

Yangon suspends Bay of Bengal exploration

Myanmar has suspended its explorations in the Bay of Bengal after Bangladesh sent a diplomatic mission to Yangon and also got China to put pressure on the matter.

South Korean company Daewoo, which had been undertaking exploration in the the Bay of Bengal on behalf of Myanmar, has withdrawn its three ships manned by personnel from India, the US and Australia. To defuse tension, Dhaka too withdrew its frigate Wednesday.

'We came to know that Korean company Daewoo had suspended exploration in view of the security problem and maybe the Myanmar authorities have also accepted the suspension of exploration,' a Bangladesh foreign office official was quoted as saying by the New Age newspaper.

Dhaka had sought Beijing's cooperation in convincing Yangon to suspend exploration in the Bay since China has enormous foreign policy influence on Myanmar, foreign office officials said.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury Wednesday spoke with the Chinese Ambassador Zheng Qingdian and apprised him of the situation arising out of Myanmar's offshore exploration of mineral resources.

'I have explained our peaceful intention to our Chinese friend and expressed our hopes that Myanmar dismantles the installations on the disputed waters,' Chowdhury told reporters.

Unnerved by Yangon ignoring its warnings against conducting exploration work in the Bay of Bengal, where territorial claims remain undecided, Dhaka had deployed naval troops on board four ships to reinforce its position and simultaneously sent a diplomatic mission to Yangon seeking peaceful resolution of the crisis. The three member delegation is led by Foreign Secretary Touhid Hossain.

Bangladesh Navy officials in the port city Chittagong told the New Age newspaper that warship BNS Kapotakkha was pulled back Wednesday amid hopes for an amicable settlement of the issue.

'We called back our frigate as tension eased while Myanmar stopped exploration activities,' said a navy official.

Explorations for oil and gas in the Bay of Bengal's northern reaches have become crucial, but have been stalled because the maritime boundaries between Bangladesh and its two neighbours, India and Myanmar, remain unclear.

Dhaka opened talks with India and Myanmar after over two decades this year. However, they remained preliminary in nature and there was no breakthrough.

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