

HASTY REPAIR OF HIGHWAY

Workers fill potholes and mend the worn-out surface of the Gharinda part of Dhaka-Tangail highway. The Tangail end of the highway has become almost unusable even though the Roads and Highways Department did emergency repairs on the 46km stretch between Gorai and Elenga just two months ago. Numerous potholes and cracks developed within a few days of the repairs. The 12km stretch between Nagar Jalpai and Elenga is also in bad shape. At some points, the highway got narrowed because of the ongoing repair work, forcing vehicles to move slowly. RHD officials hold the incessant rain responsible for the situation. The photos were taken a week ago.



PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

RECRUITMENT IN MALAYSIA Pvt agencies wary of 'syndicates'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
The Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) wants no "syndicate" among the agencies that can manipulate labour recruitment in Malaysia. "We want all our members to be in the business, not any syndicate," Baira President Mohammed Abul Basher told The Daily Star yesterday. He said this when a Malaysian official delegation began discussion with the Bangladesh government on the mode of recruiting Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia through private arrangements. The issue of syndicates among the recruiting agencies came up as two Malaysian IT companies -- Bestinet and Real Time Networking Sdn Bhd -- have been lobbying for introduction of their online system in maintaining data on recruitment, visa processing, medical checkup, insurance and monitoring. A Baira leader said Abul Basher preferred Real Time Networking, while Joint Secretary General Ruhul Amin preferred Bestinet. Both these companies have shareholders who are linked to Malaysia's ruling political party leaders, he added. Asked about it, Abul Basher said it was for the Malaysian government to decide which company would be hired for its IT services. "However, Bestinet has been trying to create a syndicate of recruiting agents. This cannot happen," he said. Ruhul Amin, however, refuted the allegation. "We also want everyone to get equal opportunities to recruit workers." However, Real Time has no experi-

ence of working in the past, he added. Abul Basher, however, said Malaysia has suspended the online systems recently following allegations from Indonesia and Nepal that the company had been charging high fees from the workers going to Malaysia. He said Bangladeshi workers faced various problems in 2007-08 and that was why they were cautious about illegal brokers both in Bangladesh and Malaysia. "We want to lower migration cost to Tk 60,000-Tk 70,000," he said. Migration cost was fixed at Tk 84,000 in 2007, but actually it went up to Tk 1.6 lakh to Tk 2.4 lakh. Even then excessive workers were recruited, resulting in thousands of them being unemployed, confined and eventually deported. The Bangladesh High Commission has also failed to monitor the systems properly. Abul Basher said they wanted the government to have a strong monitoring system. The Baira also wants to set up an office in Kuala Lumpur so that no brokers can manipulate job visas, he added. The four-member delegation led by Malaysia's immigration department's Director General Datuk Mustafa Ibrahim has meanwhile held discussions with the officials of the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) at the Probashi Kalyan Bhavan. "The Malaysian officials mainly learned about our systems, training capacity, and workers' database. We said we have adequate capacity for training the workers if needed," said an official at the BMET after the meeting yesterday.

Olama League: other side of secular AL?

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Commission, and take all Indian TV channels in Bangladesh off the air. It has also raised voice for cancellation of "anti-Islamic" education policy and confiscation of textbooks containing write-ups of "anti-Islamic and atheist" writers Humayun Azad, Rudra Mohammad Shahidullah, Selina Hossain, Sanjida Khatun and Kabir Chowdhury. The Olama League regularly organises rallies, processions and human chains to press home these demands that stand in stark contrast to AL's fundamental principles. According to the AL charter, the party is committed to ensure religious freedom and fundamental human rights irrespective of religion, caste, sex, community and ethnic identity, and to eradicate all shades of communalism. It is also committed to stop oppression against women, protect women's rights as well as dignity and empower them by ensuring female participation in all spheres of the state and social life. Talking to The Daily Star, two AL leaders said the party has no organisational ties with the Olama League. But one of them described it as a "like-minded organisation" and "pro-liberation force." Sources in the AL said a number of its leaders were spotted at programmes of the Olama League, whose headquarters is at the AL central office. Several AL leaders maintain close relations with Olama League leaders and patronise the organisation that

started its journey in 1996 on the directives of AL President Sheikh Hasina, said the sources. Some Olama League leaders claimed that they work on instructions of the AL high command. They said the participation of senior AL leaders, including Mohammad Nasim, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Mahub-ul-Alam Hanif, Hasan Mahmud and Abdus Sobhan Golap, in their programmes was a proof of their affiliation with the ruling party. According to the sources, the Olama League factions run their activities separately and use different monograms. But they all use the same address for their head office -- 23 Bangabandhu Avenue where the AL central office is located. When The Daily Star went to the address on August 9, it found Olama League's office on the second floor. A person there identified himself as Muaz Eabney Mudasser and claimed to be its office secretary. The day before, one of the three factions along with 12 like-minded organisations formed a human chain in front of the Jatiya Press Club in the capital. With a set of 17 demands, it later sent to different media houses a press release signed by Abdul Hasan Sheikh Shariatpuri who claimed to be Olama League general secretary. One of the demands was that the government scrap the minimum marriage age of 18 for girls. It said the Sharia law doesn't mention any age limit for girls to get married.

It also described the current education policy as "anti-Islamic", and said the policy was formulated in 2010 to "turn Bangladesh into an atheist country". "The education policy must be declared void and replaced by an Islamic education policy." It branded Pahela Baishakh programmes as "Haram", and called for introducing a provision of death penalty for demeaning Islam, echoing the view of Hefajat-e-Islam that came up with the proposition after Gonojagoron Mancha launched its campaign for the maximum punishment to all war criminals. However, Ismail Hossain Bin Helali, president of another faction of Olama League, told The Daily Star that he was against Shariatpuri's demands and labelled Shariatpuri as a paid agent of Jamaat-e-Islami. "He [Shariatpuri] is nobody in Olama League. We are the real people and we are doing politics under Sheikh Hasina's leadership," he said. Asked why he didn't take action against Shariatpuri, Helali said it was the AL high-command that should make the move. Shariatpuri, however, said he was "the real man" of the Olama League and was discharging duties on the directives of AL high command. Accusing Helali of committing war crimes in 1971, Shariatpuri said Helali was an "illiterate man" and had no right to be a part of the Olama League. "Sheikh Hasina sent me to Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj, made me a Kazi [marriage registrar] and invited me to

several programmes," he claimed. Asked about his faction's demands that go against AL's principles and government decisions, he said their demands were valid and they would hold talks with the AL and government high-ups on the issue. Moulana Ismail Hossain of Barisal used to lead the other faction of the Olama League, but it is now inactive. Talking to The Daily Star, AL Religious Affairs Secretary Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah said there were "four or five factions" in the Olama League and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina directed him to stop the activities of the Olama League. He, however, would not say when the PM had given him the directives. Abdullah said the AL would have to take responsibility for Olama League and take action against it immediately. "Once, I took an initiative to reconstitute the Olama League, but I gave up due to its internal feud," he added. AL Office Secretary Abdus Sobhan Golap said they had no organisational ties with the Olama League. Asked why the organisation was using AL's name and its central office address, he said the Olama League was a pro-liberation force. "It is not an associate organisation of the Awami League, but a like-minded organisation." AL Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury said the Olama League was not affiliated with the AL. "The Awami League always believes in secularism. If any organisation hurts religious sentiment of any community

17 JMB men jailed for 2005 blasts in Gazipur

COURT CORRESPONDENT
A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced 17 JMB operatives to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment each for their involvement in the serial bomb blasts in Gazipur on August 17, 2005. The court also fined the members of the outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) Tk 10,000 each or in default one year's jail. Eleven of the convicts were present in court during the pronouncement of the verdict. They are Rokonuddin Rokon, Mamunur Rashid Mamun, Arifur Rahman Arif, Nizam Uddin, Nurul Huda, Mahubul Alam, Jahirul Islam, Afzal Hossain, Md Hasib, Kawsar and Omar Faruk. Md Russel, Abdul Kafi, MA Siddiqui Bablu, Rana alias Abdus Sattar, Masum alias Abdur Rauf and Raihan alias Obayed are on the run. Judge Abdur Rahman Sardar of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-4 acquitted Hasan Mahubur Rahman Mahubur,

Durul Islam Jobair and Taibur Rahman Hasan of the charges. The court delivered the verdict after completion of the cross-examinations of all the 50 prosecution witnesses. On August 17, 2005, the militant outfit simultaneously blasted several bombs at nine places in Gazipur, including in front of the additional deputy commissioner's (tax) office. Joydebpur police later filed a case against 23 JMB men, including its chief Shaikh Abdur Rahman and his brother Ataur Rahman in this connection. But the names of Abdur Rahman and his brother Ataur Rahman were struck off the case as they were earlier executed in the judges' killing case in Jhalakathi. A charge sheet in the case was submitted on October 12, 2005 while a supplementary charge sheet on May 25, 2006. In 2012, a Gazipur court shifted the case to the Dhaka Speedy Tribunal Judge-4 of Dhaka for its quick disposal.

Onus was on Malaysia

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And when reports of jobseekers being left in a quagmire of plights would come out, the country would simply slap a ban on hiring from Bangladesh. Such bans came thrice already -- in 1997, 2001 and 2009. The only exception to this happened in 2012 when the two countries signed the government-to-government (G2G) labour recruitment deal. The system, however, has already collapsed following massive lobbying from private sector. **BLOW AT THE BEGINNING** Following the adoption of an industrialisation policy in 1970, Malaysia started looking for cheap foreign labour to make its economy competitive. In this trend, it formally began recruiting from Bangladesh in 1992. However, it never had a stable and comprehensive policy to protect the rights of migrant workforce, experts say adding that Malaysia's way of handling Bangladeshis has been particularly dubious. "Initially, Malaysian employers directly recruited workers through recruiting agencies in Bangladesh. However, in a year or two, we started receiving reports of gross abuses and tortures of Bangladeshi workers," said Ain o Salish Kendra Director Nur Khan Liton, who watched labour migration at the time. In 1995, Malaysian human rights body Tenaganita published a report uncovering evidence that 59 inmates, mostly Bangladeshis, had died of typhoid and beriberi in an immigration detention camp. Later in a statement, Asia Director Brad Adams of Human Rights Watch said the abuses included random beatings in the middle of the night, HIV/AIDS detainees sleeping on a roofless porch, unprotected exposure to rain, sun and filth, food and water shortages, and inadequate medical care. Following this, Malaysia stopped recruiting Bangladeshi workers in 1997. Then in 2000, some 20,000 Bangladeshi workers were issued visas. The ban was again put in place in 2001. **OUTSOURCING COMPANIES: NEW FORMULA OF ABUSE** When the Malaysian government

started thinking about lifting the ban, the employers said they wanted to recruit foreign workers through their representatives in order to save time and money. In 2005, Malaysia introduced a new policy of outsourcing and lifted the ban in 2006 on condition that Bangladesh send workers through outsourcing companies. The Malaysian home ministry issued licences to 223 outsourcing companies that were responsible for recruiting and managing Bangladeshi workers and supplying them to the principal companies. Under this system, the principal companies had to bear no responsibility for the workers. The employers could directly hire from Bangladesh only if the number of workers was more than 50, then principal assistant secretary Encik Ayob Abdul Rahman of Malaysian home ministry had told a discussion in Kuala Lumpur on July 10, 2007. Recruiting workers through outsourcing companies was a huge business, said M Gopal Kishnam, secretary general of Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUS). "Those who were issued licences were closely connected to the ruling party leaders," he told The Daily Star by phone. And how big was the business? Former Malaysian home ministry official Abdul Rahman himself gave an estimate. "Although the employers do not need workers, they are promised some amount of money [in bribe by Bangladeshi agents]. It is... a very high amount. From RM500-RM2000 per worker. If a company recruits 100 workers, you can calculate how much the human resources manager can get," he had told the 2007 discussion organised by Malaysian Bar Council and Tenaganita. The Daily Star has obtained a transcript of the programme. "I receive a lot of letters every day to transfer the workers, especially Bangladeshi workers. This is because the employers are already enjoying their commission. They do not want the workers, they just want the commission. Using their name and using

their company profile, they get the workers. Once approved, the workers come in. Then the direct employers will send them back," he had added. Not only agents and employers, certain quarters of the Malaysian government officials were involved in this nefarious nexus as well. The then immigration director general of Malaysia -- Datuk Wahid Md Don -- was found guilty of accepting RM 60,000 in bribe for approving 4,337 visa applications of Bangladeshi workers on July 10, 2008. Later in October 2013, the official was sentenced to six years in prison and fined RM 300,000, according to Malaysian media reports. This explains why jobseekers in 2007-08 had to spend Tk 1.6 lakh to Tk 2.5 lakh to go to Malaysia whereas the government-fixed amount was Tk 84,000. More than four lakh Bangladeshis went to the country during that period and many of them did not get jobs. They're often kept confined or made to work with low pay or none at all. Thousands of them were deported penniless and sick. Following widespread media reports on the abuses, Malaysia cancelled visas of 55,000 Bangladeshis and froze recruitment from Bangladesh in March 2009. **G2G AND ITS FAILURE** After nearly a four-year gap, Malaysia and Bangladesh introduced government-level arrangements for recruitment in November 2012, but mysteriously only some 10,000 workers were recruited in almost three years. Though Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies says employers were not interested in hiring workers through the G2G, agents in Malaysia and government officials in Bangladesh said manpower agents in collusion with some dishonest Malaysian government officials made it fail. Amid this near-stalemate in overseas recruitment, a large number of poor Bangladeshis and persecuted Rohingyas of Myanmar took risky sea journeys to reach Malaysia. According to the UN Refugee Agency, around 88,000 people took such journeys between January 2014 and

June 2015, and 300 of them died. Mass graves were discovered on the borders of Malaysia and Thailand in May, triggering a whirlwind of criticisms across the world. **B2B IN THE OFFING AGAIN** Against this backdrop, Malaysia in June announced that it would recruit 1.5 million Bangladeshis in the next three years, but under private management commonly known as business-to-business (B2B) system. This triggered severe criticisms from different migrant rights bodies and trade unions in Malaysia itself. "Brining in new migrant workers [under B2B] will only benefit those who are given approval by the authorities and the labour agents and suppliers," said Dato' M Ramachelvan, chairperson of migrants, refugees & immigration affairs committee of Malaysian Bar Council. **BANGLADESH NEVER MADE A SOURCE COUNTRY** Malaysia recruits foreign workers on a regular basis from 12 countries, known as source countries, but Bangladesh was never put on the list. So, employers need a special approval from the Malaysian home ministry if they want to hire from Bangladesh. "And it's certain that an employer has to pay government officials to get the approval," said a Malaysia-based recruiting agent. "So why would they want to lose such a huge opportunity to make a quick buck by including Bangladesh in the list of source countries?" he told this correspondent during the latter's recent visit to Malaysia. Abdur Rahman too had hinted at this underhand dealing in the 2007 discussion. "I think you can understand what I meant by 'special approval'. I do not want to elaborate further," he had said. Dhaka has many times requested Malaysia to recognise Bangladesh as a source country, but the plea remained unheeded, said an official of the Bangladesh expatriates' welfare ministry. "The reason is not known," he said, wishing anonymity.

8-year-old killed in city

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auto-rickshaw. When they reached Nagdapara area on Meradia-Demra link road, a Chittagong-bound lorry rear-ended the auto-rickshaw around 7:00pm, said Khilgaon Police Station OC Zia Md Mostafiz Bhuiyan. They were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared Sumaiya dead around 8:00pm, hospital sources said.

TWO OTHERS KILLED
Two more people were killed in separate road accidents in the city's Tejoan and Ramna areas yesterday. Abdus Sattar, 45, a government employee, was killed as a private car hit him in Tejoan area around 8:00am, police said. Razia Sultana, 52, died after a private car hit her in front of Matsya Bhavan around 1:00pm, said her son Sohel Shikder.