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Fire fear still stalks old town

Govt doing little to relocate chemical warehouses despite 2 blazes that killed over 200

HELEMUL ALAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The government has made little progress in relocating hazardous chemical businesses and warehouses from Old Dhaka, leaving the residents in constant fear following the two devastating fire incidents that claimed over 200 lives.

The chemical-induced Nimtoli inferno in June 2010 claimed 126 lives, prompting the government to embark on four projects as part of the relocation plan.

Ten years have passed after the tragedy, but the projects, taken at different times, are still at the preliminary stage. According to the latest update, land was either being acquired or filled in one or two projects, while the others face further uncertainty due to a dearth of fund allocation.

The only "considerable progress" over the years has been made at one front -- constant revision of the primary project proposals -- which contributed to cost escalation and time extension.

The cost of the four projects, which was around Tk 686 crore at the beginning, has now increased to around Tk 2,667 crore, according to documents.

With the four projects related to chemical, plastic, printing and light electronics in



virtual limbo, another devastating fire broke out in Chawkbazar in February last year that claimed 80 lives, giving a cruel reminder of the Nimtoli tragedy.

More than a year after the Nimtoli fire, the government had decided to set up two temporary warehouses to immediately shift hazardous chemical warehouses from the old part of the city. But the temporary projects -- one in Tongi and other in Shayampur -- are still in the "work in progress" state.

A cabinet meeting on February 25, 2019, decided to cancel all licences for preserving and storing chemical and petroleum products in residential areas. The cabinet also restricted issuing any new licence in

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Four-year-old Mayna is supposed to spend all her day playing, but she is often seen helping out her mother, who sells flowers on the street to make a living. At such a tender age, Mayna has learned to make garlands using sewing needle and thread. The photo was taken at the capital's Shahbagh a couple of days ago.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Politico-police nexus feeding chemical trade

TIB study finds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chemical trade still goes on in Old Dhaka under the patronage of a section of political leaders and corrupt officials of different enforcement agencies, exposing its dwellers to the danger of major fire incidents like the last year's Churihatta blaze, finds a research by Transparency International Bangladesh.

"The Nimtoli tragedy repeated in Churihatta because of lack of good governance," reads the research, carried out following qualitative methods between October 2019 and August 2020.

The TIB yesterday launched the research paper titled "Nimtoli, Churihatta and Afterwards: Governance Challenges in Ensuring Fire Safety in Old Dhaka and Way-out" through a video conference.

Reading out the summary of the research, TIB Deputy Programme Manager (research & policy) Mostafa Kamal said at least 468 fire incidents were reported from Lalbagh, Hazaribagh, Sadarghat and Siddikbazar in 2018, a year before the tragic Churihatta fire incident took place which claimed 80 lives.

The devastating blaze at a chemical warehouse in Nimtoli on June 3, 2010 had left 126 people dead.

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Khaleda out of jail for 6 more months

Suspension of her jail sentence extended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to extend the suspension of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's jail sentence for six more months on some conditions, Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star last night.

Replying to another question, the minister said, "She would not be allowed to go abroad."

The decision came after the family members

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Vicious hammer attack on UNO

Brought to Dhaka in critical state; father too hurt in attack at her official residence; motive unknown

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Ghoraghat Upazila Nirbahi Officer Wahida Khanam and her father were seriously injured in an attack by unidentified assailants early yesterday.

The thirty-four-year-old officer of Dinajpur is in critical condition from the blunt trauma to her head, said doctors at the National Institute of Neuroscience and Hospital (NINH) in the capital.

Her father Omar Ali tried to rescue her and was attacked as well, police said, adding that he was being treated at Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

Police said it appeared that two intruders broke into the UNO's official residence between 2:30am and 3:00am and one of them hit the officer and her father with a



Wahida Khanam

hammer.

Prof Zahid Hossain, surgeon at NINH, said, "She was hit in the head with something heavy. It broke her skull, injuring her brain and causing internal bleeding. Her condition is not stable. The blood pressure is low. She is trying to speak, but the level of consciousness is not like a regular person's. The pulse rate is high and she is restless. She needs to be stabilised first then operated. It will be risky to operate now. Her condition has to be improved first. She has been given blood, rehydration, and a lot of medication."

Asked how risky her condition is, the surgeon told reporters that anything could happen anytime. "It is difficult to specify the level of risk. ... She is in substantial risk

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THE THIRD VIEW



MAHFUZ ANAM

INJUSTICE, SO WHAT?

Those who "tarnish the country's image" must be taught a lesson

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BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,158

New cases in 24hrs



3,19,686

Total cases



4,383

Deaths



2,13,980

Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



869,219

Deaths



26,286,878

Total cases

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE Many countries reject requests for UN visits

Says UN Working Group official

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

States around the world must act urgently to investigate cases of enforced disappearances even during the pandemic and the search for the victims must continue without delay, said Professor Tae-Ung Baik, vice-chair of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances while addressing a virtual discussion yesterday.

The discussion was organised by Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), an international human rights coalition of organisations tackling the issue of enforced disappearances across Asia.

"Our working group's position is very strong. No matter what, we cannot justify enforced disappearances. Enforced disappearances must remain strictly prohibited under any circumstances," Prof Baik said.

"Many countries are not accepting the invitation request," he said, adding that if a visit is not possible, they are reliant on that country's civil society and non-governmental actors to help them intervene.

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A bus stops right near a road sign that says "stopping of buses is prohibited" to pick passengers on the Airport Road in MES area near the capital's Kurmitola. Such violation of traffic rules remains rampant throughout the city. The photo was taken on Wednesday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Free all detained returnees from Vietnam, ME

44 eminent citizens, 19 rights groups urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of eminent citizens and several migrant rights bodies have demanded immediate and unconditional release of the migrants who were arrested upon their return from Vietnam and the Middle East.

In two separate statements yesterday, 44 eminent citizens and 19 rights bodies called for an independent investigation and punishment to the manpower brokers, recruiting agents and the officials responsible for the fraudulence and exploitation of the migrants.

On September 1, a total of 83, including two from Qatar, were sent to jail on the ground that "they have tarnished the image of Bangladesh abroad".

Several returnee migrants told The Daily Star that each of them was charged Tk 4-5 lakh by the recruiting agents for jobs in Vietnam. They travelled there between late last year and early this year but were not provided jobs as promised though they had clearances from the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training.

The migrants started showing up at the Bangladesh embassy in Hanoi in early July to seek justice and demand repatriation. Eventually, the Bangladesh

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