

No steps taken

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"We have not received any assistance to get rid of this self-confinement," Belal told The Daily Star over the phone.

All the 27 Bangladeshis, who used to work in the Iraqi company Al-Iskan, have been passing their days in an inhuman condition at the building since June 11.

Belal said they tried to go to a safer place near Irbil, a city of Kurdistan, but could not as the owner of their company took away their passports and heavy fighting was continuing in the area.

"Two days back, company officials assured us that they would first move us to Irbil and later send back to Bangladesh by seven or eight days. But we do not know what they can actually do for us," he added.

Contacted, Bangladesh ambassador to Iraq yesterday said the embassy officials had been trying to move the Bangladeshis to a safer place with the assistance of international agencies.

"We know they are unsafe. We have been communicating with their owner and the international agencies to arrange their safe passage soon," Maj Gen Rezanur Rahman Khan said.

"But the city is still under the control of rebels and it is difficult to reach there," he told this correspondent over the phone.

Belal also said six other Bangladeshis, who were with them, were sent to another place in Tikrit by their company a few days back.

"We do not know how they are at present, as it has become difficult to communicate with them," he added.

Bangladeshi workers in Iraq's northern regions, including Tikrit, Mosul and Basra, are in serious trouble as Sunni rebels have been fighting the Iraqi government forces since June 5.

The Iraqi army yesterday launched an assault on the Sunni rebels in Tikrit. Fierce clashes began in the city after some helicopters landed near Tikrit's university campus.

At least one of the copters was downed by the rebels, according to Reuters.

With Sunni militants and rebels gradually moving in around the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, there is a dramatic race going on between slow-moving efforts to defuse the crisis politically and rapid developments on the ground, reports BBC.

Govt to bring

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She was speaking at a rally at the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan in the afternoon marking the Awami League's 65th founding anniversary.

Also the AL president, Hasina said the government is not only collecting information about the accounts with Swiss banks, but also with banks in other countries and would take measures to bring the money back.

"There's no doubt that she [BNP chief] will be caught too. Money of her one son has been brought back and Inshallah [God willing] we will be able to bring back others' money [siphoned off abroad]," she mentioned.

According to latest data of the Swiss National Bank, Bangladeshis have deposited Tk 3,236 crore with different Swiss banks till 2013, a 62 percent rise over the previous year.

Bangladesh Bank has already sent a letter to the financial intelligence unit (FIU) of Switzerland for signing a memorandum of understanding to get access to information on money laundering.

Castigating BNP, the PM said the party had played with people's fate, patronised terrorism, smuggled money abroad, resorted to killings and lootings when it had been in power.

She alleged that all members of the Zia family, including late president Ziaur Rahman, his wife BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and two sons Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko, are killers.

Calling BNP's decision to boycott January 5 national polls "wrong", the AL chief said the BNP chief is now turning to foreigners to get their sympathy as she has failed to draw public support to indulge in conspiracies.

Hasina urged the BNP chairperson not to speak ill of the government and the people to the foreigners.

Highlighting different development activities of the AL government, she said Bangladesh made all its achievements under the AL leadership. "And today Bangladesh has become a role model of development in the world," she mentioned.

"The Awami League is like a piece of diamond... the more you cut it, the more it will shine," noted the ruling party chief.

The PM directed the party men to strengthen the organisation at all levels.

AL leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Matia Chowdhury, Syed Ashraf Islam and Dipu Moni spoke at the rally, among others.



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, left photo, meets visiting Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj at Sonargaon hotel yesterday. Later in the day, Sushma called on Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad at the latter's parliament office.



PHOTO: STAR/BANGLAR CHOKH

No democracy in Bangladesh

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to build relations with the people of Bangladesh, not with any particular party or government.

"We want people-to-people contact, which is Saarc's main goal," Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, another member of the BNP delegation, quoted Swaraj as saying during the meeting at her Sonargaon Hotel suite.

The BNP, which boycotted the January 5 parliamentary polls, had blamed India for backing the Awami League in holding the election. The AL and its allies secured three-fourth majority through the election and formed government.

Replying to a query whether the BNP sought Indian assistance for arrangement of a midterm election in Bangladesh, Shamsher said the issue did not come up for discussion. "It's our internal matter and our people will settle it."

During the half-an-hour meeting beginning around 10:00am, Khaleda congratulated the new government of India and told the visiting Indian minister that Bangladesh people want deeper relations with India.

"With the election result of India, the ray of hope has arisen among the people of Bangladesh that a new chapter in the Bangladesh-India bilateral issues will open up," Shamsher quoted Khaleda as telling

Swaraj.

According to diplomatic sources, Khaleda at the meeting said her party would never allow Bangladesh territory to be used for terrorist activities against India or any other country.

She also called upon Swaraj to resolve all the pending bilateral issues, including the Teesta water sharing treaty, for mutual benefits.

The Indian minister, who was on the last leg of her maiden visit abroad as the foreign minister, appreciated Khaleda's stance and hoped both the countries would address each other's concern and cooperate for peace, progress and stability.

On pending issues, she assured Khaleda that her government already made some progress, and efforts were on to forge a national consensus about those.

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and BNP chairperson's advisers Reaz Rahman and Sabihuddin Ahmed were also in the delegation.

Later, Khaleda and Swaraj held one-to-one talks for 10 minutes.

"The external affairs minister's meeting with Khaleda Zia comes against the backdrop of the Indian government's efforts to reach out to all sections of Bangladesh society," said another Indian diplomat.

The BNP chief presented a Jamdani

sari to the Indian minister, said the meetings sources.

During a briefing at the airport, Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Syed Akbaruddin termed the Swaraj-Khaleda talks as a "courtesy meeting".

Asked about this meeting, Akbaruddin avoided a direct reply and summarised the outcomes of all the meetings held yesterday instead of being specific about Khaleda's.

"I want to summarise the outcomes of today's discussions. Across the widest spectrum of Bangladesh government and society, there are desire and feeling for greater friendship, greater cooperation and greater interaction with India," he said.

He also said the internal issues of Bangladesh need to be addressed and resolved by its people.

The BNP chief had to maintain the protocol and come to meet Indian external affairs minister at the latter's Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel suite since she no longer holds any official position following the January 5 election.

Khaleda, who was either prime minister or leader of the opposition since 1991 to 2013, was in a serious dilemma about meeting Swaraj at the hotel suite, sources say.

The Indian side stuck to maintaining the protocol as Swaraj cannot go to Khaleda's residence or office for the meeting. Finally, the BNP agreed to

meet the Indian minister at the hotel.

BNP insiders said the party made a serious mistake by not meeting Indian President Pranab Mukherjee during his first official foreign visit to Bangladesh in March 2013.

Only a year back, Pranab gave a warm welcome to Khaleda Zia at Rashtrapati Bhavan when she went to India at the invitation of Manmohan Singh government.

From that realisation, the party leadership was desperate to meet the external affairs minister in a bid to build trust with India, sources add.

MEETING WITH RAUSHAN

After the meeting with the BNP chief, Indian minister met Raushan Ershad, the leader of the opposition in parliament, at the latter's parliament office around 11:55am.

"It was just a courtesy call. We have discussed several bilateral issues including development in the power sector and different problems between two countries," Raushan told reporters after the meeting.

The Indian minister also invited her to visit India, she added.

Asked if they discussed the January 5 polls or the country's ongoing political issues, she said they did not.

Later, the two held a closed-door meeting at opposition leader's room.

Sushma Swaraj, who came here on Wednesday night, left yesterday after-

Swaraj's visit an 'excellent beginning'

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concerns and work in the spirit of good neighbourly attitude with each other," said Indian external affairs ministry spokesperson Syed Akbaruddin.

Delhi also wants to bolster relations and mutual understanding with Dhaka, but it prefers not to get involved in Bangladesh's internal politics, he stressed.

Sushma Swaraj, who wrapped her three-day-long first visit abroad as the external affairs minister of India, left Dhaka yesterday afternoon leaving an impression that the BJP government would work with the government of Bangladesh to take the bilateral relations forward.

"It is our view that the visit is extremely satisfying and fulfilling. She goes back to India and hopes to build on excellent start of our new government's relationship with Bangladesh," Akbaruddin said at a pre-departure short press briefing at the airport.

Like the previous day, Swaraj had a series of meetings yesterday as well. She met BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at her hotel suite.

Though the BNP claims that issues like the "absence of democracy" in

Bangladesh and if India wants such a democracy in its neighbour country were raised in the half-an-hour-long meeting, the Indian spokesperson described it as a "courtesy meeting" only.

"The external affairs minister's meeting with Khaleda Zia comes against the backdrop of the Indian government's efforts to reach out to all sections of Bangladesh society," said another Indian diplomat.

Interestingly, the BNP chairperson did not meet President Pranab Mukherjee during his first official foreign visit to Bangladesh after assuming office in March 2013.

"The Indian government will work with the government of Bangladesh and all other issues internal to Bangladesh will need to be addressed and resolved by the people of Bangladesh," the spokesman said, making it somewhat clear that the BJP government has no reservations in working with the Awami League government that came to power through a controversial election on January 5.

"We hope to continue to work with the leadership of Bangladesh to take

India-Bangladesh relationship forward," he added.

Swaraj began the last day of her stay with a visit to Dhakeshwari Temple where she offered prayers in the morning.

Speaking before the devotees there afterwards, she said India and Bangladesh share an excellent relation and it will be strengthened further.

"I came here with an open mind and we will continue our efforts to remove the obstacles to the relations between the two countries," she said in Hindi.

Later, Swaraj met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's younger sister Sheikh Rehana and the PM's daughter Saima Wazed Putal at the former's Sonargaon hotel suite.

Then Prime Minister's International Affairs Adviser Dr Gawher Rizvi and Economic Affairs Adviser Dr Mashiur Rahman called on Swaraj. This meeting was followed by Khaleda Zia's visit.

Swaraj ended her tour through meeting Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad at the latter's parliament office. She left Dhaka on a special plane around 1:30pm.

Syed Akbaruddin said the external

affairs minister is extremely grateful for the warm welcome given to her and the gracious hospitality of the government.

Gawher Rizvi told The Daily Star that the peoples of Bangladesh and India have a shared past and common aspirations and Sushma Swaraj's visit has reiterated the vision of the countries working together for a peaceful and prosperous future.

The Indian external affairs minister arrived here on Wednesday night on her first bilateral visit to demonstrate the importance her government gives to Bangladesh.

Though it was a "goodwill visit", Sushma had meetings with President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Bangladeshi counterpart AH Mahmood Ali during which bilateral issues, including Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) and proposed Teesta water sharing pact, prominently came up.

She also delivered a lecture on "India-Bangladesh relations: A Framework for Cooperation" at an event organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) on Thursday evening.

5th Social Business Day today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Social Business Day will be organised in Dhaka today with the aim of discussing ways to turn people into entrepreneurs for creating jobs as fighting unemployment has become a daunting task for countries around the world.

The 5th annual event, organised by Yunus Centre, will take place at Radisson Hotel on the theme of "We Are Not Job-Seekers, We Are Job-Givers -- Turning Unemployment into Entrepreneurship".

Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus will host the event and Kerry Kennedy, president of the Robert F Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, will join the opening session of the daylong event as the keynote speaker.

The event will also be attended by more than 1,000 participants. Of them, 275 are international participants from 31 countries.

The gathering is an opportunity to meet, connect, discuss and collaborate with the global social business community with the purpose of developing effective solutions to solve society's most pressing problems. The focus of this year's day is on tackling youth unemployment through social business.

A social business design lab session will be held during the event where social businesses from five countries will be presented. There will be a Social Business Marketplace showcasing social businesses from all over the globe.

A highlight of the day will be special circus performance by Phare Social Business Circus from Cambodia which trains street children to become modern circus artists.

White dogs

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vulnerable include the Dogo Argentino breed, white bulldogs, Dalmatians, boxers, whippets, beagles and white or multi-coloured cats with white patches have skin that is very sensitive to light, especially on their head.

As with human beings, animals' skin with little or no pigmentation is very sensitive to the sun and those parts which are regularly exposed to UV rays are vulnerable.

Horvath-Ungerböck said: "Some animals particularly enjoy lying on their backs to bask in the sun. This exposes the skin on their bellies, which is often hairless, to the rays of the sun, increasing the risk of sunburn."

In animals, the veterinary dermatologist said sunburn can cause itching or even pain for some, but getting sunburnt too often in animals could even cause pre-cancerous conditions or actual skin tumours.

The skin specialist explained how she had seen squamous cell carcinoma on the heads of white, outdoor cats as the result of chronic sun exposure, which meant the affected areas of the skin then had to be surgically removed.

But the skin specialist advised owners not to worry.

"Not every white dog or white cat needs sunscreen or clothing to protect it from the sun. If sun damage has already occurred though, or if an animal is highly sensitive, it is up to us to protect it from further damage," she said.

Risky living

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A huge number of mud and thatched houses in the areas have been built by cutting hills. Neither the district administration nor Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC) has taken any initiative to rehabilitate the vulnerable families, the local people complained.

Moniraj Begum of Sikdarpara has been living in such a thatched cottage. She said no one cares about their future or takes any initiative to rehabilitate them at a safer place.

Many more such thatched and semi-pucca houses are there on both sides of the Chittagong-Bandarban road, which are very risky in the rainy season.

However, the district administration so far has not taken any visible step to prevent locals from building houses on hill slopes or by cutting hills. It has not even taken action against the land grabbers and hill cutters, sources in the district administration admitted while talking to this correspondent.

Contacted, K M Tariqul Islam, deputy commissioner of Bandarban, said he had given directives to all upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) to alert people about possible landslides.

"I also ordered the district information office to make announcements all over Bandarban so that people could take shelter in safer places", he added.

The DC, however, claimed that no major hill cutting in Bandarban had taken place in recent days. He also added that the administration was prepared to tackle any natural disaster.

Crisis in Iraq takes new turn

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rebels can help push back Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant jihadists in Iraq, as Washington unveiled plans to boost Syria's opposition with \$500 million in arms and training.

The call came as he held talks with met with Ahmad Jarba, leader of the Syrian National Coalition after Washington unveiled plans to boost Syria's opposition with \$500 million in arms and training.

He also met Saudi King Abdullah a day after hosting urgent talks in Paris with the Saudi, Jordanian and UAE foreign ministers on the widening crisis in Iraq and Syria.

IOSIL is now fighting in both Iraq

and Syria, seeking to erase the frontiers and create a Sunni Islamic caliphate stretching from the Mediterranean Sea through Iraq.

Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who

commands unswerving loyalty from many Shia in Iraq and beyond, said

political blocs should agree on the next premier, parliament speaker

and president before the newly elected legislature meets on Tuesday.

Sistani's extraordinary intervention

into politics forces the pace of a

process that took nearly 10 months after Iraq's last election in 2010, and means the fate of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki - serving as caretaker after an election in April and battling to keep his job - could be decided within days.

The United States and other countries are pushing for a new, inclusive government to be formed as quickly as possible to counter the insurgency led by an offshoot of al Qaeda, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

Over the past fortnight, militants have overrun most majority Sunni areas in north and western Iraq with little resistance, advancing to within an hour's drive of Baghdad.

Iraq's million-strong army, trained and equipped by the United States, largely evaporated in the north after the militants launched their assault with the capture of the north's biggest city Mosul on June 10.

Thousands of Shia volunteers have responded to an earlier call by Sistani for all Iraqis to rally behind the military to defeat the insurgents.

Under Iraq's governing system put in place after the fall of Saddam Hussein, the prime minister has

always been a Shi'ite, the largely ceremonial president a Kurd and the speaker of parliament a Sunni.

Divvying up the three posts before parliament meets would require leaders from each of Iraq's three main ethnic and sectarian groups to commit to the political process and resolve their most pressing problems, including Maliki's fate.

Maliki, whose Shia-led State of Law coalition won the most seats in the April election, had been positioning himself for a third term before the onslaught began. Some Shia leaders have suggested he may be replaced with a less polarising figure, although his closest allies say he aims to stay.

Sunnis accuse Maliki of excluding them from power and repressing their sect, driving armed tribal groups to back the insurgency led by ISIL. The president of Iraq's Kurdistan region has also said Maliki should go.

On the ground, Iraqi helicopters yesterday fired on a university campus in Tikrit, the hometown of former dictator Saddam Hussein and second major city to fall to insurgents more than a fortnight ago.

Government commandos launched an airborne assault on the campus on Thursday, a rare push back into rebel-held territory.

ISIL fighters' dramatic advance after capturing the main northern city Mosul on June 10 has transmitted the country and reignited the wholesale sectarian slaughter that saw at least 100,000 Iraqis killed during US occupation from 2003-2011.

US President Barack Obama has ruled out sending ground forces back, but has sent up to 300 advisers, mostly special forces troops, to help the government fight the insurgents.

ISIL fighters consider all Shias heretics deserving death. They proudly boasted of executing scores of Shia government soldiers captured in Tikrit.

New York-based rights group Human Rights Watch yesterday said analysis of photographs and satellite imagery indicated ISIL had killed as many as 190 men in at least two locations over three days after they captured Tikrit. The death toll may be much higher but the difficulty of locating bodies and getting to the area had prevented a full investigation, it added.