

Washington values ties with Dhaka, New Delhi

Says US state dept spokesperson, reiterates concern about Prof Yunus

UNB, Dhaka

The United States has said it values its relationship with both Bangladesh and India and will continue to work together on the shared interests.

"We value our relationship with both Bangladesh and India. We will continue to work with the governments of the two countries to pursue our shared interests, including [those] to ensure a free, open, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region," said Matthew Miller, spokesperson for US Department of State.

He made the remarks at a press briefing in Washington on Monday.

Queried about the "India Out" campaign in the region, he said, "... We are aware of the reports of this campaign. I'm obviously not going to comment on any individual consumers' decisions, whether it's in Bangladesh or anywhere around the world."

Responding to a question on Prof Muhammad Yunus, Miller said, "You have heard me speak before about the US government's concerns surrounding the cases against Muhammad Yunus, including that they could represent a potential misuse of Bangladesh's laws to harass and intimidate him."

The spokesperson said Ambassador Peter Haas simply reiterated those comments, acting in his capacity as the US government's highest-ranking representative in Bangladesh.

Talking to reporters recently after a US delegation's Bangladesh visit, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud said there is willingness from both sides -- US and Bangladesh -- to work together and they want to create a new chapter in their relations.

"We also want to begin a new chapter of relations with them," he said, adding that the people will benefit through strengthening the relations.

Eileen Laubacher, special assistant to the US president and senior director for South Asia, US National Security Council; Michael Schiffer, USAID assistant administrator, Bureau for Asia; and Afreen Akhter, US Department of State deputy assistant secretary for South and Central Asia, had a three-day visit to Bangladesh recently.



PHOTOS: PROTIBHA FLAVOURS

PRESERVING FAMILY RECIPES

Share your legacy with Protibha Flavours

RBR

Every family has a special recipe -- a cherished dish that only the mother, a specific aunt, or sister can cook to perfection. The steaming Eid day polao garnished with almonds, pistachios, raisins, and plums will be the grandma's speciality, as is the Baishakhi special of the mother.

These family secrets, often handed down through generations, impart a taste that lingers in your collective memory.

My father's grandmother, whom I had the privilege to befriend, shared so many recipe secrets with me, just by narrating stories about them. *Bata macher korma* was an unusual dish she made for me and the memory of the meal still makes me happy.

However, no one ever thinks of jotting down the details of these unforgettable dishes. Thus, often, the magical cooking methods are lost forever or at least the dishes never taste the same when we attempt to prepare them.

In an effort to keep these family secrets alive, and give the senior members of our family a chance to become entrepreneurs themselves, Protibha Flavours started a mission



in 2023 to record these recipes, learn them, and possibly provide a chance for the home cooks to earn some money.

From retired officials, both men and women, to anyone with a strong passion for food and wanting to utilise their leisure time, Protibha Flavours offers a platform to share their skills and enthusiasm.

"Protibha Flavours is more than just a culinary endeavour; it's a social movement," said Md Adnan Hossain, founder and executive director of It's Humanity Foundation, the parent organisation of Protibha Flavours.

"Originally conceived to empower marginalised communities through employment, our mission now

extends to everyone who possesses the skills and art of cooking with a focus on authentic Bangladeshi flavours using locally sourced ingredients."

Protibha is giving our grandmothers, fathers and mothers a platform and thus encouraging them to bring their dishes to the general people through niche commercial catering services.

"But our impact reaches further," said Hossain.

"We strive to empower women in the future by creating opportunities for 100 individuals from marginalised communities within the next three years. Even now, Protibha Flavours carries mustard oil, coconut oil, black seed oil, ghee, and *chat masala* -- all sourced from women in Saidpur."

He pointed out that their best seller is the *balushai* (a kind of sweetmeat) prepared meticulously by a retired couple, who were both employed by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation.

Protibha Flavours invites you to join their movement by connecting with them on their social media handles. Sharing your culinary specialities and your favourite dishes with others will ensure that the authenticity of your dish can be replicated and become a part of their menu. Senior citizens of Dhaka can now make good use of their spare time by catering to the gastronomic demands of Dhaka dwellers.

'Burimari Express' launched on Dhaka-Lalmonirhat rail route

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Railway yesterday launched a new intercity train -- the "Burimari Express" -- on the Dhaka-Lalmonirhat route in an effort to provide an affordable option for passengers to commute between the two destinations.

With this addition, BR now operates two intercity trains on the route.

The train began its maiden journey to Dhaka after being flagged off from the Burimari Railway Station in Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila around 2:30pm following an inauguration ceremony.

There are 17 coaches on the Burimari Express; 14 for passenger seating, and the remaining three for a power car, a luggage van, and a dining car, reports our local correspondent.

Despite its inaugural launch from Burimari, the train will strictly operate on the Dhaka-Lalmonirhat route.

The train will stop at 11 stations on its way to Dhaka and 12 stations on the way back to Lalmonirhat, reports UNB.

Local and commuter trains would then be operated to take passengers to Burimari upon reaching Lalmonirhat, according to BR sources.

The distance between Burimari and Lalmonirhat stations is 81 kilometres.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, at a rally in Lalmonirhat's Patgram in 2011, promised to bring Burimari under the rail network. BR sources say the launch of the Burimari Express is a follow-up to that promise.

Man arrested for raping two girls in N'ganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A man was arrested from Sylhet for raping two girls aged 8 and 10 in Narayanganj Sadar upazila, Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) said yesterday.

The arrestee, Shipon Ahmed, 34, of Syedpur area under Gognagar union parishad of Narayanganj, is an accused in a case filed over the rape, said Al Mamun Shikder, Superintendent of Police of PBI, Narayanganj, in a press briefing at his office.

He was arrested in a village in Sylhet's Kadamtali area on Sunday, the same day the case was filed against him. He was remanded to PBI custody for one day.

On February 8, Shipon called the girls, who were his neighbours, in his Syedpur home and raped them. When the girls told their parents about the incident afterwards, some influential locals tried to cover it up.

In the meantime, the accused managed to flee, SP Shikder said, according to the case documents and initial investigation.

"On March 10, the father of one of the victims filed a case with Narayanganj Sadar Model Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

"PBI took over the investigation of the case on its initiative and arrested the accused from Sylhet within 24 hours. The two girls also gave their statements before the magistrate on the same day [Monday]."

The PBI official also said the accused has links with local influential people and threatened to kill the girls if the victims' families filed any case about the incident.

Education, health see huge cuts

FROM PAGE 1

The ADP for fiscal year 2023-24 has been reduced by Tk 18,000 crore to Tk 245,000 crore, according to the documents presented at the meeting, which was the first for the current government.

Documents also show that the development budget for education and health, two vital sectors, have been trimmed by 42 percent and 25.53 percent respectively.

The education sector's allocation has been cut to Tk 17,229 crore from Tk 29,889 crore while the health sector's allocation has been decreased to Tk 12,066 crore from Tk 16,204 crore.

After the revision, education and health sectors are getting 7 percent and 4.83 percent allocations of the total development budget.

Talking about the trimming of the allocations to the education and health sectors, Planning Minister Abdus Salam said: "There are questions regarding the abilities of some ministries who cannot fully spend the budgets allocated for them. We did not leave out the

education sector [from priorities]. Rather, we have told them to increase their capacity to spend the budgets allocated for them."

The minister said they have taken steps so that the money that was reduced from the sector's budget will be used in other sectors.

Salam said the government have increased the allocations for the transport and communication and energy sectors as they have the ability to spend the allocated money.

The transport and communication sector got the highest allocation of Tk 63,263 crore (25.82 percent), the power and energy sector Tk 37,897 crore (15.47 percent) and housing and community facilities Tk 28,002 crore (11.43 percent).

The planning minister also said the government has enough money and the health, education, energy and communication sectors are vital for the country.

A sector will get allocations keeping in mind how much money it can spend, Salam said.

Planning Division Senior Secretary Satyajit Karmakar said that there

should be a balance between the ADP allocation for education, health, transport, energy and local government sectors.

He said that there are some inconsistencies in resource allocation and those will be fixed in the ninth Five Year Plan.

Satyajit said the prime minister yesterday instructed that a committee under the cabinet secretary work to improve the capacity and skills of the officials.

The Economic Relations Division was asked to assess the guidelines of the development partners to ease the disbursement of foreign loans, he added.

The government has made lesser allocations for the education and health sectors than what is projected in the eighth Five Year Plan that is being implemented from fiscal years 2020-21 to 2024-25.

For instance, the health sector got a 6.16 percent ADP allocation this fiscal year against the projection of 11.1 percent, while the education sector received a 13.38 percent allocation against the projection of 16.5 percent.

The BNN Bloomberg report adds that there has been a resurgence of piracy near Somalia. The increase has coincided with a slew of attacks on merchant shipping in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, sapping nearby naval resources and heightening dangers for seafarers in the region.

At the end of last year, the first ship hijacking in the waters off Somalia took place since 2017. Naval forces operating in the area have published warnings that two piracy groups have been working in the Indian Ocean.

According to an United Nations report released on November 1, 2013, pirates off the coast of Somalia and the Horn of Africa made between \$339 million and \$413 million in ransom profits, fuelling a wide range of criminal activities on a global scale.

Chemical cat sparks alert in Japan

AFP, TOKYO

Locals in a city in western Japan have been told not to approach or touch a missing cat that fell into a vat of dangerous chemicals and then scampered off into the night.

An employee at a metal plating plant in Fukuyama arrived for work on Monday morning to find feline paw prints leading away from the container, the firm said.

Grainy security camera footage released by the company shows the furry fugitive fleeing from the factory, apparently unharmed.

The vat, three metres (10 feet) deep, contained hexavalent chromium, which is carcinogenic and can cause skin inflammation.

"We immediately alerted police, the Fukuyama city and neighbours near our factory," a representative from the company told AFP, without

wishing to be named.

"The incident woke us up to the need to take measures to prevent small animals like cats from sneaking in, which is something we had never anticipated before," he said.

City authorities told locals to avoid touching the animal and to inform police immediately if they come across it.

No sightings had been reported as of Tuesday afternoon.

Schools to stay open in Ramadan

FROM PAGE 1

school because I heard that schools won't be shut during Ramadan. But many of my friends are absent as they thought that the school would remain closed."

Md Mozammel Huq, head teacher of the school, said less than 50 percent students were present yesterday.

"This happened because there was confusion among the students and guardians about the closure of the school."

Anjuman Ara Laizu, head teacher of BG Press High School, said it would have been better for the teachers and students if the schools were closed during Ramadan.

"But as the authorities have decided to keep the schools open, we have to follow the decision," she said.

Jamal Uddin, head teacher of Tejgaon Model High School, said they kept the school closed yesterday in line with the High Court order.

"We informed our students through SMS about closure and reopening of the school."

It would be helpful if the authorities concerned inform the schools about the closure well in advance of Ramadan, he observed.

In separate notifications, the education and primary and mass education ministries yesterday said

the secondary schools will remain open until March 25 while the primary schools will continue classes until March 21.

Earlier in the day, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court halted the HC order that on Sunday stayed the government decision of keeping the schools open.

A five-member bench of the Appellate Division, led by Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan, passed the stay order after hearing a petition filed by the state challenging the HC order.

The apex court also asked the state to file a leave to appeal petition with it against the HC order.

23 Bangladeshis held hostage

FROM PAGE 1

WhatsApp message that the crew members were locked inside cabins, and the pirates were carrying heavy firearms and ammunition. He sought our help. We are trying to talk to the government high-ups."

BNN Bloomberg reports that its ship-tracking data shows the Abdullah slowed to a standstill in the Indian Ocean before turning around. It was heading in the direction of the Somali coast last night.

The crew members include Captain Mohammad Abdur Rashid, Chief Officer Mohammed Atikullah Khan, Second Officer Mazharul Islam Chowdhury, Third Officer Tarekul Islam, Deck Cadet Sabbir Hossain, Chief Engineer ASM Saiduzzaman, Second Engineer Toufiqul Islam, Third Engineer Rokan Uddin, Fourth

Engineer Tanveer Ahmad, Engine Cadet Ayub Khan, Electrician Ibrahim Khalil Ullah, ordinary seamen Joy Mahmud, Najmul Haque, Ainul Haque, General Seaman Noor Uddin, oilers Mohammed Shamsuddin and Ali Hossain, Fireman Mosharaf Hossain Sakil, Chief Cook Shafiqul Islam, Fitter Saleh Ahmed. The three others are Anwarul Haque, Asifur Rahman, and Sazzad Hossain.

KSRM Group has a total of 23 seagoing vessels. MV Abdullah, formerly Golden Hawk, was added to its fleet last year.

In December 2010, the company's MV Jahan Moni was hijacked by pirates in the Arabian Sea. Twenty-five crew members and the wife of the chief officer were rescued nearly 100 days after they were taken hostage.

BB outlines tough measures

FROM PAGE 1

identification unit' will have to be formed by banks by April 9 and the bank management will have to carry out all related activities through the unit.

If a defaulter is identified as a wilful defaulter as per the Bank Company Act, the concerned borrower will get 14 working days to present their statement on the issue.

A wilful defaulter is one who does not repay their loan, advance, investment or any other financial benefit taken by themselves or their family members or institutions despite their ability to furnish the sum.

The borrowers will continue to be marked as wilful defaulters until the loans are recovered fully.

The list of wilful defaulters would be sent to the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission and the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms to impose a ban on foreign travel and trade licence in line with the Bank Company Act.

It will also be sent to the registration authorities of vehicles, land, houses, flats and so on. Those authorities will take appropriate action under their existing laws and rules, it said.

The wilful defaulters will not be

able to become bank directors for five years after they come out from the default list and they will not be able to get any national award.

Any interest waiver facility and loan rescheduling facility will not be eligible for the wilful defaulters, as per the BB guideline.

Banks and non-bank financial institutions will not be able to take over the defaulted loans of wilful defaulters.

While the guideline on wilful defaulters is presented nicely, there is still scope to become non-wilful defaulter from wilful defaulter, according to industry insiders.