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## Gas leak behind mosque blast

Suspects fire service; death toll climbs to 20

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and SANAD SAHA, N'ganj

Death toll from Friday's explosion in the Narayanganj mosque reached 20 last night with fire officials suspecting that the incident took place due to leak in a gas pipeline that runs beneath the mosque.

The leaking pipeline might have caused gas to accumulate inside the Pashchim Talla Baitus Salam Mosque, and a spark then probably led to the explosion, leaving at least 40 people severely burnt, the officials said.

It happened around 8:45pm at the end of Esha prayers on Friday night. The ground floor of the three-story mosque in Narayanganj Sadar was badly damaged. All the victims had got trapped on that floor. Besides, six air conditioners there were found melted, they said.

The injured, admitted to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in the capital, were not out of danger, said doctors, adding that the death toll could rise.

Worried relatives crowded the institution the entire day to see their loved ones.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expressed profound shock and sorrow at the loss of lives and directed the authorities concerned to ensure the best treatment to the injured.

The authorities have, meanwhile, opened

- Around 20 injured not out of danger
- Ground floor of mosque destroyed
- Six ACs found melted

an investigation into the incident.

As fire fighters began removing debris from the mosque yesterday, they found a scene of devastation with shards of sliding glass doors and window panes, spilled out wires, burnt clothes and human flesh scattered on the ground.

"The mosque room was filled with gas. The gas was seeping out from different points even after the fire," Lt Col Zillur Rahman, director (operation and maintenance) of Fire Service and Civil Defence, told The Daily Star.

Based on primary findings, he said since the all the doors and rooms were kept closed for the ACs, the room got filled with gas. Any kind of spark can cause explosion in such rooms.

Asked whether there was any short circuit, Zillur Rahman, also the chief of a four-member committee formed by the

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A boy is consoled by a family member while his mother breaks down in tears after his father Zainal died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital of burn injuries he sustained in Friday night's explosion at a mosque in Narayanganj. Residents of the area said leaky gas pipes left unfixed for weeks have caused the tragedy.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Will pray, be back soon to watch cartoon

Mother describes her six-year-old son's last words

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"Ma, do not change the cartoon channel. I will go to the mosque with Baba, pray, and then come back and watch cartoons again."

Six-year-old Jubayed Farazi had told his mother Raima Begum this shortly before the explosion at the Narayanganj mosque on Friday night.

Raima did not change the channel and was waiting for her only son. But he did not return, and would never return to watch his favourite cartoons.

Jubayed was the youngest victim and among 20 people who have died so far of injuries sustained in the fire caused by Friday's explosion at Pashchim Talla Baitus Salam Mosque.

Raima said that when she learnt that there

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## Finger pointed at Titas' neglect

SANAD SAHA and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

One or more leaky gas pipes left unfixed for over a month have caused Friday night's tragedy in a Narayanganj mosque, grieving residents said.

They blame Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company for not fixing the problem on time and demanding Tk 50,000 for the job.

The explosion at Pashchim Talla Baitus Salam Masjid left 20 people dead and at least 20 others praying in the mosque critically injured.

Mosque management committee members said it happened when cooking gas leaked from adjacent pipes got trapped in the mosque and ignited somehow.

"We have been noticing constant bubbling in the rain water right beside the building for the last one month," said Al-Amin, religious affairs secretary of the mosque management committee, "We could also smell the gas in the air."

There are three gas pipes around the three-storey building. One of them is partly underneath the mosque and the two others are along the sides, said the 45-year-old man, adding that there was an old riser underground on the left side of the main entrance.

People in the neighbourhood also said they first noticed the signs of a leaking gas connection nearly two months ago.

Besides, video clips of bubbles in the rainwater beside the mosque shot allegedly after the explosion went viral on Facebook.

Titas officials, however, shrugged off the responsibility,

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BHASHAN CHAR FACILITIES

Rohingya team on 'go-and-see visit'

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A team of 40 Rohingyas reached Bhashan Char in Noakhali's Hatiya upazila yesterday on a "go-and-see visit" to the island where the government has built an accommodation for one lakh Rohingyas.

Mahbub Alam Talukder, refugee rehabilitation and repatriation commissioner (RRRC), said, "Rohingya majhis [leaders] from Cox's Bazar camps went to Bhashan Char under the supervision of Bangladesh Army and Navy. They will stay there for three days before returning to Cox's Bazar on Tuesday."

Relocation of one lakh Rohingyas would begin after the monsoon season if everything went right, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Additional RRRRC Mohammad Shamsuddoza

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PROBE INTO SINHA MURDER

## Call recordings 'unavailable'

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The committee formed to probe the killing of retired army major Sinha Md Rashed Khan was unable to obtain the call recordings of around 30 people related to the incident and will mention it as a "limitation" of the investigation when submitting its findings to the home ministry tomorrow.

The probe body was able to get call lists of the people, including those of former Teknaf Police Station officer-in-charge Pradeep Kumar Das and sub-inspector Liakat Ali, who shot Sinha at Shamlapur check point on Marine Drive road on July 31.

However, despite having the call lists at hand, they were unable to obtain the call recordings of those people from the authorities concerned. Contacted, Mizanur Rahman, head of the probe committee formed by the home ministry, yesterday told The Daily Star that they would mention it as a "limitation" in the probe report.

"If we could get the recordings, the investigation would be better. We might have gotten something important. But we will submit the report mentioning it as a limitation," said Mizanur, who is the additional divisional commissioner (ADC) of Chattogram.

Asked, he said, "The OC has made a number of calls and also received some. An OC can talk to various people but the content of the conversations are important."

Contacted yesterday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said, "I am not aware of the issue. We did not interfere in the investigation. We provided support."

On Friday, ADC Mizanur told reporters in Cox's Bazar that they would submit their report on Sunday, adding that the committee members have spoken to 68 people related to the killing incident in various ways and recorded their statements. They have finalised the report unanimously

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Lt Col (retd) Abu Osman Chowdhury (1936-2020)

## Another war hero leaves

RASHIDUL HASAN

Lt Col (retd) Abu Osman Chowdhury passed away yesterday morning while undergoing treatment at Combined Military Hospital in the capital. He was 85. He was a veteran freedom fighter and the sector commander for Sector-8 that covered Kushtia, Jashore, Khulna, Barishal, Faridpur and Patuakhali region. Lt Col (retd) Chowdhury had been suffering from old age ailments for the last few months.

He tested positive for Covid-19 and got admitted to Dhaka CMH on Sunday, said

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BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,950 New cases in 24hrs



3,23,565 Total cases



4,447 Deaths



2,17,852 Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



880,967 Deaths



26,919,806 Total cases

Tests drop, positivity rate rises

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health directorate reported 1,950 new Covid-19 cases yesterday as the number of daily cases and the positivity rate increased slightly from the previous day.

The new cases were confirmed after 12,847 tests were conducted in 24 hours till 8:30am yesterday. The positivity rate stood at 15.18 percent, according to a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

In 24 hours till 8:30am on Friday, 1,929 new cases were found following 13,073 tests, putting the positivity rate at 14.76pc, shows DGHS data. It was the lowest for the last three months.

With the new cases, the total number reached 323,565, almost 20 percent of all tests conducted since January 21.

The authorities also reported 35 deaths yesterday, taking the official death toll to 4,447, which is 1.37 percent of all reported cases.

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The unsightly structure on the footpath on New Elephant Road in the capital was built in the hope of disinfecting people. Over the months, people have lost the zeal for such matters, but the structures like this still remain occupying walking spaces. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## ATTACK ON GHORAGHAT UNO Not theft gone wrong, it is pre-planned

Claims administrative cadre association; doctors say her condition improved

STAR REPORT

Condition of Dinajpur's Ghoraghat Upazila Nirbahi Officer Wahida Khanam has improved, doctors at the National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital (NINH) said yesterday.

"Her physical condition has improved. But she is not out of danger yet. We have to wait 72 hours [till Sunday night]. We will review her condition on Monday morning," Prof Zahed Hossain, member secretary of the eight-member medical board formed at the NINH for Wahida, told The Daily Star.

On Thursday night, doctors performed a surgery on Wahida's brain.

Wahida and her father Omar Ali Sheikh was critically injured in an attack by miscreants at her official residence in Ghoraghat upazila early Thursday.

Director General of Directorate General of Health Services Prof ABM Khurshid Alam and Vice Chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Prof Kanak Kanti Barua yesterday visited Wahida at the hospital.

"Wahida Khanam's level of consciousness is normal. She can recognise everyone; has talked to everyone, including her husband," Prof Zahed Hossain said during a briefing yesterday.

He informed that the right side of Wahida's body is still paralysed.

"It is difficult to say when it [paralysed side] would improve; otherwise, her condition is well," he added.

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