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People's Right to Know

FALGUN 13, 1412 BS

MOHARRAM 25, 1427 HIJRI

Ctg RMG factory fire toll 54, Most parts of capital many still unaccounted for

Blaze followed boiler explosion; both main gates were shut: 2 KTS officials held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The death toll in Thursday's worstever industrial fire here continued to rise yesterday, hitting 54 in the afternoon, with scores of workers still trapped, and feared dead, inside the charred four-storey factory building.

Over 150 employees were badly burnt in the inferno that engulfed KTS Composite Textile Mill of Arina Group at about 7:10 Thursday

mostly women, were working inside, sources said.

Of the injured, severely burnt 49 workers were undergoing treat-ment at Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) yesterday. Their condition is critical and many of them may not live through

the injuries, feared CMCH sources. Ten of the fire victims died on way to hospital and another during treatment at the CMCH at about

3:00am yesterday. Until filing of dent took place at the same factory this report at 7:00pm yesterday, on February 4. But, that day the this report at 7:00pm yesterday, rescue workers had retrieved 43 charred bodies from the ashes.

Witnesses and firemen said the fatal blaze caused by a boiler explo-sion on the first floor quickly spread and seized the entire build-ing. The ground and first floors of the building were used for garment production, and the second and third for textile.

It was alleged another fire acci-

workers could escape immediately. After that accident, the factory management closed one of the two collapsible gates on each floor.

Some injured workers said when they tried to escape from the flames they found the ground-floor collapsible gate locked.

A Bangladeshi expatriate in the USA, Wahidul Kabir Khosru, reportedly owns the mill in

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia flew in here in the afternoon and visited the accident spot and the injured at the CMCH.

Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) yesterday formed a 7-member committee headed by its First Vice President SM Abu Tayeb to probe into the

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plunge into darkness

Three major power plants trip

Most parts of the capital plunged into darkness last night as big power plants tripped one after another at Meghnaghat, Siddhirganj and Ghorashal due to what the authorities attributed to sion line connecting east and west technical faults in the East-West Interconnector Line.

and supply scenario of the country has already been in a dismal condition. It turned for worse in the

ongoing pre-summer spell with the Power Development Board (PDB) being able to generate a record low of 2,200megawatt (MW) electricity against a demand of 3,850MW.

As the 230 kilovolt (KV) Meghnaghat-Hasnabad transmisregions developed serious problems at 1:20pm yesterday, the The overall power generation 450MW Meghnaghat, 210MW Siddhirganj and 210MW Ghorashal unit 6 power stations subsequently failed, officials concerned said last

Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (Desa) control room sources told The Daily Star that as against yesterday's demand of 1,300MW power in Dhaka and its peripheries, Desa got barely 750MW electricity, forcing it to go for drastic load-shedding.

Sources at Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), Dhaka, said it had a tough time to meet the public demand for water as sufficient

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia visits the injured workers of KTS Textile Mills at Chittagong Medical College and Hospital (CMCH) yesterday, left, a fire victim's relative breaks down at the CMCH

WIDENING RICH-POOR GAP

Corrupts feed on MPO funds pay Tk 10,000 to the district educa-

INAM AHMED

It's not much of a school in Ishwardi -- a two-room concrete structure and a tin-shed partitioned with hardboards. The students draped in green Kamiz and red pyjama move around the small playground -- it's early January and their classes are yet to start. The teachers gather in their room to prepare class rolls. A common scene found in many private schools receiving government

hidden under this mundane scene these schools are feeding a huge corruption cycle. From the grassroots to the high-ups, millions of taka are being skimmed every year committee and for that he had to in the name of appointment, pro- cough up Tk 2 lakh. Next, he had to

motion and disbursement of the government funds under the monthly pay order (MPO).

Teachers of at least 10 schools from Ishwardi to Kurigram narrated their first-hand experiences of corruption -- how they have to pay hefty sums to get a job or to get entitled to the MPO.

Sirajul Huq (not his real name) is one such teacher who gets Tk 5,100 as basic pay, 90 percent of which comes from the government as MPO. Without the MPO money, Siraj could hardly survive, because There is another common story the school pays him only Tk 500 a month, not to mention that he has not got paid in the last five months. But to get the job first, he had to 'manage' the school's managing

another Tk 25,000 at the Shikkha Bhaban (Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education) Siraj had a promotion two years back upgrading his scale from Tk 4,100. It also did not come free; he had to pay Tk 5,000 for that to the district education officer.

tion officer. Then to put his job

under the MPO, he had to pay

As the estimate goes, each teacher has to spend at least Tk 2.35 lakh for a job at a private MPOlisted school The school too has a long list to

pay bribes to. The upazila project implementation officer visits the school every month to monitor the students' stipend programme run SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

for safety standards in factories

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia : SHARIFUL ISLAM ordered compliance with the safety standards at all industrial units as the death toll in the country's worst ever factory fire at the outskirts of Chittagong City reached 54 yester-

A five-member committee was also formed following a directive of the prime minister to investigate the incident of fire.

The inquiry committee, headed by Commerce Ministry Additional Secretary Sirajul Islam, also include the deputy commissioner of Chittagong, commissioner of the Chittagong Metropolitan Police, a representative of the Chittagong Area General Office Commanding (GOC) of the Bangladesh Army, and a representative of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The directives came as the Composite Textiles Mills at :

PM's directive Fire-related incidents Victims' relatives in garment units kill over 350 since '90

Over 350 garment workers have died and some 1,500 been injured in fire-related incidents since 1990 including Thursday night's devastating fire in Chittagong.

As there is no official figure regarding the number of casualties in fire, the death toll so far has been based on newspaper reports. Meanwhile, as of last evening,

54 people are confirmed dead and over 100 injured in Thursday night's fire at a composite textile factory in the BSCIC Industrial Area of the port city, the worst in the country's history President of Bangladesh

Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Tipu Munshi offhand said some 300 garment workers might have died in fire and stampede set off by prime minister visited the KTS : fire or fire alarm in the last 20 years.

In most of the fire incidents, the Khalurghat industrial town, the : casualties go high as the factories scene of Thursday's deadly fire, keep their main gates shut and as a SEE PAGE 15 COL 6 : result, the workers struggle to make

A top official of Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) said almost all the factories do not comply with the safety rules.

On condition of anonymity, he said most of the factories keep their entrances locked, flouting the safety rules. He said many of them even lack fire exits, emergency lights, searchlight boxes with batteries and enough water to put out

"Many have double stairs, but the alternative stairs usually remain occupied by goods and they lack enough light," he said, adding that according to the FSCD law, it is mandatory for the factories to have an emergency exit to prevent casualties. But the provision is grossly ignored.

Garment workers' leaders often complain that the country's garment factories have virtually

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crowd CMCH SHAHIDUL ISLAM and DWAIPAYAN BARUA

It was a heart shattering sight at Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) when the workers with severe burn injuries from the a quick exit even during an emerbodies of the not so fortunate ones were being brought there since 9:40pm on Thursday. Most of the inured workers are young women.

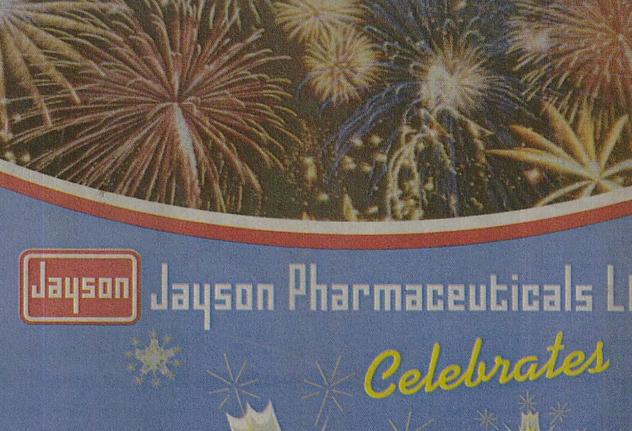
Cries of pain of the injured and frantic search by the victims' relatives for their loved ones made the air heavy with sadness.

Whenever some injured or dead arrived at the hospital all those anxiously waiting to know the fate of their dear ones rushed there. Their anxious wait turned into

uncertainty as the flow of injured and the dead to the hospital from the factory stopped after midnight. The long wait of many went in

vain as there was no scope to identify some of the bodies that were burnt beyond recognition. Md Zafar, elder brother of a

worker, Hanufa Akter, 18, was seen asking everybody he was meeting on the CMCH premises for the whereabouts of his sister. "She is become death traps for the workers: my younger sister, very beloved as most of them lack fire-fighting : sister. Please somehow help me SEE PAGE 15 COL 4



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JAYSON IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE ITS 50TH YEAR OF SERVING THE NATION IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR, PRODUCT INTEGRITY AND UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO QUALITY HAS EARNED US CONSUMERS' TRUST NATIONALLY AND GLOBALLY. WE THANK THE NATION FOR ITS SUPPORT!

FOR BETTER LIFE & HEALTHY NATION

Fresh barricade for urea, govt still sees no crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fertilizer-hungry farmers have been continuing their demonstrations demanding steady supply of fertilisers amid the government's repeated claim of 'no fertilizer crisis' in the country.

Thousands of fertilizer-starved farmers yesterday barricaded the Satkhira-Khulna highway for four hours in demand of urea during the peak season of IRRI-boro cultiva-

Meanwhile, Deputy Minister for Industries Abdus Salam Pintu told journalists yesterday that there is no fertilizer crisis in the country. SATKHIRA

About 2,000 farmers yesterday blocked the Satkhira-Khulna highway from 12:00pm to 4:00pm causing a long traffic jam.

The barricade was withdrawn when Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Rakibul Hawlader met with the farmers at the barricade and

assured them of adequate fertilizer League president Bishawjit Sadu

Sathkhira district Awami League president expressing solidarity with the demand of the farmers went to the barricade and announced that the deputy commissioner's (DC) office will be surrounded tomorrow in demand for supply of fertilizer, fuel and

Meanwhile, Juba Dol leaders of Tala Upazila led by their local president Hafizur Rahman snatched 26 sacks of urea from a union parishad member to distribute among pro-BNP farmers, reported our Satkhira Correspondent.

Besides, the Juba Dal activists forcibly bought 191 sacks of fertilizer at about 11:00am from three shops named Kapatakkha Enterprise, Bharoti Enterprise and Agrani Traders in Patkel Ghata area under the upazila.

At that time the Juba Dal activists assaulted the district Krishak

and also chased the upazila agriculture officer Sattya Ranjan MYMENSINGH

The police arrested four persons including a local fertilizer dealer and a truck driver from Dhanikhola village in Trishal Upazila at 8:00pm Thursday while they were smuggling 120 sacks of urea allotted from Trishal for Jamalpur district.

The police raided Dhanikhola Bazar and arrested the four -- Idris Ali, 45, a fertilizer dealer, Hafizul Islam, 26, a truck driver, Habibur Rahman, 40 and Korban Ali, 40. The sacks were being passed to Melandah upazila in Jamalpur district as a severe crisis has gripped the district raising the price of fertilizer over Tk 100 a sack, said the police

'NO FERTILIZER CRISIS' State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar and Deputy SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

at Ctg today SPORTS REPORTER

Final one-dayer

When Bangladesh meet Sri Lanka today in the series deciding third and final one-day international in Chittagong, it would not be an attempt for the Tigers to play just for pride rather to make history.

Habibul Bashar's men staged a rare fightback against the islanders in Bogra on Wednesday to square the three-match battle 1-1 and now they are looking forward to clinching the series. The match will start at 9am with

Bangladesh Television (BTV) beaming live coverage from the Chittagong Divisional Stadium. The 15,000-capacity venue in the suburb of the port city is also waiting to make its debut as an

international venue with this

STARSports and state-run

Bangladesh have erased their nightmare memories against Sri Lanka of losing all 15 matches until Wednesday before they handed a four-wicket defeat on the visitors who had won the first game on SEE PAGE 15 COL 6