US wants a 'strong Europe': Rubio

AFP, *Athens*

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio yesterday said Washington wanted strong allies in Europe as he headed to Portugal for the last leg of a four-day European trip.

"We want our allies to be strong. The stronger they are, the stronger we are collectively...We want a strong Europe. We want strong partners in Europe," Rubio told reporters at Athens airport.

"The stronger the individual members of (NATO) are, both societally, economically, and militarily, the stronger NATO is," he said.

Rubio was in Greece for talks Wednesday on energy, defence and cultural matters, and also announced a joint agreement on information-sharing on drug trafficking and terrorism.

In a fiery speech beneath the Acropolis after talks with Greek officials, the US secretary of state flexed American power and called on Europe to shake off its "long slumber".

He warned that Western civilisation now finds itself "at a crossroads" between "national power" and decline.



Visitors take photos in a field of pink muhly grass during the peak blooming period at a scenic area in Fuyang, in China's eastern Anhui province yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Authorities approve Rooppur Unit-1 to begin fission

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pabna*

The Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant yesterday received permission to begin its first controlled nuclear reaction, a key step towards generating electricity.

Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Authority (BAERA) approved taking Unit-1 to the criticality stage after resolving recent safety valve issues.

According to BAERA high officials, two more licences will be needed for the unit before it can proceed to grid synchronisation.

Earlier, two valves failed to perform during the commissioning stage, delaying the process.

Later, a Russian technical team went to Rooppur in Pabna's Ishwardi and spent the last month resolving the problem.

All tests for the unit's automatic pressure relief valves (PORV/POSV) have now been successfully completed. Following initial adjustments and technical support from Russian experts to resolve minor and high pressure-testing issues, the main control room (MCR) and emergency control room (ECR) verified all required parameters, valve response speeds, and safety mechanisms, said project officials.

"As PORV tests have been successfully completed, we have allowed them to reach the next stage of commissioning," Md Mahmudul Hasan, chairman of BAERA, told The Daily Star.

"We approved the B-2 licence on Thursday to start the

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Army camps planned in Cox's Bazar: home boss

Govt to build police academy at Jungle Salimpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to set up two army camps at Rangikhali and Noakhali Pahar in Cox's Bazar to curb kidnappings and other crimes.

It will also build a police academy at Jungle Salimpur in Chattogram. The government has also acquired 72 acres of land in the area to relocate the Chattogram Central Jail.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed announced the decisions while briefing reporters at his ministry yesterday following two meetings.

The first was the second meeting of the National Committee on Coordination, Management, and Law and Order Related to Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals. The other focused on improving the overall law-and-order situation in Jungle Salimpur.

Salahuddin said, "Following earlier discussions, we have decided to set up two army camps at Rangikhali and Noakhali Pahar, where kidnappings take place regularly. The camps will be built under the leadership of the 10 Infantry Division based in Ramu."

He said the decision was made, considering that the camps would help curb abductions and other criminal activities in the areas.

Speaking about security in the Rohingya camps, the minister said, "There are drug-related activities inside



the camps, and different armed groups enter the camps. We have to monitor these activities. We also have to carry out operations against drugs, weapons, and human trafficking inside and outside the Rohingya camps."

He added that barbed-wire fences surrounding the Rohingya camps were frequently damaged or destroyed, while CCTV cameras and streetlights also needed regular repairs.

The minister said the damaged facilities would be repaired and security around the camps strengthened. "Closed-circuit cameras and watchtowers will be installed at some distance outside the camps."

Salahuddin said different security forces regularly conduct operations against drug trafficking, arms-related crimes, and human trafficking inside and outside the Rohingya camps.

He added that arrangements were already in place to deal with any war-like situation or emergency under the leadership of an army brigadier general.

Regarding Jungle Salimpur, the minister said road construction was underway in the area.

The police academy to be built there would be similar to the one in Rajshahi's Sardah, he said, adding that the government would also decide how to rehabilitate the residents of the area.

"We will run the educational institutions and other institutions located there. We will bring everything under proper management and free the area from being a safe haven for criminals."

The minister said land had also been allocated to ensure the presence of police, BGB, and SRB, formerly RAB, in the area.

Responding to a reporter's question about Rohingya repatriation, Salahuddin said, "Rohingya repatriation is possible with the support of the United Nations and the international community.

"A lot of time has passed, and the problem has become much bigger. I hope we will be able to overcome this problem soon."

Responding to another query, the minister said maintaining public trust remained a major task, as pointed out by the inspector general of police.

"We have earned public trust. The people will judge how much."

Govt bets on DP World

FROM PAGE 1

Modern equipment, digital systems, international operating standards and global logistics connections will make NCT more competitive, Rabiul said.

Initial modernisation work is expected to be completed within six months, while the terminal is expected to operate at full capacity within about two years.

Truck waiting time, currently around 24 hours, could fall to two hours in the first year and eventually to one hour, while vessel turnaround time is also expected to decline from about 2.5 days to between one and 1.5 days.

The container dwell time at the port could fall to around three to four days after modernisation, he said.

That could have a significant impact on trade.

According to World Bank data cited at the event, cutting dwell time by one day could increase Bangladesh's exports by about 7.4 percent.

Faster cargo handling would shorten lead times for exporters and help make the garment and other export industries more competitive, Ahsan said.

The government has also sought to allay concerns over job losses.

The existing port employees would not lose their jobs under the agreement and their current gross salaries would remain unchanged, Rabiul said. "Modernisation could instead create demand for more skilled workers."

Rabiul acknowledged public concerns over the deal, saying some opposition was linked to fears over job security and loss of influence.

"We respect their views," he said, adding that the government would engage with stakeholders if they had specific concerns.

DP World Executive Chairman Essa Kazim said the company would connect NCT with its global network of ports, logistics infrastructure and supply chain services.

"Bangladesh is an increasingly important trading and manufacturing economy, and we are committed to supporting its continued development," he said.

After the signing ceremony, a DP World delegation led by Kazim met with Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at his office in the secretariat and discussed various issues of mutual interest, including trade and investment between Bangladesh and the UAE, port management and development of the logistics sector.

Tarique sought DP World's investment in free trade zones and rail-based inland container depots in Bangladesh, reports UNB.

The DP World representatives expressed interest in cooperation and investment in the areas.

Over in the port city, leaders of protesting workers' organisations at Chattogram have given the government a three-day ultimatum to open talks over the deal with DP World.

They also announced a token hunger strike for Monday and warned that the movement would be intensified if the government failed to hold talks with protesting port workers and employees by October 11.

The announcement came at a rally organised by Chattogram Bandar Rokkha Sangram Parishad, a platform of pro-BNP workers' organisations active at the port, in front of the main gate of the port's administrative building.

Leaders and activists of several political and labour organisations, including Sramik Karmachari Oikkya Parishad, the Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Basad) and Basad (Marxist), also joined the programme under the banner of Chattogram Bandar Rokkha Committee.

After the rally, participants brought out a procession through roads adjacent to the port area.

Addressing the gathering, Parishad Coordinator Humayun Kabir said the protesters are still willing to engage in dialogue.

They still believe the government is ready to discuss the issue and listen to the arguments of the port's workers and employees.

He criticised the government for signing the agreement without making its details public.



DP World Chairman Essa Kazim and CPA Chairman Rear Admiral SM Moniruzzaman pose for a photo after signing the deal for operating the New Mooring Container Terminal at a ceremony at the Invest Bangladesh auditorium in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Sheikh Nurullah Bahar, general secretary of the Chattogram divisional unit of Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, accused the government of ignoring public opinion and the concerns of port workers and employees.

He questioned what safeguards, if any, had been included in the agreement for workers.

Bahar also accused Invest Bangladesh Chairman Ashik Chowdhury and the CPA chairman of influencing the government to hand over the NCT to DP World.

No agreement would be accepted unless port workers and employees agree to it, said Parishad Co-Coordinator Ibrahim Khokan, who is also general secretary of Bandar Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal.

Vacant posts hurting children, taxing teachers

FROM PAGE 1

SHORTAGES HIT CLASSROOMS

During visits to secondary schools in several districts, many teachers complained of heavy workloads, while students said gaps in classroom learning were pushing them towards coaching centres and lessons on YouTube.

At Shariatpur Government Girls' High School, half of the 53 sanctioned teaching posts remained vacant, leaving 27 teachers to serve around 1,200 students.

This means one teacher was available for every 44 students whereas the National Education Policy 2010 set a target of one teacher for every 30 secondary school students.

The school has five English teachers against eight posts, four mathematics teachers against six and three Bangla teachers against eight. It has no sanctioned ICT teaching posts, forcing teachers from other disciplines to conduct ICT classes.

Many teachers who would usually take 15 to 17 classes a week were taking 25 to 27 classes.

Moreover, science practical classes were not being held regularly. "As these classes have become irregular, we have no choice but to rely on YouTube videos to understand many topics," said Nishat Tabassum, a Class-X science student at the school.

The situation is similar at Palong Tulasar Gurudas Government High School in the district, where 32 teachers are working against 53 sanctioned posts for 1,050 students.

Teacher shortages also persist in many schools in southern districts of Noakhali, Cox's Bazar and Rangamati.

At least 251 of the 452 sanctioned teaching posts remain vacant at 16 government high schools in Noakhali, while nine schools in Cox's Bazar have 109 vacancies against 226 sanctioned posts.

In Rangamati, 657 of 1,700 teaching posts were vacant across 117 secondary schools, said sources at the district's Secondary Education Office.

CONCERNS OVER LEARNING EQUITY

A national evaluation of student learning has exposed deep gaps in educational outcomes, raising concerns about the quality of classroom instruction at secondary schools.

The National Assessment of Secondary Students 2023 found that the average score among 26,601 Class VIII students assessed in science was just 32 percent.

Of the students surveyed, 48 percent were in the two lowest achievement bands and 22 percent in the top two.

Performance in Bangla, English and mathematics also fell in Classes VIII and X compared with 2019, with the steepest declines in Bangla and mathematics. The assessment did not examine teacher shortages as a cause.

Prof Manzoor said poor classroom teaching pushes students towards private coaching and tutoring. This puts low-income families at a particular disadvantage, as access to better teachers and smaller coaching groups increasingly depends on families' ability to pay.

"This situation turns school education into a commodity. Children's right to education is violated and the state's obligation is not fulfilled when a child gets only as much education as the family can pay for."

He called for coordinated short- and long-term measures, backed by funding and political commitment, to address the problem.

RECRUITMENT YET TO CATCH UP

Speaking at the Jatiya Sangsad on April 8, Milon said the Public Service Commission (PSC) was asked to recruit 2,330 teachers for government secondary schools.

He further said 728 BCS candidates were provisionally picked as non-cadre assistant teachers and steps were underway to create 782 ICT teaching posts.

While teacher recruitment in government secondary schools is carried out through PSC, MPO-listed institutions follow a separate recruitment process overseen by the Non-Government Teachers' Registration and Certification Authority (NTRCA) set up under a 2005 law.

NTRCA, which operates under the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), recommends candidates for entry-level vacancies. It was recently given the responsibility for recommending headteachers and assistant headteachers for MPO-listed institutions.

In March, NTRCA moved to recruit 2,881 headteachers and 3,296 assistant headteachers at MPO-listed institutions. Vivas for successful candidates were due to begin on October 1 but were deferred to October 15.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not contact NTRCA Chairperson Alif Rudaba and Secretary Rony Rahman on their mobile phones and via WhatsApp.

When contacted, DSHE Director General Prof Khan Moinuddin Al Mahmud Sohel said the directorate had repeatedly pressed the ministry and the PSC to speed up recruitment of teachers in secondary schools.

He said several hundred non-cadre candidates for teaching posts were still awaiting appointment or posting because police verification had not been completed.

Referring to ICT courses, he said efforts were underway to create ICT teaching posts, as the subject is compulsory.

He pointed out that filling the vacant posts will ease the shortage but will not solve the problem entirely. "We may need another two or three rounds of recruitment."

Noting the hurdles in retaining teachers in key subjects including English and mathematics, he said, "Teaching is not attractive enough at present in terms of salary and other facilities."

"Teaching should be made more attractive, keeping in mind the socio-economic situation," he added.

[Our correspondents in Shariatpur, Noakhali, Cox's Bazar and Rangamati contributed to this report]

StanChart confirms retail banking exit

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focus in Bangladesh to concentrate on areas where our global footprint creates the greatest impact -- particularly international trade, cross-border capital flows and infrastructure financing. Bangladesh remains a vital pillar of our global network and our commitment to driving its long-term economic growth is as strong as ever," he said.

The bank said the move is in line with the group's broader strategic focus on cross-border and affluent clients, reaffirmed in its 2025 full-year results and at its May 2026 investor event.

Despite the planned exit from retail banking, Standard Chartered remains Bangladesh's top profit-making bank.

Its profit fell slightly to Tk 3,219 crore last year from the previous year, but remained higher than that of any other bank in the country. BRAC Bank ranked second with Tk 2,250 crore.

The London-based multinational bank has been operating in Bangladesh for 120 years.

Standard Chartered said client service remains its highest priority throughout the transition period. "Operations will continue business as usual and we will work closely with our clients to ensure a seamless transition with minimal disruption," the bank said.

It also said it remained committed to supporting employees affected by the deal process in a fair, transparent and professional manner, adding that their wellbeing was a key consideration.

Several Standard Chartered Bangladesh officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the bank has around 1,500 employees in its front and back offices.

In recent weeks, senior executives of private banks, including Pubali Bank, Mutual Trust Bank, BRAC Bank and City Bank, confirmed that they had begun preliminary talks with Standard Chartered Bangladesh about taking over its retail business.

A mid-level official of the bank, preferring anonymity, said retail banking is highly competitive and involves considerable operational challenges in Bangladesh, while Standard Chartered has stronger prospects in corporate banking.

The bank therefore wants to concentrate on its strengths in trade and corporate business, the official said.

Standard Chartered had already been scaling back its physical network in Bangladesh, saying it was promoting cashless transactions.

Five years ago, it had 24 branches and around 90 ATM booths. It now has 18 branches and 70 self-service terminals, including ATMs and cash recycling machines, according to its website.

The bank recently suspended its fund-transfer facility to mobile financial services amid security concerns, after users on social media reported alleged fraud involving the service.

Standard Chartered's move follows HSBC Bangladesh's decision last year to wind down its retail banking operations in the country.

HSBC said the decision followed a review of its retail business and was part of a broader reassessment of its global portfolio. Although its retail operation in Bangladesh had remained profitable and was growing, the closure affected around 257 to 300 employees.

Bangladesh has seen other foreign banks leave the retail market. American Express Bank withdrew from the country in 2006, while Citibank, NA operates strictly as a corporate and institutional bank and has never established a retail banking operation here.

Standard Chartered's planned exit is also part of a broader global restructuring by the bank.

It has started selling its retail banking portfolio in Bahrain to focus on institutional and corporate growth. In Sri Lanka, it sold its wealth management and retail banking operations while retaining its institutional business.

As part of the restructuring, the bank has also withdrawn local banking operations from Angola, Cameroon, The Gambia, Lebanon, Jordan, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe. In Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire, it exited consumer, private and business banking while retaining corporate and institutional operations.