

# Ctg RMG factory fire

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devastating accident. The committee members launched the investigation by visiting the spot yesterday.

The district administration and the Department of Fire Service and Civil Defence formed two 3-member probe committees into the accident. Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC-General) Mafzul Haq heads the district administration's committee and Fire Service Deputy Director Rashedul Islam Majumder the other.

The government earlier formed another 3-member probe committee headed by a joint-secretary of the commerce ministry. The deputy commissioner and police super of Chittagong are the other two members.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday noon arrested the administration and production director of the mill, M Sadat Ullah, 45, son of the late Ahmedul Haq Chowdhury of Charkhine, Patiya, Chittagong. Rab also detained an accountant of Vintage Textile Mill, a sister concern of KTS Textile Mill, named Mohammad Kamrul, 29, son of Abul Kashem Chowdhury of Kamalla, Phulgazi, Feni.

### WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

Some 1,200 people worked in two shifts at the textile mill. Around 600 workers were inside the building when the fire broke out, the local city corporation commissioner, Nazim Uddin, told The Daily Star.

He quoted two food vendors, Mohiuddin and Ismail, as saying that on Thursday they had supplied 520 packets of snacks to the factory for evening refreshment, from which the number of people at work during the accident could be easily reckoned.

When the fire broke out at about 20 minutes to the 7:30pm refreshment break, Hannan got trapped on the third floor. "We rushed to the narrow staircase, but many of us blacked out from the obnoxious gas and smoke pervading the stairwell," he told The Daily Star lying on a bed at CMCH Ward 1.

"We then broke a window. We made a long rope by tying up some scarves of the women and hung it from the window. About 20 of us could make it before the rope caught fire," he described with fear still distorting his face.

As the fire originated on the first floor, almost all the workers on the ground floor could come out, said survivors. But those working on the upper floors got trapped inside.

With one of the two gates locked, the workers were forced to rush down a single narrow staircase filled with thick smoke and poisonous gases of burning chemicals. They said only a few could escape down the stairs; most of them made it through the windows.

They broke the windowpanes and the iron grills with the help of local people and workers of the adjacent factories, said Akhter Hossain, who works at the laundry section of the garment unit.

"When the fire erupted, I was working on the second floor. One of the two collapsible gates on the floor was padlocked. Finding it impossible to come out through the milling crowd at the other gate, I jumped out through a window on the roof of a nearby two-storey building," said Farzana, another injured victim being treated at the CMCH.

"Some local people standing on the rooftop of that building broke open the window and helped us out," she said.

After firefighters equipped with over 20 fire tenders from the city's eight fire stations had managed to bring the blaze under control, the army started recovering charred bodies from the factory at 3:00am.

The building has two huge gates in front, besides another in the north used exclusively by the office staffs. There is another narrow and spiral fire escape in the north.

SM Fazlul Haq, former BGMEA first vice-president, said the regulation demands a garment factory to have three gates. At the end of a shift and during any emergency all the gates

## US sided

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former Soviet Union, the arch rival of the US during the Cold War, stood by the Indian government assisting the Bangladeshi freedom fighters, Chitrot observed.

Titled 'Genocide and Mass Political Killing: Why Does It Happen?', the discussion was organised by the Centre for Human Security at RC Majumder Auditorium of Dhaka University.

Chitrot noted that the US started taking up the cudgels for Pakistan after Henry Kissinger, the then foreign secretary, had visited China. Kissinger wanted to develop good relations with China to counteract the Soviet Union's influences across the world, he added.

"The US played an anti-Bangladesh role in 1971 for its foreign policy. However, it now has no such tendency," he added. Noted for teaching international studies and sociology, Chitrot pointed out, "Most of the genocide and political killings take place mainly for the purpose of gaining economic, political, ideological or ethnic supremacy."

He said the incidents of massacre and political killing will come down if the world focuses more on establishing communications between the disputed countries and exchange of opinion among the political parties.

The civil society members can play a vital role in resolving conflicts and thus reducing drastically the volume of genocide and killings on political and ethnic grounds, he added.

Prof Harun-ur-Rashid, dean of Social Science Faculty at Dhaka University, presided over the discussion attended among others by Prof Imtiaz Ahmed.

including the emergency route have to be completely opened.

"The factory had the required number of gates and the escape route. Now, we have to find out if they were kept wide open when the fire broke out," he said. "We have already launched an investigation into it and hope to find what caused so much casualties."

The survivors said both the main gates were closed, with only the small entrances in them open during the accident, while the fire escape was full of smoke and flames, making it hard for them to come out that way.

All the seven guards manning the gates fled without opening the main gates when the fire broke out, said some staffs of a neighbouring factory preferring anonymity. At one stage, the workers with the help of local people broke open both the gates.

Some of firemen also said they found many of the collapsible gates in the passages of the factory floors closed and had to break them open. Six of them fell sick from the poisonous fumes of dying chemicals on fire, said fireman AK Azad.

### IDENTIFIED VICTIMS

Twenty of the dead had been identified until last evening. Of them Rasheda Akhter, 17, is daughter of Seku Khan of Panpatti Village under Golachipa Upazila of Patuakhali District, Lutfa Begum, 18, daughter of Delwar Hossain, Sebagram, Ramgati, Laxmipur, Beauty Akhter, 19, daughter of Khaleq Bishwas, Roghunathpur, Bakerganj, Barisal, and Taslima, 14, daughter of Tazul Islam, South Hatiya, Noakhali.

Khadija Akhter, 16, is daughter of Sohrah Sheikh of Jamirtala in Bagerhat, Khuki Akhter, 15, is daughter of Fasi Mia and Sumi Akhter, 17, daughter of Abu Taher of Banskhal, Chittagong. Nazma, 12, Asma, 17, and Yasin, 13, hail from Lohagara Upazila and Tania from Rangunia in Chittagong. Jyotsna, 15, Mita Akhter, Jharna, 20, Rosy, 12, Sharmin and Nipa Akhter came from Bhola, while Al-Amin, Kohinor, and Khadiza Begum, 17, from Barguna.

All the 54 bodies were taken to the Chittagong General Hospital morgue.

Of the injured, 23 were undergoing treatment at CMCH Ward 27, 18 at Ward 1, and four each at Ward 26 and Ward 16.

Those at Ward 27 include Shamima, 18, Nazma, 28, Abdus Salam, 45, Monir, 24, Moni, 16, Seema Chakma, 22, Kamrun Nahar, 34, M Ismail, 21, Zhumki Das, 40, Kulsam, 40, Rasheda Begum, 28, Hasan, 19, Majeda Begum, 18, Swapna, 20, Champa Das, 18, Farzana, 20, Lovely, 20, Rani, 25, Arzu, 14, Jui, 16, and Suja Uddin, 20.

The injured at Ward 1 include Miraj Uddin, 18, Raju, 23, Surma, 18, Mohsin, 20, Akkana Bhoumik, 20, Delwar Hossain, 18, Rama, 15, Munni, 19, Hasina, 18, Shebhi Barua, 23, Mamata, 18, Al-Amin, 40, Thakurani Dash, 40, Deepa Dhar, 17, Noor Jahan, 30, Nasima Akhter, 28, Priyanka Nath, 20, and one 20-year-old unidentified worker.

The four victims at Ward 26 are Rana Akhter, 18, Rosy Barua, 20, Nurannahar, 20, and another unidentified one. Those at Ward 16 were identified as Rani Nath, 40, Salim, 21, Raju, 20, and Jamal Hossain, 35.

## 9 Hindus

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and torched the ground floor of the owner's house next door. The fire quickly spread to the adjoining bakery, trapping and killing those working inside. The prosecutions' main witness, Zaheera Sheikh, told an earlier trial in Gujarat that, while hiding on the roof of a neighbouring building, she saw the attack and could identify those responsible.

However she later recanted her testimony and the trial collapsed. The Supreme Court consequently ordered that the case move from Gujarat to Mumbai, capital of adjoining Maharashtra state, for a retrial because of concerns of witness intimidation.

Sheikh, who was 17 at the time of the killings, and four members of her family were convicted of perjury and will be sentenced at a later date, said special prosecutor Manjula Rao outside the court.

An Internet news portal claimed some Hindu politicians had paid Sheikh to change her testimony.

## Tremor

**FROM PAGE 16**  
port city. Our Staff Correspondent from Sylhet reported that a mild tremor was felt in Sylhet at 2:10 am and lasted for 20 seconds.

However, there was no report of any casualty. The local met office confirmed the tremor but could not give details, as there is no equipment in Sylhet to ascertain the intensity and distance of the epicentre.

## Aug 17 blasts

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all to Gaibandha police. The police submitted the charge sheet against them to a magistrate's court under the Explosive Act and the Special Act.

Reaz told the police he was holding the responsibility of the regional commander of Gaibandha and Joypurhat districts. Earlier on January 15, the police submitted another charge sheet against Matin Mehedi alias Motul Islam of Bridge Road, Gaibandha and AbdulAziz of Fulchhari upazila.

## Darkness

**FROM PAGE 1**  
water could not be lifted for supply because of the poor power supply yesterday.

A PDB press release issued by its Director (Public Relations) ASM Bazul Haq last night claimed that the board is trying to gradually restore all the tripping power units. The PDB control room sources acknowledged that the Meghnaghat and Ghorashal units were partially restored while it was still struggling to restore unit 6 at Siddhirganj where unit 4 also developed troubles late last night.

While Dhaka has been getting at least 1,000MW of its daily demand of 1,300MW for the last one week, its share was cut down to only 750MW causing immense sufferings in civic life.

The PDB claimed that it was able to generate 2,400MW electricity until last night. The Desa officials, however, claimed that the PDB generated only 2,200MW power and provided it with only 750MW yesterday.

With the government failing to generate any additional power to meet the increasing demand in the country, and also in keeping the existing plants operational, the gap between the supply and demand of electricity is widening, making the power crisis across the country even graver.

The power shortage is likely to double during the coming summer and the gap between supply and generation may hit 1,800MW mark as many recently closed power plants are yet to resume production, experts feared.

According to them, the demand during summer may go beyond 4,200-4,500MW while the power generation capacity will remain almost the same unless the closed plants come back in operation.

With the SSC and HSC examinations round the corner and the irrigation demand during the peak boro season, students and farmers are finding it difficult to bear with such extreme level of power cuts.

## Kansat

**FROM PAGE 16**  
But Rabbani soon left the spot for Kansat citing security reasons as tension arose between his supporters and the BNP activists.

Instead of the compromise meeting, another meeting was held with Acting Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ferdous Alam in the chair at noon. Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu and others addressed the meeting.

Minu declared to withdraw the meter rent and late fine of Palli Bidyut and to fix the minimum charge at Tk 65 instead of Tk 105 as per the demand of the demonstrators.

The family of each killed in the Kansat incident will be given Tk 100,000 from the government and Tk 50,000 on behalf of the local MP, declared Minu. Besides, he said each injured will get Tk 20,000 and, if necessary, Golam Rabbani will be sent abroad for better treatment.

The mayor assured that stern action would be taken against those found responsible for the tragic incident in Kansat, as per the report of the inquiry committee.

Meanwhile, Rabbani rejected Minu's offer and threatened to launch a movement from February 28 to realise their demands.

## Arms, ammo

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Naikkhongchhari on January 3.

Earlier in December, the BDR in an operation in Naikkhongchhari seized four Russian-made AK47 rifles and .79mm German-made pistols.

Since February 2004, seven American-made sophisticated M79 rifles, three M16 rifles, 12 excess barrels of M16 rifles and 451 bullets of M16 rifle and eight local-made rifles were recovered from different places of Naikkhongchhari.

Besides, 33 foreign-made pistols, 13 rifles, eight .12 bore rifles, one machine gun, one sub-machine carbine (SMC), large amount of TNT explosives, one grenade, 22,655 bullets and huge quantity of military materials were seized in several operations during June-August of 2005.

In the first week of September last year, 67 sophisticated arms including 20 AK47 rifles, 32 German-made pistols, one British-made heavy machine gun and one SMC, and around 30,000 bullets of several firearms were captured from Lembuchhari area of the upazila.

## Housewife

**FROM PAGE 16**  
of Niloy Cosmetic Corner at Pantil Bazar, from a rickshaw van when he was returning to his sister's home at Chourangi at about 9:30pm on Thursday, police said.

Later the gang phoned his family through a cell phone and demanded Tk 3 lakh for his release.

The gang threatened to kill Achintya if the money is not paid within two days, family sources said.

At least 108 people including traders and students were abducted in the district during the last one year.



Amar Ekushey Book Fair on the Bangla Academy premises witnesses huge gathering of book lovers on weekly holiday Friday yesterday.

# Victims' relatives

**FROM PAGE 1**  
find her dead or alive," he was requesting everyone he was meeting, showing a photograph of Hanufa held in his hand.

Although, Hanufa was a good student, poverty forced her to quit school and take a job in the KTS factory about a year ago, said Zafar in a choking voice, who hails from Gyanpara of Patharghata in Barguna.

Siraj Mia, 40, a physically challenged man, was searching desperately for his 14-year old daughter Asma Begum, the lone bread-earner of a six member family. "My daughter is missing and I can't find her anywhere," said the helpless father with tears rolling down his cheeks.

Farzana, 20, with her tender face severely burnt was crying in pain on a bed in ward no 27 while her injured colleagues were more or less in a similar situation all around her.

Eleven bodies were lying in the CMCH morgue since Thursday night while more charred bodies recovered from the burnt factory have started arriving at General Hospital since yesterday morning.

All the bodies including those from the CMCH morgue were brought and kept in a heap in the General Hospital morgue at Anderkilla by 3:00pm yesterday.

Hundreds of relatives of the workers gathered at both the morgues but no one was allowed to go near the bodies to identify them.

Security forces cordoned off the General Hospital morgue yesterday afternoon leaving the relatives with no other option than to wait there till the autopsies are done.

# Fresh barricade

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Minister Pintu yesterday visited Badamtal and Aminbazar river-ports, where about 40,000 metric tons of fertilizers are stocked.

The ministers talked to Truck Drivers and Owners Union and labour leaders to ensure immediate transportation of fertilizers to the northern districts.

"We have sufficient amount of fertilizers in stock and have sent the necessary amount to the northern districts already," Pintu said while visiting the two river-ports in the capital.

The northern districts need a total of nine-lakh metric tons of fertilizer in the January-March season and the government has already sent seven lakh metric tons, which is sufficient for January and February, Pintu said.

"We will sent one lakh metric tons more for March in the next five days," he added.

Termining the fertilizer crisis as a 'rumour', the deputy minister said some retailers spread the rumour about the crisis. "The farmers are trying to collect fertilizers for March thinking there would be a shortage next month," he said.

Admitting that there is a transportation crisis for carrying the fertilizers to the northern districts, Babar told journalists that the government sought help from Bangladesh Road Transport

## Khulna criminal

**FROM PAGE 16**  
five robbers while they were committing robbery in their bus at Alipura in Gazaria upazila on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway on Thursday night.

The robbers, in the guise of passengers, boarded the Comilla-bound bus from Dhaka and swooped on them while the bus was crossing Meghna Bridge at about 9:30pm, reports UNB.

At one stage, passengers caught the robbers and beat them up. On information, police rushed to the spot and arrested the robbers.

The arrestees are Faruk, 30, and Nannu, 22, of Mehendiganj in Barisal, and Abdur Razzak, 25, of Keutkhali in Pirojpur, Abu Farhad, 25, of Shariatpur and Ershad, 23, of Comilla.

"The autopsies might not be completed before 10:00am tomorrow," said Nepal Chandra Das, the lone coroner at the morgue, yesterday.

With the charred bodies kept on the floors all around him, Nepal said despite working with dead bodies for a long time the sheer number of so many bodies at a time made him nervous. "It's quite shocking and I never heard of so many people burnt to death in a single fire," he murmured.

"Only in another previous incident back in 1988 I saw so many dead bodies of human beings when some 39 were stampeded at a factory in the city's Paharlati area during a distribution of zakat."

Even then the experience was not so shocking as the bodies were not disfigured beyond recognition, he said.

Mohammed Nurul Islam, father of Salma, 12, a worker in the textile factory, while talking to The Daily Star alleged that he could not even get a chance to take a look at the bodies to see if any of them was his daughter's.

"I have been running between the morgues in vain to know the fate of my daughter," Nurul broke down in tears.

However, Mohammed Mostafa, standing outside the General Hospital morgue, at least got to know about the tragic ends of her cousin Rasheda, 17, and niece Khadiza Begum, 18. He is now in a long arduous wait to get the bodies of his loved ones.

Corporation (BRTC) in solving the crisis and the BRTC authorities have agreed to give 100 trucks.

Babar said the Highway Police and Rapid Action Battalion have been asked to cooperate with the truck drivers to solve their problems.

The truck drivers' union leaders said they had a crisis of trucks last week as Sona Masjid and Hill landports were closed. "Besides, trucks have no entry into the capital during the day hours, which also delayed the transportation," said Mohammad Asad Ullah, vice-president of Bangladesh Inter-district Truck Drivers' Union.

About 15,700 metric tons of fertilizers are stocked at Amin Bazar river-port and they had dispersed 72 trucks to the northern districts till 5:00pm yesterday, Asad said.

## Hasina

**FROM PAGE 16**  
"The nation is witnessing killings and deaths one after another since this government came to office," she said.

The people are experiencing severe electricity, fuel, fertiliser and seeds crises under this government, which has increased prices of fuel and essentials in a planned way to become rich, she added.

Hasina arrived in Dinajpur at 7:00pm to take part in the rally today at Gora Shaheed Maidan in the town, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

She visited the grave of Abdul Wahed Kanu Mia, her brother-in-law, on her way and offered feteha and attended the chehlum at Fatehpur in Pirganj.

She will stay at Dinajpur Circuit House during her three-day visit and is expected to return to Dhaka tomorrow.

Security measures have been stepped up in the town due to the visit. An 8,000-strong force of policemen and Rab and BDR personnel has been deployed to maintain law and order.

Police sources said a two-square-kilometre security blanket has been formed to ensure foolproof security.

# Corrupts feed

**FROM PAGE 1**  
encourage enrolment. The visits are not free – the school has to pay between Tk 2,000 and Tk 5,000 to the officer every time he steps into the school office.

Nightmarish situation is created every year when time comes for Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations. To get students registered for exams, the schools have to get certificates from the education boards. This involves a complicated process – after receiving a Tk 3,000 bank draft, the boards ask the district education officer to visit the schools and submit a report. When the officer comes, the schools have to pay him at least Tk 5,000 as cost for 'fuel for car and food'.

Every year, the schools have to renew their 'Manjuri' (grants) with the boards. This particular Ishwardi school had to pay Tk 9,600 this year in speed money. Another school in Natore, a comparatively new one, had to pay Tk 40,000 to get the Manjuri for the first time.

In appointing teachers, the schools have to pay bribe to the boards. If the subjects are new for the institution, the rate of bribes goes up. For example, the Natore school had to pay Tk 27,000 to appoint a teacher for computer science. Of course, the school realised the money from the teacher.

The corruption story does not end here, rather it picks up a political edge on another level. A school in Pabna could not hold its election of a deputy minister in presence of a deputy minister is deplorable. Such acts should be resisted."

Durbar Network will launch a programme protesting the incident, she added.

Nilphamari district Mahila Parishad General Secretary Daulat Jahan Chhobi said the incident is a violation of law, which does not allow marriage of girls under 18. It is an example of negligence to women's rights, she added.

Talking to the brides during the ceremony, a number of them were found aged between 12 and 15, having just passed primary education.

## PM's directive

**FROM PAGE 1**  
and the injured victims of the blaze at Chittagong Medical College Hospital yesterday.

Leaders of the BGMEA were present as she directed all concerned to ensure safety measures with particular reference to garments and textile factories.

The prime minister also inquired about the rescue operations and expressed her satisfaction over the steps taken so far to rescue the trapped factory workers and the treatment of the injured survivors.

Earlier, she flew in here by an air force helicopter to be received and briefed about the accident and subsequent rescue measures by the GOC of the Chittagong-based 24 infantry division of the Bangladesh Army, Maj Gen Sinha Ibne Jamali.

Senior officials representing the services operating rescue operations including the fire brigade, police, army and the district administration were present during the premier's visit.

Health Minister Dr Khondaker Mosharrar Hossain, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, Food and Disaster Management Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman, Prime Minister's Parliamentary Affairs Adviser SQ Chowdhury, her political secretary Haris Chowdhury, Amir Khosru Mahmud MP, whip Syed Wahidul Alam and Khwaza Ahsanullah MP, accompanied the prime minister.

According to an estimate of the BGMEA, there are about 3,600 garment factories across the country, and of them, nearly 2,600 are in the capital and on its suburbs.

The BGMEA president said all factories have emergency exits and fire extinguishers. "An accident is always an accident. Still, we try to compensate the workers and their families for injuries and losses of life. In every case of accidental death, we give the victim's family Tk 1 lakh," he said.

In response to two cases filed against two garment factories seven years ago, the High Court had

## Iraq slaps curfew

**FROM PAGE 16**  
accused Shia of conducting the bloodless bombing to justify reprisals.

In southern Baghdad on Friday, Shia militiamen clashed with gunmen, leaving Iraq security forces who are trying to enforce a curfew helpless to stop them.

Police sources said the clashes were between unidentified gunmen, possibly minority Sunnis, and members of the Mehdi Army militia. It was not immediately clear if anyone was hurt in the skirmishes in the Saidiya area.

Twenty bodies of people who were killed overnight and this morning have been brought to the morgue, a police source said.

Even if the curfew calms passions on the Muslim holy day, Iraq's government will still have to demonstrate it can control Shia militiamen who have been attacking Sunni targets and setting up their own checkpoints in defiance of the state.

Following the government's decision to extend an overnight curfew until 4 p.m. (1300 GMT), the large crowds at Sadr City posed a challenge to Iraq's security forces, many of whom are drawn from militia groups they may be ordered to control.

the ruling BNP to put its men on the school body. The school once tried to hold elections ignoring the pressure but could not do it as muscle-men were sent in to foil it.

The question that naturally rings is what kind of benefits motivate the people of power to capture the school management bodies. The answer is again money. The schools get test relief from time to time and the teachers and management body members constitute relief committees. The committee controls the relief and sells the rice and wheat to make profit. The management committee also takes between Tk 1 lakh and Tk 2 lakh for appointment of every teacher.

The story does not end here. Everything set and done, now comes the turn for the school to earn something. The teacher is happy to get his job, the school is happy to get its MPO and other allocations and the management committee is satisfied with its earning. Now the teacher has to make a final payment to the school. It may vary between Tk 20,000 and Tk 30,000.

As the story unravels, figures roll out one after another. More schools add on to the existing 4.5 lakh MPO accredited schools, over Tk 4,000 crore has already been spent on them, and an uncountable amount exchanged hands to breed corruption in education.

(This is the concluding part of the series)

# Fire-related incidents

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Besides, many of the factory owners have a tendency to ignore the safety rules such as keeping heat and smoke detectors and an alternative electricity system.

The authorities responsible for ensuring a safe atmosphere for thousands of garment workers too seem indifferent to taking actions against the owners failing to maintain basic safety measures.

Moreover, lack of knowledge on the part of garment workers about how to use safety measures including emergency exits and fire extinguishers are also a reason behind higher casualties, say sources in the sector, the top earner of foreign currency for the country.

Many of the factories have emergency exits but in most cases of fire and other mishaps in the past, panicky workers did not use those and rushed to the staircase together,