

## Donald Lu due today

Climate crisis, economic and Indo-Pacific issues to top the agenda

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

On the third leg of his visit to South Asia after India and Sri Lanka, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu will be arriving in Dhaka for a two-day visit to strengthen bilateral cooperation and demonstrate US support for a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

During the visit, he will meet with Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud, Prime Minister's Private Industry and Investment Adviser Salman F Rahman,



Forest and Environment Minister Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen, and civil society leaders.

According to a statement from the US State Department, Lu will discuss US-Bangladesh cooperation, including addressing the climate crisis and deepening economic ties.

This will be the highest-level US official to visit Dhaka after the January 7 national election that Washington termed not free and fair. He last visited Bangladesh in January last year.

Speaking to reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud said that issues related to visa policy and Dhaka's call for the withdrawal of sanctions on Rab may come up for discussion during Lu's visit.

He said Bangladesh maintains excellent relations with the United States, and the two countries will work together to take the relations further.

The US had been very vocal about free and fair elections ahead of the parliamentary polls in Bangladesh earlier this year. It also announced a visa policy last year, nearly two years after imposing a sanction against Rab and some of its officials.

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Saudi Ambassador Essa Youssef Essa Al Duhaian meets Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhavan yesterday. PHOTO: PTD

## How to wean Bangladesh off LNG addiction

Use of efficient captive power generators could save \$460m a year, says energy research thinktank IEEFA

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh can reduce its liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports by 21 percent and save \$460 million a year by replacing ageing, inefficient industrial captive power generators with more efficient models and harnessing the waste heat produced by generators for other applications, says a study.

The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) has prepared the report based on available evidence and a survey of 51 industries with a combined generation capacity of about 250 megawatts (MW).

Analysing data from 73 gas fired captive power generators in these industries, the study finds that the average efficiency of these generators is 35.38 percent.

It says if the generators are replaced

with efficient models, the efficiency rate can be increased up to 45.2 percent.

Additionally, the use of a waste heat recovery boiler and jacket cooling water in a chiller or heater can save up to 50.18 billion cubic feet (BCF) of gas every year, the study also says.

The study found that 44.22 percent of industries do not use waste heat released by generators, and 79.6 percent do not use jacket cooling water in productive applications.

Waste heat recovery is the process of reusing heat energy that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere. The jacket cooling water system is used to cool the cylinder liners, cylinder covers, and exhaust valves of the main engine, which increases engine efficiency.

Replacing old generators would take 1.5 to 5 years to recoup the investment, while

waste heat recovery takes only one year, the study said.

A captive power plant is a facility that provides a localised source of power to energy users, like industries, large offices, or data centres.

Currently, the capacity of captive power generators is 4,723MW, of which 2,943MW is gas fired. The captive power plants consumed 164.27 BCF or 17.6 percent of total gas usage in the country in 2022-23.

In Bangladesh, industrial units usually produce electricity by themselves through captive power plants amid the lack of reliable and uninterrupted electricity supply from the national grid, said Prof Mohammad Tamim, dean of the chemical and materials engineering faculty at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet).

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## Rohingya leader shot dead in Ukhiya camp

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Rohingya community leader, locally known as "head majhi", was shot dead at a refugee camp in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

The deceased Mohammad Ilias, 43, was a head majhi of Camp 4 extension. He was also an active member of the armed group Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), said police.

This murder, which allegedly took place over establishing dominance in the camp, occurred within 23 hours of the killing of Rohingya youth Syed Noor at Camp 4 early Sunday morning.

With the latest murders, a total of five Rohingyas were killed in the last eight days in Ukhiya and Teknaf camps.

Myanmar-based armed group the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) has been accused of committing the four murders in Ukhiya while the murder at Teknaf camp was allegedly committed by a gang of robbers.

Meanwhile, Rohingya refugees are becoming increasingly concerned about their safety as a result of recent murders in the camps.

Ukhiya Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Shameem Hossain said some 10-15 armed assailants broke into Ilias's house and shot him dead after taking him behind a nearby NGO office.

The body of the deceased has been sent to Cox's Bazar District Sadar Hospital morgue for post-mortem.

## Bangladeshi shot 'by BSF' in Benapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A Bangladesh national was shot allegedly by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) along Putkhal border in Jashore's Benapole area this morning.

Amjad Ali, 32, of Krishnapur village, received injuries when BSF personnel fired at him on zero point of the border, said brother of the victim, Amir Ali.

"Amjad along with his associates went to India to bring cattle through the Putkhal border last night. The BSF troops under India's Kaliani camp opened fire while Amjad and his fellows were returning home with cows in the morning. My brother received injuries in his left leg," he added.

His associates brought him back to the Bangladesh border and then he was admitted to Jashore General Hospital, Amir added.

The injured is currently undergoing treatment at the hospital.

Border Guard Bangladesh Battalion-21 Commanding Officer Lt Col Khurshid Alam said, "I'm looking into the matter. Action will be taken after investigation."

## Health, education face spending cuts

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healthcare and human resource development and it also increases people's out-of-pocket expenditure, said the eighth five-year plan midterm review report placed before the Planning Commission in January.

The low allocation for healthcare is a "historical concern", the report said. The health sector has been getting allocations less than 1 percent of the GDP against a recommended 3 percent of the GDP, the report said.

Low allocation has serious implications on individuals in Bangladesh, as reflected in high and increasing out-of-pocket expenses, the review said.

It said an out-of-pocket expenditure of 72 percent on healthcare is very high. In India, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, it is much less.

"This is also an indicator of high inequality in healthcare services and a cause of poverty and vulnerability," the review said.

Families bear 71 percent of the total education expenditure in Bangladesh, as per Unesco's Global Education Monitoring Report 2022.

The issue of financing education remains the core of the problem.

In 2023, government expenditure on education was only 1.64 percent of the GDP, whereas most upper middle-income countries spend around 5-6 percent of their GDPs on education, the review said.

If public funding cannot be managed, the government must explore innovative financing mechanisms such as public-private partnerships to mobilise additional resources for the education sector, it said.

Manzoor Ahmed, founder of BRAC University Institute of Educational Development, said the gap between prescription of the five-year plan and actual allocation shows that there is an inconsistency between planning and implementation.

He said education and healthcare should be for all, but only the well-off can afford them.

Planning Commission officials say that education and health ministries get lower allocations as the ministries cannot spend the money. Cost overruns and delays in implementing the projects are also to blame, they say.

The commission's data shows development projects in the health and education sectors had 13 percent and 27.5 percent cost overruns over the last five years.

As much as 55 percent of the health ministry projects and 34 percent of the education ministry projects had to have their deadlines extended.

Rasheda said people should not suffer for management weaknesses. Governance and capacity of implementation of the budget should be improved.

MA Mannan, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the planning ministry and a former planning minister, admitted that the allocations for health and education are lower than many other countries and that the budget for them should be increased.

He said budgetary constraints often do not allow greater allocations for these two sectors.

Mannan, however, said vested quarters sometimes do not allow the government to cut allocations elsewhere. "Now it is time to realign the expenditure on health and education."

## 62.9pc turnout in fourth phase

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some booths in West Bengal and Odisha.

Stray violence marred the fourth phase polls in the eight parliamentary constituencies of West Bengal as TMC and BJP workers clashed in various parts of Birbhum and Bardhaman-Durgapur seats.

Clashes also broke out between supporters of TMC and BJP in Monteswar's Susunia area of Bardhaman-Durgapur Lok Sabha seat around noon, as BJP candidate Dilip Ghosh was on his way to a polling booth following complaints of booth jamming.

But despite that, the turnout in the eight constituencies of West Bengal yesterday was the highest (75.66 percent) followed by Madhya Pradesh at 68.01 percent.

Among other states, Andhra Pradesh saw 68.04 percent polling, Bihar 54.14 percent, Jharkhand 63.14 percent, Odisha 62.96 percent, Telangana 61.16 percent and Uttar Pradesh 56.35 percent.

## JnU student gets 5yrs

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to be recorded in writing, instead of sentencing the person at once, make a probation order, that is to say, an order requiring him or her to be under the supervision of a probation officer for such period, not being less than one year or more than three years.

Judge AM Julfiker Hayet of Dhaka's Cyber Tribunal yesterday delivered the verdict in Tithy's presence at the courtroom.

During the probation, she will be allowed to stay home but her activities will be monitored by a probation officer, Mamun told the Daily Star, adding that if the officer's report on her is satisfactory, the court will reconsider her penalty.

Speaking to this correspondent on the court premises yesterday, Tithy said, "I regret the incident and I am already facing a great loss in my life... I want to go back to studying."

Her elder aunt Sheba Dasi Sarker, among others, accompanied her to the court.

"Tithy has been living with us since her sister got married. Her father has become mentally disturbed due to the incident while her husband left her because of it."

Tithy's lawyer Babulur Rahman

Srinagar, the main city of troubled Kashmir Valley, also voted for the first time yesterday since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's August 2019 decision to scrap Article 370 which gave Jammu and Kashmir a special status and remove the region's semi-autonomy with a turnout of 35.75 percent.

The BJP is not contesting there, as analysts said the outcome was likely to contradict Modi's narrative of a peaceful, more integrated Kashmir.

"I voted after over two decades... just to get relief from what we are facing here," said Bashir Ahmad Lala, 67, a Srinagar resident.

Police imposed restrictions on gatherings ahead of the vote in the militarised region, while opposition parties said their workers were arrested, which police denied.

Former Jammu and Kashmir state Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, president of the National Conference party, said Modi and Shah "will definitely get defeated" nationally.

Asaduddin Owaisi, a prominent Muslim lawmaker from the southern city of Hyderabad, which also voted yesterday, said the BJP had fewer supporters after Modi's recent "venomous" comments against minority Muslims.

Analysts have raised doubts over whether the BJP and its allies can win the landslide predicted by opinion polls and said the lower turnout had prompted Modi to change the tack of his campaign after the first phase.

Modi has shifted focus from his economic record to accusing the Congress of planning to extend welfare benefits to Muslims at the expense of disadvantaged tribal groups and Hindu castes.

Last month, he said the Congress planned to redistribute the wealth of majority Hindus among Muslims, who he referred to as "infiltrators" who have "more children".

Congress has denied making any such promises and has said Modi is rattled by the turnout, which the BJP denies.

## MPs may lose duty waiver for car imports

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"As per the proposal, 25 percent import duty, along with other taxes, will be imposed on the vehicles imported by lawmakers," he added.

The NBR data shows that of the 572 cars imported by the MPs since 2009, at least 563 were brought from Japan. They included Toyota Land Cruisers, Range Rovers, and Mitsubishi Pajeros. Most of these cars have engine capacity above 4.5 litres.

An importer has to pay 89 to 850 percent duty on a vehicle, depending on engine capacity.

Welcoming the NBR move, Prof Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said, "It's a timely and right step."

"I don't know if such a benefit is offered anywhere else in the world."

"We saw in the past that some MPs misused the facility... They sold their imported cars and bought new cars at lower prices."

"It [the duty-free benefit] should be immediately scrapped."

According to NBR officials, the duty-free facility was first given to MPs during HM Ershad's rule in 1987

to please them and keep them loyal to the regime. A notification in this regard was issued on May 24, 1988.

Later, the BNP and the Awami League maintained this facility upon assuming power.

Many members of the eighth parliament sold their luxury cars though the law didn't permit so within three years of purchase.

In the wake of gross abuse, the provision was scrapped during the last caretaker government's tenure through an ordinance in 2007.

However, it was reintroduced by the AL government in 2009.

the premier that pressure on the country's foreign currency reserves would ease and inflation would fall starting in December.

The meeting saw a presentation on the next budget prepared by the finance ministry.

According to the presentation, the government plans to design a Tk 7,96,900 crore outlay in the new budget with a focus on tight spending as economic headwinds are expected to persist.

The draft budget is 4.6 percent

bigger than the original budget for the current fiscal year.

The next Annual Development Programme (ADP) allocation will be Tk 2,65,000 crore, an increase of 0.76 percent.

Finance Minister AH Mahmood Ali, State Minister for Finance Waseq Ayesha Khan, Finance Secretary Khairuzzaman Mozumder, Bangladesh Bank Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder, and NBR Chairman Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem attended the meeting.

## Make budget tight, control inflation

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pressure on taxpayers and to take various measures to increase revenue collection.

She discouraged the import of luxury items and expressed dissatisfaction over the import of items like plastic flowers.

Hasina asked the finance ministry to consider increasing the number of beneficiaries of social safety net programmes.

According to meeting sources, finance ministry officials assured