

US to help protect democracy in Bangladesh

New envoy tells PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States yesterday assured the government of helping Bangladesh protect and continue with the democratic process in the country.

Newly appointed US Ambassador to Dhaka Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat made the assurance during her first call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the latter's Jatiya Sangsad office.

"We are committed to helping you protect and continue with the democracy in the country," AKM Shamim Chowdhury, press secretary to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, told reporters quoting the US envoy after the meeting. Bernicat told Hasina that they truly valued Bangladesh's democracy. "We want to see continuation of democracy in the country," she was quoted by the press secretary as saying.

The US ambassador also assured the premier of her government's help in fulfilling the dream and vision of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

She expressed the hope that the friendly relations between the US and Bangladesh would be boosted in the coming days as both the countries maintain "very good relations", Shamim said.

In response, Hasina told the US envoy

that democracy in Bangladesh was hard earned and her government was committed to upholding it and maintaining its continuation at any cost, he added.

Hasina also said her government believed in regional cooperation with the neighbours to take the country forward, fighting common enemies like poverty.

Outlining different development activities launched during her tenure, Hasina, also president of ruling Awami League, said her party had fought a war to bring independence of Bangladesh and thus had additional responsibility for the country. She also mentioned various steps taken for the development of women, education and human resources.

In her appreciation, the US envoy told the premier that there might have been some secrets behind such development. Hasina said there was nothing but commitment of her government that had led to the development.

Welcoming her to Bangladesh, Hasina assured Bernicat of highest cooperation from the government during her period in the country, the press secretary said.

Bernicat later witnessed parliamentary proceedings at the request of Hasina.

The premier's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi, Senior Secretary of the Prime Ministers' Office Abul Kalam Azad were present during the meeting.



Newly Appointed US Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcia Bernicat meets Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the latter's office at the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

HIZB-UT TAHRIR PHOTO

Lawyer sues The Daily Star

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A lawyer yesterday filed a case against the editor and publisher of The Daily Star, Mahfuz Anam, and two others of the English daily for publishing a photograph of a poster of Hizb-ut Tahrir under the headline "Fanatics raise their ugly heads again" on February 11.

Shahjalal Kibria, a lawyer of Dhaka Judge's Court, filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

The other defendants are the daily's Chief News Editor Syed Ashfaqul Haque and Chief Photographer SK Enamul Haq.

After the hearing, the court ordered the officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station to probe the matter and submit a report to it. The order, however, did not mention any timeframe for submission of the report.

Canadian envoy calls for end to violence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Canada has called for efforts to end the violence spewing from the ongoing political crisis as it has been costing lives and hurting businesses.

"We are seeing the terrible impact of this violence on the Bangladeshi people and the country. This is truly unacceptable," Benoit Pierre Laramée, high commissioner of Canada, told reporters yesterday while speaking on the concluding day of Showcase Canada, a trade show, at Sonargaon Hotel.

He said there must be an end to the current crisis as this would have an impact eventually on the image of the country.

"I am very distressed when I see the sufferings of the victims. These victims are certainly the most vulnerable people," he said, calling for creating space for peaceful political programmes.

EU human rights team due today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A delegation of European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights arrives in Dhaka today to observe the human rights situation in Bangladesh.

Christian Dan Preda, vice-chair of the subcommittee, will lead the three-member delegation, diplomatic sources said.

During the five-day visit, the team will meet Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali and Law Minister Anisul Huq.

Sources said although there is no scheduled meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yet, the delegation might meet Khaleda before wrapping up their visit.

The EU members of parliament will also hold meetings with civil society members, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Pabna dairy farmers face huge loss

Nonstop blockade, hartals force them to sell their produce at throwaway price

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Dairy farmers of Pabna and Sirajganj are frustrated over the drop in sales of their produce to government and private milk processing companies. They have held the ongoing blockade and shutdowns responsible behind the erratic sales, which is taking a heavy toll on their business.

In protest, dairy farmers of Vangura upazila in Pabna on Saturday poured around 2,000 litres of milk on a road in front of Brac dairy chilling centre.

Farmers in the country's biggest milk producing zone have been counting huge losses since the BNP-led alliance had enforced blockade on January 6.

The milk processing companies, too, are blaming the blockade and shutdowns for the current situation. They said they were unable to ship milk to the capital and elsewhere in the country due to arson and petrol bomb attacks on vehicles.

"We could not supply milk properly to the capital and other places due to the transport blockade and hartals for the last few weeks. That's why we sometimes stop collecting milk from them [dairy farmers]," said AFM Idris, manager of Milk Vita at Baghabari.

Around 1,200 milk producing units of "Milk Vita Zone" at Shahzadpur in Sirajganj and Bera and Santhia upazilas in Pabna are bearing the brunt of blockade and vandalism, said Aminul Islam, manager of Charanga Milk Samiti at Shahzadpur.

"We used to supply around 500 litres of milk to Brac milk collection centre every day. The centre did not purchase milk for the last two days. The huge produce [milk] will turn sour. Moreover, we cannot sell those in retail outlets in the upazila as the price of milk has fallen sharply," said Jewel Rahman, manager of Patharghata Dugdh Cooperative Society.

Talking to The Daily Star, Abdud Dain, area manager of Brac of Pabna area, said they used to collect 1,00,000 litres of milk from Pabna and Sirajganj a day, and ship those to the capital, but now they can transport around 60,000 to 80,000 litres due to the ongoing blockade.

The two northern districts produce around 4,00,000 litres of milk every day. Of those, Milk Vita purchases around 2,00,000 litres of milk while Brac purchases around 1,00,000 litre. The rest is purchased either by Akij or Pran.

HC slams violent hartal

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people -- 44 of them in arson and bomb attacks alone -- since January 5.

The HC also issued a rule on the government and the leaders of the BNP-led 20-party alliance, including BNP chief Khaleda Zia, to explain in four weeks as to why political activities, blockades and hartals which are detrimental to education and people's lives and properties should not be declared illegal and unconstitutional.

In the rule, the bench of Justice Quazi Reza-Ul Hoque and Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman asked the respondents to show causes as to why they should not be directed to compensate the people who have become victims and suffered losses in the ongoing hartal and blockade.

In another rule, the court ordered the authorities to clarify why blockade and hartal during the SSC exams should not be declared unlawful and unconstitutional.

In this rule, the court asked the government to explain why law enforcers should not be directed to prevent shutdowns and blockades during the exams with all powers and forces at their disposal.

The petitions were filed by Shahinur Islam Shahin, a businessman from Keraniganj, and Shafail Azam Khan Barku, chairman of the managing committee of Ispahani High School in Keraniganj.

The petitions, both filed on February 12, challenged the legality of the deadly blockade and hartal being enforced by the 20-party opposition combine.

Citing the writs, the petitioners' lawyer Abdul Matin Khasru told this

correspondent that several people have been killed, properties damaged and torched and businesses, educational institutions and people's earnings hampered due to the continued blockade and hartals.

The future of more than 15 lakh SSC candidates have been thrown into uncertainty as they cannot take the exams due to such subversive acts, he told the court during the hearing.

Along with the writs, the petitioners submitted newspaper reports, including that of The Daily Star, of violence and deaths since January 6, the day the nonstop blockade began.

They also included a 2007 Supreme Court order that said hartal was a democratic right, but nobody could force anybody to observe such programmes and create panic and anarchy in the name of hartal and blockade.

A decision of the Indian Supreme Court that hartal is illegal has also been submitted along with the petitions.

Contacted, BNP chairperson's adviser Khandker Mahbub Hossain said they were against violence and anarchy in the name of hartal.

He said calling hartal was a constitutional right and added, "There is no relation between hartal and violence."

Khandker Mahbub, also president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, said the HC, during hearings on its rules, would be convinced that hartal was a right guaranteed by the constitution.

He said it was the government's duty to identify the culprits who were creating violence during hartal and blockade and to put them on trial.

Six in six for India

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Zimbabwe in Hamilton earlier in the day.

And if there were any doubts regarding where the match was headed they were cleared after Ravindra Jadeja grasped on to a catch in second attempt to send back the dangerous Ahmed Shehzad.

However, one can't take away the credit from team India. They came into the tournament in bad shape and were demoralised in the tri-nation ODI series. The only win on the tour prior to this match came against Afghanistan. However, all that was forgotten as the defending champions got off to a flying start, courtesy of a solid batting show from Shikhar Dhawan and Kohli, with Suresh

Raina joining in the fun in the latter stages.

After Pakistan's defeat in the 2011 World Cup semifinal, the legendary Imran Khan had said: "The team that handles the pressure best comes out victorious in an Indo-Pak affair." And there were no doubts that under the shrewd leadership of MS Dhoni, India won the battle.

Since his unbeaten 139 against Sri Lanka in November last year, Kohli had failed to even make double figures in his last four innings but the Indian batting master returned to form just at the right time.

In a well-composed knock, Kohli struck eight boundaries in his 126-ball 107 while Raina contributed a quickfire 74 which featured five fours

and three sixes as India amassed 300 runs for the first time against Pakistan in a World Cup and steal pacer Sohail Khan's thunder who took his maiden five-wicket haul.

After Younis Khan's early dismissal, Shehzad and Harris Sohail steadied the ship. Dhoni brought in Umesh Yadav, who took two crucial wickets and ended Pakistan's hopes. Captain Misbahul Haq's fighting 76 only reduced the margin of defeat as they scored 224 before being bundled out with three overs in hand.

Cricket pundits will no doubt come up with a series of explanations regarding the defeat, but for Pakistan's fans, the long lasting nightmare may just have been extended by another four years.

Withdraw hill restrictions

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members of the armed forces and local administration.

"The rule -- which requires ministry approval and the BGB-army supervision for any meeting with the adivasis in the hill tracts but doesn't apply to the rest of the country -- is undoubtedly racist, discriminatory and unconstitutional and amounts to stripping individual freedom," read a statement issued by commission yesterday.

While infringing the basic rights of national or foreign citizens, "the racist" directive will "seriously impact the implementation of the CHT Peace Accord", said the statement, signed by Sultana Kamal, Lord Eric Avebury and Elsa Stamatopoulou, co-chairs of the commission.

It demanded a specific timeline for the full implementation of the peace treaty.

The commission also slammed the ninth directive stipulating that BGB sector/battalion/border outposts (BOP) can operate on acquired land.

In line with a condition set in the accord, the amended CHT District Council Act 1998 states that no land, except for reserved forests, can be acquired in the CHT without the district council nod, it said.

"It is notable that the land for establishing BGB sector/battalion/BOP was acquired only with the approval of district administration bypassing the district council," it added.

Moreover, the land acquired for BGB establishments was shown as reserved forests. But it was adivasi people's common land, grabbed after evicting many families.

In this context, the ninth directive worries the commission.

Commenting on the 10th directive of the ministry order for setting up checkpoints at the entry to the hill tracts, the commission said there was no such provision for any other district. Why would the CHT be an exception?

The statement also read that checkpoints failed to prevent incidents of rape and oppression of adivasi women as well as communal attacks in the past.

For instance, recent arson attacks and looting in indigenous villages of Bogachhori under Naniachar of Rangamati took place despite the presence of nearby check-posts, it read.

The 11th directive of the order stated that former Shanti Bahini members in police and ansar would

be removed from the CHT.

"Given that the importance of mixed policing has repeatedly been emphasised in order to implement the Peace Accord and maintain law and order in the region, this decision, which clearly contradicts the Peace Accord, has undoubtedly increased a sense of insecurity among the people of CHT," the statement said.

The third directive of the order asked the CHT Commission to remove the word 'Commission' from its name without explaining which law dictates that there could be no non-governmental initiative with the word attached to its name, said the statement.

Commenting on the first directive asking the UNDP to submit a report on the implementation and outcomes of its \$160 million development projects in the CHT in the last 10 years, the statement said, "The question remains why the projects of CHT need to be singled out and monitored separately."

Stressing that the decisions were taken unilaterally without consultation with the Regional Council, it said, "This order is also an attack on the freedom of expression of not just adivasis but every citizen of Bangladesh."

Two BNP, Shibir men killed

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intersection by a van, they saw four to five men sitting there.

"When we asked them about their whereabouts, the group opened fire and threw a bomb on the police van, prompting us to return fire," OC Biplob Kumar Nath said.

He told our Kushtia correspondent that it could not be confirmed if Moshir was hit by bullets from the firearms of the police or of the attackers.

Moshir was taken to Magura Sadar hospital where doctors pronounced him dead, said police.

OC Biplob, SI Hafizur Rahman and Constable Razab Ali were injured in the incident, police claimed, adding that they recovered three petrol bombs from the spot.

On Saturday, at least 30 BNP-Jamaat men were injured, three with bullets, as they clashed with

police at Simakhali, a neighbouring village of Chhoighoria. They had vandalised a police van before the clash.

SHIBIR MAN

Motiar Rahman, the Shibir leader, died at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases yesterday morning. He was brought to the capital early yesterday.

He was shot during a raid by a team of police and BGB personnel at Ranirbandar of Dinajpur on Saturday night.

Police and locals said that during the raid around 8:30pm police arrested BNP activist Khoda Bakhs, an accused in several arson cases.

As the team was taking him out of the area, Jamaat-Shibir and BNP men exploded several crude bombs and surrounded the team in a bid to snatch the arrestee.

Police fired rubber bullets and then

the BGB men fired seven shots. Motiar, Bakhs' elder brother, who led the attack, was hit by three bullets, said Anisur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Chirirbandar Police Station.

Law enforcers took Motiar, son of Abdur Rahman of Dakkhin Nashratpur, to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital. Later, he was moved to the capital, said Dinajpur Superintendent of Police Ruhul Amin.

Jamaat-Shibir men vandalised 10 vehicles in Ranirbandar area after the incident.

Police took Motiar's body to Dhaka Medical College morgue from NICD around 4:00pm, but none came for his body as of 12:15 am today, said morgue sources.

A case has been filed with Chirirbandar Police Station against 250 BNP-Jamaat men in connection with the incident.