

Their wounds have not healed Cops still clueless

Families still reeling from loss of loved ones; DSCC gives compensation to 31 victim families



MEMORIES OF HORROR ... Locals look on at a banner commemorating the devastating blaze one year ago on the very spot that claimed dozens of lives. The photo was taken yesterday in front of Haji Wahed Mansion in Chawk Bazar's Churhatta.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four-year-old Junayed still waits for his father to return home with a bag full of chips and toys, a promise he was given a year ago. "He still complains to his mother why his father was not coming back with chips... 'Why is abbu [dad] still taking so much time to come home from downstairs?' he asks," said Junayed's mother Shirin Aktar yesterday, in a choked-up voice.

Junayed's father Shahadat Hossain, who used to run a tea stall in Satrawza, was one of the victims of the tragic fire in Chawk Bazar's Churhatta last year.

He had died on the spot.

Shahadat was one of the 71 people burnt to death on the night of February 20 last year.

"Whenever someone knocks, my little boy rushes to the door hoping his father has returned," Shirin told this correspondent at a programme yesterday.

"Every time he asks me the question, I tell

him his father went downstairs, and will come back soon. I haven't yet tried to make him understand that his father is dead. He is too young to understand," she added.

Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) yesterday arranged the programme where they gave compensation to family members of 31 victims of the Churhatta blaze.

Like Shirin, family members of 30 more victims were present at the programme, each of them still reeling from the wound inflicted by the horrendous fire.

Shirin and 20 others were offered jobs on a master roll [pay-per-work] basis at DSCC's waste management department.

They are offered Tk 475 per day, with condition that they can be sacked anytime without any reason.

Asked, Md Ripon, son of a fire victim Joynal Abedin, said, "I have to be content with this. There is nothing to do."

"They gave the job and I'll do it," said Ripon, who now works at a private organisation.

Of the 31 that received compensations, four were given allocation of shops, and two Tk 4 lakh each. Four applicants of victim family members -- who had higher educational qualifications -- were promised jobs at DSCC as per their qualifications within two weeks.

Replying to a question, DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon said of the victims, only 31 applied for compensation, and that is why they were giving compensation to them.

He said the bureaucratic process has taken them a long time to hand over the compensation to victims' families.

"We have to learn from such a fire incident. If we forget, such heart-wrenching incidents will recur," Khokon said, adding, if people become conscious, the magnitude of damage will reduce in future.

LOCALS RALLY FOR JUSTICE

Meanwhile, a mass-signature programme was held in Chawkbazar area yesterday morning, demanding compensation for the families of the 71 victims of the devastating fire.

Around 100 locals, including victims' family members, participated in the programme held in front of Wahed Mansion, where the fire had originated.

The participants, wearing black badges, recalled the horrific incident and demanded the compensation authorities had promised them.

However, on the anniversary of the tragedy, nobody from the government, not even the local government members, visited the spot.

MA Rahman, one of the key organisers of

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A year after Chawk Bazar blaze, no headway in probe

RAFIUL ISLAM

Exactly one year after the tragic blaze at Wahed Mansion in Chawk Bazar, police have neither arrested a single accused, nor made any headway in investigation.

Despite a public outcry for their arrest, owners of the building remained out of law enforcers' radar until they surrendered before a High Court bench on March 11 and secured bail. The two siblings finally landed in jail on April 2 after they surrendered to a lower court. However, the duo secured a six-month bail in August -- which was later extended by a year -- and are currently out of prison.

Much like the building owners, law enforcers in the last one year could not arrest the owners and top officials of the chemical warehouse in the building. On that fateful day, huge explosions took place at the warehouse on the first floor of the residential building, initiating the fire that engulfed the nearby areas.

The victim families, meanwhile, are still bearing the brunt of the incident, with some shifting to their village homes -- unable to bear daily expenses in the city. The investigation officer has so far taken nine dates from the trial court to submit a probe report. The next date of submitting the report is February 26.

The only thing investigators can say for certain in one year of investigation is the name of the warehouse -- Paarl Trading International -- and its owner and some top officials.

Kabir Hossain Hawlader, inspector (investigation) of Chawk Bazar Police Station, said they could not identify and locate the owners, as they did not get any clue about them.

"We got some information and addresses going through their trade licence, passport and national ID cards. But visiting those places, we found the information were incorrect," Kabir, the investigation officer

of the case filed following the incident, said recently.

The police officer, however, said they were investigating with sincerity, and waiting for the post-mortem report from the forensic medicine department at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. According to police, Mohammad Kashif, the executive director of the company; and two directors Imtiaz Ahmed and Mozammel Iqbal -- have gone into hiding after the incident.

The company's offices at Moulvibazar of Old Dhaka and Hatirpool has remained shut since then. Family members of victims, however, are frustrated over the progress in investigation, and raised questions about sincerity of law enforcers in tracking down the culprits.

"Our police are very capable, and are arresting dreaded criminals; I do not know why police are not able to arrest them [the culprits]. They are moving freely... The building owners, after coming out of jail on bail, are also leading their normal lives," said Nahida Rahman, wife of slain ASM Anwar Hossain, a pharmacy shop owner near Wahed Mansion.

"Our families have been destroyed... We want justice and compensation," she said.

"They are just biding time... We fear the case will be buried after a couple of years," said a family member of another victim, preferring anonymity.

The victims in the deadly fire are mostly pedestrians, people travelling on rickshaws and cars, residents of the buildings as well as owners and staff of the shops located near the Wahed Mansion.

Md Asif, son of victim Md Jummun, filed a case with Chawk Bazar Police Station against two Wahed Mansion owners -- Hasan and Sohail -- and at least 12 unnamed persons after the incident.

Talking to The Daily Star, Asif said, "We do not see any sign of getting justice... I want justice for all those who are responsible."

Prof Perween new TIB chair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prof Dr Perween Hasan, vice chancellor of Central Women's University, has been elected chairperson of the trustee board of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

She was elected during the 103rd meeting of the board at TIB office in the capital's Dhanmondi yesterday, according to a press release.

She will succeed Advocate Sultana Kamal



and will take charge tomorrow.

Besides, former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumdar has been elected the new secretary general while Prof Tasneem Siddiqui and Advocate Sushmita Chakma have been elected new members of the board.

Prof Perween, also a noted educationist, is a former teacher of Islamic History and Culture Department of Dhaka University. She obtained her PhD in Islamic architecture from Harvard University of the United States.

10 laureates for Independence Award named

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday announced the names of nine persons and an institution for the Independence Award for their outstanding contributions to the nation in various fields.

They are: Bir Pratik Golam Dastagir Gazi, late Commander (ret'd) Abdur Rauf, late Muhammad Anwar Pasha, Azizur Rahman, Prof Md Obaidul Kabir Chowdhury, Prof AKMA Muktadir, freedom fighter SM Rois Uddin Ahmad, Kalipada Das and Ferdousi Mazumder.

The institution is Bharateswari Homes, which was nominated for its contribution to the education sector.

Dastagir, Rauf, Anwar and Azizur were nominated for their contributions to the country's Liberation War and independence, while Prof Obaidul and Muktadir for their outstanding contributions in medical science.

Kalipada and Ferdousi were nominated under the culture category and Rois for his work in literature.

PM Sheikh Hasina will hand the awards on March 25, at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

CASE AGAINST SK SINHA Charge framing hearing Mar 25

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday transferred the graft case filed against former chief justice Surendra Kumar Sinha and 10 others to the Special Judge's Court-4 of Dhaka for its trial.

After getting copies of advertisements published in two national dailies, Judge KM Emrul Kayesh passed the order. The court set March 25 for hearing on charge framing against Sinha and 10 others.

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Not enough books on Language Movement



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Although the most number of books on Language Movement has been published by Bangla Academy, the institution has stopped printing new editions of many of those.

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Amar Ekushey book fair has always been a manifestation of people's love for their mother tongue. On the eve of Ekushey, the fair has been buzzing with people, many of them interested in learning from books on the Language Movement.

The Language Movement is of particular interest to the younger generations, as books can be a major medium to learn history from.

Although this is a topic that has been covered by older authors in the past, there are barely a handful of contemporary writers working on it. So readers are left with just a few options.

On the other hand, the authorities of Bangla Academy, which had a reputation for publishing such books, did not release new editions of these books at the fair this year as of yet, according to their stall attendants.

Ahmed Rafiq, a Language Movement activist, has written many books on the topic. Among these, one titled "Bhasha Andolon: Teknaf to Tetulia" features how the Language Movement spread all over the country during that time.

Another book Ekusher Dinlipi also narrates significant moments of 1952.

"These two [books] are very important to me," said the veteran.

When asked why books on the movement are published rarely now, Rafiq said, "People are reading these books written by a few of us, and these were written at a time when the movement

was very important. This was a successful protest that led to Bangla being the state language. Finally, one must know a lot to write on this."

Publishing house Ananya has brought several books on the Language Movement, including Ekusher Dalil by MR Akhtar Mukul and Ekusher Golpo edited by Hasan Hafiz.

"We want to publish more books on language movement but nobody is writing on it. I will publish if I get good manuscripts," said Monirul Haque, owner of Ananya.

The stall attendants of the academy told this correspondent that there is a huge demand for such books at the fair, although there have not been new editions.

This correspondent found the lowest number of books on language martyr Abdul Jabbar, although books on him are in heavy demand at the fair.

Bangla Academy had published several books including "Ekusher Smritycharon" in 1980, "Bhasha Andolon o Shaheed Minar" by Rafiqul Islam in 1982, and "Bhasha Andolon: Tatparjo o Itihash" jointly written by Abdul Matin and Ahmed Rafiq in 1992.

However the latest editions of these books could not be found.

A Bangla Academy official seeking anonymity, told The Daily Star, "The copies of these books have run out. Only the printing division of the academy can provide insight on this."

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সুখের ভাষা

ঘর যেন এক মায়াময় অবয়ব। কিছুটা বাস্তব, অনেকখানি কল্পনা। কোন কোন ঘর আছে আমাদের টেনে নেয় ভেতরে। আশ্রয় দেয়, মায়াময় করে, দেয় বেঁচে থাকার প্রেরণা। আবার কোন কোন ঘর আমাদের করে ঘরহীন। পার্থক্য ভাষা আর ভাষার প্রকাশে। মায়ের ভাষা ঘরকে করে দ্যুতিময়। মনের ভাষা ঘরকে করে শ্রুতিময়। পরস্পরের বোঝাপড়া ঘরকে করে ঐশ্বর্যময়। আর সেখানেই শুরু সুখের। সেখানেই শুরু আমাদের। প্রতিটি ঘর হয়ে উঠুক সুখের এক অনাবিল উৎস।



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