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FATAL BLAZE AT UNITED HOSPITAL

Burnt unit had no fire safety

The makeshift isolation unit was built as an extension of main building without fire clearance, violating Nat'l Building Code

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The isolation unit for coronavirus patients at United Hospital was makeshift, it lacked fire safety measures and was built in violation of the Bangladesh National Building Code, fire service officials said yesterday.

A devastating fire, which started from an air-conditioning unit in one of the four rooms there, killed five senior bed-bound patients, who could not get up and escape, on Wednesday night.

"This extension was built in violation of the building code. The hospital authorities did not seek fire security clearance from us when building the extension. While the main hospital has a fire licence, it was also necessary for them to get a similar clearance for the annexe," said Debashis Bardhan, deputy director (Dhaka division) of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

He claimed the fire service department did not even know that such an extension was built.

"The main building had a fire hydrant but this extension did not. The extension did not have a fire exit either," he said.

A fire exit is mandatory for structures providing healthcare services, according to the latest (2015) revision of the Bangladesh National Building Code.

Also, depending on the structure, the exit has to be a fire door capable of resisting fire for two to three hours. Fire hydrants are also mandatory.

One of our correspondents who visited the spot yesterday reported that the makeshift structure was made of metal wall panels, and the interior partitions were similar to plywood.

Also, the construction material used was of flammable nature, Debashis said. Meanwhile, Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam

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CID officials inspect charred remains at the isolation coronavirus unit of the capital's United Hospital yesterday. Inset, the temporary unit, which was set up outside the hospital's main building. Five patients being treated at the unit were killed after a devastating fire broke out there on Wednesday night.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

'Can't get the smell of his burnt body out of head'

Says son of a United Hospital fire victim

ZYMA ISLAM



Vernon Anthony Paul, 75, was one of the five patients who died in the fire at United Hospital.

Just four hours before the fire, he was found to be coronavirus negative and was slated for a shift to one of the normal wards of the hospital.

But instead, he was consumed in the flames that took down the isolation unit while his son watched helplessly from outside.

"My father was admitted to United Hospital with pneumonia on May 25," said his son Andre Dominic Paul, an electrical engineer from Chattogram.

"He had a stroke [when he was] in the bathroom on May 17. He had gone in to shower, fell on the wet floor and lay there for

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BANGLADESH UPDATE

2,029 New cases in 24hrs

40,321 Total cases

559 Deaths

8,425 Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

359,532 Deaths

5,846,653 Total cases

2,029 people test positive in a single day

Confirmed cases top 40,000

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The rate of Covid-19 infection has increased during the Eid holiday as about one out of every five people tested in the last four days showed positive for the virus.

Earlier, it used to take six or more tests to find out a coronavirus patient.

Meanwhile, the country yesterday recorded 2,029 infections -- so far the highest in a single day when 9,310 tests were conducted.

The total number of positive cases rose to 40,321.

On the day before the Eid, a total of 9,451 tests were conducted and 1,975 people were found to be positive.

On the Eid day, only 5,407 people tested for coronavirus and 1,166 came out positive.

On the next day, 1,541 positive cases recorded out of 8,015 tests.

Seventy-nine people died due to the virus in the last four days with 15 deaths recorded yesterday, said Prof Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general

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Risky reopening

Public transport, offices to resume operations from May 31

RASHIDUL HASAN and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

While the country sees the numbers of Covid-19 patients and deaths surge sharply, the government yesterday announced the end of the temporary shutdown.

All public transport, and public and private offices will resume on a limited scale from May 31.

However, all educational institutions will remain closed till June 15, according to a circular issued by the Cabinet Division yesterday.

The government's own health expert panel said the ongoing restrictions should be effective for at least another month.

Two members of the panel said the withdrawal of the shutdown would increase the risk of further spread, and country is heading in a terrible direction.

Meanwhile, in the last 24 hours until Thursday, 2,029 people tested positive for Covid-19 -- the highest number of infections detected in a single day in the country -- taking the total to 40,321.

Fifteen Covid-19 patients have died in the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 559, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

The government shut down most public and private offices, and all public transport from March 26 and extended it till May 30 in several phases.

However, people's movement to and from Dhaka continued, especially during the Eid rush and when export-oriented factories partially resumed operations last month, exposing more people to the risk of infection.

WHAT THE CIRCULAR SAYS

The circular said all public, semi-government, autonomous and private offices can resume their activities on a limited scale. However, vulnerable people, sick employees and pregnant women won't need to join work.

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Things you might've missed

NEWS IN BRIEF (MAY 23-27)

PM ADDRESSED THE NATION

Reaffirming her government's stance to be there with people until the coronavirus crisis is over, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday said economic activities have to be resumed for the sake of the lives and livelihoods of people.

"Most countries of the world have already compelled to relax their lockdowns because it's not possible to restrict people's paths of income for an indefinite period. It's not possible at all for a developing country like Bangladesh," she said.

The prime minister said this while addressing the nation on the occasion of holy Eid-ul-Fitr.

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Case filed over 'torturing 2 top bank officials'

Sikder Group MD, his brother sued; Exim Bank, NBL give contradictory statements about event centring TK 500cr loan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Exim Bank authorities have sued the managing director of Sikder Group of Companies and his brother for allegedly torturing two top officials of the bank and firing at them over a Tk 500-crore loan.

In a statement to the media, the National Bank Limited (NBL), a concern of Sikder Group of Companies, said the case was "baseless" and "fabricated", and that Ron Haque Sikder, managing director of Sikder Group, "did not apply for any such loan".

The case was filed with Gulshan Police Station against Ron and his brother Dipu Haque Sikder on May 19, SM Kamruzzaman, officer-in-charge of the station, told this newspaper.

THE CASE According to the case statement, Ron Haque went to the Gulshan Avenue branch of Exim Bank on May 7 morning and put forward a proposal to take Tk 500-crore loan.

He asked the bank's Managing Director Mohammed Haider Ali Miah and Additional MD Mohammad Feroz Hossain to visit the Group's property in Narayanganj's

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Two brothers 'fled country on May 25 in air ambulance'

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

A Sikder Group air ambulance left Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport for Bangkok on May 25 with two passengers amid the coronavirus restrictions.

And the two "critical patients" were not one but Sikder Group Managing Director Ron Haque Sikder and his brother Dipu Haque Sikder, both accused of threatening to shoot and torture two top bank officials over loan permission, reliable sources, asking not to be named, told The Daily Star.

Immigration officials declined to disclose their identities, but airport authorities admitted that an air ambulance with two passengers indeed left for Thailand on May 25.

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Cyclone took everything they had

DIPANKAR ROY from Koyra, Khulna



A man carries a child on his shoulders on an inundated road to higher grounds in Koyra upazila of Khulna yesterday. The Horinkhola embankment was destroyed by Amphan resulting in many villages getting flooded.

PHOTO: DIPANKAR ROY

Mahmuda Akhter and her two children were heading towards Moharajpur area in Koyra upazila yesterday to look for a dry place to live.

Her house near Horinkhola embankment in the upazila was destroyed by Cyclone Amphan which battered the country's coastal areas on May 20.

"There is nothing left in my house. The tidal surge has washed away everything," she told The Daily Star yesterday.

The homemaker said they tried to stay in their village, but they could not as it was under knee-deep water. Besides, there was no food either.

"Nobody gave us food as it is very hard to reach our village," said Mahmuda.

About 70 villages in Koyra upazila went under water on May 20 when the embankment breached.

Like Mahmuda, hundreds of other people from those villages were

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CONDOLENCE MESSAGE

Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, (MCCI) Dhaka is deeply saddened by the passing of Mrs. Niloufer Manzur, renowned educationist, founder and Principal of Sunbeams School. She breathed her last at the Combined Military Hospital at 00:55 hour on 26 May 2020. Inna lillahi wa inna ilaihi rajeun.



One of the great nation builders of the country, Mrs. Manzur was the wife of former MCCI President, eminent industrialist and former Adviser to the Caretaker Government Mr. Syed Manzur Elahi and mother of MCCI's former President and Managing Director of Apex Footwear Limited Mr. Syed Nasim Manzur. In her passing, the country has lost not just one of its legendary educationists, but a great human being, a dedicated and caring individual and a person who never gave up on another human

being. While her legacy will be carried forward by her legion of students, whom she taught to serve humanity with equal dedication and humility, her loss will be felt deeply personally by all whose lives she touched.

MCCI expresses its deepest condolences to the bereaved family.

Mrs. Manzur left behind her husband, son, daughter Munize Manzur, daughter-in-law Dr. Samia Huq, 6 grandchildren and a large host of friends, admirers and students.

"Give me good mothers and I shall give you a great Nation". Niloufer Manzur was an exemplary mother for us and for the nation.

"When their specified time arrives, they cannot delay it for a single hour nor can they bring it forward" (16:61 Al Quaran).

On behalf of MCCI, all are humbly requested to pray for the departed soul.

"It is not the length of life, but the depth of life." -Ralph Waldo Emerson