghanistan.

The US State Department has denied on record that Hillary Clinton's recent visit to Dhaka had anything to do with military co-operation. Times Now claimed the visit was rather strategic than friendly and India was caught unawares.

The Bangladesh government remains extremely tight-lipped over the developments as it has internally decided to deny it on record, fearing a backlash from its own hardliners, it added.

"This move by America could put India on the back foot if the American fleet moves to Bangladesh. All of Indian security installations will come under the American scanner... The base could cast a shadow on Indian interests."

The foreign ministry statement said the attention of the government has been drawn to a news item in the local media referring to the Indian report which suggested a possible parking of the US 7th Fleet in Chittagong.

Referring to the recently signed Joint Declaration on Bangladesh - US Partnership Dialogue, the ministry said it reflected

the multifaceted partnership between the two countries.

The declaration provides an institutional mechanism of dialogue on an annual basis on all issues of mutual interest.

Both sides are committed to such institutional dialogue in furthering substantive co-operation and consultation.

The government also wishes to underscore its commitment to furthering co-operation, peace and stability in the region and in the world, it said.

"Bangladesh's role in global peacekeeping and its pioneering role in engendering institutionalised regional co-operation in South Asia is well recognised, as also her credentials as an active, responsible and contributing member of the international community."

The spokesperson of the US embassy in Dhaka further said the United States and Bangladesh did have a strong military-to-military relationship that involved a range of training exercises and provision of equipment to enhance Bangladesh's capacity to participate in international peacekeeping operations and to better protect its maritime borders.

"We look forward to further cooperation with Bangladesh along these lines."

# Mubarak jailed for life

FROM PAGE 20  
Former Interior Minister Habib al-Adly also got a life sentence, but the acquittal of four aides sparked fury.

Mubarak and his two sons were also acquitted on separate charges of corruption. Shouting and scuffles erupted in court after the verdict was read out.

**ANGRY SHOUTS**  
Outside the building, Mubarak's sentencing was initially greeted by celebrations from relatives of those killed, according to the BBC's Yolande Knell.

Firecrackers were set off. Soha Saeed, the wife of one of the victims, shouted: "I'm so happy. I'm so happy."

But the joy soon turned into angry shouts as the crowd learned that the four senior security officials had been acquitted.

Protesters clashed with riot police. Many headed for Cairo's Tahrir Square, which was a leading focus in the protests that toppled Mr Mubarak. The verdict also sparked angry demonstrations in Suez.

As Mubarak was being transferred from the courthouse to the hospital of Tora prison, near Cairo, state television reported that the former president suffered a "health crisis".

The BBC's Jon Leyne in Cairo says it is difficult to interpret the nature of this particular incident, but

adds that Mubarak has had regular health lapses in the past.

Since his trial began last August, he has been held in the International Medical Centre outside the capital, as his lawyer said he was in poor health. Tora prison is where a number of figures from the former government are serving jail sentences for corruption.

Mubarak's sons, Alaa and Gamal, are to remain in detention despite their acquittal because they are to go on trial on charges of stock market manipulation. 'YEARS OF DARKNESS'

In his preamble, Judge Ahmed Refaat insisted the 10-month trial had been a fair one.

He spoke of the Mubarak era as "30 years of darkness" and praised what he called "the sons of the nation who rose up peacefully for freedom and justice".

Announcing the verdicts, the judge then said Mubarak and Adly had failed to stop security forces using deadly force against unarmed demonstrators.

Mubarak, who ruled the country from 1981 to 2011, had faced a possible death sentence over the killing of about 850 protesters.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood - the main opposition force under Mubarak's rule - said the defendants must be retried.

"The public prosecutor

did not carry out its full duty in gathering adequate evidence to convict the accused for killing protesters," said Yasser Ali, a spokesman for brotherhood.

The prosecution experienced difficulties during the trial. Its first five witnesses recanted initial statements that police commanders had been ordered to use live ammunition against demonstrators.

But presidential candidate and Mubarak's last prime minister, Ahmed Shafiq, said that the verdicts "must be accepted".

The ruling comes as political tensions are rising in Egypt between the two rounds of voting in a presidential election.

Correspondents say many of Egypt's revolutionaries are bitterly disappointed by the choice they now face - between a Muslim Brotherhood candidate, Mohammed Mursi, and Mr Shafiq.

The first leader toppled during the Arab Spring was Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, who was found guilty in absentia of drugs and gun charges in July.

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was killed by rebels in October. Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh received immunity from prosecution after handing over power in November.

# Chemical storing

FROM PAGE 20  
Although government and non-government organisations came up with aid for the fire victims, Chan Mia did not receive any because the inferno had not killed any of his family members, he said.

"Nobody came [to our help]... nobody." One could not be sure whether Chan Mia was complaining about the help providers or his fate.

The families that lost their members to the devastating fire got Tk 1 lakh each from the district administration. Non-government organisations also gave some money to the fire victims.

Like Chan Mia, many are yet to get their former lives back. Besides trauma, some injured in the fire are yet to recover physically.

Samanta Lal Sen, project director of Burn And Plastic Surgery Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said the hospital authorities had counselled 15-20 people so that they could recover mentally.

Mamun Mia, who lost his seven-year-old son in the fire, is still reeling from the loss and suffering from pain in his ailing right hand.

"I cannot work for long due to this pain," said Mamun, who received treatment at the DMCH burn unit for 33 days.

"I could not see my son's body. That is why I have put up my son's photograph in my shop and hoisted a black flag in his remembrance," said the father.

Hasina Akhter Lucky, widow of Abdur Rahim, who died in the fire, had to leave Dhaka as her husband was the only breadwinner of the family. She is now living in Savar, on the outskirts of the capital, with her father, said her relatives.

Two buildings in Nimtoli are still abandoned.

Survivors, locals and different civil society organisations alleged that the government and non-government organisations had failed to keep their promises to rehabilitate the victims.

Hundreds of chemical warehouses are still housed in the old part of Dhaka, leaving residents of the locality vulnerable to fire accidents.

After the Nimtoli inferno, the government had taken an initiative to remove all the chemical stores and factories from residential areas and conducted mobile court drives. But the drives stopped after a few days due to various problems.

Following repeated requests from businessmen, the government halted the operations of the mobile court for two months and directed the owners to shift their warehouses and factories from residential areas by September 30, 2010.

After the deadline passed, the mobile court conducted several drives in the area but the scene hardly changed.

On a spot visit, The Daily Star talked with some 25 to 30 residents and traders of Old Dhaka and found many chemical warehouses at Nawab Katra, Mahuttuli, Bangshal, Siddique Bazar, Sat Rowza, Babu Bazar, and Armanitola.

After the Nimtoli fire, several more fire accidents occurred in Old Dhaka, claiming a considerable number of lives.

According to Bangladesh Environment Conservation Rules 1997, no industry can operate in and around a residential area using hazardous chemicals or goods; and the factory owners must have environmental clearance certificates before they can use the materials.

A resident of Nawab Katara, who is also an employee of Dhaka Medical College, told The Daily Star, "We are living in panic, as the existing chemical stores may cause incidents like Nimtoli again."

Some families have already left the area fearing further accidents, he said. Another resident of the area said many house owners had rented out their facilities to warehouses secretly to make more money and avoid people's wrath.

Mohammad Al Amin, executive magistrate of Dhaka district administration, who conducted drives after the Nimtoli fire, told The Daily Star that the mobile court had found one chemical storehouse to every 10 residences in 2010.

Mohammad Faruk, president of Bangladesh Chemical and Perfumery Merchants' Association claimed that the organisation had already shifted the highly inflammable chemical storehouses from the area after the Nimtoli inferno.

Faruk, however, admitted that there were still some storehouses of inflammable chemicals in the area.

He said in September last year, the government pledged to allot some 60 bighas of land in Sonakandi, Keraniganj, on the outskirts of the capital, for chemical warehouses but the decision was still to be finalised.

"As soon as the government provides the land we will shift the rest of the chemical warehouses [from Old Dhaka]," said Faruk, adding that the volume of land proposed was not sufficient.

Abdul Jalil, a businessman dealing in chemical substances, told The Daily Star that people of his vocation were very much willing to shift their storehouses from the area but they could not manage any place outside the area.

"I am waiting for the government's decision [for allotment of land outside the residential area]," said Jalil.

Jalil, also a member of Bangladesh Chemical and Perfumery Merchants' Association, said there were 600 members in the organisation but a lot more people were engaged in chemical storing in the city.

Meanwhile, several environmentalist and civil society organisations have demanded that all storehouses of chemicals and inflammable substances be removed from residential areas immediately.

Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA) and Adi Dhakabasi Forum yesterday organised a citizens' rally before the Jatiya Press Club to press home the demand.

Addressing the programme, eminent columnist Syed Abul Moksud warned the government of a movement if it did not keep its promise to shift chemical warehouses far from residential areas.

Their other demands include strong monitoring to ensure that chemical businessmen follow the environment law, closure of unauthorised warehouses, shifting chemical warehouses and providing security to them.

On Thursday, Citizen Rights Movement, a citizens' platform, organised a rally at the Nimtoli fire spot pressing the same demand.

Dr Samanta Lal Sen of the DMCH, told The Daily Star that the Bangladesh Society for Burn Injury and Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association would bring out a procession at the Central Shaheed Minar on Sunday to make people aware of fire accidents.

**DMP official**  
FROM PAGE 1  
Salahuddin Khan, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, and Omer Faruk, inspector (investigation) of Bangshal Police Station.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, Masudur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner of DMP (detective branch-media), said the allegations against the officials were proved in preliminary investigation. Actions had been taken against them so that further probe was not hampered.

Cops assaulted and harassed the girl and her parents in the police club next to Dhaka magistrate's court on Tuesday.

After the assault, when the girl was talking to newsmen about her ordeal, policemen beat up her, six journalists and four lawyers.

The High Court on Wednesday summoned eight police officers to appear before it on June 6 and explain their role in Tuesday's incident.

# Whip's motorcade attacked

FROM PAGE 1  
was going to inaugurate, torched three cars and four motorbikes. At least two women were hit by shotgun pellets fired by police to bring the situation under control.

A ruling Awami League lawmaker from Jessore-6 constituency, Wahab was on his way to Bilkapalia at around 10:00am to inaugurate the Tidal River Management (TRM) project, which promises to end the waterlogging problem the southwest region has been plagued with.

Of the injured, 13 including Assistant Superintendent of Police of Jessore Abul Kalam, Abhaynagar Upazila Chairman Abul Malik, whip's bodyguard Monir Hossain and assistant personal secretary Dilip Kumar Goshwami were admitted to Abhaynagar upazila health complex.

Abul Malik was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital as his condition deteriorated.

of fish enclosures along with some land grabbers and NGO owners had launched the attack as they felt their businesses would be hampered if the project was implemented.

Meanwhile, people who want the project to be implemented brought out a procession at Noapara Link Road leading to the Jessore-Khulna highway and vandalised three buses there.

Around an hour after the attack on motorcade, project supporters vandalised over a dozen shops and torched three shops and three houses in Monirampur upazila, Soyruddin Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Monirampur Police Station, told The Daily Star last night.

TRM is an indigenous water management system developed over generations. It allows tidal water to flow into the wetlands and river basin and rolling back of the water when the tide subsides. Under this system, water does not stagnate. Consequently, there

are very few waterlogging problems.

In the mid 1960's, 37 embankments and 282 sluice gates were built in three southwestern districts, including Jessore. However, since 2006 waterlogging on 80,000 hectares of land had become a serious problem due to siltation. Crops could no longer be cultivated there and several lakh people were marooned.

In 2007, people started cutting embankments and reverting to the traditional TRM system, allowing crops to grow there again and ensuring relief from being marooned.

Meanwhile, many people had already made their livelihood on fish farming in the area. They were unhappy with the TRM system.

Locals say a number of people who make a huge amount of money by taking the opportunity of waterlogging in the region also oppose the TRM. According to them, however,

# Media absolutely free

FROM PAGE 1  
government, said Hasina, who is also president of ruling Awami League.

During the BNP-led government's tenure between 2001 and 2006, 14 journalists and many AL activists were killed, and nearly 1,800 journalists and hundreds of AL activists were subjected to torture across the country, said Hasina.

People were even deprived of their right to seek justice at the time. "None could even file cases against BNP men. Those who sought justice were harassed through false cases," said the prime minister.

Hasina said the country had been torn apart by killings and bomb explosions during the period. "Not a single day passed without an incident of bombing taking place."

said Hasina.

She said the elites whose loyalty had always lain with military dictators could not give anything to the country. She claimed that the Awami League had always been close to the common people.

The prime minister said her government had curbed terrorism in the country, and Bangladesh was now considered "a model of potentialities" in the world. The country had been able to maintain economic stability amid the global financial meltdown.

She also said the Awami League government had attained enormous success in agriculture, education, health, ICT and many other sectors, but its critics refused to acknowledge these developments.

The government has been able to reduce child and maternal mortality rates, ensure food security, establish the rule of law, improve the standard of education and healthcare services, and win the legal battle over the maritime