



Workers of Tuba Group demonstrate, left, blocking a street in Badda, to demand that the group's owner Delwar Hossain's bail be cancelled while other workers of the group, right, continue with their hunger strike demanding unpaid salaries and bonuses.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN/PALASH KHAN

BGMEA seeks emergency funds

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The agitating workers vowed to continue their hunger strike until they receive their dues in full, and reiterated their demand for cancelling Delwar's bail.

"I have not been able to feed my son properly for three months. I better die here protesting rather than seeing him starve," 26-year-old Shapna, a worker of Tuba Group, told

this correspondent.

Around 100 workers have fallen sick since the fast-into-death began Monday last. About 80 workers were given intravenous saline, with 11 undergoing treatment at nearby medical centres.

Several hundred workers and leaders of left parties staged a sit-in in front of Hossain Super Market that houses three units of Tuba Group at

Pragati Sarani.

Under the banner of Tuba Group Sramik Sangram Committee, the protesters demonstrated for several hours. They got into a scuffle with police when the latter foiled their attempts to hold a procession after the sit-in.

Speaking at the sit-in, Anu Muhammad, professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University, said,

"The fact that we have a government is only felt when workers are beaten. We do not see the government when workers starve."

The government and the BGMEA should be held accountable for creating a situation that left the garment workers with no alternative but to go on a hunger strike during Eid, he said.

Mujahidul Islam Selim, president

of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, urged the government to confiscate Tuba Group's property and pay the workers their arrears.

Demanding exemplary punishment to Delwar, he said it was tantamount to genocide to deprive workers of wages and let them starve for days.

Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal General Secretary Khalequzzaman;

Nijera Kori Coordinator Khushi Kabir, and leaders of Ganatantrik Baam Morcha, an alliance of eight leftist parties, were also present.

Meanwhile, the condition of Moshrefa Mishu, president of the Garment Workers Unity Forum, who has been fasting since Monday evening, deteriorated yesterday. She refused to leave the spot and get hospitalised.

Israel gets boost from US, UK

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The United States is Israel's chief backer at the United Nations, where it routinely blocks Security Council resolutions condemning the Jewish state.

Washington has funnelled more than \$100 billion in aid to Israel since its formation in 1948, and consistently provides its chief Mideast ally with up-to-the-minute weaponry.

Money to Israel flows through Congress largely uncontested.

The US Congress on Friday approved \$225 million for Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile defence system, credited with destroying missiles fired by Hamas before they could reach their targets.

House of Representatives approved the funding by 395-8 in a late Friday vote. The Senate earlier approved the measure unanimously before the start of its five week summer recess, reports AFP.

The measure now awaits President Obama's signature.

The emergency spending funds, which adds to the US deficit, will restock Israel's Iron Dome system with interceptor missiles.

The funding is part of the administration's request of \$3.1 billion for military assistance to Israel, the world's largest beneficiary of US foreign aid.

Congress appropriated \$235 million to Iron Dome last year.

The White House had originally requested about \$176 million for the system for 2015, but lawmakers increased the amount. Congress often increases funding for Israeli security projects sought by the president.

The added funding is needed immediately because Israel is "running out of Iron Dome missiles to protect themselves," Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, said on the Senate floor. Lawmakers can't say "we left Israel in a lurch," he said.

Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel had asked Senate leaders on Israel's behalf to approve the funding for the US-funded Iron Dome. It would be used "to accelerate production of Iron Dome components in Israel to maintain adequate stockpiles," Hagel said in a July 22 letter.

An agreement with Israel calls for more than half the funds the Pentagon provides for Iron Dome to be spent in the US. Israel estimates that it would take two to three years to reach that full co-production capacity in the US, "which would not address Israel's current shortfall," Hagel wrote.

Iron Dome, built by Rafael Advanced Defence Systems Ltd, is designed to intercept and destroy

rockets capable of flying as far as 70 kilometres (43.5 miles).

Raytheon Co (RTN), based in Waltham, Massachusetts, is under contract with Haifa-based Rafael to find suitable US suppliers.

Speaking with reporters after the vote, Graham said congressional approval of the Iron Dome money sends a broader message to Israel, reports Bloomberg.

"Not only are we going to give you more missiles, we're going to be a better friend," he said.

US politicians mired in Washington gridlock agree on virtually nothing these days. Nothing, it seems, apart from their unquestioned support for Israel.

In short, "America's got Israel's back," US National Security Advisor Susan Rice assured a gathering of Jewish leaders Monday in Washington. "We've always had a truly special relationship."

The same could be said of the UK. The UK's political support is underpinned by its strong military relationship with Israel. In terms of exports, the UK has awarded almost £50m in military licences to Israel in the last five years, including £10m last year.

It seems likely that UK arms exports have played a direct role in the Israeli-Palestine conflict. In 2009, David Miliband, then Foreign Secretary confirmed that Israeli equipment that had been used in Gaza in the 2008-9 conflict "almost certainly" contained UK-supplied components.

The relationship works in both directions, writes Andrew Smith, a spokesperson for Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), in the New Statesman's politics blog.

The Israeli arms industry is one of the most advanced in the world, with more than 200 arms companies and a government spend of \$18.2 billion in the last year alone.

The Independent in an exclusive report wrote yesterday: the government has been accused of failing to regulate arms sales to Israel following evidence that weapons containing British-made components are being used in the bombardment of Gaza.

Documents shown to the newspaper reveal that arms export licences worth £42m have been granted to 130 British defence manufacturers since 2010 to sell military equipment to Israel. These range from weapons control and targeting systems to ammunition, drones and armoured vehicles.

Among the manufacturers given permission to make sales were two UK companies supplying components for the Hermes drone, described by

Israeli air force as the "backbone" of its targeting and reconnaissance missions. One of the two companies also supplies components for Israel's main battle tank.

The Hermes drone has been widely used during Operation Protective Edge, the ongoing Israeli military action in Gaza, to monitor Palestinians and guided missile strikes.

The Foreign Office said on Friday night it was investigating reports that Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, 23, was British born.

The Government said that it would review all outstanding export licences to Israel. But politicians and campaigners called on ministers to establish definitively whether UK-manufactured weapons or components have been used by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) in Gaza since hostilities began three weeks ago.

Labour MP Katy Clark told The Independent: "By refusing to investigate this vital question the British Government are trying to bury their heads in the sand. This is a shameful approach to take and frankly makes the Government look as if it has something to hide."

The British public have the right to know the level of support which the United Kingdom has provided to the Israeli armed forces through arms sales."

Israel is one of the biggest customers for British exports of so-called "dual-use" equipment capable of both civilian and military deployment in a trade worth more than £7bn last year.

But documents obtained by the CAAT under the Freedom of Information Act reveal for the first time the full extent of sales of military-only equipment, along with the names of the companies granted export licences by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Of the £42m of so-called "military list" exports approved since 2010, some £10m has been licensed in the last 12 months.

The ongoing military collaboration and the sale of weapons are not apolitical moves, writes Andrew Smith. Arms deals don't just give Israel military support, they also bolster the Israeli government by sending out a strong message of political support.

Arms sales and military collaboration fuel the cycle of war. When a government sells weapons it can not absolve itself of responsibility for what happens when they are used.

That's why an immediate end to military co-operation and an embargo of all arms sales to and from Israel is essential.

Govt failed to ensure security

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why the government has no right to hold on to power anymore.

The former military autocrat condemned the Awami League-led government at a meeting with JP Shariatpur unit leaders and activists at his Banani office in the capital.

The image of the country has been tarnished by what he said was the ongoing abductions and killings across the country.

Anyone may fall victim to abduction. "Dead bodies are floating in the rivers. Such incidents did not take place when I was in power."

The JP chief also said that the anti-government movement by his party would be non-violent but did not give details as to when the party

would wage such a movement and how it would be carried out.

Lambasting the BNP for its destructive anti-government movement before the January 5 national election, he said his party men would not set fire to vehicles or demolish cars on roads like BNP activists had done in the name of movement.

"With the people, we will wage a movement in a systematic way against the government's failure in various sectors."

At one point of his speech, Ershad said neither the ruling Awami League nor the BNP could fulfil people's aspirations when they were in power.

Describing himself as a "successful ruler and a patron of private

sector," he said at least seven private banks and 18 insurance companies had been approved without any nepotism and politicisation when the Jatiya Party was in power, which helped the economy grow at six percent GDP (gross domestic product).

Asked about Ershad's criticism of the government, Awami League presidium member Nooh-Ul-Alam Lenin told The Daily Star that the JP chief was known as an "unpredictable character" in politics.

"He [Ershad] changes his position and statements frequently. He backtracks at night on the statement he made in the morning," he said, adding that there was no guarantee that Ershad would not change his yesterday's statement.

Can't home going be any better?

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did the communications ministry have to sit tight until the last moment to repair roads? That also it did after much media reporting and threats of strikes from transport owners.

What we have gathered from our sources is that for such emergency work, the authorities keep aside some funds and also construction materials which it hurriedly mobilizes. It also ropes in the contractors to the job at a much higher rate.

This in a way breeds lack of accountability and corruption. Nobody actually knows how much extra money is dished out. Nobody cares about the quality of work, as the authorities are happy as long as the repair lasts through the short-lived Eid rush. Thereafter the roads may go back to their earlier state. Who cares?

So it is corruption and making quick bucks ahead of Eid that result in the late dash for road repair. It is basically a waste of public money.

Another Eid is coming in about two months and people will not

expect the same repeat show.

The second question is much more complex to answer. Can the risky journey be avoided? We have seen how precariously people have travelled on buses and launches, packed like sardines. One may wonder if they had glued themselves to the rooftops. Otherwise why did they not slip over?

But can such rides be avoided? Apparently it seems impossible, as at least 50 lakh people go home at a time during the festival. This is way too high a number for the buses and launches to accommodate. So what's the solution?

The bus and launch owners can introduce more vehicles to handle this peak movement. But what will they do with the vehicles during the rest of the year? The launch owners already do this practice - they plied 185 launches during this Eid while during normal time only 65 set sail. So the rest just sit idle.

But in the road sector, the situation is somewhat different. The sector is captured by a few owners, who deliberately keep the number of

buses below the demand. There is no competition there and new investors dare not enter the fray.

The government can streamline this sector and make sure that more investments come in. And it can strengthen the railway. The under capacity malaise has overpowered the rail sector. It lacks engines, bogies and rail lines. Even then the railway doubled the number of passengers it carried during Eid. This is a sector neglected over the years and many say this was because of the petty interests of the road transport owners.

So revamping the railway, BRTC and BIWTC could provide a solution to the Eid woes. But, then, can the government also find another solution? It has a huge fleet of buses to carry its staff. Can they be put to use to ease the situation?

Whatever may be the answer, even if it is a part answer, the government has to find it. It just can't sit and watch people tossing and bobbing on the rooftops of buses and trains and hanging from the doors on their journey home.

Rana Plaza probe at final stage

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negligence and violating the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) for which the highest punishment is seven years' imprisonment, the investigator said.

A total of 22 people had been arrested in connection with three cases filed over the Rana Plaza tragedy and 14 of them, including Rana's father Abdul Khalek, have been released on bail.

Savar police, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakka (Rajuk) and a victim's family filed the cases following the disaster on April 24 last year.

Rajuk official Helaluddin filed a case against Sohel Rana for structural faults found at Rana Plaza and for constructing the building with substandard materials and violating the BNBC.

Another case was filed by Sub-Inspector Wali Ashraf of Savar Police Station against Rana, his father Abdul Khalek and owners of five apparel factories housed in the nine-storey building for the loss of lives.

The last case was filed by Sheuli Akter, wife of Jahangir Alam whose body was recovered from Rana Plaza debris on April 24 last year, holding Rana, New Wave Style owner Bazlus Samad Adnan and the chief engineer of Savar municipality, responsible for the deaths.

Allegations have been found against all the arrestees, including those who are on bail, in connection with the deadly incident, Bijoy said.

Since two of the three cases are similar, two charge sheets will be submitted -- one in the first case and the other in the second and third cases, he added.

The first charge sheet will deal with the violation of building code and the maximum punishment for the offence is up to seven years' jail term.

Charges will be pressed under Section 304, which deals with death due to negligence and stipulates life imprisonment as the highest punishment, and Section 302, which lays down death penalty for killing of the penal code in the second charge sheet, according to Bijoy.

The CID recorded statements of more than 1,000 people, including survivors and families of the deceased.

"They are both witnesses and victims," Bijoy said, adding that they have readied the investigation reports, which will now be scrutinised by the higher authorities before submission to the court.

100 injured in B'baria clash

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gas shells to break up the feuding parties around 2:30pm.

The Officer-in-Charge of Ashuganj Police Station said around 100 people from both sides were injured in the altercation.

Police from Ashuganj Police Station rushed to the spot and struggled for two hours in vain to bring the mob under control. Finally riot police from Brahmanbaria Police Lines were brought in. They fired 77 rounds of rubber bullets and 12 rounds of tear

gas shells to break up the feuding parties around 2:30pm. The Officer-in-Charge of Ashuganj Police Station said around 100 people from both sides were injured in the altercation. Of the injured, 16 were sent to Dhaka for treatment, nine were admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital, 26 to Ashuganj hospital and 11 were taken to private clinics. Others were given first aid.

Riot police remain deployed on the spot, said Md Mohiuddin, OC (investigation) of Ashuganj Police Station.

No case was lodged till filing this report at 10:30pm.