

WEDNESDAY'S CLASH US envoy, UN, Amnesty voice concerns

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Ambassador Peter Haas, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly Clement Voule, and Amnesty International yesterday expressed concern over political violence in Dhaka on Wednesday.

In a statement yesterday, Haas also called on everyone to respect the rule of law and to refrain from violence, harassment, and intimidation.

"We encourage government authorities to investigate these reports of violence and to protect the fundamental freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly," Haas added.

UN Special Rapporteur Voule yesterday said Bangladesh must guarantee the right to peaceful assembly and refrain from using excessive force against protesters.

In a tweet yesterday, he said he has been following events in Bangladesh closely "after concerning reports of attacks and lethal force against

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Hira Biswas, a woman in Khulna's Dumuria, pushing her bicycle, loaded with large bags, towards a school where she sells jhalmuri. She earns between Tk 200 and Tk 250 daily and supports her carpenter husband in making ends meet. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Bureaucrats do not consider the public as friends

Says High Court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday blasted bureaucrats for their negligence in duty, saying it is causing the general people of the country to suffer.

"The ordinary people would not have to suffer if bureaucrats would have considered them as their friends. Most of the high officials think they are above that.

"The secretaries must bear in mind that the general public is the source of all their powers. If they forget their own duties, the public suffers," the HC bench Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman and Justice AKM Rabiul Hassan told Md Abdur Rahman, a deputy secretary at the ministry of local government, rural development (LGRD) and cooperatives, during the hearing of a contempt of court rule.

Deputy Secretary Abdur Rahman appeared as the representative for the LGRD secretary before the HC bench yesterday, in compliance with a summons order.

The order was issued as the secretary's office has not complied with an earlier order of this court for the past five years.

Following a writ petition filed by 14 municipality accountant officers, the HC on November 20, 2017,

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1098 HELPLINE A godsend for CHILDREN in distress

NILIMA JAHAN

Moriom Begum has been a victim of domestic violence ever since she got married in 2016 for not being able to pay dowry money.

The 25-year-old from Dinajpur spent years silently praying for an end to her sufferings. She thought maybe the arrival of her first-born would change things.

But nothing changed.

Instead, the torture went on to an extent where Moriom was forced to leave the house with her 14-month-old son Ramim and move back in with her parents.

Within a few days, her husband went to her saying he wanted to "visit his son".

He, however, made off with Ramim without Moriom's knowledge.

She looked for her son in every possible place, but couldn't find him.

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Anyone can now report child rights' violations, child abuse or exploitation, or any other act of disruption to the protection of children by calling a 24/7 toll-free number - 1098 - from any corner of the country, from any mobile phone operator.

ANTI-CORRUPTION DAY

Cases filed, but no progress in probes

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Several big loan scams in the banking and financial sectors came to the fore in the last decade and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has done its job by filing cases. But, no progress is apparent.

Since 2012, the ACC has filed more than a hundred cases against different business groups and persons over siphoning off of upwards of Tk 15,000 crore, records show.

But, the anti-graft watchdog could not submit probe reports in most of the cases, and subsequently, got the verdict in not more than ten cases.

For instance, in 2015, the ACC filed 56 cases on misappropriation of Tk 4,500 crore from the state-run BASIC Bank.

Seven years on, the ACC is yet to complete probes on the cases.

Recently, the commission has tasked one of its officials to probe the cases. Before the new appointment, three investigation officers probed the cases, said an ACC official.

While hearing bail petitions, a two-member HC bench on November 28 said: "Crores of taka has been embezzled. But no work is being done though the Anti-Corruption Commission and so many judges and lawyers are there. Why are they [ACC] silent? This is just like a drama. We are watching the drama. This is not

acceptable."

This was not the first time that the HC has expressed its disappointment at the sluggish pace of the probe. In 2018, the HC said: "We have to cover our faces in shame."

The anti-graft watchdog initially filed the 56 cases without accusing the then BASIC Bank chairman Abdul Hye Bacchu and other board members. And only after directives from the HC, in late 2017 and early 2018 the commission interrogated Bacchu and some board members.

By now, some bureaucrats who were members of the then BASIC Bank board are retired while some are promoted to crucial positions in different government departments.

"You have to understand why the investigation has been slowed down... they do not want to bring the board members to the book," the ACC officer said on the condition of anonymity to speak candidly on the matter.

While the ACC is dilly dallying, several investigations by the central bank unearthed the board's direct involvement in the scandal that subsequently took a heavy toll on the bank's financial health.

Of the Tk 4,500 crore swindled out of the bank, more than 95 percent was sanctioned by the board. In each case, the loan amount was more than Tk 1.5 crore, a sum the management cannot

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POLITICAL VIOLENCE

A journo behind US statement

Says Momen

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A journalist in the US is responsible for the US voicing concerns over the recent political rallies in Bangladesh, Foreign Minister Abdul Momen said yesterday.

"He instigates them," Momen told reporters after attending a seminar in Inani of Cox's Bazar.

The minister, however, did not mention the name of the journalist.

"The journalist has access to the White House and the UN. He questions promptly whenever there is an issue in Bangladesh and gets response. He [the journalist] even writes the answer. Possibly for that, the US is so prompt," he said, reports Ajker Patrika.

At a press briefing on Tuesday, US State Department Spokesperson Ned Price expressed concern about reports of intimidation, political violence, police harassment, arrests of opposition party members and restrictions on the ability of the opposition parties to meet and hold peaceful rallies.

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Scientists find 2m-yr-old DNA in Greenland

AFP, Copenhagen



Scientists in Greenland announced Wednesday they had found DNA dating back two million years -- the oldest ever extracted -- in sediment from the Ice Age, opening a new chapter in paleogenetics.

"We are breaking the barrier of what we thought we could reach in terms of genetic studies," said Mikkel Winther Pedersen, co-author of a new study published in science journal Nature.

"It was long thought that one million years was the boundary of DNA survival, but now we are twice as old" as that, Pedersen told AFP.

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Touted as one of the biggest art festivals in Asia, the 19th Asian Art Biennale kicked off yesterday at the premises of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, with 493 artists from 114 countries. The Biennale's theme this year is "Home and Displacement".

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Father of Jubo Dal leader 'beaten to death'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The father of a Jubo Dal leader was beaten to death by the ruling party men who came to his home in the capital's Wari "looking for his son" early yesterday, said the victim's family members.

Police, however, said the victim suffered a stroke during an altercation with local youths and died.

Millat Mia, 70, is the father of Faysal Mahub, a former joint convener of Wari unit Jubo Dal.

Talking to The Daily Star, Faysal said some 60 activists of the ruling Awami League went to his home around 12:30am.

"They started beating my uncle as I was not present there. At one point, my father came out and asked them why they were beating my uncle," he said.

"The attackers then hit my father on the head with a stick. He fell on the ground. The attackers also took my uncle Shahadat to Wari Police Outpost," he further said, adding that his family was attacked because of his political affiliation.

Contacted, Kabir Hossain Hawlader, officer-in-charge of Wari Police Station, said a group of youths went to Faysal's house and locked into an altercation with his father.

"We came to know that Millat Mia fell on the ground after suffering a stroke during the altercation and was seriously injured," the OC said.

The family members then took him to a nearby private

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EMERALDS OF THE SKY ... Two Common Emerald Doves picking seeds from the ground in the capital's National Botanical Garden. Known as "shyama ghughu" and "shobuj ghughu" in the country, the bird is native to the tropical and sub-tropical parts of the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. It is, in fact, the state bird of India's Tamil Nadu. Validating the dove's reputation of being the symbol of love and harmony, the Common Emerald Dove is an inherently peaceful, tame and approachable creature. The birds are quite terrestrial as they prefer being on the ground in search of seeds and fruits most of the time and can be seen in trees when roosting. As they are resident breeders in their regions, they are listed in the "least concern" category by the IUCN.

PHOTO: ARIEF AHMED

Shamsul Alam Bir Uttam passes away



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Valiant freedom fighter and Swadhinata Padak winner Group Capt (ret'd) Shamsul Alam (Bir Uttam) died yesterday.

He was 76.

He was undergoing treatment at a city hospital for cancer. He breathed his last at 4:47pm, according to a press release of Confidence Group. He was a former chairman of the group.

Shamsul is survived by his wife, a son, a daughter, grandchildren and a host of relatives and well-wishers.

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