

Peter Haas for growing defence ties with Dhaka Meets Sheikh Hasina

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas told Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday that the US looks forward to growing its defence cooperation with Bangladesh.

During his first courtesy call since he arrived in Dhaka on March 1, Hasina said people were suffering due to Covid-19, Russia-Ukraine war and the Western sanctions on Russia, but her government was trying to work for the wellbeing of the people.

Regarding the graduation from LDC, the PM said her government, after winning the election in 2008, took different measures to uplift Bangladesh as a developing nation. Now, despite the setback of Covid-19, Russia-Ukraine war and the sanctions, Bangladesh will continue to grow.

According to a US embassy statement, Hasina and Haas discussed a range of bilateral issues, including economic development, security, climate change, Rohingya refugee assistance, and Covid-19 at the meeting in the Gono Bhaban.

The US-Bangladesh relations saw strains in recent times, especially after the Biden Administration imposed sanctions on Rab and seven of its current and former top officials on December 10 for human rights violations.

Earlier, Washington did not invite Bangladesh to its Summit of Democracy, frustrating Dhaka.

Washington, however, continues to hold the bilateral meetings and considers Dhaka as its important partner in development and strategic cooperation.

The US also wants Bangladesh to sign two defence deals, General Security of Military Information Agreement and the Acquisition Cross-Servicing Agreement, as Bangladesh seeks to buy advanced military equipment.

"During our meeting, I told Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that I think one of our proudest joint achievements was in how we worked together to respond to the Covid-19 crisis," said Ambassador Haas.

"I commend Bangladesh's effort to vaccinate over 70 percent of its entire population."

BSS reports that the US wants Bangladesh as partner in "Global Covid Action Plan".

"A minister-level special session of US-Bangladesh along with other stakeholders would be held on the sidelines of UN General Assembly," Haas said, terming Bangladesh's vaccination amazing and remarkable.

While briefing reporters, PM's Deputy Press Secretary Hasan Jahid Tusher said Haas praised the graduation of Bangladesh to a developing nation under Hasina's leadership.



US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday. The envoy lauded Bangladesh's effort to vaccinate over 70 percent of its population against Covid.

PHOTO: PTD

AZERBAIJAN BORDER CLASHES

49 Armenian soldiers killed

Says PM; Baku also claims to have suffered casualties; Russia convinces historic rivals to agree to rapid ceasefire

AGENCIES

Armenia said yesterday that at least 49 soldiers had been killed in the worst clashes with Azerbaijan since their war two years ago, but Russia said it had convinced the historic rivals to agree to a rapid ceasefire.

After several hours of fierce border fighting overnight, Armenia appealed to world leaders for help, saying Azerbaijani forces were trying to advance on its territory.

The fighting was the worst since the end of a 2020 war between the ex-Soviet republics over the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region that left more than 6,500 killed on both sides.

It came with Yerevan's closest ally Moscow - which deployed thousands of peacekeepers in the region after the war - distracted by its six-month invasion of Ukraine.

Russia said it had succeeded in bringing the clashes to a halt, with the foreign ministry in Moscow saying a ceasefire had been agreed from 9:00 am Moscow time (0600 GMT), reports AFP.

"We expect that an agreement reached as a result of Russian mediation on a ceasefire... will be carried out in full," the

ministry said in a statement, adding that it was "extremely concerned" by the uptick in fighting.

Armenia's defence ministry said later that clashes had subsided but that the situation on the border "remains extremely tense".

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addressed parliament yesterday morning, after calling French President Emmanuel Macron, Russian President Vladimir Putin and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to demand "an adequate reaction" to "Azerbaijan's aggressive acts".

"For the moment, we have 49 (troops) killed and unfortunately it's not the final figure," Pashinyan told lawmakers.

Azerbaijan said it had also suffered casualties but did not specify the number killed. "Provocations committed by Armenian forces at the border have been averted and all necessary objectives were fulfilled," President Ilham Aliyev's office said in a statement following his meeting with the military leadership.

The defence ministry in Yerevan said the clashes started early yesterday, with Armenian territory coming under fire from artillery, mortars and drones in the direction of the cities of Goris, Sotk, and

Jermuk.

But Azerbaijan accused Armenia of "large-scale subversive acts" near the districts of Dashkesan, Kelbajar and Lachin and said its armed forces were responding with "limited and targeted steps, neutralising Armenian firing positions".

Baku's long-standing political and military sponsor Turkey blamed Armenia and urged Yerevan instead to "focus on peace negotiations".

The United States called for an end to the fighting, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying the US was "deeply concerned" over the situation, including "reported strikes against settlements and civilian infrastructure" in Armenia.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell meanwhile said it was "imperative that the hostilities stop and that there is a return to the negotiating table".

Iran, which shares a border with both countries, urged "restraint" and a "peaceful resolution" to the fighting.

France will also raise the long-standing conflict at the UN Security Council, Macron's office said following his call with Pashinyan.

Al Badr man gets death penalty for crimes in 1971

UNB, Dhaka

The International Crimes Tribunal yesterday sentenced absconding war criminal Khalilur Rahman to death for his crimes against humanity during the Liberation War of 1971.

A three-member tribunal led by Justice Shahinur Islam pronounced the death sentence for Khalilur who is from Netrokona.

Prosecutors Rana Dasgupta and Rezia Sultana represented the state during the hearing while state appointed lawyer Gazi MH Tamim appeared for the accused.

Rezia said three of the four accused in the case died during the trial.

Khalilur was a commander of Al Badr in Chandigarh Union Parishad, she added.

Charges of illegal detention, torture, abduction, looting, arson, vandalism, attempted rape, rape, murder and genocide in 1971 were brought against the accused.

2 cops injured as gang opens fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, PATUAKHALI

Armed gang members shot and injured four people, including two policemen, in Paurgoja area of Kalapara, Patuakhali, early yesterday.

Locals said they noticed five to six men in front of a villager's house around 2:00am and it seemed that they were preparing for a robbery.

One of the villagers then called the police. As a police team arrived, the armed men started shooting and fled.

Assistant Sub-Inspector Md Tarek, constable Sirajul and locals Dulal Sardar and Yusuf got injured and took treatment at Kuakata 20-bed Hospital, said Hafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Mahipur Police Station.

Police are looking for the suspects, he added.

Arrest warrants issued against 2 SIs for perjury

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chattogram court yesterday issued arrest warrants against two sub-inspectors of Patenga Police Station for committing perjury.

Officers Anwar Hossain and Subir Paul were accused by a judge of filing a false case, pressing charges and falsely testifying against a child in a gold smuggling case.

Ferdous Ara, judge of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-7, filed the case against the two officers, writing in the complaint that the juvenile languished one month in jail because of the false case filed in April 2019.

The judge also mentioned that the officers attempted to harm the child despite knowing the truth.

The child was acquitted on September 4 this year.

EC banks on technologies

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were installed... We got very good results... That's why we are planning to use technology in a big way in the next national election," she noted.

Rashida, however, said the EC was yet to decide whether CCTV cameras will be installed in all polling centres.

The EC is set to unveil today the electoral roadmap that will cover issues including the use of EVMs, demarcation of constituencies, registration of new parties, use of technology in collecting results, finalisation of the voter list and the specified period for election preparations.

Though the major opposition parties are opposing the use of EVMs in the next polls, the EC has already announced EVMs would be used in 150 of the 300 seats.

Rashida said EVMs could be used in all city corporations, and divisional and district headquarters.

"We, however, have decided not to use EVMs in rural and remote areas," she added.

EC sources said the commission already has system software that stores information on candidates and election results, but this time it wants to use it to the maximum.

They said the commission now plans to obtain system software through which it can directly monitor any polling centre.

According to the roadmap, the EC is likely to publish the draft voter roll on January 2 next year, and the final one on March 2 after scrutiny and settlement of objections.

EC sources said 11.33 crore voters are expected to cast ballots in the next election. The number, however, may go up as those who will turn 18 in January next year will get the chance to become voters.

According to the constitution, the next parliamentary election must be held by January 29, 2024. Since the first session of the current parliament began on January 30, 2019, its tenure will expire on January 29, 2024. And the next polls have to be held 90 days before the dissolution of parliament,

they explained.

As per the roadmap, the EC will complete the process of registering political parties by June next year and also the demarcation of constituencies.

Besides, an app will be introduced through which voters will get information on affidavits of the candidates as well as polling centres. Besides, they will be able to file online polls-related complaints.

Over the last few months, the commission held a series of talks with political parties, stakeholders and civil society members to finalise the roadmap. Most of them said the major challenge for the commission is to hold a free and fair election by restoring voters' confidence in polls.

The BNP and several other opposition parties refrained from joining the talks, saying they don't have any confidence in the current EC.

The EC said it would try its best to hold a free and fair election but would not "compel any political party to join the polls".

EU states seek

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international aviation rules.

A foreign ministry official told this correspondent that Bangladesh expressed concerns over high fuel and food prices in the global market and sought the European countries' support in facing the challenges.

Secretary Masub also spoke of the challenges Bangladesh faced in buying fuel from the global market and paying Russia for oil following the western sanctions.

Masud also informed them of the latest conflicts between Myanmar military and Arakan Army near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

The Border Guard of Bangladesh has remained on high alert to make sure that no new influx of Myanmar people takes place, he said, and expressed concerns that shells fired from Myanmar landed in the Bangladesh territory several times since mid-August.

US team unhappy over

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security staff of the airport)," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on foreign affairs on August 8.

The Daily Star came to know about this from the meeting's minutes, which were placed before the committee for approval yesterday.

According to the minutes, the foreign minister said the security staff at the airport barely carry out any checks on foreigners.

He, however, did not mention when the US delegation visited Dhaka.

Sources in Biman said the negative report by the delegation on the lack of security at the Dhaka airport may delay their ongoing efforts to resume the direct flights between Dhaka and New York.

Resuming direct flights on the Dhaka-New York route is a major pledge of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and the government has been trying for years to resume flights on this prestigious route.

Biman had operated the New York flight between 1993 and 2006 before suspending it due to losses.

The US Federal Aviation Authority

placed the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) in Category 2 after finding irregularities in its operational activities in an investigation in 2006.

Such categorisation placed additional restrictions on Bangladesh's airlines flying to the US, including resumption of the sole direct route between the nations.

The FAA placed the Caab in Category 2 as the Bangladeshi regulator could not meet the International Civil Aviation Organisation's (ICAO's) minimum safety standards.

According to the FAA findings, Bangladesh's aviation regulator runs short of technically qualified personnel.

A Category 1 rating means the civil aviation authority of a state complies with ICAO standards.

In 2012, the Caab was again assessed as belonging to Category 2 by the FAA under the International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA) programme.

The purpose of the IASA programme is to ensure that all foreign air carriers operating to and from the US are properly licensed and

with an appropriate safety oversight provided by a competent civil aviation authority of the state pursuant to ICAO safety standards.

In February 2018, the FAA conducted a technical review of the safety oversight provided by the Caab.

The FAA report said, "Bangladesh has taken significant steps towards developing and implementing an effective safety oversight system that meets ICAO requirements."

"The CAAB is to be commended for its continued commitment to the necessary corrective actions toward providing and sustaining an effective safety oversight system."

Bangladesh will be evaluated through two more technical reviews by FAA teams before the final assessment for attaining a Category 1 status is made.

This February, a five-member delegation of the Transportation Security Administration of the US visited HSHA and held a meeting with Caab Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman and the then HSHA executive director Group Captain AHM Touhid-ul Ahsan, among others.

Babul, 6 others charge-sheeted

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Islam Sakku, Nurunnabi, Md Rashed and Abu Naser Gunnu.

Rashed and Nurunnabi were killed in an alleged shootout a few days after Mitu's murder, while the PBI did not find Sakku or Gunnu's involvement during investigation.

Meanwhile, 97 people were made witnesses in the charge sheet.

Speaking to journalists at the court, PBI SP Naima Sultana said, "We have submitted the charge sheet after careful investigation, during which we found Babul Akhter to be involved in the murder of Mitu."

Kamrul Hasan, additional deputy commissioner (prosecution) of CMP, said, "The court has scheduled

October 10 for the hearing on the charge sheet."

Babul dramatically turned into the main accused from the plaintiff after failing to give satisfactory answers when summoned for interrogation by the PBI's Chattogram metro unit in May 2021.

One of the questions was regarding the payment of Tk 3 lakh to Babul's business partner and now charge-sheeted fugitive Kamrul Islam Musa soon after the murder. Musa worked as Babul's informant after the latter became an SP.

Two of the testimonies were given by Sayful Haque, another business partner of Babul, and Kazi Al Mamun, relative of Musa, on May 11 last year,

after Babul was arrested.

Sayful had said he arranged Tk 3 lakh from Babul's share of profits from their business and sent the money via mobile banking service to Musa, a top PBI official said.

On June 5, 2016, Mitu was stabbed and shot while walking her son to his school-bus stop at the port city's GEC intersection. After the murder, Babul filed a case against three unidentified men with Panchlaish Police Station.

On September 8, Babul lodged a complaint accusing PBI Chief Banaj Kumar Majumdar and five others, including two PBI SPs, of physically and mentally torturing him in custody before showing him arrested in the case.

Violence erupts in Kolkata, Howrah during BJP's protest march

THE HINDU ONLINE

Large parts of Howrah and central Kolkata turned into a battle zone yesterday as clashes erupted between the police and supporters of the BJP after the latter tried to march to the State Secretariat 'Nabanna' building.

Thousands of BJP supporters had descended on the streets of Kolkata and Howrah and were trying to reach the State Secretariat from different sides. BJP State president Sukanta Majumdar was detained and taken to Chitpur police station.

Earlier, Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly Suwendu Adhikari and Hooghly Lok Sabha MP Locket Chatterjee were detained by police before they could reach Howrah and lead a rally of party supporters.

Violence erupted in Santragachi in Howrah, where the police fired tear gas shells and used water cannons to disperse BJP supporters who pelted stones at the police. The situation at Santragachi remained volatile for several hours, with pitched battles between the police and BJP supporters.