

Bangladesh-US ties to deepen

Says Hasan Mahmud about US official's visit

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud said yesterday that the US official Afreen Akhter's visit will deepen and broaden ties between Bangladesh and the US.

He made the remarks when a journalist wanted to know about the upcoming visit of US Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Afreen Akhter, who is scheduled to be in Dhaka on Saturday.

The foreign minister also said the letter sent by US President Joe Biden to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is important to further strengthen the relationship between the two countries.

"The visit of the US official will deepen and broaden the relationship between the two countries."

This is going to be the first visit by any US official after the January 7 election.

Apart from bilateral issues and other areas of mutual interest, including economic growth and development, the Rohingya issue may also come up for discussion, according to a diplomatic source.

Afreen visited Bangladesh before the national election.

She is likely to meet senior officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At a media briefing on February 14, she said, "We have a tremendous amount of work ongoing developing free media in Bangladesh, working with civil society, and working with labour organisers across the spectrum to build up these institutions of democracy that will enable Bangladesh to become more democratic over the longer term."

Afreen visited Dhaka and Cox's Bazar on October 16-17 last year and met with senior government officials, civil society members, Rohingya refugees, and representatives from humanitarian organisations.

FM Hasan Mahmud also told reporters that the United States' veto against a draft UN Security Council resolution, demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, is disappointing.

The resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Palestinian Gaza Strip was presented to the UN Security Council (UNSC) by Algeria. It was voted on last Tuesday.

Of the UNSC's 15 member states, 13 voted in favour of the resolution. Another permanent member, the United Kingdom, abstained from voting, while the US vetoed it.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Pedestrians are sure to be perplexed when they want to use the zebra crossing near Dhanmondi Road 27 on Satmasjid Road and realise they have no way to cross the street. The zebra crossing leads to the central median which has a steel fence.

POST-POLLS PAKISTAN

Imran to ask IMF to halt aid over 'rigged' election

AGENCIES

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan will write to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), demanding it to stop their support for Pakistan due to "rigged elections," party leader Ali Zafar announced yesterday.

"Imran Khan will issue a letter to IMF today. The charter of IMF, EU, and other organisations stipulates that they can function or provide loan to a country only if there's good governance," Zafar told journalists after meeting Khan at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail.

Zafar claimed that the "most important section" of their charter is that a country should be democratic. "If there's no democracy, then neither can these institutions function in those countries, nor should they."

Senator Zafar said the people's vote was stolen in the darkness of the night. He said going to the IMF for a bailout package would be detrimental to the country without conducting the audit of the election results, reports Geo News online.

He also lamented that permission has not been granted to meet Khan's wife Bushra

Bibi, who is incarcerated at the Bani Gala residence declared as sub-jail.

Meanwhile, the newly elected members of the 18th Punjab Assembly will take oath today in the inaugural session of the provincial legislature, reports Dawn online.

Out of five assemblies that went to the polls on February 8, the Punjab Assembly is the first house convening its opening session, slated to take place at 10:00am today.

Punjab Governor Baligh Ur Rehman has issued a notification in this regard. Speaker Sibtain Khan will administer the oath to the newly elected members.

The two main dynastic parties, the army-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), late Tuesday announced a coalition with smaller parties to govern the world's fifth most populous nation.

The United States called Wednesday on Pakistan to lift restrictions on X, formerly known as Twitter, after days of disruption following an election marred by fraud allegations.



Chinese 'research' ship makes port call in the Maldives

Sparks New Delhi's security concerns

REUTERS, Beijing

A Chinese research ship arrived in the Maldives yesterday, global ship-tracking data showed, just three months after a similar vessel visited the Indian Ocean and sparked New Delhi's security concerns.

The visit follows January comments by a US think tank that China's navy could "leverage the insights gained from these missions" for deployment of naval forces, a claim Beijing calls part of a concocted image-smearing "China threat" narrative.

Xiang Yang Hong 03, owned by a research institute that reports to China's natural resources ministry, made a port call in the Maldives capital of Male, data from MarineTraffic showed, more than a month after leaving its home port of Xiamen in southeastern China.

Prior to its arrival, the civilian ship had spent more than three weeks surveying waters just outside the exclusive economic zones of India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, the ship-tracking data showed.

Man dies en route to mother's funeral

UNB, Narsingdi

A road accident claimed the life of a man who had just arrived in Bangladesh from Italy to attend his mother's funeral.

He was among the two who died when a microbus collided with a stone-laned truck on the Dhaka Sylhet highway in Shibpur upazila of Narsingdi last morning.

The deceased were identified as Shah Alam, 50, of Natai village in Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila, and his brother-in-law, Selim Mia, of the same upazila, said Arifur Rahman, sub-inspector of Itakhola Highway Police Station.

Shah Alam arrived at the Dhaka airport early morning after receiving the news of his mother's death.

Later, four people, including Shah Alam and Selim Mia, left the airport for Brahmanbaria on the microbus around 9:30am and met with the incident on the way. Shah Alam died on the spot, and Selim Mia died after being taken to Narsingdi District Hospital.

DoE director, wife die after falling ill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A director of the Department of Environment (DoE) and his wife died after falling ill at their Mirpur residence yesterday.

The deceased were Syed Nazmul Ahsan, 58, DoE director of Dhaka region; and his wife Nahid Binte Alam, 47, police said.

Both fell ill at their house in Mirpur-2 yesterday. Nazmul was admitted to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital where he died in the evening, said Munshi Sabbir Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Mirpur Police Station.

His wife Nahid was admitted to the intensive care unit of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) where she breathed her last this morning, he said.

Police sent both bodies to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy, the OC said.

Nazmul joined the DoE in 1996 as a research officer. He was eventually promoted to the post of director in 2017.

The couple is survived by two daughters. One of them is sitting for the ongoing SSC examination, a colleague of Nazmul said.

Missing woman found dead after eight days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Police recovered the decomposing body of an elderly woman from a local waterbody at Pabnalpara village in Panchagarh's Debiganj upazila yesterday, eight days after she went missing.

The deceased was identified as Hazera Khatun, 60, wife of Md Salam of Gopikantapur village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

Md Iftekhar, officer-in-charge of Debiganj Police Station, said Hazera, a patient with mental illness, left the house on February 14 and didn't return that night.

The following day, her family filed a general diary with Thakurgaon Police Station in connection with her disappearance.

Last morning, local farmers discovered her body on their way to their croplands.

9 Rohingyas

FROM PAGE 1

Rohingya leaders living in refugee camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf are fearing that a possible retaliation by Myanmar forces to regain territories in Rakhine may force more Rohingyas to try to enter Bangladesh.

Despite a lull in fighting across the border over the last three days, they feared that fighting in Rakhine may intensify soon.

Besides yesterday's pushback, BGB and Coast Guard intercepted 372 Rohingyas attempting to cross the Naf river on small boats this month.

Lt Tahsin Rahman, media officer of Coast Guard Chattogram East Zone (Teknaf), said their patrol has been strengthened in the Naf to prevent Rohingya infiltration.

Early this month, fierce clashes broke out between the Myanmar troops and the Arakan Army across the border from Tumburu area of Bandarban's Naikhongchhari upazila.

The fighting forced 330 members of the Myanmar junta forces to flee to Bangladesh. They were handed over to the Myanmar authorities on February 15.

Later, the fighting moved to the border area of Myanmar opposite to Shahporir Dwip in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar.

Fear gripped the people there as the loud sounds of explosions came from the other side of the border across the Naf river.

However, no sound of explosions was heard for the last three days.

Rohingya leaders there, citing information from various sources, said the AA has taken control of most of the border posts in Rakhine after defeating the troops.

They said the gains by the rebels have resulted in a pause in fighting along the Naikhongchhari border in Bandarban and Ukhiya and Teknaf of Cox's Bazar.

During the fighting between the Myanmar government troops and Arakan Army, one Bangladeshi woman and a Rohingya man were killed after a stray mortar shell landed in Ghumdhum under Naikhongchhari upazila early this month.

A voyage fraught with peril

FROM PAGE 1

Most of the survivors interviewed by the BRAC researchers are from Faridpur, followed by Cumilla, and Noakhali. This gives an indication of where the trafficking rackets are more active.

"A significant proportion of the survivors said the traffickers had manipulated their parents with false promises of lucrative job opportunities," reads the study.

Shajahan Hossain, additional SP (human trafficking) of CID, said, "We speak to everyone who comes back and encourage them to file cases and also give them legal assistance if needed. From the last two special flights from Libya carrying returnees, 25 expressed interest in filing cases ... We can investigate only if there is a case."

Tohidul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of police of Uttara Division said, "It is imperative that trafficked migrant workers file cases otherwise we cannot crack down on the rackets, and this cycle will continue."

Since 2009, at least 26 lakh Bangladeshi migrants have migrated to Europe by sea, using the tip of northern Africa as a launching pad, says the BRAC study. An update by UNHCR from December 2023 found that of 5,236 refugees and migrants reached Italy by sea that month, 13 percent of them were Bangladeshis.

The research sheds light on the scale of horrors possibly faced by this large number of migrant workers.

However, it is not as if all migrants travel to Libya aiming to reach Europe. They often have no choice.

"Disturbingly, the study also highlighted that the vast majority of respondents (551) did not receive the promised job upon reaching their destinations, leaving them deceived and vulnerable. Only 36 respondents confirmed that they actually obtained the job as initially promised," the

study adds.

Out of the interviewed individuals, 316 paid for the dangerous journey themselves while 142 took money from their families but they all returned home penniless.

From 2016 to 2021, the number of people attempting to leave Libya by boat and being forced to return to the north African country rose from zero to over half of the people who made it across, said a report by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) released yesterday, adding, "In the first eight months of 2023, more than 11,000 people were intercepted at sea and returned to Libya."

The MSF reported that the migrants they rescued all made multiple attempts to flee Libya by sea, some up to seven times.

Just over the past one year, 1,722 people were repatriated from Libya to Bangladesh on 12 special flights, according to airport and immigration data. On February 1, a plane brought in 136 rescued people.

Another special flight carrying 144 rescued Bangladeshis is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka today, announced the Embassy of Bangladesh in Libya.

The BRAC study says that the trafficking rings were abusing the tourist visa for Dubai. No matter which country they intend to traffic people to, Dubai is almost always a port of call.

The BRAC study found that most of the trafficked survivors went to Dubai from Dhaka, then Egypt, before landing in Libya.

Law enforcement sources claimed that a Pakistani smuggling ring operates chartered flights between Dubai and Libya.

Other countries used as a transit between Dubai and Libya include Turkey, Sudan, Tunisia, Jordan, Syria and Kuwait, found the study. There are a total of 8 routes.

Dubai stopped issuing work permits for Bangladeshis in 2015.

Shariful Hasan, head of BRAC Migration Programme, said, "But there is a constant demand for Bangladeshi workers from companies in the Gulf state. All of them are given tourist visas. This means that they are not protected as formal migrant workers, and are susceptible to trafficking."

Similarly, Libya and Bangladesh had no formal agreement about migrant workers until October last year, meaning human trafficking rings were the only means for migrants to reach the European gateway.

On February 15, a boat carrying 52 migrants caught fire and sank in the Mediterranean off Tunisian coast. Eight Bangladeshis perished in the accident, while 26 Bangladeshis were rescued. One Bangladeshi is critically injured and hospitalised.

Russia sent hitmen to kill deserter in Spain: report

AFP, Madrid

Moscow sent hitmen who gunned down a Russian deserter in Spain last week, six months after fleeing to Ukraine in his helicopter, El Pais newspaper reported yesterday, citing Spanish intelligence sources.

"The Spanish intelligence services have no doubt that the long arm of the Kremlin was behind this unprecedented crime in Spain: the murder in Alicante of Maxim Kuzminov," the paper said.

The victim's body, which was riddled with six bullets, was found on February 13 in Villajoyosa, 12 kilometres (seven miles) from the coastal resort of Benidorm, and Spanish media on Monday said his fingerprints identified him as Kuzminov.

Chinese boat 'lost balance' in deadly incident: Taiwan

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's coast guard said yesterday a Chinese boat that capsized during a chase was trying to evade a patrol vessel and "lost its balance" in a deadly incident condemned by Beijing.

It gave more details about the incident after China accused Taiwanese authorities of "seeking to evade their responsibilities and hide the truth" about the incident last week in which two Chinese nationals died.

The speedboat carrying four people capsized on February 14 near Taiwan's Kinmen islands while being pursued by the Taiwanese coast guard, throwing all onboard into the water.

Healthcare plagued

FROM PAGE 1

equipment and management, but the ones outside the city do not maintain any standard at all, he added.

"For most surgeries, an anaesthesiologist is engaged at the very last moment, when the patient is already on the operating table," he said, adding that that's why fatalities related to anaesthesia use are not uncommon.

The standard protocol is a patient must go through pre-anaesthesia check-ups so that doctors can identify the risks, he said.

Experts also say that in many countries there is a tradition of creating professionals based on the demands and needs.

The government can introduce a quota to ensure that the number of medical students specialising in anaesthesiology and the other branches are proportional.

However, Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, said such a step by the

Two other crew were rescued and temporarily detained in Kinmen -- a territory administered by Taipei but located just five kilometres (three miles) from the Chinese city of Xiamen.

The incident occurred against a backdrop of heightened tensions between China and Taiwan, a self-ruled island that Beijing claims as part of its territory.

A survivor has reportedly claimed the boat was "rammed", while Taiwan insists the coast guard was following legitimate procedures.

Coast guard authorities told a news conference in Kinmen yesterday that the Chinese boat had "lost its balance and capsized" after it was "snaking" to avoid inspection.

authorities may not be popular among the medical students who may wonder whether "they would be allowed to choose their career path."

He added that students factor in the social recognition, financial benefits, and social security when they decide what they want to study.

"It must be ensured that the anaesthesiologists get paid well," Alam, also a renowned surgeon, said.

According to BSACPP, from assistant professor to professor-level there are 213 posts for anaesthesiologists at the government facilities. At least 107 of the posts are currently vacant.

Anaesthesiologists say they face serious pay inequality at private hospitals and clinics.

At most of the private health facilities, an anaesthesiologist has to depend on a surgeon to earn money.

"But no one wants to be dependent. The way a surgeon is celebrated in society, an anaesthesiologist is not," said Prof Khalilur Rahman, honorary consultant at BIRDEM.