

STRATEGIC FOCUS ON ASIA

# US sends warship in Southeast Asia

AFP, Singapore

A US warship designed to fight in coastal areas arrived in Singapore yesterday for its Southeast Asian deployment, underlining President Barack Obama's new strategic focus on Asia.

The deployment of the USS Freedom comes at a time of heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula and as China publicly flexes its naval muscle in the South China Sea, where it has competing territorial claims with some Southeast Asian states.

US Navy officials said the Freedom, a new class of vessel called the littoral combat ship (LCS), sailed into Changi Naval Base at around 11:00 am (0300 GMT) in Singapore, a long-standing US ally that assists in logistics and exercises for forces in Southeast Asia.

The ship, the US Navy's first LCS which

is designed to fight close to the shore, will be deployed for the next eight months in the region, where it will participate in naval exercises and visit other ports.

Regional security expert Ian Storey said the Freedom's deployment signals Washington's commitment to ensuring freedom of navigation in the region, which hosts some of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

"The forward deployment of these ships is part the US pivot, rebalancing away from Iraq and Afghanistan and towards Asia," said Storey, a senior fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore.

"It demonstrates to US allies and friends that it is committed to maintaining a strong presence in the region to ensure stability. In naval terms, it also underpins the US' commitment to ensuring freedom of navigation," he told AFP.

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clear their applications in time as it is understaffed and does not have the proper infrastructure.

They added they had to come to the BMET office on at least three or four occasions to get clearance but earlier, when Baira used to process job applications, it took people only one day.

Md Mizanur Rahman, director (emigration and protocol) of BMET, however, said they have set up 18 counters to speed up the processing of applications.

"We are working till night to hasten the migration activities," he said yesterday.

The issuance of clearance is taking more time now as the BMET has been checking job application of one person at a time, but earlier, recruiting agencies dealt with them in bulk, the director explained.

"I have been waiting for my clearance certificate for the last three days," he told this correspondent. "I do

not know when I will get it."

Many other job seekers echoed his words, saying they were worried about missing their flights due to the delay.

Malala Yousafzai, who recently enrolled in school in the UK after being shot by the Taliban in her native Pakistan for campaigning for universal education for girls, features as an 'icon' in the list, as do Girls creator Lena Dunham, firebrand footballer Mario Balotelli and Burmese dissident Aung San Suu Kyi.

Artists to make this year's cut include Lincoln director Steven Spielberg, gay R n B singer Frank Ocean and British twice-Booker Prize winning author Hilary Mantel. Included in this year's online edition of the list are tributes to each figure by another famous face.

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while Jodie Foster calls Oscar-winning actress Jennifer Lawrence "a gem with a killer stare". Sir

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## TIME'S MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE Malala, Obama, Kim all make to top 100

THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

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Split into five sections – titans, pioneers, leaders, icons and artists – the list covers people from areas including politics, activism, sport, the arts and science, who have been deemed to change the world for better or for worse.



Among those deemed to be pioneers are Bollywood actor and activist Aamir Khan, Egyptian satirist Bassem Youssef and the first black president of Brazil's Supreme Court Joaquim Barbosa.

Both President Obama and his Vice President Joe Biden sit in the leaders section alongside US-despising Kim Jong-un and the newly inaugurated Pope Francis.

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City

THE WORLD

## WB bans Lavalin

FROM PAGE 1

The WB action followed an investigation by the bank's anti-corruption arm, the Integrity Vice-Presidency.

The Canadian company was trying to bag the \$3 billion project's supervisory consultant's job worth \$50 million.

In April last year, the WB temporarily barred a unit of the company from bidding in new World Bank projects, after primarily finding it to be involved in corruption in the bridge's project.

This is the first time that the global lender has expelled a company for the highest period of 10 years. Earlier, the bank debarred a company for five years and two others for three years. The last two companies were also fined \$9.5 million, WB officials said.

According to the WB statement, Lavalin faced the ban also because of its misconduct in a WB-funded Rural Electrification and Transmission project in Cambodia.

Its misconduct involved a conspiracy to pay bribes and misrepresentations when bidding for WB-financed contracts in violation of the bank's procurement guidelines.

"This case is testimony to collective action against global corruption," said Leonard McCarthy, the bank's integrity vice-president.

"Once we had evidence of the company's misconduct, we referred the matter to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police whilst the World Bank finalised its

investigation. Going forward, I hope that SNC-Lavalin's commitment under this agreement represents meaningful action in deterring the risks of fraud and corruption to development projects," he added.

Robert G Card, Lavalin's president and CEO, in a statement said: "The company's decision to settle signals our determination as we go forward to set standards for ethics in business conduct and for good governance that are beyond reproach."

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police has charged two former Lavalin officials -- Ramesh Shah and Mohammed Ismail -- for their alleged involvement in corruption in the Padma bridge project.

In November last year, the WB in a report to the ACC noted that Ramesh Shah's notebook had names of individuals who would receive "percentages" for ensuring the consultancy job.

In the notebook, the following percentages and names are listed under the heading Padma PCC: "4%

Min; 2% Kaiser; 2% Nixon;

1% Secretary; 1% Moshi

Rahman."

According to the report, "Min" is Syed Abul Hossain; "Kaiser" is Abul Hasan Chowdhury (former state minister for foreign affairs); "Nixon" is Mujibur Rahman (the prime minister's nephew); "Secretary" is Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan (secretary of Bridges Division) and "Moshi Rahman" is Mashru Rahman (the economic affairs adviser to the prime minister)."

In a statement, Abul Hossain yesterday denied his involvement in any irregularities, conspiracy and corruption in the project, reports BSS.

Comments from Abul Hasan Chowdhury, Mujibur Rahman and Mashru Rahman were not immediately available.

## Private agencies

FROM PAGE 20

manpower bureau, in issuing clearance to migrant workers in time.

The Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) has been struggling to issue clearance since Baira went on an indefinite strike on April 9, blaming the government's role in losing foreign job markets.

The bureau has undergone heavy workload due to Baira's suspension of manpower export activities that created bottlenecks for the job seekers in taking flights abroad in due time.

The job seekers staged protests against the BMET, alleging that it had failed to

clear their applications in time as it is understaffed and does not have the proper infrastructure.

They added they had to come to the BMET office on at least three or four occasions to get clearance but earlier, when Baira used to process job applications, it took people only one day.

Kabir Hossain, applying for a job in Oman, came to Dhaka from Bholia on Sunday and submitted his application. But he was yet to obtain permission to leave for the country yesterday.

"I have been waiting for my clearance certificate for the last three days," he told this correspondent. "I do

not know when I will get it."

Many other job seekers echoed his words, saying they were worried about missing their flights due to the delay.

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