

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,125
New cases in 24hrs



3,68,690
Total cases



5,348
Deaths



2,81,656
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,039,349
Deaths



35,232,157
Total cases

A disaster called Titas

FROM PAGE 1
A SAGA OF NEGLIGENCE
Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited has 13,138km underground pipeline, 624km transmission and 12,514km distribution or service lines, in its network that covers Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Gazipur.

It has around 28.66 lakh domestic and industrial consumers.

Of the total service line, 7,001.40km was constructed by the end of the year 2000, according to official documents of Titas. Its longest service line is around 6,000km, which is in Dhaka.

Titas officials said around one third of the total gas pipeline, installed 25-40 years ago, has become rusty and risky. The problem is mostly with the distribution line.

The company has a dedicated section called System Operation Department for maintenance. But it mainly depends on consumer's complaint in the absence of a mechanism or device to identify the leaks without seeing it physically.

For lodging complaints, it has a call centre which receives on an average 375 emergency and 50 normal calls a month, according to an official.

Surprisingly, Titas does not have the detailed service line map and central database for replaced pipelines.

"We don't have the exact data on leaks in gas distribution lines right now," Titas Managing Director Ali Md Al-Mamun told The Daily Star.

However, a survey conducted by Titas three years ago found 35,000 out of its 5.65 lakh gas risers leaky.

Risers are used to bring buried natural gas piping above the ground to allow access to the gas flowing through the pipes.

A Titas official concerned said there was no data on risers being fixed so far.

The poor condition of the gas transmission and distribution infrastructure was highlighted in the Power Sector Masterplan (PSMP)-2016, prepared by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

As a short-term goal, the PSMP-2016 recommended that transmission and distribution should be electronically mapped to introduce advanced monitoring and control systems to support efficient use of gas by 2019.

On the gas leak incidents, it said most of the incidents presumably are caused by poor maintenance, use of low-grade materials, and/or poor construction practice.

"More attention should be given to gas leaks and system loss from gas transmission and distribution infrastructure to prevent economic loss, i.e. the lost opportunity cost," it added.

Four years have gone by since the PSMP-2016 came up with the recommendations but nothing has changed in the field of operations and maintenance, said energy experts.

The government mainly focused on power generation using expensive fossil fuel, they said, adding that due to poor maintenance and operation, gas-related fire incidents are taking place frequently, leading to casualties.

According to the Fire Service and Civil Defence Directorate, there were 24,074 fires last year.

"We found 19 percent accidents were gas-related, gas leakages to be precise," said Brigadier General Md Sazzad Hussain, director general of the directorate.

Titas claimed 208 fires in 2018-2019 in its distribution areas gas-related.

'AN ENEMY OF THE MASSES'
Prof Badrul Imam of Dhaka University pointed to two factors: use of poor-quality raw materials in illegal connections and no effort to replace the old pipelines.

Terming the network of illegal gas lines nothing but a time bomb, he said it is the creation of Titas officials who are "more interested in corruption than providing service".

"They are not accountable. The illegal network of gas pipelines is their creation. Unless Titas stops their illegal activities, accidents will continue to happen."

Prof Badrul suggested that the government makes alternative fuels like LPG cheaper, even if it requires subsidy, to shed the burden on pipeline gas.

On the graft among Titas officials, Prof M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB), said, "People are suffering just due to the greed of those corrupt officials. Titas has turned into an enemy of the masses."

"We have to bribe them to fix the leakages and pay extra charge due to the rise in gas price. They are providing poor quality gas but feasting on illegal networks."

He claimed there are 70,000 points in Dhaka city where gas leaks due to poor maintenance and illegal connections.

M Tamim, a teacher of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, thinks the main problem of Titas is in its management.

"Illegal gas connections, gas line leakage, corruption -- all are interrelated. If there is corruption, there will be illegal connections," said Tamim, also a former adviser to a caretaker government.

SHIFTING BLAME

Titas Managing Director Ali Md Al-Mamun blamed other service providers, including city corporations and Wasa, for damaging and cracking its pipes during their development activities.

"In most cases, when other service providers work, they unintentionally make some leaks," he said.

"I have already issued instruction to identify all the gas-leaking points and repair those within a month."

Rana Akbar Haidary, director operation of Titas, said, "A number of development work like metro rail is going on in the Titas gas transmission area, causing a good number of leaks. But some leaks happened automatically."

State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid said most of the Dhaka city lines are old and need to be replaced.

There are around 700km of illegal gas pipelines across the country, he said without elaborating further.

"Of course, Titas has responsibility and they will be punished for any negligence on their part. But Titas also cannot do everything. What about the other service providers? We all have to work together," he said.

The minister said the government has taken up a Tk 1,200 crore project for replacing the old pipelines to streamline the gas distribution system.

Under the project, the gas transmission and distribution system will come under Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system.

Once the SACDA system is introduced, information of a leak in a gas line or an illegal connection at any place will immediately go to the central control room, said Nasrul.

China ready to improve

FROM PAGE 1
always respected each other and treated each other as equals, enhanced political mutual trust and deepened mutually beneficial cooperation that brings tangible benefits to the two peoples, he noted.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, China and Bangladesh have stuck together through thick and thin, helped each other and fought against the pandemic side by side, writing a new chapter of bilateral friendship, the Chinese president added.

This year, China has also offered zero-tariff treatment to 97 percent of Bangladesh's exports by adding 5,161 more items to the existing list of 3,095 duty-free products.

With some \$26 billion Chinese investments and \$38 billion funding commitments, Bangladesh is one of the largest recipients of China's massive infrastructure project.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), President Xi's top priority initiative, aims firm up China's global influence through rail, maritime and road links from Asia to Europe and Africa in a revival of ancient Silk Road trading routes.

Bangladesh has joined BRI, saying it is ready to be part of any initiative that is aimed at promoting economy, connectivity, peace and sustainability.

India, which has yet to join it, and its ally US, however, are critical of the initiative. They said Chinese financing of projects lead to debt-trap of the

recipients. Dhaka maintains that it is careful and makes sure that the country does not fall into debt trap.

For his part, President Hamid in the message said the Bangladesh-China relationship is developing rapidly and has covered cooperation in key areas, to which Bangladesh attaches great importance.

He expressed his deep appreciation for China's continuous support for Bangladesh in its socio-economic development progress, adding that he believes the close and friendly relationship between the two countries will continue to deepen in the future.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang also exchanged congratulatory messages with his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina.

In his message, Li said China is willing to deepen practical cooperation with Bangladesh in various fields and promote the steady and sustainable development of the China-Bangladesh strategic partnership of cooperation to better benefit the two countries and their people.

For her part, Hasina said the strategic partnership of cooperation between Bangladesh and China has been developed from the two countries' time-tested friendship and cooperation.

The strengthened Bangladesh-China cooperation has unleashed enormous potential in maintaining peace, security and stability in the region and even around the world, she said.



Motorists driving in the dark on Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover. The streetlights of the flyover have not been lit for a long time, despite the surrounding buildings appearing to have electricity. This photo was taken on Friday.

PM expresses sympathy over Trumps diagnosis

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday wrote to US President Donald Trump sending a message of sympathy after he and First Lady Melania Trump were diagnosed with Covid-19.

"I'm saddened to have learnt that you have, unfortunately, contracted the novel coronavirus and began your treatment at a hospital," Hasina wrote. The PM wished full recovery of the US president and the first lady at the soonest.

"Hope to see you back in your office with a robust and vibrant disposition in the coming days so that you can continue to lead your country in its fight against coronavirus and related challenges," she wrote in her letter.

2 Rohingyas killed in gunfight in Kutupalong

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Two Rohingyas were killed in a reported gunfight between two rival groups in a camps in Ukhia of Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

The gunfight erupted between two groups of Rohingya "criminals" over "establishing supremacy in the area", said Samsuddoza Nayan, additional repatriation, rehabilitation, and relief officer of the government.

The deceased were identified as Imam Sharif, 32, and Shamsul Alam, 40, residents of Kutupalong refugee camp in the upazila, our Cox's Bazar correspondent reports. They had bullet wounds in their bodies.

The violence began at the Refugee Camp-2 West around 1:00am and continued until 5:00am.

Law enforcers did not reveal the identity of those involved in gunfight.

The bodies were recovered and sent to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, said Ahmad Sanjur Morshed, officer-in-charge of Ukhia Police Station.

No case was filed in this connection.

Meanwhile, there was another "gunfight" around 8:30am in Refugee Camp-3 of Kutupalong between alleged Rohingya criminals, said Hafez Jalal Ahmed, chairman of Kutupalong Rohingya Registrar camp. At least 15 Rohingyas were injured and seven houses were burned during the incident, sources at the camp said.

The injured were taken to different hospitals including Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, they said. None of them had bullet injuries.

99.8pc say they're not Covid-infected

FROM PAGE 1

facilities at workplaces.

MJF Programme Manager Shoma Datta shared the findings of the study, conducted between March and June this year, at a virtual meeting jointly organised by the MJF and The Daily Star.

Tanjim Ferdous, a national consultant of the United Nations in Bangladesh, moderated the meeting.

While presenting the findings, Shoma said 85.5 percent of the respondents said their factories resumed operation and 67.44 percent said they feel the threat of job loss.

About sexual harassment amid the pandemic, 31.8 percent of the female workers said they were subjected to sexual harassment at workplaces, while 47.6 percent said the supervisors used abusive language if they failed to meet the target. Of the victims, 32.9 percent lodged complaints and only 7.4 percent got remedy.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of the MJF, said the study does not give a complete picture of the entire garment sector, rather it gives a partial picture. The study was conducted on a limited scale.

"We want the sector to thrive, and at the same time we want improvement in the living standards of the workers," she noted.

Addressing the meeting, Planning Minister MA Mannan said the government has rolled out stimulus

packages so that the garment sector remains unaffected by the pandemic.

"We want to work together with all the stakeholders..."

The minister also mentioned that Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics is conducting a study to know the socio-economic status of people, including the garment workers, amid the pandemic.

At the virtual meeting, Jasmin Shila, former operator at a garment factory, said she and her family have been going through a tough time since she and her husband lost their jobs.

She contacted some factories for a job but couldn't find one as all of those had sufficient manpower.

Nazma Akter, executive director of Awaj Foundation, said that when the owners started shutting factories in big numbers in late March, many workers lost jobs.

Later, many of those who still had jobs didn't return to their workplaces though international retailers and brands reinstated a significant number of work orders for local apparel manufacturers, she noted.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said the importance of the garment sector is immense as more than four crore people are directly or indirectly involved in the sector which accounts for 84 percent of the country's annual exports.

Nazneen Ahmed, senior research

fellow at Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, suggested creating a database of retrenched workers so that they can be given jobs in factories when normalcy returns in business activities.

Referring to the measures to protect workers from Covid-19, Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said those were not adequate to keep the workers safe from virus infections.

George Fallor, chief technical adviser of the ILO's RMG Programme, said "Throughout, the ILO has been working with the government of Bangladesh in preparing several Covid-19 guidelines and training on workplace safety and health and labour relations."

Banasree Mitra Neogi, gender adviser to the MJF, said female workers must be protected through enforcement of legal measures at workplaces.

The survey found that the majority of the respondents reduced food intake, started depending on loans and felt job insecurity and mental pressure, added Banasree.

SM Shahed Hossain, human resources manager at the Chattogram-based Clifton Textiles, said his factory was shut for one month between March and April this year because of the pandemic. But none of the workers was terminated.

Encroachers dig

FROM PAGE 1

causing it to resemble a water body.

Around 30 trucks lumbered in empty and chugged back sand-laden over the course of the day. One of the truck drivers, pulling the vehicle over at Shah Suja road, said each truckload of sand would be sold for Tk 10,000.

The sand is used at various construction sites, he said, requesting that his name not be used.

Another truck driver told The Daily Star the vehicle's owner pays Tk 500 for each trip to influential locals including Dulhazra Union Parishad Chairman Nurul Amin, his brother Md Monsur and one Bipen Dutta.

They have the backing of Chakaria upazila Chairman Fajlul Karim Saydee.

Nurul Amin told The Daily Star that Paglir Beel was leased out to the upazila chairman and that he had nothing to do with the sand lifting.

Saydee said most quarries in Chakaria were leased out to him as party men make a living by lifting sand.

"I don't know actually what the scenario is on the ground. If there is any damage, I will certainly abide by the action the authorities concerned will take," he said.

Thouhidul Islam, divisional forest

officer (north) of Cox's Bazar under Chattogram Forest Circle, told this correspondent that they had seized and burnt down sand lifting machines last year in the area.

"As I came to know it from you, I am going to take action soon," he said, adding that there is political backing behind the rampant sand lifting.

Abu Naser Md Yeasin Neyaz, divisional forest officer (wildlife and nature conservation), said due to the sand lifting which has caused a large crater in the area, a biodiversity conservation zone for animals is in jeopardy.

Outrage as woman gang-raped, filmed

FROM PAGE 1

was probably no different from any of the 889 rapes that happened between January and August 2020, the video forced netizens to face just what rape entails, and the horror of having one's rights violated.

The incident happened in Noahkhali's Begumganj upazila at Joykrishnapur village of Eklashpur union on September 2.

The brutality of the torture lay not only in how much physical pain it inflicted on the woman, but also in their lack of mercy.

"I am calling you my father, my brother, please let me go! For the sake of Allah let me go!" the woman implored her rapists, but mercy was not on their agenda.

The video also documents that sticks were used as instruments of torture when executing the action of rape and the whole gang of men aided and abetted each other in raping the woman.

Confirming the incident, Moazzem Hossain Sohag, a ward member of Eklashpur union, said the woman came to him after the incident, but

did not name anyone.

The woman and her family members left the village soon afterwards, locals said. The survivor could not be contacted by The Daily Star, and more details about the circumstances surrounding this incident could not be found.

Police said they started looking for the culprits after seeing the video on social media.

Locals say alleged notorious drug trader Delwar, the chief of Delwar Bahini, and six of his followers were involved in the crime.

Truckers to go on 48hr strike on Oct 12

UNB, Ctg

Bangladesh Truck-Covered Van Owners-Workers Coordination Council yesterday called a 48-hour strike across the country from October 12 to press home their nine-point demand, including amendment to the Road Transport Act.

The transport organisation announced the programme through a press release yesterday.

Earlier, Osman Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, called the strike at a meeting at Rajbari Community Centre near Karnafuli Shah Amanat bridge in the city on Saturday.

DEATHS OF 26 IN LIBYA

CID to seek

Interpol's help in capturing suspects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Criminal Investigation Department will issue a Red Notice through Interpol by this week for Bangladeshi human traffickers thought to be responsible for the killing of 26 people of the country in Libya earlier this year.

"We will issue the notice for 10-20 people," Syeda Zannat Ara, special superintendent of police (Serious Crimes and Homicide), told a press conference at the capital's CID headquarters yesterday.

Also present at the event were nine survivors of the massacre that happened at a warehouse in Mezda in southwest of Tripoli in May.

A Red Notice is a request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action.

The survivors came back to the country on a special flight on September 30. Three other survivors have yet to reach Bangladesh, Zannat said.

"We will talk to the survivors and identify the foreign agents involved in the trafficking chain," she said.

Law enforcers arrested 44 people in 26 cases filed in this regard.

"We have spoken to the families of the 26 who died. The families filed the cases, and they gave us the identities of the local traffickers. Most of them have been arrested."

The nine survivors present there bore the marks of torture and many had freshly healed bullet wounds, and one of them had been permanently disabled.

Janu Miah said, "The incident happened on May 27 around 11:00am. The mafia used to come to our camp and beat us up; this was a daily routine, but that day they tortured us indiscriminately."

"There were around 100 to 150 people from Ghana, Nigeria and Sudan. Around 30-35 of them were women. The Libyan mafia started beating them up, but they retaliated that day and killed a member of the mafia."

The other members of the mafia called for reinforcements, who came and started a shooting at the migrants, he described, "That is how 26 of us died, and 12 of us got injured."

The CID shared with journalists a video footage of the incident obtained from the survivors. The video begins with the image of a body being dragged on a mosaic floor with floral motifs. Men carrying weapons that looked like semi-automatic rifles walked about. The smoke and dust made it difficult to see what was going on. Most of the video was shot in the dark with the only light coming from a parked car.

The person filming walked up to a body possibly of a dark-skinned individual lying in a pool of blood. He then walked up to another body of a lighter-skinned man with close-shorn hair wearing a black and red polo shirt. More bodies come into view, blurry in the smoke.

Throughout the video, people shouted in Arabic. "Stop recording," and "Where is my pistol?" were two of the things said.

Janu Miah said, "One person from the mafia took us to a hospital, but the doctor refused to treat us, saying that there is no chance of survival. The hospital provided an ambulance for another hospital, and they too refused to treat us."

He himself survived two bullet wounds in the stomach.

"Around dawn, they left us on a garbage heap in the desert. We walked around two to three kilometres in that state and found a house of a Sudanese camel-herder. He gave us shelter, and got the locals to call the militia. The militia came, took us away in their vehicles, and got us admitted to Tripoli University Medical College Hospital."

"They didn't treat us until the Bangladeshi embassy officials came. My surgery was done at 1:00am."

The survivors were taken to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka to give their statements.