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PUTTING DEFEAT BEHIND

Hillary Clinton is writing a book on her life, bruising 2016 presidential campaign

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'Abrupt changes' made at Islami Bank without consent of foreign shareholder

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WITH TODAY'S ISSUE



Bangladesh backs 2-state solution

Slams new Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory

UNB, Dhaka

Strongly denouncing the recent Israeli announcement about building new settlements in Palestinian territory, Bangladesh yesterday reiterated its stance on the two-state solution for Palestine and Israel.

Bangladesh also reaffirmed its support for the people of Palestine.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reiterated her country's strong stance on the issue during the official talks with Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas at her office.

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President Abdul Hamid, visiting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Bangabhaban yesterday evening. Abbas went there to attend talks and a state banquet hosted by Hamid.

PHOTO: PID

Dhaka-Syria-Dhaka

Narrative of a Bangladeshi engineer reveals how he reached Raqqa to 'fight for Muslims' and returned home 'disillusioned'



ZAYADUL AHSAN writes for The Daily Star

Gazi Kamrus Salam Sohan went to Syria in December 2014 to join Islamic State, believing he was answering a holy call. But after five months in the war-torn country, he got disillusioned as he learnt that the terror group kills Muslims as well.

Sohan returned to Bangladesh on May 16, 2015. He was picked up by law enforcers 10 days later and kept confined for one and a half years, according to a transcript of the interrogation by counterterrorism unit of the police. (The Daily Star has the copy of the transcript obtained by the writer.)

The Rapid Action Battalion told the media on November 17 last year that they detained him the night before from a café in the capital's Adabor. Sohan was later handed over to the police who interrogated him.

Now in jail, the 27-year-old narrated to the counterterrorism unit of the DMP his experience in Syria and how he had got there.

EX-CADET CONNECTION

After passing HSC in 2007 from a cadet college in Dhaka division, Sohan completed BSc in electrical and electronics engineering. He joined Energypac Engineering in 2012 before joining Desco.

In January 2014, he joined Facebook group "EX Cadets Islamic Learning Forum", whose admin was Saifullah Ozaki, a Bangladeshi expatriate in Japan.

One of the key members of the forum was Aminul Islam Beg, an ex-student of another cadet college in southern Bangladesh, who graduated in computer science and engineering from a Malaysian University and later became the head of the IT department of a multinational company.

In February, Sohan and Aminul met in a mosque in Dhanmondi-7 and discussed the Syrian war.

Sohan told Aminul that he had been following news on Syria since 2011. The "persecution of Sunni Muslims by the Syrian regime" upset him, he said, adding, "I want to do something for them."

"War" is the only way to do something for the Syrian people, replied Aminul, who was arrested in Uttara on May 24, 2015. "If you want to go to war, I can send you to Syria."

ROAD TO SYRIA

Aminul gave him Ozaki's Japanese phone number and said that Ozaki would send him a Facebook friend request and talk to him at night. The call did come at night.

In the following days, Ozaki, an ex-student of another cadet college in the northeast of the country, kept on encouraging Sohan to go to Syria.

Born into a Hindu family, Ozaki earned a scholarship and eventually started teaching business administration at a university in Kyoto. He is believed to be in Syria now.

In mid-2014, he came to Bangladesh and met Sohan at a mosque in Uttara. In October, he told Sohan that he will help him get a visa for Japan as a visa for Turkey is not required if anyone has it for Japan.

Sohan got the visa after applying for it with documents sent by Ozaki and visited Malaysia and Japan.

Ozaki informed Sohan that he would attend a conference in Turkey on December 11 and Sohan should start for Turkey on December 9.

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'Those shortlisted have no political affiliations'

Search committee could still make changes to list, says official

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 20 people, shortlisted recently for the election commissioners' posts, do not have any direct political affiliation.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Abdul Wadud, additional secretary to the Cabinet Division, also said the search committee shortlisted the people taking their honesty, competency and neutrality into consideration.

The panel still could bring some changes to the list as it had not been finalised yet. It would again meet at the Supreme Court Judges' Lounge at 5:00pm on Monday to finalise the names, he added.

On January 31, the search committee, formed for the constitution of the EC, prepared the list from around 125 names recommended by 26 registered political parties, which also had held talks with the

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2 officials of Chinese firm held at 'gunpoint'

Gang waylays them at Rail Bhaban apparently to prevent them from dropping tender; the gang flees as rail employees come to rescue the two

HASAN JAHD TUSHER

Two officials of a Chinese company were held at "gunpoint" at the capital's Rail Bhaban for around five minutes apparently to prevent them from participating in a tender for a more than Tk 250-crore rail line project.

They went to the Bhaban on Abdul Gani Road around 11:45am and kept waiting on the ground floor for the lift to go to the fifth floor to drop tender documents.

Suddenly, a gang of four to five men forced them into the lift and took them to the eighth floor, which is quieter than the other floors, said several railway officials present there at that time.

The gang then asked the two Chinese nationals to get out of the lift, and they complied. Sensing that there were people around, the two screamed for help.

Hearing that, several railway officials came out of their rooms. The gang members then hurriedly took the lift and escaped.

"We came out of our rooms after hearing a scream for help. They [the Chinese men] were shouting -- please help us, please save us ... please don't hit us," said a railway official who was on the floor at that time.

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ZIA ORPHANAGE CASE Khaleda has no confidence in judge

COURT CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed no confidence in the judge of the trial court which is dealing with the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

Earlier in the day, the judge dismissed a petition Khaleda submitted on January 30 to seek further investigation into the case. According to the petition, the previous investigation was faulty.

Judge Abu Ahmed Jamadar of the Special Judge Court-3 of Dhaka set February 9 for the placement of Khaleda's self-defence statements in the Zia Orphanage and Zia Charitable Trust graft cases.

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Baby crocs stolen from sanctuary

A CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

At least 43 baby crocodiles have been stolen from the country's lone wildlife breeding centre at the East Sundarbans in Bagerhat.

The reptiles -- all about one-year-old -- were found missing on February 1 morning when staff at Karamjol Crocodile Breeding Centre did a count of its 277 crocodiles, said Mehedizzaman, assistant conservator of forest at Chandpai ranges under the east wing of the Sundarbans Forest Division.

No evidence has been found of any carnivorous animal entering the centre and preying on the baby crocodiles and so it is most likely that they were stolen and smuggled out, he said.

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Already half an hour late for the Bangla First Paper test, an SSC examinee sobs while entering her exam centre at the capital's Kamalapur Government Primary School around 10:30am yesterday. Her mother, also seen in the photo, said they were stuck in traffic jam. The SSC and its equivalent exams began across the country yesterday.

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