

Tuba workers still wait

FROM PAGE 20

"We informed the government of the Tuba Group issue much earlier. We are still trying to engage the government and we intend to visit the workers on the site after that to solve the problem as soon as possible," said Abdus Salam Murshedy, former BGMEA president, at a press conference at the association's office in the capital yesterday.

Leaders of the apex body of garment makers also said they would ensure payments of the protesting workers by the end of the next week.

"We are currently negotiating to get a bank loan to pay the workers. We will pay them by the end of this [next] week," said SM Mannan Kochi, acting president of the BGMEA.

Kochi also said both the BGMEA and Tuba Group management tried to collect funds from the bank to pay workers but failed, as the group's owner was in jail.

The management paid Tk 2.5 crore to workers of other units of the group as those had work orders, but could not pay the workers of five units -- Bugshan Garments Ltd, Tuba Fashions Ltd, Tuba Textile Mills, Tayeb Design Ltd and Mita Design Ltd -- due to "non-cooperation of the banks", Kochi said.

A sum of Tk 4.14 crore is required to pay the arrears and bonuses of the 1,600 workers, who have been on hunger strike since Monday.

The workers did not go to their village homes to celebrate Eid and rather chose to stage the hunger strike on the factory premises in Hossain Market area of North Badda, Dhaka.

The aggrieved workers had also been holding Laili Begum, mother-in-law of Delwar Hossain, on the 11th floor of the factory building since Friday.

The protest gained momentum after some leaders of left-leaning political parties expressed solidarity with the agitating workers. Some of those leaders were seen with the Tuba workers on the protest scene during the Eid holidays.

Attacks on minorities

FROM PAGE 1

minority groups normally had economic or criminal dimensions, and could not be attributed solely to religious belief or affiliation, it added.

Government officials, including police, were sometimes slow to protect them from violence, and there were several reports of involvement of government-affiliated actors in such violence.

The report quoted religious minority leaders who complained that the ruling party men sometimes instigated such violence for political purposes.

The role of religion in the state played a considerable part in the political disagreements between the major parties, although the definition of Islam as the state religion has not been accompanied by any broad changes in the country's legal framework.

Representatives of religious minorities complained that the government sometimes failed to prevent abuses by nongovernmental actors against them, and police in some instances failed to arrest the perpetrators and the courts failed to administer justice effectively, it said.

Quoting Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), the report said 495 statues, monasteries, or temples were destroyed; 278 homes and 208 businesses were demolished; 188 persons were injured; and one person was killed during the year.

Local and international press,

AL shrugs

FROM PAGE 2

Yesterday, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said the agitations would be massive and centred on the capital.

Talking to journalists at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters, he said the next course of action would be finalised after consulting the senior leaders of the BNP-led 20-party alliance.

Also, BNP Dhaka city chief Mirza Abbas said they were preparing for the movement keeping in mind the issues like abduction, murder and forced disappearance.

Talking with journalists at his residence in the capital, he added that the government would have to shoulder all responsibilities if it obstructs their movements.

"Every day the workers are falling sick from the hunger strike. We want an immediate solution and payments," said Sumi Akter, a sewing operator of the group.

She said the workers could not go to their villages for Eid as they were not paid.

"Both the BGMEA and the Tuba management assured us of paying at least one month's wages before the festival, but they did not do so," Sumi said.

"I have not been able to properly feed my son in three months. I would rather die here protesting than see him starve at home," said Swapna, 26, who was being given intravenous (IV) fluid to avert dehydration since yesterday morning.

At the press conference, Tipu Munshi, another former president of the BGMEA, said Tuba Group MD might get bail from the court as his lawyers were trying to this end.

"But, we will not wait for the bail of Delwar Hossain to pay the workers. We will pay the workers by the end of this [next] week as negotiations with the bank are going on for a packing credit," Munshi said.

Munshi's assumption regarding Delwar's bail soon found some ground when the state minister for labour and employment said later in the day that the Tuba Group owner had already secured bail from the High Court before the Eid vacation.

"I hope the jail authorities will receive the bail order of the High Court by Sunday or Monday," Mujibul Haque Chunnu told The DailyStar over the phone yesterday.

He also believes the arrear issue would be resolved as soon as Delwar is released.

The Daily Star called Delwar's lawyer AM Aminuddin several times but his mobile phone was found switched off.

Acting Attorney General Murad Reza said he was not aware of Delwar's bail order.

"If Delwar gets a bail, I will seek a stay order from the Appellate Division," he said.

human rights organisations, and Hindu community leaders blamed Shibir for the attacks. Both the BNP and its ally Jamaat called for the attacks to cease and refused to accept any blame for the violence.

ASK stated that violence by Jamaat supporters had been designed to dissuade the government from conducting further war crimes trials.

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, tensions over issues that were not originally religious in nature sometimes acquired religious overtones because many of the inhabitants were Buddhist, Hindu or Christian members of tribal groups.

The International Christian Concern (ICC), an international NGO, stated that a small ring of five to 10 traffickers approached families in the hills, promising to provide Christian educational opportunities to their children.

According to the ICC, the traffickers sold the children to madrasas, where they were forcibly converted to Islam. The ICC reported the children were then given new names and identification papers and were not allowed to contact their families.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community also suffered harassment. Citing an example, it said the conservative Muslim group Tehrik-e-Khatme Nabuwwat reportedly assembled a 20,000-strong mob to set fire to the canopy, tents and stage of an annual Ahmadiyya event in Kaliakoir on February 26. Police made no arrests.

New shipping

FROM PAGE 20

Bangladeshi and Indian vessels.

"An understanding has been reached between the two countries for commencement of coastal shipping between the ports of Bangladesh and the eastern ports of India," a highly placed source said.

According to officials, Bangladesh first proposed to provide trans-shipment facilities to India through Chittagong and Mongla seaports during the shipping secretary level meeting held in Dhaka on July 2-3, 2012.

They said discussions were held through diplomatic channels to formalise the coastal shipping arrangements over the last two years and the upcoming trial run was the outcome of the talks.

Meanwhile, Indian media reported

Investment in EPZs shoots up by 22pc

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Investment in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) soared 22.53 percent in fiscal 2013-14 from the previous year.

Some 428 operational units in EPZs invested US\$ 402.58 million in the recently ended fiscal year, while their investments amounted to \$328.53 million in fiscal 2012-13, according to the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza).

Bangladesh was the second favoured investment destination in South Asia, which is reflected in investments in EPZs, Bepza said referring to a 2013 report of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Bepza, which runs eight EPZs, facilitates investments by local and foreign firms to produce goods for exports.

Dhaka EPZ received \$125 million, the highest investment, in the just concluded fiscal year followed by Chittagong EPZ that received \$109.46 million. The EPZs at Adamjee, Karnaphuli, Comilla, Uttara, Mongla and Ishwardi received the remaining amount.

Greek court

FROM PAGE 20

The Bangladeshis were shot at in April last year when they demanded to be remunerated for six months of unpaid work at a farm in Manolada in the southern Peloponnese. Four of the strawberry pickers were badly injured in the attack.

At a time of unrivalled crisis in Greece, where living standards have deteriorated dramatically after six straight years of recession, the case had triggered widespread indignation.

Media investigations showed the migrants to be working in subhuman conditions without access to proper hygiene or basic sanitation.

Politicians who took up the cause also weighed in on Wednesday saying the verdict sent set an unwelcome example for other employers to follow.

"It sends the message that a foreign worker can die like a dog in the orchard," said Vassiliki Katrivanou, an MP with the main opposition radical-left Syriza party. She added that in a nation where fruit-farm labourers are frequently from overseas, the attack in Manolada was far from being an isolated incident.

"It leaves room for new victims by closing eyes to the brutal, inhuman and racist character of the exploitation suffered by workers on the land," she said, pointing out that the ruling had been made on World Day against Trafficking in Persons.

The Greek farmers had instructed top criminal lawyers to defend them in a court drama that lasted for over a month. More than 40 prosecution witnesses testified in a case in which the prosecutor had asked that exemplary punishment be made.

Denouncing the judgment as scandalous, anti-racism organisations said it raised questions about the impartiality of the Greek justice system and vowed to step up protest action against the decision.

"We call upon unions and human rights movements to react against this unprecedented racist scandal," said Petros Constantinou, coordinator of the Movement Against Racism and the Fascist Threat in a statement. "The hundreds of millions of profit made in the strawberry industry cannot come about by shooting labourers in strawberry fields."

A sombre Eid in Gaza

FROM PAGE 1

Her young daughter silently pushed pink and white flowers into the mound of freshly dug earth.

"The world is watching us, but they do not feel for us. Why did they waste the lives of the Palestinian people? Why did they do this to us?" said Shammaly, who also lost her house in the bombardment of Shejaia that Israel says was a Hamas stronghold.

Izzddin Akila knew what he wanted to do on the first day of three-day Eid holiday. But the 35-year-old's wishes - to exchange gifts, visit relatives, and watch the children of the family play games - didn't go as planned.

Holding brown prayer beads and white flowers, he instead spent the first day of the three-day holiday digging a small hole in which to put flowers at the head of his 20-year-old cousin Mohammed's grave.

"You have always been the moonlight and inspiration to your brothers," said Izzddin, sitting beside the grave.

"Come back Mohammed, return to your weeping mother, she has your Eid gift," another cousin cried, as people tried to comfort him.

There wasn't a dry eye at the gravesite.

Mohammed was killed last week when an Israeli tank shell hit his home. He was sitting in the family's living room. The blast also injured his aunt's husband, and eight children. "In one second, an Israel missile ended his short 20 years of life," said Izzddin, unable to hold back tears.

Before he died, Mohammed and his father had opened their home to displaced Palestinians fleeing Israeli bombings in Shujayea. They shared food and drinks with women and children who had been driven out of their homes.

"He hadn't planned his future yet, but was intelligent and keen and had

Death toll hits 1,422

FROM PAGE 1

continue destroying tunnels used by militants to attack Israel.

"Until now, we have destroyed dozens of terror tunnels and we are determined to finish this mission -- with or without a ceasefire," he said at the start of the meeting.

"So I will not accept any (truce) proposal that does not allow the (military) to complete this work for the security of Israel's citizens."

His remarks came after the army confirmed mobilising another 16,000 reservists, hiking the total number called up to 86,000. Israel does not say how many troops are currently fighting inside the Gaza Strip.

Washington also said it had agreed to restock Israel's dwindling munitions supplies, despite increasing international concern over the death toll in Gaza, where 1,422 people have been killed in 24 days of violence.

UN figures indicate two-thirds of the victims were civilians, nearly half of whom were women and children.

The top UN refugee official in Gaza yesterday told the Security Council that his UNRWA Palestinian refugee agency was stretched to breaking point by the massive humanitarian fallout from the fighting.

"I believe the population is facing a precipice and appeal to the international community to take the steps necessary to address this extreme situation," Pierre Krähenbühl said.

Following the shelling of a UN school in northern Gaza on Wednesday which killed 16, UN human rights chief Navi Pillay slammed Israel for attacking homes, schools and hospitals, accusing it of "deliberate defiance" of international law.

"None of this appears to me to be accidental," she told reporters.

"There appears to be deliberate defiance of obligations that international law imposes on Israel."

The shelling of the school also drew sharp condemnation from UN chief Ban Ki-moon, who described it as "reprehensible", as well as from Washington.

HSC results

FROM PAGE 1

ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The minister would formally announce the results at a press conference in the education ministry later, he added.

A total of 1,141,374 examinees-- 606,293 boys and 535,081 girls-- from 8,104 institutions across the country had registered for the examinations under 10 educations boards.

Of them, over 9.24 lakh students sat HSC examinations under eight general education boards and some 2.11 lakh students took the examinations under the madrasa and technical boards.

The examinations began on April 3.

This year's HSC and its equivalent examinations saw some 1.28 lakh more students taking the examinations compared to last year.

already managed to memorise the whole Quran, verse by verse," Izzddin cried, as his fingers moved across the sand on top of Mohammed's grave.

Though the guns fell largely silent on Monday, with Hamas announcing a 24-hour truce to coincide with the festival, the widespread death and destruction of the last three weeks of violence has made this a sombre Eid, devoid of celebration.

"We should be celebrating Eid with happiness and family love. As usual, our children would enjoy themselves and play together. But the Israeli occupation denied us that right and forced us to take our children to the graveyard, to say goodbye to murdered relatives instead of letting us all celebrate the joy of life," said Izzddin.

The main cemetery in eastern Gaza has also been under heavy Israeli air strikes, making even burials dangerous. As a result, the Akila family had no other option but to bury Mohammed somewhere else.

"We had to dig into the grave of Mohammed's grandfather in order to use his space," Izzddin said, as his brothers wept beside him. "It's like opening up the old wounds of [my] grandfather's body, to lay the newly-wounded body of Mohammed next to him."

While Izzddin and his brother, Khaled, visited the grave, Israeli drones hovered overhead. This cemetery was bombed on Monday by an Israeli F16 missile; bones are now scattered throughout the sand. "Then we had to rush to bury him immediately, under Israel's constant bombing," Izzddin said. "At least Mohammed is warm, with his grandpa."

At 6:30pm on Monday, the graveyard was full of people coming to visit their loved ones, killed during Israel's latest offensive. As the crowds of people tried to comfort each other, Khaled and Izzddin poured water and sand

into the grave to remould it, and make sure it stayed intact.

"We cry for those we have loved and lost," Khaled said, "but we say that God is also watching these atrocities [committed] upon innocent people".

POISON

The conflagration has forced more than 167,000 Palestinians to seek refuge in the blue-and-white painted schools run by the United Nations agency UNWRA that was set up in 1949 to help Palestinian refugees from Israel's war of independence.

"This is a holiday of seeing people get martyred, of seeing destruction. What holiday is this? Who has the heart to enjoy the holiday?" said an elderly woman, Um Mustafa Jarbou, tears streaming down her face as she sat on a schoolroom floor.

She came from the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiya, but, like so many others, had fled ahead of the Israeli advance.

"When we eat food, it tastes like poison. Shame on them. Where is the world? Where is everybody?" she asked, sharing a commonly held view that the outside world, including many fellow Arabs, have turned their back on their plight.

On a normal Eid, the streets of Gaza would be packed with children rushing around showing off crisp new clothes and receiving handfuls of sweets. Celebratory firecrackers would fill the air. On Monday, the roads were largely empty and nerves jangled by countless air strikes could not take fireworks.

Men hugged each other on the street, wishing that "tomorrow may bring a solution". But few saw any solution in sight.

When telephones rang, it wasn't always a relative or friend on the other end passing on Eid greetings.

[Reporting by Reuters, Aljazeera]

Turkish

FROM PAGE 20

word, it's an ornament [for women]," Arinç told a crowd celebrating the end of Ramadan in the city of Bursa in an address that declared "moral corruption" in Turkey. "A woman should be chaste. She should know the difference between public and private. She should not laugh in public."

On Wednesday thousands of women posted pictures of themselves laughing out loud, with the hashtags #direnkahaha (resist laughter) and #direnkadin (resist woman) trending on Twitter.

Turkish men also took to social media to express their solidarity. "The men of a country in which women are not allowed to laugh are cowards", tweeted one user.

Ekmeladdin Ihsanoglu, the main opposition presidential candidate running against current prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in next Sunday's elections, joined a chorus of male voices criticising Bülent Arinç's comment, tweeting: "More than anything else, our country needs women to smile and to hear everybody's laughter."

Other opposition figures pointed out that Arinç's comments highlighted the dismal state of women's rights in Turkey. Calling on people to protest against massive violence towards women at a demonstration next week, Melda Onur, an Istanbul MP for the main opposition Republican People's party, wrote on Twitter: "We would have left Arinç to his fantasies and wouldn't even have laughed about it, but while so many murders are being committed he makes [women] a target by stressing the need for chastity."

A 2009 report commissioned by the Prime Ministry Directorate on the Status of Women found that more than 40% of Turkey's female population have suffered domestic violence. More than 120 have been killed since the beginning of this year alone, mostly by their partners or other family members.

Mehtap Dogan of the Socialist Feminist Collective -- who was among the women who posted pictures of herself laughing -- said that Arinç's statements were not an isolated incident of misogyny.

Tragedy marks

FROM PAGE 1

"With more vehicles and pedestrians on the road, chances of accidents rise. Besides, vehicles such as passenger buses are usually jam-packed. So, even if the number of accidents remains the same, the number of deaths rises," he added.

According to police record, Prof Hoque said, on average 3,000 people die each year in road accidents across the country. But the World Bank and the World Health Organisation put the figure at 12,000 and 18,000.

Hoque stressed the need for proper design of roads and enforcement of traffic laws to cut road mishaps.

Of the three incidents of boat capsizing, one happened on the Eid day, killing 12, including five children. Yesterday, eight people drowned in two other incidents.

On the Eid day in Kushtia, a joyful boat ride turned into a tragedy as the boat carrying 21 people capsized in the Padma river, reports out district correspondent.

The bodies of all the 12 victims were recovered by yesterday, said Syed Belal

Hossain, deputy commissioner of Kushtia.

Yesterday, at least six people drowned and 16 others went missing as a boat capsized in the Jamuna around 10:00am.

The accident happened when a motorboat bound for Char Salimabad turned over with some 70 passengers at Chowhali upazila in Sirajganj.

A rescue operation is undergoing, said Chowhali Upazila Nirbahi Officer Abdullah.

The boat was overloaded and it capsized after hitting a pillar of a bridge, said Rezaul Haque, a witness.

In another incident, two people drowned and two others were injured as a small boat sank in a well (water body) near Mariyal Belua village in Tongibari upazila yesterday, reports our Munshiganj correspondent.

In Sylhet, three people drowned after the boat carrying some 20 people capsized in Jaflong in the Piyan river in the afternoon.

Fire service divers recovered the bodies but three more people were still missing, police said.