

US envoy holds urgent meeting with foreign minister, expresses concern over security

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The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk: US ambassador in Dhaka Peter D Haas held an urgent meeting with foreign minister AK Abdul Momen on Wednesday following the incident during the envoy's visit to the house of a missing BNP leader in Dhaka. At the meeting, Peter Haas expressed concern over his security, citing leaks of his personal information. Prior to the meeting, Peter Haas visited the home of BNP leader Sajedul Islam, who has gone missing for over a decade, in capital's Shaheenbagh on Wednesday morning. When the US envoy was leaving the house, a group of people tried to surround him and he left the area with the help of security members.

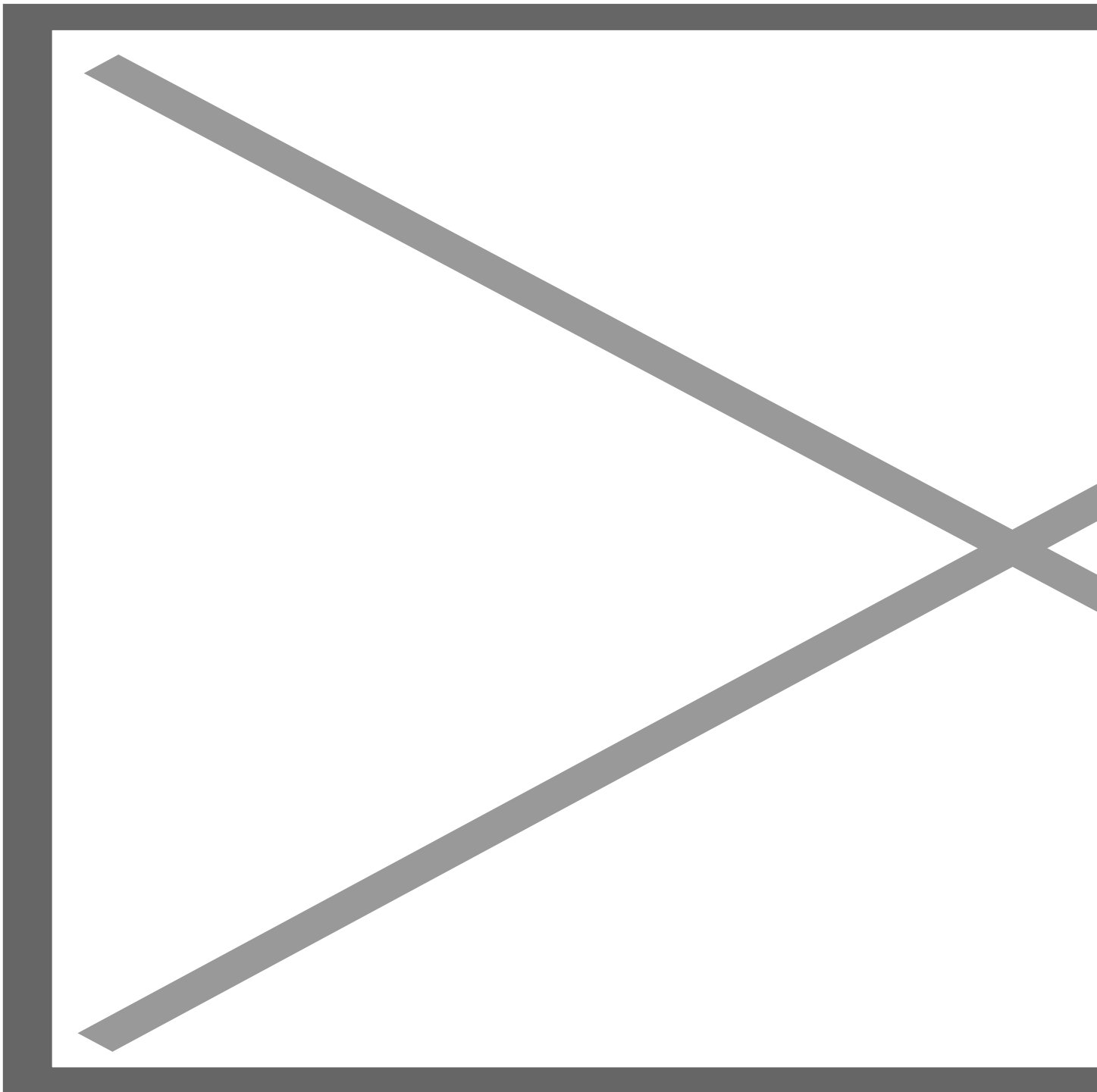
US embassy spokesperson told Prothom Alo that the envoy left the home of Sajedul Islam without ending the meeting due to security concerns and they have informed the matter to the high level of the government. After that, Peter Haas went to the foreign ministry and held a meeting with minister AK Abdul Momen. The minister said this in reply to a query on the side-lines of a programme at Bangabandhu International Conference Center in capital on Wednesday evening.

Abdul Momen told newsmen, "The US ambassador met me on an urgent basis. The envoy told me that he went to a house, there were many people outside the house during his arrival, and they wanted to speak to him. His security personnel advised him to leave the place as soon as possible saying 'They will block your vehicle.' So, he left the place hurriedly due to uncertainty over security and that made him very dissatisfied."

Foreign minister said, "I told the envoy that it is our responsibility to ensure your security. Has anyone attacked you or your personnel? He said 'no,' but he said his vehicle may have been scratched, but he is not sure. I have told him I will give security to your people and if you want more security we will give that too." Citing that the US envoy expressed concern over leaking his personal information, Abdul Momen said he told him, "We don't know who revealed information of your visit and how. The foreign ministry knows nothing. You did not inform us. Who leaked the information? The envoy could not answer. We said you should find out how information on your visit was leaked, your people might have done it."

Peter Haas visited the house of Sajedul Islam, who was general secretary of BNP's Dhaka city Ward No 30 unit (now Dhaka north Ward No 25). Sajedul Islam has gone missing since 4 December 2013. Family alleged members of law enforcement agencies picked up him ahead of the 2014 election. Sanjida Islam, sister of missing Sajedul Islam, is the coordinator of 'Mayer Daak,' a platform of the families of those who have been victim of enforced disappearance. She told when the US envoy went to their home a group of people from a platform called 'Mayer Kanna' were standing outside the house, holding banners. 'Mayer Kanna' is a platform of the families of the army and air force members, who were sacked, jailed and hanged following the 2 October 1977 abortive coup.

Sanjida Islam told Prothom Alo the US envoy went to their house a little after 9:00am and stayed there for half an hour. US State Department Bangladesh Desk officer Lika Johnston accompanied the US envoy there. She said, "A police team led by Tejgaon police station officer-in-charge Apurba Hasan visited our house on Tuesday and Wednesday on the occasion of Peter Haas' visit. But, local leaders and activists of Awami League and people from Mayer Kanna had taken position on streets in front of our house 40 minutes before the US envoy arrived."



“When the envoy was getting into his car after leaving our home, those people tried to speak to him. At one stage, there was chaos. Later, Peter Haas got into his car with the help of police members who were deployed for his security,” Sanjida Islam added. Speaking to Prothom Alo, Tejgaon police station officer-in-charge Apurba Hasan said, “A group of people from a platform called ‘Mayer Kanna’ came to give a memorandum to the US envoy. He got into his vehicle after leaving that house and he left the place without paying attention to anything else. There was no chaos.”

Citing the conversation with Peter Haas over this matter, foreign minister said, “I told him if anyone attacks you, assaults your people and destroys public and private property, I will arrest them and we will give you protection.” Since media in Bangladesh is very vocal, he cannot to prevent them, Abdul Momen said adding, if Peter Haas wants, he can keep the media 10-15 feet away from him.

At the meeting, Abdul Momen said they cannot prevent the people who gathered outside the home of Sajedul Islam during the US envoy's visit since everyone has freedom of speech in the country. He said, "We cannot prevent people from going there. We will keep them at distance for your (Peter Haas) protection. They will give their speech, I cannot arrest them. If there is an attack on you and your people, or there will be damage to public and private property for sure and I can arrest them."