

Jamuna Fertilizer Factory fire Was it due to negligence?

Star Report

Was the July 4 fire at the compressor house of the underconstruction Jamuna fertilizer factory an outcome of negligence? Experts have started asking this question, since there was no adequate fire fighting equipment in the compressor house at the time of the accident, it was reliably learnt.

Fire broke out when some electrical equipment were being cleaned with light fuel oil which is highly flammable. At that time some technicians were doing welding work in the same house, sources said.

Cables, valves and switch boxes in the compressor house were gutted in the fire. Experts said a full-fledged inquiry into the incident by a neutral body was needed to determine whether other costly equipment had suffered serious damage or not.

The Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) has appointed a technical committee to look into the cause of the accident. The Taka 1223 crore Jamuna Fertilizer Factory is an enterprise of BCIC.

Informed sources said, the fire had exposed the costly natural gas compressor, the synthetic gas compressor and their connecting pipes made of alloyed iron to 800 to 900 degrees centigrade of heat. And since alloyed iron changes composition at such high temperature, the machinery are feared to have suffered damage.

A BCIC source said the foreign construction firm engaged to install the factory had brought in experts from abroad to determine the extent of damage. Outwardly, the damage does not seem very heavy, he added.

It was, however, gathered that instead of checking the machinery and equipment that were exposed to fire, the con-

tractors were putting fresh paint coatings on these. Use of damaged equipment, if any, will shorten the life of the factory. Possibility of accidents also cannot be ruled out.

Accident at the Ghorasal Urea Fertilizer Factory in the third week of June has subjected BCIC to a loss of Taka 250 to 300 crore, according to experts.

BCIC sources said that they believed the contractors would not take such a risk, because they have to put the Jamuna factory into operation before handing it over to BCIC in December next. They said the equipment in the compressor house had to withstand high pressure of gas and contractors would have to replace any machinery or equipment that failed at the trial stage.

Informed sources said the construction firm installing the factory had removed its safety officer some time before the accident. The safety officer had complained against technicians of a sub-contractor for not obeying safety rules while working in the compressor house.

They also said that when fire broke out from a spark at about 1 pm, people at the compressor room could not decide what to do, because they did not have adequate fire fighting equipment. It took about thirty minutes to use hose pipes from some other places in the construction site to spray water. It took another 30 minutes to extinguish the fire, they said.

Experts observed, the construction firm installing the factory should be penalised if the alleged negligence is proved.

Construction of the Jamuna Fertilizer Factory began in 1989, when completed the factory is expected to produce 5.6 lakh tonnes of urea fertilizer a year.



JEDDAH: US Secretary of State James Baker (L) is received by Saudi King Fahd (R) after his arrival Saturday.

Baker wins Hussein's approval for ME peace move

JERUSALEM, July 21: US Secretary of State James Baker won approval from King Hussein of Jordan for his peace initiative on Sunday when he took his quest to Israel.

In Amman, Hussein said Jordan will attend a proposed Arab-Israeli peace conference and approves the lifting of the 40-year-old Arab boycott of Israel in exchange for a ban on Jewish settlements in occupied territories.

Mixed reports of Israeli response to the latest overtures added an air of anticipation to Baker's scheduled meetings in Israel.

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"When the process is there, when the conference is there, Jordan will be the first to attend," Hussein told a crush of reporters at the royal palace.

Earlier report said: Secretary of State James Baker, taking his quest for a peace conference to three Mideast Arab states in one day, said Sunday he is "very hopeful" of success, reports AP.

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Responding to a question about what he expects from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Bush said to a reporter: "You don't know what he has made clear to me and what he hasn't. What I am saying is that I am hopeful he will accept it."

Bush's remarks came as Baker was preparing to leave Jordan for a meeting with

Shamir in neighbouring Israel.

Baker arrived in Amman for lunch with King Hussein after a flight from Saudi Arabia, where officials set the condition on lifting the 40-year-old boycott.

Some Israeli leaders, meanwhile dismissed the Saudi offer.

Housing Minister Ariel Sharon was quoted by the Israel radio as telling Jewish fund-raisers on Sunday that Israel would continue settlement-building "for hundreds of years to come."

"Cancelling a boycott that is against international law has nothing to do with the rights of Jews to their land," Sharon reportedly added.

Meanwhile, Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Arens welcomed a report of Syrian President Hafez Assad's willingness to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir at the outset of a peace conference if it can be set up.

The Midnight File

Saddam pardons political prisoners

BAGHDAD, July 21: President Saddam Hussein pardoned all political prisoners and exiles except military officers today, the official Iraqi news agency INA said. The ruling Revolution Command Council (RCC), in a statement signed by Saddam, said it was declaring the amnesty because Iraq was moving towards a new phase "based on popular participation in government and political pluralism," the agency reported, says Reuter.

Afghan guerillas seize Badakshan province

PESHAWAR, July 21: Muslim guerillas said they captured a strategic town on the Afghan-Soviet border Sunday, their second major battle victory in less than a week. A spokesman for the guerilla commanders' Supervisory Council said the town of Ishkashim in northeastern Badakshan Province fell Sunday after five days of fighting, reports AP.

Schwarzkopf back in Gulf

MANAMA (Bahrain), July 21: Gen H Norman Schwarzkopf on Sunday was back in the Gulf, the theater for the 42-day Gulf war and the 700,000 allied forces he commanded to and Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait. Schwarzkopf arrived in Saudi Arabia after a two-day stopover in Egypt for a meeting with President Hosni Mubarak, one of the leading Arab members of the 33-nation alliance, reports AP.

Hartal observed in upazilas

A six-hour hartal called by the Upazila Chairman Samity was observed in some upazilas across the country Sunday protesting a reported move against the local body, reports UNB.

There were reports of violence during the half-day hartal from some upazilas.

In Netrakona, hartal was observed in most upazilas barring a few. There was no shutdown in Kendua and Sedar upazilas.

A complete hartal was observed in Natpur, Madan, Mohanganj, Kalmakanda and Durgapur, while it was a partial success in Kalaijuri, Barhatta and Purbadhala upazilas.

Police arrested Shahid Iqbal, Chhatra League President of Mohanganj upazila unit, during a clash. He was allegedly beaten up severely.

Later at meetings in Mohanganj and Barhatta upazilas, the speakers accused the BNP government of conspiring to dissolve the post of Upazila Chairman because, the speakers said, the ruling party has no grassroot base.

UNB Feni correspondent reported a half-day hartal was observed peacefully in five upazilas of the district. Buses on the Chittagong-Dhaka highway were off.

A report from Habiganj said hartal was not observed in the district. But Chairman of eight upazilas of the district brought out a procession and held a rally in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office to protest what they said government decision to abolish the upazila system.

Road communication on the Aricha-Dhaka highway was halted for an hour by supporters of Shibalaya Upazila Chairman, Manikganj district blocking the road with trees.

Hundreds of coaches, 80 trucks and over thousand passengers were stranded between 10 am and 11 am Sunday.

Police later removed the barricade with the help of local people.

In Jhenidah, the hartal call

Safir

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realistic system of tax for mobilising domestic resources which is badly needed for the development of the country. He said "Our neighbour Thailand introduced the VAT system only the other day."

Turning to the BCCI affairs, the Finance Minister said a committee was working on the issue and on the basis of its findings and recommendations measures would be taken so that interest of the customers was preserved.

The Finance Minister criticised the Bank of England for taking unilateral action on the BCCI Bank without consulting the other countries where the bank was in operation.

On his way back home, Safir held meetings with the Governor of the Bank of England and British Minister of the Treasury Mrs. Gillian Shephard and Minister for Overseas Development Administration Lynda Chalker. He also met the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England.

Rahman apprised the Governor of the Bank of England about the difficulties faced by the Bangladeshis in England whose savings with the BCCI had been frozen.

Joint rally today Some newspapers accept demand for enhanced salary, allowances

A joint rally of journalists, press workers and general employees of all newspapers and news agencies will be held today at 11 am in the National Press Club premises to press home their various demands including enhancement of salary, reports BSS.

The rally has been organised by the three federations of the newspaper industry against the "conspiracy of the owners" and for realisation of their demands for enhancement of salary.

A three hour token strike from 11 am to 2 pm will be observed today in all newspapers and news agencies in support of the demands.

Meanwhile, a number of owners of newspapers and news agencies has accepted the demand for enhanced salary of the journalists and workers of their respective establishments. The names of those organisation will be formally announced in today's rally, a federation press release said. Besides, owners of more newspapers and news agencies have been holding negotiations with the union leaders for solving the issue.

An indefinite strike will begin from 6 am on July 24 in those organisations which will fail to come to a settlement over the demands of the unions by July 23, the press release added.

Mugger killed

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hend anyone coming to see the dead. After sometime, one Monowar Hossain Mona (20) came to see the body and police arrested him from the spot. Police recovered Taka 3,000 from him.

After interrogation, confessed involvement of the gang in snatching the money on Saturday last and the subsequent killing of Manik by Khairul over the sharing of robbed money.

Ershad's case

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Attorney General Aminul Haq said since the accused was under bereavement, "We have no objection to granting a day's adjournment." He said "Our law is blended with mercy" and added that the adjournment may be granted.

Judge Mohammad Ali Khan granted the adjournment and ordered that the court will resume Monday.

Talpaty

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survey to settle the cross-claim on the island.

In 1982, a Secretary-level meeting of the two countries decided to conduct an on-the-spot "joint verification".

India, on the other hand, proposed for exchange of data and information between the two countries about the island before the joint verification drive.

The Talpaty issue was raised again during the visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister to Bangladesh in February 1990.

It was decided at the time that Bangladesh would fix place and date for the exchange of data and information about the island and communicate that to India, the Foreign Minister said, adding steps are being taken in this regard.

Ambassadors

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cadre and the rest from army.

In reply to another question from Tabbar Rahman of AL, he said the present government has no plan to set up any new mission abroad.

A proposal for reducing the number of personnel in foreign missions is under active consideration of the government as per its austerity programmes, he said replying to a supplementary.

The Foreign Minister told Mozahar Hossain of CPB that the government had not yet decided to open its embassy in Afghanistan.

He told another questioner, Abdul Matin Khazru of AL, that Tk 43 crore 27 lakh 56 thousand had been spent during fiscal 1990-91 for officials and employees working in Bangladesh missions abroad.

Law and order

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Earlier Abdus Samad Azad, Deputy Leader of the Opposition raised the demand for fixing a date for the proposed general discussion on the law and order situation.

AL MP Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, and Jannaat leader Mattur Rahman Nazami also spoke in support of the demand.

The Treasury Bench on July 4, agreed to the Opposition demand for a general discussion on the subject.

DUCSU polls deferred

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4 pm, leaving July 30 for withdrawal.

Votes will be held on August 5 from 8 am to 2 pm at 14 residential halls. A supplementary voters' list will be announced on August 4 at 4 pm.

Voters have been asked to collect their identity card from their respective hall offices by August 4. Those who would not be admitted to the university by July 30 would not be allowed to cast votes.

An earlier report by DU correspondent said: The leaders of now defunct Central Students Action Committee (CSAC), who have boycotted the election, called on Vice-Chancellor Prof Manruzzaman Miah Sunday morning and demanded an immediate announcement shifting the election date.

They warned, if the DUCSU election date was not shifted, the authorities would be responsible for any consequence.

Meanwhile, two Jatyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) workers were beaten Saturday night and three others were chased Sunday by the rival student groups over the election issue.

The two students were beaten at Shahidullah Hall and Jagannath Hall. Campus sources said three activists of JCD were attacked by Awami League-backed Chhatra League (S-A) workers in the science annex building premises. One of them managed to escape but two others were beaten up.

Meanwhile, the components of now defunct Central Students Action Committee (CSAC) separately held demonstrations on the campus demanding postponement of the DUCSU election while JCD stressed on holding the DUCSU polls on schedule at its rally.

The JCD rally held in front of the DUCSU building was addressed by DUCSU Assistant General Secretary Nazimuddin Alam, JCD Joint Convenor Fazul Huq Milon and Manruzzaman Miah. They said those who had boycotted the DUCSU election had no intention to maintain congenial academic atmosphere on the campus. They alleged that they wanted to foil the election by creating anarchy. JCD is determined to resist them, the speakers said.

The BCL (S-A) rally, addressed by Golam Mostafa Suzan and Quamruzzaman Ansari, President and General Secretary respectively of its Dhaka University unit, called Vice-Chancellor Prof Manruzzaman Miah a collaborator of the government and said the Vice-Chancellor introduced the new election system according to a blueprint of the government in order to reduce the importance of DUCSU.

Amendment bill

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secret ballot and that the Election Commission should conduct the election.

However the third point, on the induction of non-MPs in the cabinet, was accepted by the Awami League in principle but the ratio of the non-MPs in the parliament should be limited to within 10 per cent, according to Committee sources.

The Select Committee sources further said another new point had been raised by the Awami League that in case of any request by the Prime Minister to the President to dissolve parliament, the Prime Minister should take concurrence of the parliament members.

But the amendment bill proposed by the BNP stated that the President could dissolve parliament only after a written request by the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, BNP sources said that the Awami League

CPB for DUCSU leadership from regular students

By Staff Correspondent

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) has expressed concern over the situation on the Dhaka University campus arising out of postponement of the DUCSU election.

CPB General Secretary Saffuddin Ahmed Manik in a statement Sunday said that the situation deteriorated as some major student organisations boycotted the election.

Most of the major student bodies, except the Jatyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Islami Chhatra Shibir, failed to put their senior student leaders in the DUCSU polls race due to DU Syndicate's earlier decision barring the irregular students from contesting the polls.

They, including the CPB-backed Chhatra Union, demanded facility for participation of irregular students in the polls.

Manik said the demand was "unreasonable" and that the student leaders should be elected from among the regular students.

Irregularities of the autocratic regime should not be continued under a democratic government, he observed

BCCI depositors

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money.

The Minister gave them a patient hearing and assured them that an announcement to this effect would be made within two to three days, a Depositors' Association press release said.

The State Minister said that the Prime Minister would be informed about the plight of the depositors arising out of the sudden closure of the Bank's operations.

The depositors will again meet on Wednesday at the BCCI head office premises at 10 a m to review the latest situation.

In the memorandum to the Minister, the depositors pointed out that the Bangladesh Bank Governor had assured them on July 14 that a preliminary audit would be completed in a week's time and steps would be taken to return their money in consultation with the government.

The depositors expressed their deep concern that even after the expiry of the scheduled time, the authorities did not spell out any concrete decisions on the return of the deposited money. They called it "highly unfortunate."

In the memorandum to the Minister, the depositors put forward some suggestions for phase-wise withdrawals of their deposited money.

Returnees

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1115.95 crore during the same period this year.

Earlier initiating the discussion Monirul Huq Chowdhury called for concerted efforts in securing reemployment of the repatriated Bangladeshis and recovery of their assets.

Mohammad Nasim, Chief Whip of the Opposition, AL member Azizur Rahman, JP MPs Moqsub ibne Aziz Lama, Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury and Abu Lais Md Mobin Chowdhury, Jamaat MP Enamul Huq and BNP MPs Mahbulul Alam, ATM Alamgir, and Fatima Chowdhury also took part in the discussion.

Amendment bill

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had adopted evasive tactics in giving its consent about narrowing down the differences on different issues.

The proponents of parliamentary democracy within the BNP also sat in a meeting to discuss the prevailing circumstances regarding passage of the bill.

They have taken a decision that unless there was a unanimity in the Select Committee they would bring the bill to the House unilaterally by next week.

Meanwhile, the Awami League sources said that there would be no basic differences. One of them said, "Objective of both the BNP and the Awami League is the same. Melting of differences is a time factor."

Select Committee sources said that the members of different parties may give their notes of dissent during the scrutiny. But the Committee would submit its report within the stipulated time.

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