

## BANGLADESHIS IN IRAQ 700 workers go on strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 700 Bangladeshis yesterday went on work abstention protesting against assault of a fellow worker and lack of security at their workplace in Baghdad, the capital of trouble-torn Iraq.

Iraqi police arrested Saiful on Friday in Bismaya New City Project area, 10 kilometres away from Baghdad, where the agitated migrants work under Hanwha Engineering and Construction, a South Korean company.

"The police arrested Saiful yesterday [Friday] who is an Imam at our company mosque. They took him to a secret place and beat him up. On Friday night they left him near our labour camp," Abu Orthi [not his real name], one of the migrants, told The Daily Star over phone.

The workers did not call off the strike till filing of this report yesterday evening. A number of Bangladeshis, who work at the administration level of the company, were also trying to resolve the issue.

Iraqi army personnel had also searched the company's labour camps to find suspected Sunni rebels and ordered the migrants to maintain their (Iraqis') instruction, Abu alleged.

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## Samyabadi Dal faction joins BNP-led combine

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A faction of Samyabadi Dal last night joined the BNP-led alliance, turning it into a 20-party coalition now.

Led by Sayeed Ahmed, general secretary of Samyabadi Dal, around 50 leaders of the left-leaning party joined the opposition alliance by presenting a bouquet to alliance chief Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office.

Welcoming Samyabadi Dal, Khaleda later announced the official inclusion of the party in the alliance.

On June 4, the faction leaders called on Khaleda and expressed their eagerness to join the opposition alliance. Later the 19-party alliance leaders agreed in principle to include Samyabadi Dal in the coalition.

Earlier, a faction of the Jatiya Party led by Kazi Zafar Ahmed joined the opposition alliance after the January 5 election was boycotted by the BNP-led combine.

## Quader slams

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Sinohydro was awarded seven out of 10 packages of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway project.

Instead of blacklisting the company for breaching contract and refusing to complete the expansion of Dhaka-Chittagong highway, the communications ministry has been persuading it into doing the job.

In January 2010, Sinohydro Corporation won the contract for expanding around 140 kilometres of the highway into a dual carriage-way by December 2013. After that, it started dillydallying to do the job, saying it would not finish the work unless the allocation is increased which it can't do as per the procurement rules.

The government then sought help of the Chinese envoy in Dhaka to resolve the problem but still the performance of the firm is frustrating, communications ministry officials said.

The project deadline had to be extended by a year already. And its cost rose to Tk 3,190 crore due to the inclusion of three rail overpasses and five bridges in the project, changes in its design, price adjustments and the Chinese company's delaying tactics.

About easing traffic on Dhaka-Chittagong highway, known as economic lifeline of the country, Quader called upon the transport owners for not overloading their vehicles during Ramadan.

A monitoring office will be opened at Chittagong Sarak Bhaban from today. The office will monitor traffic jam and condition of roads and take measures accordingly, he said.

The minister also said that several teams will also conduct simultaneous repair work on the highway to ensure smooth traffic movement.

Lawmaker Didarul Alam, Chittagong Port Authority Chairman Rear Admiral Nizam Uddin Ahmed, Chittagong Deputy Commissioner Mejbah Uddin, Chittagong Metropolitan Police Commissioner Md Shafiqul Islam, Deputy Inspector General of Chittagong Range Md Nowsher Ali, Chittagong Police Super AKM Hafiz Akter and leaders of transport owners and workers were present at the meeting.



Firemen and locals trying to douse the flames in Jhutpatti slum in Mirpur-10 in the capital yesterday. Around 160 shanties were gutted in the fire.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

## Ctg, Sylhet airports shut for 6-hr a day

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considering morning to evening operations of the airports in Chittagong and Sylhet in 1984. The operation time and airports' capacity expanded, but the manpower remained the same," Caab Director (ATS/Aerodromes) Azad Zahurul Islam said.

He said the manpower shortage plagued all airports and units as there has not been a recruitment for around four years due to a court order.

The court issued the order after some daily basis employees filed a writ seeking the court's order banning new recruitments until their services were regularised.

Azad, however, said the writ had recently been vacated, clearing the way for recruitments.

The closure of Shah Amanat

International Airport in Chittagong and MAG Osmani International Airport in Sylhet is causing inconvenience to different airlines, particularly Biman Bangladesh Airlines, sources said.

Biman officials said in case of delays of any scheduled flights to Chittagong and Sylhet airports, they would have to land the plane at Shahjalal and then fly to the airports when they open, causing sufferings to passengers and loss to Biman.

In reply to the Biman managing director's request for an early watch extension at Sylhet airport, Azad wrote on June 19 that due to the acute shortage of manpower in all airports, same set of officers and staff continue to work for 18-22 hours, which was not safe for operation considering human performance.

He requested the Biman MD to consider the shortage of manpower and the performance limitation before asking for early watch or watch extensions.

Azad told The Daily Star that the Caab was still keeping the operation of the airports open when they are requested for delayed flights, but he feared Caab might not continue to do so in future.

The existing Caab organogram, approved upon an ordinance in 1985, has 3,716 posts with a chairman as its head. Caab is awaiting government approval for its restructured organogram that proposes creating around 7,000 new jobs to correct serious lapses in security, supervision and monitoring at airports.

Caab had submitted the draft organogram to the civil aviation ministry in February last year pro-

posing 13,776 posts for officials and staff. The ministry after scrutiny reduced the number to 10,694 and forwarded it to the establishment ministry in April.

"In the last 30 years we couldn't recruit any additional manpower although the aviation activities have increased 10 to 15 times," a top Caab official said.

Biman officials said usually airlines want their flights to land at airports at late hours, so that passengers could be out of the airport in the morning and go to their destinations safely.

"If flights land in late hours we can send them to other destinations in the morning, considered the prime time for departures," a Biman official said wishing anonymity.

## Iraqi forces set to retake Tikrit

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premier to be chosen without delay to tackle Islamist rebels threatening to tear apart the country.

International agencies have raised alarm bells over the humanitarian consequences of the fighting, with up to 10,000 people having fled a northern Christian town in recent days and 1.2 million displaced by unrest in Iraq this year.

Thousands of soldiers, backed by air cover, tanks and bomb disposal units, were advancing on Tikrit -- now-executed dictator Saddam Hussein's hometown -- which fell to insurgents on June 11.

Witnesses said loyalists were moving toward Tikrit from the west and engaged in heavy clashes.

"A large military operation started today to clear Tikrit of ISIL," Staff Lieutenant General Sabah Fadlawi told AFP, saying its fighters now have two choices "flee or be killed."

Earlier sources inside the city told CNN that the Iraqi security forces entered the city supported by special forces and fighters from among the local tribes, and had gained control.

He said that fighters from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) retreated in the direction of Kirkuk

and Nineveh provinces.

Helicopter-borne troops swooped into a strategically located university campus in the city on Thursday, with sporadic clashes reported throughout yesterday.

Taking the university is seen as an important step towards regaining control of Tikrit, one of the biggest cities held by the militants.

Iraqi forces were carrying out air strikes against insurgents inside the city, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's security spokesman said.

They were also now in full control of a key road from Baghdad to Samarra, between the capital and Tikrit, Lieutenant General Qassem Atta added.

Although they initially wilted in the face of the offensive in majority Sunni Arab areas that began on June 9, the security forces have appeared to perform more capably in recent days.

A senior US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said "a few" armed drones were being used over Baghdad as a precaution to safeguard Americans, but they will not be used for offensive action against the militants. The Pentagon confirmed that among the manned and unmanned US aircraft flying over Iraq

to carry out surveillance, some were carrying bombs and missiles.

World leaders have insisted that a political settlement be reached among Iraq's Shia Arab, Sunni Arab and Kurdish communities to thwart the militant threat.

In a striking political intervention on Friday that could signal the demise of Maliki's eight-year tenure, influential Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani urged political blocs to agree on the next premier, parliament speaker and president before a newly elected legislature meets in Baghdad on Tuesday.

"The next 72 hours are very important to come up with an agreement... to push the political process forward," said a lawmaker and ex-government official from the National Alliance, which groups all Shia Muslim parties.

The lawmaker, who asked for anonymity due to political sensitivities, said he expected internal meetings of the various parties and a broader session of the National Alliance including Maliki's State of Law list to be held through the weekend. Some Sunni Muslim parties were to convene later on Saturday.

Sistani's entry into the fray will make it hard for Maliki to stay on as

caretaker leader as he has since a parliamentary election in April. That means he must either build a coalition to confirm himself in power for a third term or step aside.

Meanwhile, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov yesterday said in Damascus that "Russia will not remain passive to the attempts by some groups to spread terrorism in the region."

"The situation is very dangerous in Iraq and the foundations of the Iraqi state are under threat," he said.

Iraq has appealed for US air strikes against the militants, but Washington has offered only up to 300 military advisers.

US official have said a proposed \$500 million plan to arm and train moderate rebels in neighbouring Syria could also help Iraq's fight against ISIL, which operates on both sides of the border.

Maliki's security spokesman has said hundreds of soldiers have been killed since the offensive began on June 9, while the UN puts the overall death toll at nearly 1,100.

The International Organisation for Migration warned that aid workers could not reach tens of thousands of Iraqis displaced by the violence, and called for humanitar-

## Fake votes

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The 43.5 percent turnout rate does not give the accurate statistic because huge fake votes were cast in the by-election, claimed the EWG.

The EWG deployed 60 observers in as many polling stations on the polling day to monitor the by-election. The report was prepared based on the information received from the election observers.

A group of people, said the report, entered into a polling station under ward no-11; forcibly took away some ballot papers from electoral officials and put those into ballot boxes after stamping. Law enforcers present there made no attempt to prevent the irregularity.

Some 50 to 60 people went to a polling centre in Alirtek under Sada upazila of Narayanganj; stayed there for around two hours and stuffed ballot boxes.

People intruded into some polling stations under ward no-13 around 2:00pm. About 10 percent votes were cast in those centres by that time. But the rate shot up to around 40 percent within just half an hour, noted the report.

Speaking at the press meet, EWG steering committee member Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah said casting such a huge fake votes will affect the development of a fair electoral system. "We want such evil practices be stopped for the sake of fair elections and democracy to flourish," he added.

EWG Director Abdul Alim was present, among others.

The Narayanganj-5 seat fell vacant following the death of Jatiya Party lawmaker Nasim Osman on April 30.

AKRAM LODGES COMPLAINT

Talking to The Daily Star last night, SM Akram said he made a complaint to the EC.

The by-election was not free, fair and impartial. The irregularities, specially a threat by a lawmaker to a law enforcement official, are alarming, noted the complaint.

However, a deputy secretary and a senior assistant secretary at the EC secretariat, who were designated to monitor the by-election, last night denied receiving any such complaint.

In another development, three eminent personalities in a statement last night urged Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad to take necessary steps in accordance with the appeal filed by Akram.

The three are famed jurist and Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain, Nagorik Oikko convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna and Bangladesh Gonorantrik Ainjibi Samity president Subrata Chowdhury.

## \$105m

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month, to a point of such extraordinary wealth that it is now seen as a potential political liability if she runs for president in 2016.

Bill Clinton has been paid \$104.9m for 542 speeches around the world between January 2001, when he left the White House, and January 2013, when Hillary stepped down as Secretary of State, according to a Washington Post review of the family's financial disclosures. Although slightly more than half of his appearances were in the US, the majority of his speaking income, \$56.3m, came from foreign speeches, many of them in China, Japan, Canada and Britain.

The financial industry has been Clinton's most frequent sponsor. The review showed that Wall Street banks and other financial services firms have hired Clinton for at least 102 appearances and paid him a total of \$19.6m.

Since leaving the State Department, Hillary has followed her husband in this profitable line of work, addressing dozens of industry groups, banks and other organisations for pay. Records of her earnings are not publicly available, but executives familiar with the engagements said her standard fee is \$200,000, and that she has been in higher demand than her husband.

The speaking itineraries could be a political challenge for Hillary should she run for president, giving opponents an opening to attack the Clintons for being beholden to powerful interests. Some companies that have paid Bill for speeches have faced scrutiny from federal regulators.

Matt McKenna, a spokesman for Bill Clinton, and Nick Merrill, a spokesman for Hillary Clinton, declined to comment.

Both Clintons also give speeches for free. Bill Clinton, for instance, makes frequent visits to the Clinton School of Public Service at the University of Arkansas — appearances that Skip Rutherford, the school's dean, called "an Arkansas fringe benefit."

The Clintons also sometimes request that sponsors pay their fee as a donation to the Bill, Hillary and Chelsea Clinton Foundation, the family's non-profit group that leads global philanthropic initiatives. Hillary Clinton is doing this with her \$225,000 fee for a speech this autumn at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, according to her office.

## Unusual scene at Sangsad

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parliaments.

"The BNP lawmakers behaved indecently in the 1996 parliament and also the last parliament. They made vulgar speeches and threw files in the House. They also beat up a BTV camera person," Hasina added.

She appreciated Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad for her "pragmatic decision" to take part in the January 5 parliamentary election, which the BNP-led opposition alliance and some other parties boycotted.

Raushan led the Jatiya Party in the January 5 parliamentary polls even after party chief HM Ershad had announced that the party would not take part in the one-sided electoral race.

"You [opposition leader] took the right decision at the right time," Hasina said.

Following negotiations with the ruling Awami League, as many as 18

of the 34 JP lawmakers had got walk-overs in the elections.

The JP emerged as the main opposition party and Raushan was recognised as the leader of the opposition with the status of a minister.

The Jatiya Party, however, received flak for allowing some of its MPs to join the Sheikh Hasina-led cabinet. Jatiya Party is now in the government and the opposition in parliament.

Referring to the criticism of Raushan for her role as the opposition leader by some quarters, Hasina said the opposition leader has made some constructive criticism during her speech on budget.

Raushan had expressed Jatiya Party's support for the Sheikh Hasina-led government for the sake of democracy and development.

"Along with providing support for the government for the sake of democracy, the Jatiya Party, as the opposition in parliament, will high-

light the mistakes of the government, if any, through constructive criticisms," Raushan added.

Raushan demanded that the government take stern actions against Hallmark-Sonali Bank loan and Destiny scams and those involved in the share market debacle to increase people's confidence in the financial institutions.

Requesting Hasina for promulgating a strict law to prevent food adulteration, she said the government has to take a strong stance in this regard to save the new generation.

"If you are the daughter of Bangabandhu then stop mixing poison in food items. Don't you have affection for the people of the country, won't you stop this poison? It's your responsibility," she said.

The opposition leader said the allocations for agriculture, health, human resources and education in the proposed budget were inadequate.

During the marathon discussion on the budget, which began on June 9, JP MPs lauded the government's many activities and criticised some actions. They supported most of the budgetary proposals.

Hasina yesterday termed the budget time-befitting and pro-people. "The entire world is stunned to see how Bangladesh is moving ahead with its limited resources."

Stressing the need for political stability to attain the desired development goals, she talked about her government's firm determination to implement the budget.

"Our government is capable of consolidating democracy," she added.

Pointing to those who criticise the government in TV talk shows at night, Hasina said, "I don't understand what pleasure they get out of making meaningless criticism against the government at the cost of their sleep."