

US under secy to visit Rohingya camps today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Visiting US Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights Uzra Zeya will travel to the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar today.



Uzra Zeya

Heading a three-member US delegation, she arrived in Dhaka yesterday evening, and was received at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport by Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen.

The delegation also includes Donald Lu, assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, and Anjali Kaur, deputy assistant administrator of the USAID Asia bureau. They flew from Delhi after a four-day visit.

Tomorrow, Zeya, who is on a four-day visit to Bangladesh, is scheduled to hold meetings with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her Private Sector Industry and Investment Adviser Salman F Rahman, Law Minister Anisul Haq, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen.

She will also engage with civil society organisations on freedom of expression and association, labour rights, governance and democracy, said US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller during a briefing in Washington on Monday.

Zeya will leave Dhaka on Friday. Miller said Zeya would meet senior government officials to discuss shared humanitarian concerns, including the Rohingya refugee crisis, human rights, free and fair elections, and combating trafficking in persons.

Her visit is considered important given the prevailing discord over the polls time administration. The BNP is adamant about reinstating the practice of a polls-time caretaker government, while the ruling Awami League insists that its government would conduct the election as per the constitution, like it did in 2014 and 2018.

Washington, which has been critical of the elections in 2014 and 2018 for alleged irregularities, on May 24 announced visa restrictions on individuals and their immediate family members if they are found to undermine the democratic election process in Bangladesh.

While democracy and human rights are important aspects of Zeya's visit to Bangladesh, the Rohingya issue is a major aspect too, a diplomatic source said.

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There is hardly any space left at Mugda Medical College Hospital amid the deluge of dengue patients.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Managing DENGUE CRISIS in the city

RBR

"Mosquitoes are a nuisance" is an understatement. These pests are the deadliest when it comes to spreading viruses that can play havoc to our health.

The "curse" of King Tutankhamun is really a mosquito bite! The financial backer of the discovery of the king's tomb was bitten by a mosquito which led to a deadly blood disease. Even if you let go of myths and legends regarding the pest, the truth remains mosquitoes are deadly.

Currently, dengue fever is shadowing the city almost like the plague. Hospitals are overflowing with patients and their sufferings have no end. About 13,843 dengue patients and counting have so far been hospitalised in city clinics.

The children's wards in hospitals are crowded with sick children, panicked mothers, harassed nurses and doctors. It is almost the same in adults' wards. Patients are lying on makeshift beds on the floor for the lack of a proper hospital bed.

The risk of infection is high because the peak season for the endemic is between July and September. However, this year it broke early on and health officials state that besides standing water it is also breeding in areas with no stagnant water bodies.

What is scary is that mosquitoes can mutate. It is true, especially

with the Aedes species that generic repellents or the chemicals used in fogging machines are ineffective. Mosquitoes mutate and adapt to new environments leading to higher health risks.

The only way to keep them at bay is to make our homes free from mosquito breeding grounds. Among the most pressing dos is to make sure that your trash bucket is clean. No fruit peels or dirty water can be allowed to sit and rot. The pantry and dark corners in store rooms or kitchens where you stuff the used and unclean polythene bags must be given thorough decluttering rounds.

Your water plants must be washed and the water topped up every three days. If you have balcony gardens or window sill plant pots, make sure that the water is not collected in plates for too long. You should air out the plants to avoid mosquitoes from making it their hiding place. Your garage and car are areas where you should be paying attention to. A little regulated cleanliness will save you from the menace and help stop the spread of dengue.

You must make sure your residential community offices are making their regular crack-downs to ensure their clean-up maintenance routines. The city corporation offices should take heed that construction sites are the biggest breeding ground, especially in monsoons when rainwater remains

stagnant in the debris. And Dhaka is going through a lot of face-lifting construction now.

And finally, our mayors need to be vigilant to free the city of deadly mosquitoes; but instead of waiting for them to jump to action, you must take the first step to sanitised and declutter your home.

If you are bitten by an Aedes species mosquito infected with dengue virus (DENV), you not only have the risk of having dengue but this species also spread zika and chikungunya viruses. Mosquitoes are also to blame for malaria, yellow fever, and other diseases.

The symptoms of dengue vary from mild to severe haemorrhagic fever, leading to a drop in the number of clot-forming cells (platelets) in your bloodstream. This, platelet drop can lead to shock, internal bleeding, organ failure, and even death.

Nutrient-rich food like omega-3, found in fishes; vitamins, found in fruits; iron, easily found now in taro greens (in season now for monsoon); these helps produce antibodies and also increase platelet count.

The treatment for dengue involves resting, drinking plenty of fluids, and taking painkillers to help bring down your temperature and ease any pain. And there is no way to stop the spread of dengue other than being hygienic and keeping the home clean.

2 killed in Netrakona road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Two labourers, including a teenager, died when a brick-laden truck fell into a ditch in Barhatta upazila of Netrakona yesterday.

The victims were identified as Ridoy Mia, 17, and Niloy Mia, 23, of the district's Rajurbazar area.

The two workers were on the truck when its driver lost control of the vehicle near Nischintapur area. It skidded off the road and fell into a ditch on the side of the road around 9:00am killing the duo on the spot, Khokon Chandra Saha, officer-in-charge of Barhatta Police Station.

Members of police and of fire service recovered the bodies and sent them to Netrakona General Hospital for autopsy.

A case was lodged with Barhatta Police Station in this regard.

Child drowns in pond

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

An 11-year-old girl drowned in a pond in Arahazar upazila of Narayanganj yesterday.

When Srabonti Akter, daughter of Saiful Islam of Brahmondi village of the upazila, was playing with her friends next to a pond in front of her home, she accidentally fell in.

Her family rushed to the spot and rescued Srabonti from the pond. They took her to the local upazila health complex, where the on-duty doctor declared her dead, said, Imdadul Islam Taiyob, officer-in-charge of Arahazar Police Station.

On June 26, two children, aged seven and eight, drowned in Hajirtek area of Kalapahari union of the upazila.

A total of seven children died from drowning in the district in the last 16 days.

Elderly man stabbed to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An elderly man was stabbed to death at a tea stall in Gandamara village under Banshkhali upazila in Chattogram yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Bajrul Haque, 62, from Hazipara of the village.

Murder suspect Nurul Aziz, 55, was arrested on the spot.

Kamal Uddin, officer-in-charge of Banshkhali Police Station, said Bajrul and Nurul got into an argument when they were teasing each other while having tea at a local tea stall.

At one point, Aziz got angry and stabbed Bajrul with a knife he got from the shop, leaving Bajrul critically injured.

Later, locals took Bajrul to Banshkhali Upazila Health Complex where the on-duty doctor declared him dead.

"His body was sent to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for autopsy. A case is being filed in this connection," the OC added.

AL, BNP

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the LDP at its party office near FDC; the Gono Forum near the Notre Dame College in Motijheel; and Bangladesh Labour Party on Masjid Gali in Nayapalton. The Gono Odhikar Parishad (Nur) has said it will hold an event at 4:00pm, but has yet to announce where it will take place.

Contacted, BNP Vice Chairman Abdul Awal Mintoosaid, "The BNP and its like-minded parties have agreed that they will launch a one-point movement. And an outline of the joint declaration for the state reform proposal may be announced at the rally."

BNP leaders say the announcement of the one-point demand during the two delegations' visit is significant to them.

The US and EU delegates will talk about democracy, election and human rights and see the public support for BNP, said a senior leader, wishing not to be named.

"We want to send the message that we have public support and the organisational means to realise our demands. We will say this at our meeting with the EU delegates," said the leader.

BNP activists and leaders have been working for the last few days to ensure a gathering that reflects its strength.

On December 10 last year, the BNP announced a 10-point demand. The party and its allies launched a simultaneous movement on December 24.

Although the Jamaat expressed support for the 10-point demand, the party is not on board with the one-point demand. Jamaat leaders say that they are now focusing on their own programmes.

BNP leaders say many of their leaders and activists have already arrived in Dhaka mainly from nearby districts.

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman is likely to join the meeting virtually and address the crowd.

BNP's one-point demand includes resignation of the government, dissolution of parliament, formation of election time neutral government, reconstitution of an Election Commission, release of all political leaders, and withdrawal of false and fabricated cases.

Era of trade in rupee begins

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"It will benefit both countries and it can enable us to increase exports to India manifold," he added.

In fiscal 2022-23, Bangladesh's exports to India stood at \$2.02 billion, up 2.5 percent year-on-year, while imports stood at \$12.2 billion, down 24.2 percent.

"As Indian customers will see they are buying the products in their own currency, they may consider Bangladeshi products as their own. So, I think it will open a new way for us to boost exports to India," he added.

This, along with the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), for which the two neighbours will start negotiations soon, is expected to make bilateral trade more robust, Verma said.

Md Jashim Uddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers

of Commerce and Industry, hoped the new mechanism would ease trade between the two neighbouring countries.

To demonstrate how the system would work, two letters of credit from two Bangladeshi businesses were presented at the event. Bogura's Tamim Agro exported in rupee, while Nitol-Niloy Group made the first import in rupee.

"We were urging to launch the settlement mechanism for long as it will ease the trade between the two countries," said Abdul Matlub Ahmad, managing director of Nitol-Niloy Group and also the president of the India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Economists though remain sceptical about the success of the arrangement in easing the pressure on Bangladesh's strained foreign

currency reserves.

"For now, there is no loss or gain for Bangladesh," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

Only those businesses that export to India and also import from there will enjoy the gains from the new settlement mechanism, he added.

"It remains to be seen whether exporters are willing to do trade in rupee -- that is very important," said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling.

Policymakers need to take steps to make businesses aware of the benefits of settling trade in rupees.

"We also need to pursue India to accept payment for a certain volume of imports in taka too," said Raihan, also a professor of the University of Dhaka's economics department.

Ex-MP Poton's firm stole 72k tonne fertiliser

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sent a letter to the BCIC along with photos of 66,222.18 tonnes of Urea in place of 71,801.31 tonnes while the fertiliser was in transit.

In the letter, the contracting firm, M/S Poton Traders, showed 5,579.13 tonnes of the fertiliser less than the total quantity.

As per the information provided by the firm, the previously formed committees visited the spots in Khulna, Noaparaghat, Shiromoni, Nagarbari, Baghabarighat and Barishal and found only around 1,307.976 tonnes of the fertiliser instead of 66,222.18 tonnes. But the 1,307.976 tonnes are substandard, said the probe body.

It added that the firm embezzled the fertiliser and provided the BCIC with false information, as 1,307.976

tonnes of fertiliser was found instead of 66,222.18 tonnes.

Besides, Shahadat Hossain, general manager of M/S Poton Traders, and Nazmul Hossain, general manager (operation) of the firm, admitted this before the previous two probe committees and signed the relevant documents on it, the probe body mentioned in the report.

BCIC lawyer Molla Kismot Habib yesterday placed the probe report before the HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Khizir Hayat Lizu during hearing of a suo motu rule on this issue.

The bench fixed July 23 for delivering judgement on the rule and ordered the Anti-Corruption Commission to submit its enquiry report on this issue by this time.

Lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan appeared for the ACC during the hearing.

Inclusion

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the model of capacity payments to power plants is a "model of robbery" and is a reflection of ill-motivated contracts.

However, on July 7, after news on the report had been published by different media outlets, the chapter related to capacity charges was dropped from the report available on the website. So, the report has come down to 54 pages from 58.

Officials related to the research said the chapter was mistakenly included in the report, and it was not written by any of the researchers.

EU delegation

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EU ambassador in Dhaka Charles Whiteley also attended the meeting.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, EC Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar Debnath said the EU mission enquired about the commission's preparations for next general election, including voter list, voting centres, and installation of CCTV cameras.

Asked whether there is any time frame for filing applications to send election observers, the EC informed the EU mission that it will be better if they send the application by September as there are some other formalities for having clearance from the home and foreign ministries, Ashok said.

"The commission said they [EU] can send as many neutral observers as they want," he added.

The EU didn't send any election observers for the 2014 and 2018 national polls.

It cancelled sending election observer missions to Bangladesh in 2006 when the national election was postponed amid violence and anarchy.

Sources who attended yesterday's meeting told The Daily Star that the CEC briefed the delegation about electoral system.

Call for free, fair polls

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Russia last week said Western calls for "free and fair" elections in Bangladesh were an act of "neo-colonialism".

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova defined the calls as "another attempt at blatant interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state."

In mid-June, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China supported the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's remarks criticising US sanctions on Rab.

Referring to the US, Wenbin said, "Indeed, while turning a blind eye to its own racial discrimination,

Habibul said many elections were held during their tenure and those were free and fair without any major violence. He also said they had installed CCTV cameras in and outside polling stations.

Enquired by an EU delegation member whether the cameras breached voters' privacy, the CEC said those were installed in such a way that it didn't breach voters' privacy.

Ashok said there were no queries from the EU delegation regarding an election-time government and participation of all political parties in the general election.

Meanwhile, pro-BNP lawyers staged a demonstration when the EU delegation was coming out of the attorney general's office after a meeting with him around 3:00pm yesterday. Holding placards and chanting slogans, the lawyers demanded free and fair polls under a caretaker government.

In the morning, the EU mission sat down with the Election Monitoring Forum at the EU embassy in the capital. The mission wanted to learn about the preparations of the forum and the election environment.

Making reference to the recent elections, forum officials, led by Chairman Prof Abed Ali, said the election environment is good.

gun violence and drug proliferation problems, a certain country has long been interfering in the internal affairs of Bangladesh and many other developing countries under the pretext of democracy and human rights."

At Monday's briefing, Miller said, "We don't consider it interference in internal affairs when other countries raise our elections process with us. We welcome those discussions as an opportunity to strengthen our democracy, and we don't know why any other countries would object."

He said Washington supports a genuine democratic process.