

## Ctg fire tragedy

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to form a high-powered committee to carry out the inspection.

Meanwhile, members of the investigation committees, formed to probe the incident of fire that killed at least 54 workers, told journalists yesterday after visiting the factory at Kalurghat BSCIC Industrial Area under the Chandgaon Police Station (PS) that their preliminary investigation found serious negligence by the owners, what they said has wrought a havoc to such an unbelievable degree and suggested punitive actions.

Sub Inspector Shamsuzzaman Bhuiyan of the Chandgaon PS filed a case yesterday against the owners for ignoring safety measures and employing child workers.

The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments will file three cases today against the owners for (a) keeping the factory gate locked, (b) for not reporting immediately about the accident and (c) for failing to take approval for its working hours.

"We will file the cases tomorrow," an official of the department told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (Blast) and Bangladesh Human Rights Commission might file two more cases against the owners.

News agency UNB reported that Bangladesh Human Rights Commission (BHRIC) filed a case with the Chandgaon PS yesterday holding KTS owners responsible for the fire.

BHRIC in its first information report (FIR) said the owners used to apply force to make the workers work under lock and key violating laws. The workers were trapped inside the factory as its authorities refused to open the collapsible gate, said a news release.

The BHRIC said compensations of Tk 10 lakh for each of the deceased workers and Tk 5 lakh for each of the injured should be disbursed immediately.

The FIR named the company's Chairman Ohidur Kabir, Managing Director Touhidur Kabir, Factory Manager Raju and Production Manager Sadat Ullah as the main accused.

**PROBE COMMITTEES & BUSINESS LEADERS**

Sirajul Islam, additional secretary to the commerce ministry, also the leader of the government probe committee, visited the factory at noon yesterday.

"The factory lacks some mandatory measures, it has only one main gate, whereas at least two to three gates were supposed to be there," he told reporters.

## Pirates kill 4 Boatmen, loot cargo

UNB, Barguna

Pirates killed all four people aboard a cargo vessel loaded with 1,100 maunds of rice and looted the consignment at the estuary of Paira river in Taltali upazila.

Sources said a trader, Jaher Akhand, of the town on Feb 18 sent the consignment of rice by ML Shiba for Khulna.

"The pirates swooped on the cargo vessel at the estuary and looted the rice. They tied hands of the four men behind their back and threw them into the water," the trader said.

The deceased are boatman Abu Jafar, 38, and crewmen Ibrahim, 30, Tayeb Ali, 35, and Masum, 25.

Bodies of Jafar, Ibrahim and Tayeb were recovered from Ashar Char on Friday and body of Masum on Saturday.

After autopsy, all the bodies were handed over to their respective relatives.

All the deceased were residents of different parts of Sadar upazila. Of them, Jafar and Ibrahim are cousins and Masum is their nephew. The killing of four people, including three of a family, cast a pall of gloom on the areas.

## Sit-in to protest

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two-hour token sit-in programme from 4:00pm to 6:00pm on February 28 across the country to protest the prevailing crisis.

She said the coalition government came to power through massive rigging in the 2001 elections and they are hatching conspiracy to rig the upcoming elections.

The AL president said the alliance government excluded the names of many AL workers, minorities and freedom fighters from the voter lists.

Urging people to check whether any worthy citizen's name has been excluded from the voter list, Hasina called on her party leaders and workers to teach an appropriate lesson to those who are responsible for such exclusion.

She also urged the people to remain alert so that the alliance government cannot snatch votes in the next election.

By stocking up fertiliser, some government high-ups and businessmen have created an artificial fertiliser crisis across the country, the AL chief said, adding that the government is playing with the fate of the farmers.

After witnessing militancy, extra judicial killings, repression, looting, price hike of essentials, and spread of corruption under the current regime, the people do not want the alliance government anymore in power, she said.

During the last four years, the

Inside the building it is very congested and instead of three stairways it has only one, which too was narrowed down because of the garments that were piled up on it during the time of the accident, he said.

Sirajul, referring to his committee's primary findings, said the factory owners had totally disregarded the laws and rules.

He assured that the committee will not linger the investigation process and will try to concentrate on the issue from a humanitarian point of view.

The committee will recommend stern actions against the owners after the investigation is over, he added.

Sirajul Islam yesterday formed a technical committee to assist the main probe committee. He made the deputy commissioner of Chittagong member secretary of the technical committee and included representatives from the BGMEA, CMP, BSCIC, Fire Service and Civil Defence Department, CDA and the PDB as its members.

FBCCI President Mir Nasir Ahmed and former BGMEA President Annisul Huq, who also visited the factory, found the owners negligent and non-compliant with the laws concerned.

They will propose the government to take punitive actions so that no one will dare to disregard the laws and rules concerned, they said.

Anisul termed the locking of the main gate a serious violation and said the owners should be punished.

### 34 LAID TO REST

Thirty four of the workers who died in Thursday's fire were buried yesterday at the National Graveyard in the city's Jalalabad area under the supervision of Chittagong City Corporation (CCC).

Earlier, post-mortems of the victims were conducted at the General Hospital morgue. CCC Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury received the bodies of 35 victims. Later, a janaza was held there and the mayor handed over one of the bodies to the relatives while 34 others were laid to rest at the graveyard.

BGMEA leaders, garments workers and people of the city attended the janaza.

## Dalai Lama envoys report better ties with China

AFP, Dharamsala, India

Envoys for the Dalai Lama said yesterday that recent talks with China had revealed an improved understanding between the two despite differences over the issue of autonomy for Tibet.

The envoys reported to the Tibetan spiritual leader Saturday at the Indian hill station of Dharamsala, where the Tibetan government-in-exile is based, after concluding talks with Chinese leaders this week.

"Today there is a better and deeper understanding of each other's position and the fundamental differences that continue to exist in the positions held by the two parties," the envoys said in a statement.

Lodi Gyari Gyaltsen and Kelsang Gyaltsen concluded their week-long talks in China Wednesday, along with two senior Tibetan officials.

Tibet has been ruled by China since 1950. The Dalai Lama fled into exile in India in 1959 and direct ties between the Tibetan leader and Beijing collapsed in 1993.

The dialogue between the two sides resumed in September 2002 after a thaw in relations. The first three rounds of talks were held in Beijing, while the fourth round was held in Switzerland.

After the latest round, the Tibetans expressed hope of further dialogue.

## BGMEA

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to form a high-powered committee to carry out the inspection.

The BGMEA also decided to cancel the provisional certificate of KTS mill, bear the medical expenses for the nine severely burnt KTS workers being shifted to Dhaka for better treatment, compensate the dead and the injured workers and provide financial assistance to all the factory-fire affected people at the meeting.

The association also took an initiative to employ the workers of the KTS mill to other factories, as the fire-gutted factory virtually remains closed.

"We also talked with the management and owners of the KTS factory and they assured us that they will pay the due salaries of the workers," Tayyab said.

"An accident may occur, but we have to take steps to prevent any loss of life in case of any mishap," the BGMEA vice-president further said.

The association also formed a 7-member committee headed by Tayyab to probe into the devastating accident in Chittagong.

According to the BGMEA, about 75 percent of the 4000 member factories is strictly following the compliance issues.

## PMO monitoring

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She also asked the authorities concerned to ensure proper treatment of those injured in the incident.

The prime minister urged the locals to extend cooperation to the rescuers engaged in this humanitarian task.

She expressed deep shock at the loss of lives in the building collapse and conveyed her sympathy to the bereaved family members.

Opposition Leader and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed deep shock at the loss of lives in the building collapse.

In a message of condolence, she conveyed her heart-felt sympathy to the bereaved families and prayed for the salvation of the departed souls.

The opposition leader called for giving compensation to the families of the victims and providing adequate treatment for the injured.

## Darkness

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Selim Bhuiyan, deputy director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said their rescuers found gas leaking inside the debris.

"If someone is still trapped there we must rescue them as soon as possible; otherwise they would not survive as the gas is leaking," said a firefighter.

Twenty-two-year-old mason Bashir had two hours to recollect the golden moments of his life, to repent and regret some things he did, as he thought he was dying. He was lying helplessly under a big chunk of a collapsed wall of the Phoenix building.

Bashir's trauma felt even more unreal when he was finally rescued around 1:30pm. Miraculously, he did not suffer serious injuries but a slight wound in his leg.

"I was sure I would die eventually. A huge wall fell on me. Luckily there were two pillars by my sides that saved me from being crushed under the wall," he said.

"But my leg was stuck in the debris and I could not move," he told The Daily Star at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.

Bashir said though he is a wall painter by profession, he was working as an electrician at the collapsed building.

"I was working on the second floor when I suddenly heard a rumbling noise. The next moment I saw the building crumbling around me and within few seconds a wall fell on my leg."

"I heard another young worker screaming for help nearby. I was getting prepared for death and recollecting all sorts of things -- my father, mother, my pregnant wife and others of my family."

There was no ray of hope for survival until he heard people outside the debris looking for trapped victims. "I tried to scream for help, but I could not make a sound. After about half an hour rescuers pulled me out of the building."

## Extra floors

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(Rajuk) said as the building was built at least 25 years ago, Rajuk authorities back then did not permit the owners to build more than three storeys.

"We are yet to find out the file for that building. But I think it was not more than three storeys," Rajuk chairman told The Daily Star.

"Unplanned renovation works might have quicken the collapse," he added.

Echoing the chairman some local people said the owners even broke down some parts of the pillars to accommodate their new renovation plans to convert the garment factory building into a hospital.

A local resident Jahidul Islam said, "The building was slashed by one to two feet on all sides and a good quantity of iron rods were taken out during the process which might have been a cause for the collapse."

Selim Newaz Bhuiyan, deputy director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said load distribution inside the building might not have been proper which could have been also a contributing factor to the collapse.

"This is on a busy street where always heavy vehicles are passing by. They might not have considered the highway vibration while developing it," said Selim Bhuiyan.

"It would not collapse without construction and maintenance fault," he added.

Rajuk has formed a four-member investigation committee that will submit a report on the collapse within a week.

## 6-storey building

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The authorities were forced to stop vehicular movement from Tejaon Satrasta to Mohakhali intersection.

"I was plastering a room on the third floor when at first I heard the sound of an electric generator. Soon I heard the sound of crumbling and saw the walls of the northern part of the building collapsing," Shahaj Uddin, a mason, told The Daily Star at DMCH.

The whole building collapsed within a few seconds as all but the first floor were empty, said witnesses living in adjacent buildings.

"Seeing the walls and pillars collapsing, we tried to run out of the building but did not get enough time," said Shahaj, who received injuries in his head, legs and hands.

"I saw the whole building was coming down and a wall fell on me, pinning me to the ground."

According to the injured, there were 20 tile-workers and 10 masons on the second, third and fourth floors, nine workers in the Phoenix Electronics showroom, seven woman labourers and two security guards on the ground floor.

Security guard Sahabul said there were 60-70 people working inside the building.

Around 50 corrugated tin-made shanties behind the building are also now lying under the rubble.

Those present in the slum or at the nearby tea-stalls, the passers-by and those working at the adjacent car workshop--all were instantly buried under the rubble.

Two rickshaws, a CNG-run three-wheeler and two empty minibuses parked on the roadside were totally crushed.

Locals could not confirm the number of the ill-fated people but feared zero chance of their survival.

Hundreds of local people started the rescue work before the fire brigade, army, police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) arrived and put up barricade, sending away the curious locals and relatives of the victims.

The rescue workers hammered away at the collapsed structure, trying to cut away concrete slabs with pneumatic hammers, pickaxes, hammers and gas cutters.

They were rather keen to operate rescue inside the main building first as they believe some people might still be alive there.

"Our rescuers have already entered the building to find out if anyone is alive inside the rubble," said Selim Newaz Bhuiyan, deputy director of fire brigade. "It would take at least four to five days to finish the rescue operation," he said.

## Loan default

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swelling of defaulted loan amount.

There was no improvement also in recovery of the loans handed out to state-owned enterprises, pointed out a Sonali Bank source. This NCB owes around Tk 6,000 crore to Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation alone.

The defaulted NCB loans stood at Tk 10,024 crore on December 31, 2005, compared to Tk 9,955 crore on December 31, 2004.

The defaulted PCB loans had scaled down from Tk 4,195 crore on end-2004 to Tk 3,544 crore on end-2005, PCB loans from Tk 109 crore to Tk 104 crore, and DFI loans from Tk 4,467 crore to Tk 3,837 crore.

In 2005, some 20 of the total 30 PCBs achieved a commendable reduction in the amount of loan defaults. A number of PCBs like Pubali Bank, City Bank and United Commercial Bank, who had been bracketed as problem banks, came out of that list last year by dint of overall good performance including downsizing the volume of loan default.

Again some PCBs including Al-Arafah Islami Bank and Social investment Bank were in pretty bad shape in 2004. But restructuring of management and Bangladesh Bank's rigorous monitoring have resulted in much improvement of their condition.

While the overall condition of the PCBs has improved, some of them are still lagging behind in performance. Of them two banks have defaulted loans to the tune of 24 percent and 30 percent of their total outstanding loans. The loan default amounts of some of these PCBs had also ascended over last year.

The central bank is strictly monitoring the activities of some PCBs so that their conditions do not deteriorate further, said a Bangladesh Bank source.

However, in December 2005, when the gross loan default in the country was 13.55 percent of the total outstanding loan, the net loan default was only 17.15 percent. In case of the PCBs, the net loan default was just 1.75 percent.

Net loan default is considered as the standard for determining bad assets internationally, the BB source added.

## Int'l workers' body

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trade unions apprehended more accidents.

"This (Spectrum tragedy) could have happened in any one of 1,000 other factories, and a similar accident will soon happen again - unless something is done now," the ITGLWF report said.

Even on February 17 in Dhaka, ITGLWF General Secretary Neil Kearney said Bangladesh's readymade garment industry was at a crossroads and urged the garments factory owners to improve industry environment and ensure security of the workers.

In the wake of the accidents in garments industries, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) held a meeting last night to discuss the present situation. The leaders of the association are under pressure from buyers who have been repeatedly asking for better working conditions.

Following the Spectrum tragedy, a high profile team comprising the ITGLWF general secretary and top apparel buyers including -- Cotton Groups of Belgium, GAP, Inditex of

Spain and Karstadt Quelle of Germany visited Bangladesh in between June 5 and 8 last year. Collectively, these buyers import a large share of Bangladesh apparel.

The delegation had cautioned that Bangladesh might face a major decline in receiving orders if working conditions in the industries did not improve. It also prepared the enquiry report on the Spectrum tragedy and situation in other factories.

"The Savar disaster has to be a wake-up call for the garment industry in Bangladesh," the report was quoted.

It also said that the ITGLWF and its affiliates have been calling for a clean up of the industry for the past 15 years and every time the BGMEA has said, "We need more time."

"Time ran out for the dead and injured at Spectrum. Now time has run out for the owners, and for the government, which is as guilty as Spectrum management for failing to uphold its own laws," the report added.

## Farmers

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Chairman of Dantbhanga union parishad in Roumari AKM Fazlul Haque Mandol and Abdul Kader of Bandaber union parishad in the same upazila said urea was selling at Tk 390-400 per bag (containing 50 kg) in their areas. But the district fertiliser monitoring committee at a meeting on February 23 decided that each bag of urea would be sold at Tk 290.

Market sources said about 14,450 tonnes of fertiliser were not delivered from Baghabari, Kazirhat and Nagarbari due to high transportation costs. Truck fare in every route has increased by Tk 700-800 for the rise in petroleum price.

They attributed the fertiliser crisis in some northern districts mainly to increased transportation cost.

Our staff correspondent in Rajshahi reports that 139 fertiliser dealers of Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi yesterday stopped lifting fertiliser from the buffer stock for an indefinite period, protesting what they said is supply of date-expired urea imported from China.

But warehouse in-charge at Rajshahi Siddikur Rahman claimed that the fertiliser was tested to be of good quality.

Deputy Secretary of the establishment ministry SMA Baton, on behalf of the industries ministry, visited Rajshahi warehouse. He heard complaints from the dealers' and resented that the fertiliser stock was not properly stored.

Rajshahi Fertiliser Association General Secretary Rabiul Islam said the BCIC imported the urea through the TCB and most of the fertiliser is full of rubbish, making it unacceptable to farmers. "Every sack is torn and weighed less than it is supposed to. Growers are not purchasing it," he added.

Meanwhile, acting on a tip-off, police recovered 16 bags of urea on Friday from Rasheda Enterprise at Chitalmari Bazar in Bagerhat district.

UNO of Chitalmari Nitish Chandra Sarker told our Khulna staff correspondent that 16 bags of urea were hoarded by the dealer to sell it in black market. Delder Jahangir Alam, who owns Rasheda Enterprise, is now absconding.

## Power shortfall

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another at Meghnaghat, Siddhirganj and Ghorashal due to what the authorities attributed to technical faults in the East-West Interconnector Line.

As the 230 kilo volt (KV) Meghnaghat-Hasnabad transmission line connecting the east and the west regions developed serious problems at 1:20pm Friday, 210 MW Siddhirganj and 210 MW Ghorashal Unit 6 power stations subsequently failed.

UNB adds: Another unit at Siddhirganj power station went out of order yesterday, PDB sources said.

A PDB official said the country posed a relatively lower demand on Saturday being the weekend. "But the demand will definitely go up from Sunday when industrial and commercial enterprises will start consuming... The demand may even reach 4,500 MW," he said on condition of anonymity.

An official at the Desa control room said almost all the areas of the city had to face blackout for several hours in two or three spells. The problem was specially nagging for the students preparing for the upcoming SSC exams.

The areas where electricity consumers were the worst victims of the on-gan, off-again power supply include Malibagh, Mouchak, Rajarbagh, Moghbazar, Dhanmondi, Mohamadpur, Farghat, Siddiqbazar, Paribagh, Nakhapara and Kakrail.

Rockets and mortars fell on the sprawling Shia slum of Sadr City in eastern Baghdad. One destroyed a house and killed two women and a man and wounded a child, said a spokesman for the Shia movement led by fiery cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

Near the northern city of Kirkuk, a Katyusha rocket damaged a Shia shrine overnight, police sources said.

## 2 bills

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The draft of the Public Procurement Bill 2006, that has already got the cabinet's approval, says if an officer is found involved in corruption in any stage of a public purchase such as process of the purchase deal and its implementation, criminal proceedings will be brought against him.

It has also omitted the lottery provision while the option of purchase in phases has been obliterated.

The Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), Amendment Bill 2006 has divided the magistrates into two categories -- judicial and executive. Judicial magistrates will have no administrative business and they will be under the authority of the Supreme Court.

Executive magistrates will not take part in any judicial activities. They will, however, be authorised to issue executive orders such as declaration of Section 144, and issuance of orders to use force in cases of deterioration of law and order along with carrying out other administrative jobs.

"Passing the bill is going to be the biggest development towards separation of the judiciary from the executive," Law Minister Moudud Ahmed told reporters after the cabinet approved it on Monday.

## Lanka win series

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his side struggling at 17-2, the Lankan vice-captain shrugged off the pressure with a clinical display on way to his fifth ODI hundred that took the game away from the home side.

The elegant left-hander featured in two significant partnerships -- 75 runs with Jayawardene (51 off 56 balls) for the third wicket and 104 with all-rounder Lokuarachchi (69 off 57 balls) to steady the ship.

Left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique, who palmed an excellent return-catch off Jayawardene, not only set both the half-centurions back but also clean bowled Sangakkara, the wicketkeeper who smashed 11 boundaries in his heroic effort that earned him the man-of-the-match and man-of-the-series awards.

Bangladesh bowling had gone haywire in the last few overs that saw the Lankan tail blasting their way past the 300-run mark, rattling 46 runs in the last 21 deliveries. Farveez Mahroof provided pure entertainment in the slog overs, clubbing one four and three sixes in a 9-ball 27.

Mashrafe, brilliant in his first spell (6-2-9-2), conceded 59 runs in his last four overs while Rafique finished with best figures of 3-61.

The hosts, reduced to 44-3 by the 13th over, never recovered from a slow start although Ashrafal and captain Bashar took charge in the

middle like the previous match. Ashrafal's eighth fifty helped Bangladesh recover with an 86-runs stand for the fourth wicket with Bashar, who made a patient 30 off 54 balls.

Alike the last match, Ashrafal -- who smashed 11 fours in his rapid-fire 64 off 67 balls -- did not last long after the departure of his captain when part-time off-spinner Tilakaratne Dilshan, pick of the Lankan attack with 2-14, had him caught at long-on.

The two teams will now be engaged in a two-Test series with first match taking place at this venue from February 28.

## 41 workers

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near Olanker intersection exploded in a big bang.

On information, police and fire fighters rushed to the spot, rescued the injured and send them to nearby Al Amin Hospital and different clinics.

Of the injured, condition of four was stated to be critical. They are Nasima of Moon Fashion, Kusum and Shaira of Gaus Apparels and Nurun Nabi of Leading Fashion.

The authorities of the garment units said they will bear the expenses for treatment of the injured workers.

## Iraq govt warns

**FROM PAGE 16**

Extending the curfew to Monday morning, Iraqi leaders are scrambling to break the round of tit-for-tat reprisals, sparked by a suspected al-Qaeda bombing of a major Shia shrine in Samarra on Wednesday. The gravest crisis since the US invasion in 2003 threatens US plans to withdraw its 136,000 troops.

The biggest political bloc from the once-dominant Sunni Muslim minority said it might end a boycott of US-backed negotiations on forming a national unity government that Washington hopes can stifle sectarian strife that has killed more than 200 people in Baghdad in three days.

But Iraq's most prominent Sunni cleric, blaming Shia police for attacking his home, said live on pan-Arab television during the gunbattle: "This is civil war declared