

## Myanmar halts gas exploration in disputed waters: Bangladesh

Authorities in Bangladesh Sunday claimed that Myanmar has suspended oil and gas exploration in the disputed waters in Bay of Bengal as a result of Dhaka's efforts to defuse tension between the two countries.

'Diplomatic endeavours and a strong presence by the Bangladesh Navy resulted in the suspension of exploration by Myanmar in the disputed waters,' a statement issued by the Inter-Service Public Relations office of the country's defence ministry said.

The statement said Myanmar also withdrew its warship and Korean rig Trans Ocean Legend from the disputed waters 50 nautical miles from St. Martin's island amidst heavy presence from the Bangladesh Navy.

'There has been a conflict between Bangladesh and Myanmar over disputed territorial waters over a long period of time. It became more complex after the probability of finding gas in the disputed area,' the statement signed by Lt. Colonel Kazi Md Kabirul Islam said.

Tensions between the two neighbours escalated after Myanmar authorities allegedly intruded last week into Bangladesh's territorial waters in the Bay of Bengal to explore for oil and gas.

Bangladesh's defence ministry statement said that on Nov 1, Bangladesh naval ship Nirbhoy observed four drilling ships, a tug boat and a rig operating in the territorial waters claimed by Bangladesh.

'For that reason the Bangladesh Navy intensified its patrols augmenting more warships in the disputed area. At the same time Bangladesh started its diplomatic activities. Such as, a high level delegation went to Myanmar to have bilateral talks on this issue.'

Dhaka summoned Myanmar's envoy twice to lodge a complaint asking Yangon to immediately withdraw the installations from the disputed waters and suspend exploration until the maritime boundary between the two countries was settled.

Myanmar trashed Bangladesh's claim saying it was 'wrongful and unlawful' and initially vowed to continue exploration in the bay waters.

A meeting between Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Touhid Hossain and Myanmar Deputy Foreign Minister Maung Myint ended inconclusively Thursday in Myanmar with both sides agreeing on another round of talks to be held in Dhaka sometime in mid-November.

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