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GARMENT WORKERS

Salary hike underway  
Govt moves to set up wage board

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to form a new minimum wage board for garment workers. The fresh wage structure will take retrospective effect from May 1.

Initially, the industry leaders strongly opposed the move but later agreed to comply with the government's decision.

Textiles Minister Abdul Latif Siddique made the announcement after a meeting with garment owners, labour leaders and other ministers at the secretariat yesterday.

He did not elaborate on the matter. He only said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had made the decision and left the venue without taking questions from reporters.

Emerging from the meeting, garment owners told journalists they opposed the decision to form a new wage board. They argued they were not in a position to raise the salaries of their employees as business had been down owing to political unrest and global recession.

They also said they were not consulted before the decision was made.

Later, leaders of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) and two former presidents of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) held an emergency meeting with Labour and Employment Minister Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju.

At the meeting, they agreed to the government decision and promised

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Cyclone eyeing Chennai

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mahasen, the first cyclone of the season formed in the Bay of Bengal, was moving slowly towards the Chennai coast of India with the possibility of changing course toward Bangladesh, Met officials said.

"It is too early to comment on where and when it will hit," Bazlur Rashid, a meteorologist at Dhaka Met office, told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

The cyclone was moving at about 10 kilometres per hour, and it might remain stationary and gain energy and change its direction,

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

"Have the rice I cooked and feed your brother and sister too". That was the instruction Sabina got from her mother Mita as the latter rushed to work on the morning of April 24. In the photo Sabina is seen in tears among her siblings and grandmother yesterday when her mother's body was identified 19 days after Rana Plaza collapsed in Savar.

Political Impasse  
Busy day for UN team

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

UN Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernández-Taranco yesterday stressed the need for creating a healthy atmosphere for holding the next parliamentary election to strengthen the democratic process in Bangladesh.

"There is no alternative to democracy for development. The government and the opposition will be able through discussion to hold a parliamentary election transparent and acceptable to all," observed the visiting UN official at a meeting with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury at her office, according to a press release issued by the parliament secretariat.

Talking to journalists later, Shirin said, "They [UN] think no solution is possible through conflict. They are urging all to search for a solution through talks."

Replying to a question, the Speaker said she told the UN

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BODIES RECOVERED 3 DEATH TOLL 1,127  
A few expected left  
Rescue reaches final stage

PANKAJ KARMAKAR and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The possibility of finding more bodies under the wreckage of the ill-fated Rana Plaza narrows, as the rescue operation enters the final stage.

Brig Gen Azmal Kabir, commander of 14 independent engineer brigade at Dhaka cantonment, told The Daily Star yesterday that the rescue operation had entered the final stage with the rescuers reaching the basement.

"The front side of the basement is waterlogged. Once we remove the water, we will be able to clearly see whether any body is still trapped in the basement. I hope it will not take much time to finish the job," he said.

Three more bodies were pulled out of the debris yesterday, the 19th day into the building collapse in

Savar, raising the death toll to 1,127.

Many of the bodies had decomposed beyond recognition, as those had remained trapped under the wreckage for days. At least 234 unidentified bodies have been buried so far at Jurain graveyard in the capital.

Blood samples of nearly 400 family members and DNA samples of more than 200 unidentified bodies had been collected for DNA tests at Dhaka Medical College, said Ahmad Ferdous, scientific officer at DMC.

Scores of people are still looking for the bodies of their loved ones at the site of the collapsed building.

"I want my son's body, even if it is decomposed," said elderly rickshaw-puller Huzur Ali. His 27-year-old son Mahedul Islam was working on the 4th floor

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Sharif sweeps  
Poised to become Pak PM for third time; Manmohan, Karzai want better ties

AGENCIES

Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday looked set to return to power for a third term, with an overwhelming election tally that just weeks ago seemed out of reach for a man who had been ousted by a coup and was exiled abroad before clawing his way back as an opposition leader.

As unofficial returns continued to roll in yesterday, state TV estimates put Sharif close to the majority needed to govern outright.

Even if he falls short of that threshold, independent candidates almost

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PAKISTAN POLLS
Pakistan Muslim League (N)
128 (leading in)
Pakistan People's Party
32
Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
31
SOURCE: GEO TV

Another week to go to waste  
Jamaat calls hartal for tomorrow, BNP plans for Wednesday, Thursday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami has called for another day-long strike tomorrow, a day after its dawn-to-dusk hartal ended yesterday without much violence except for a few cocktail blasts, torching of vehicles and vandalism in different parts of the country.

In a statement, Jamaat's acting secretary general Rafiqul Islam Khan said Tuesday's strike was in protest against the arrest on Sunday of top party leader AKM Yusuf, the accused founder of Razakars, which assisted the Pakistani army during the 1971 Liberation War.

Yusuf, 84, has been sent to jail pending hearing of his bail petition today.

The latest hartal comes on the heels of a series of shutdowns enforced by Jamaat and pro-Jamaat student body Islami Chhatra Shibir, a blockade of Dhaka by Hefajat-e Islam as well as hartals by the 18-party opposition alliance led by former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

In the backdrop of continuing political conflict and pressure building on the government to accept opposition's demand for the next election to be held under a caretaker government, the BNP is likely to call for further strikes next Wednesday and Thursday, leaving the country again on virtual halt for five days through the weekend.

Businessmen expressed their displeasure and despair over the shutdowns, asking what was the logic behind calling frequent strikes when the whole economy was

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PHOTO: COURTESY

Rapid Action Battalion personnel take Jamaat-e-Islami Nayebe-e-Ameer AKM Yusuf to Dhanmondi Police Station yesterday after his arrest in connection with crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War in 1971.

Yusuf lands in jail  
War crimes charges against Razakar founder accepted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami leader AKM Yusuf, known as the founder of the infamous Razakar force that collaborated with the occupation Pakistani army in killing three million Bangladeshes in 1971, landed in jail yesterday.

International Crimes Tribunal-1 yesterday took the charges against him into cognisance and issued a warrant of arrest around noon. About an hour after the issuance of the warrant law enforcers arrested Yusuf at his Dhanmondi residence.

The tribunal also fixed today for hearing the defence's bail petition.

A team of Rapid Action Battalion led by Maj Anwarul Haque, second-in-command (2IC of Rab-2), picked up the founder of the Razakar force from his Golap Villa residence on Road 10/A in Dhanmondi and whisked him off to Rab-2 headquarters at

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Proposal on Ticfa ready for cabinet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commerce Minister GM Quader yesterday said Bangladesh agreed in principle to sign the Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement with the US, mainly to boost the trade with the world super power.

The commerce ministry today will place a proposal at the weekly cabinet meeting at the Bangladesh Secretariat, chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, for approval.

"We are agreed to sign the Ticfa soon. But signing it is not any pre-requisite for continuation of the Generalised System of Preferences in the US market," GM Quader told journalists at a press briefing at his secretariat office yesterday.

The GSP is a duty-waiver scheme of the US government for the least developed countries, introduced in 1976.

The Minister added that the Ticfa was a necessary platform to resolve bilateral trade issues between the two countries.

"The US is the single largest export destination for Bangladesh. We will do whatever we need to main

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