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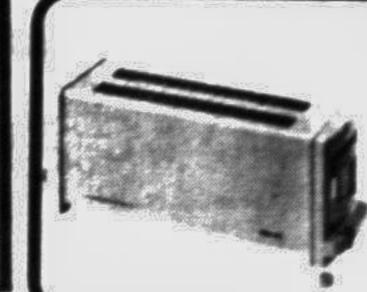
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DHAKA WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 1996

12 The Baily Star

News Analysis

Garments fire: A retold tragedy

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed

The death of eleven more garments workers in yet another city fire on Monday brings up the burning question: How many more deaths before our garments factory owners are convinced that most of their work places are virtual death traps?

As in several other previous garments factory fires in the city, on Monday afternoon, the same sequence of events took place at Trimode France and Suntex Fashion factories in Mirpur: short circuit was as usual ascribed as the cause of fire because apparently none can then be held responsible there was panic, people could not escape as the gates were locked, the "darwan" with the keys was not at hand to unlock the gates immediately, flames and smoke quickly engulfed areas with combustible materials, inmates collapsed due to lack of oxygen as is typical in any large fire, some were trampled in the stampede to flee because of fear, heat and the need to breathe fresh air.

It may be recalled with sadness that on 27 December 1990, twenty-five workers, including 16 women, died in a fire at Saraka Garments, on 11 February 1995, five female workers died in a fire at Prostor Garments and on 5 August 1995, nine women workers died at a fire at Lusaka Fashion Garments. The recent tragedy at Trimode and Suntex Garments is a re-enactment of the past horrors. The most unfortunate part of the deplorable episodes is that perhaps all the deaths could have been avoided.

With a few exceptions, none of the garments factories have any precautions against fire. Most of them do not have a single fire extinguisher. Many do not have water even in their

For want of security, there is usually only collapsible gate of the size of a door used in residential buildings. That, too. remains always half-locked. Sometimes, the door is fully locked such as during lunch hour even though hundreds of workers may be inside. In the panic accompanying any fire. the "darwan" with the keys is usually the first to flee the

Extracts from a previous write-up is being repeated below because the forewarning has remained unheeded.

Most garment factories are time bombs for a potential fire disaster. The factory floor and the escape route are crammed with work-tops and combustible materials. The risk of fire being ignited is omnipresent due to improper wiring and electrical design, illegal connections, and careless smoking and heating habits. The hazard is multiplied because (a) the narrow exits are often locked. (b) the

large illiterate working force is without any fire training or drill, (c) there is no trained personnel to take charge and dispel panic during emergencies. (d) the building has been subjected to unauthorised change (approved as residential but used as industrial premises). (e) the waste products are not disposed off properly. (f) adequate firefighting equipment is not provided and (g) water is forever scarce.

Escape has become increasingly difficult as garment factories are being housed in multistoried buildings with only one narrow staircase. Although, options of multiple doorways and staircases exist in some buildings, most management keep only about twenty-five inches of doorway and collapsible gate, and one staircase open during shifts.

In order to avoid suffocation and burns, inmates must reach a place of safety within two to three minutes of a fire starting. Owners must ensure by design that adequate number of "unlocked" doors are located strategically. If the owners apprehend pilferage by employees, they have only to spend more on security by employing more guards for the extra vigil

Alternative escape routes albeit in the form of optional doors and staircases should be provided lest one should be made inaccessible during a fire or other emergencies. Occupants should not need to pass through smoke, heat or fire in order to reach a place of safety Instead of trying to shrug

responsibility by putting the blame on electric short circuit or trying to appease oneself by demanding compensation from the owners for the dead and injured, workers should demand safe working conditions. And, that means, precautionary measures, fire-fighting equipment, more doors that should never be locked during shifts. It will be useful if some of us remember that no death can really be compensated.

The garments sector is global pride of Bangladesh. It has many obvious enemies. If the frequency of fatal fire incidents increase, envious overseas competitors will take this up as yet another damaging issue. Notwithstanding the international pressure, safety standards in our garments factories should improve because the owners owe it to their highly loyal workers as a

moral responsibility. The garments factory deaths is the last few years are more than ominous signs. Effective and quick measures must be taken at government, BGMEA. fire service and individual factory owners levels to prevent further catastrophe. Anything short of this, we are awaiting reruns of such tragedies.

BNP to revamp party

From Page 1

reorganised, the sources said. The planned top-level changes may bring into the limelight party's mid-level and non-controversial leaders, replacing the hardliners who are being blamed for BNP's debacle in the June 12 polls.

"Replacement of the present secretary general of the BNP, Barrister Abdus Salam Talukdar, who lost the polls from two constituencies, is almost certain," a front-ranking leader said "There were

bitter criticism regarding Talukdar's role as a minister as well as a policy planner," he

Chances are bright for Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, the senior-most joint secretary general, and KM Obaidur Rahman, a former secretary general, to replace Salam Talukdar, the party leader said.

Since the results of the June 12 polls were announced hardliners like Salam Talukdar and former Home Minister Abdul Matin Choudhury are seldom seen at the party's Kakrail election office and the Naya Paltan central office, another source said.

On the other hand, softliners including Prof. Badruddoza Choudhury, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan arld Khandakar Delwar Hossain, who are visiting the party offices regularly, seem to have earned more confidence of the party chief, the source said. KM Obaidur Rahman who staged a comeback to the party just before the June 12 polls is also recovering his lost party position and finding his room among the moderates, the source said. Obaid was once the secretary general of the

Changes are also in the offing in some key-positions of the party's National Executive Committee as well as the Standing Committee, the highest decision-making body. Several members of the 15-

member Standing Committee may be dropped while new faces are likely to be inducted.

"Giving key-positions to the moderates will also enable the party to overcome the damages caused by alleged corruption and some unrealistic, illogical and controversial actions of the hardliners during the BNP regime," an influential leader of the party told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

4th anniversary of Tin Bigha accord today

From Our Correspondent

RANGPUR, June 25: The fourth anniversary of the handing over of the Tin Bigha Corridor will be observed tomorrow at Dahagram and Angorpota enclaves amidst great enthusiasm and festivity.

A number of socio-cultural organisations have drawn up colourful programmes to mark the occasion. The programmes include eultural functions. sports programmes, discussion meeting milad mahfil and processions. Meanwhile sources say, the Indian Forward Bloc leader Kamal Guha, backed by other anti corridor activists has planned to stage demonstrations demanding annulment of the Tin Bigha accord signed between Bangladesh and India in 1992.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addressing the secretaries and senior officers at the cabinet conference room un Bangladesh Secretariat yesterday. - PID photo

Hasina visits Tungipara today

By Staff Correspondent Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina will visit her ancestral home Tungipara in Gopalgani this morning. Prime Minister will leave Dhaka at 8 am and is sched-

uled to return to the city at 3:35 pm today, according to sources in the Prime Minister's Secretariat Ministers, state ministers and party MPs will also accompany the Prime Minister and offer fatcha at the grave of

Father of the Nation Banga

bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rah-

Fire in garment units

man at Tungipara.

BGMEA to give Tk 50,000 to each family of the dead

Bangladesh Garments Manufactures and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and the garments factory owners will provide Tk 50.000 to each lamily of the workers who were killed in a factory fire on Monday, reports UNB.

BGMEA President Redwan Ahmed visited the fire-ravaged factories to see for himself the extent of damage and announced the compensation for the families of the victims, said a press release vesterday.

The BGMEA president thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her instant visit to the two garment units. The BGMEA has also greeted Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina on her assump-

tion of office. The Bangladesh Employers Association (BEA) yesterday alleged that Monday's devastating fire incident in the city's two garments factories occurred due to "carelessness" and called for proper enforcement of the labour laws to check recurrence of such in-

cident.

Dhaka-Rajshahi rail link restored

SIRAJGANJ, June 25: Direct train communications between Rajshahi and capital Dhaka was restored today with the resumption of Sirajganj-Jagannathgani ferry services after long 21 months, reports

Syed Morshed, General Manager of Bangladesh Railway, Western Zone, inaugurated the operation of the railway ferry.

Railway sources said ferry vessel 'Suhrawardy' left Sirajganj ghat at 11 am for Jagannathganj ghat with the passengers of Dhaka-bound intercity 'Padma' express train from Rajshahi.

The ferry services snapped in September 1994 as the Jamuna lost navigability for abnormal fall in the river water, the sources said.

Since then, ferry services in the routs had not been restored, even in the last monsoon.

No new minister

From Page 1

colleagues anything about expansion of the council of min-

"Definitely, the newlyformed cabinet will be expanded, taking a number of ministers and state ministers. But, that time has not yet came," said the minister, who is also a central leader of the ruling Awami League.

Eleven ministers and eight state ministers took oath on Sunday after Sheikh Hasina was sworn-in as the 10th

Prime Minister of the country. The names of Abdul Mannan, Abdul Momen, Amir Hussain Amu and Salahuddin Yusuf are being discussed in the ruling party circles as would-be ministers.

Region-wise representation in the council of ministers is also being considered, the minister said. But sources in the cabinet and in Awami League were tight-lipped regarding the Prime Minister's plan about expansion of the council of ministers.

BNP to back govt to consolidate democracy

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) yesterday expressed the hope that the new government would continue the development programmes initiated by the BNP government, reports

In a statement issued in response to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's address to the nation on Monday, BNP joint secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said his party would extend allout support to the Awami League government in its efforts for strengthening constitutional process and ensuring welfare of the common

BNP chairperson repeatedly said that our party had served the people when it was in power and also struggled for people's right and protecting sovereignty while it was out of power, Mannan Bhuiyan added Mannan said, "We once

again want to say equivocally

that the BNP will cooperate

and sincerely support any efforts to strengthen the democratic-constitutional process. He, however, warned that the BNP would not he tate to resist any stroke on the people's rights, democratic process sovereignty and national

The BNP leader said his party was surprised and hurt as the Prime Minister did not mention "the name of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman, who was the announcer of the

economy with its whole stren-

Honorarium for polls officials Tk 1000 each

By Staff Correspondent The Election Commission (EC) will give an honorarium of Taka 1000 each to about 2,300 to about 2.300 election officials for their performance in the June 12 parliamentary

elections. EC sources said yesterday. Returning officers, assistant returning officers, district election officers, technicians. drivers and others will get the honorarium, the sources said.

The honorarium will be given within a day or two. Some officials have already received their remunerations, the sources said

May 18-20 incidents Probe body led by SC judge demanded

The leaders of "Muktijoddhar Janatar Mancha" have urged the government to constitute a high-powered enquiry committee to be headed by a Supreme Court judge to probe the events of May 18 to May 20 and the incidents that followed, reports BSS.

In a statement, five leaders of the Mancha described President Abdur Rahman Biswas's address to the nation on June 23 immediately after Sheikh Hasina was sworn-in as Prime Minister as 'clear violation of the norms' of parliamentary democracy. The leaders said the President by his address, which was "not desirable and correct" had created a new controversy.

The signatories to the statement are Syed Hasan Imam, Prof. Abdul Mannan Chowdhury, Lutfun Nahar Lata, Major (retd) Nasiruddin and Principal Ahad Chowdhury.

Foreign ship From Page 1

tug of Bangladesh navy have been placed around the vessel so that it can not move and navy divers were engaged to ascertain the extent of damage to the ship.

The secretary of the shipping ministry Anwarul Islam arrived here and visited the ship and the KAFCO jetty.

The government has, meanwhile, set up a threemember committee with the chairman of Chittagong port Zahiruddin Mahmud as its convenor to determine the cause of the accident

Independence War and expo nent of Bangladeshi national ism, although she recalled the national leaders with respect in her speech to the nation on Monday

We were surprised and hurt due to her "narrow attitude" despite her call for na tional consensus and coopera tion of the opposition parties. he added Mannan said every citizen of

the country expects a strong democratic process and institutionalisation of constitutional system

The importance of Bangla desh's political history is that the BNP has restored democratic system, fundamental rights and multi-party system in the country as a result of which the way for peaceful transition of power has been pave," he said. Mannan alleged that altho-

ugh the Prime Minister's assurances of adopting no poli tics of revenge, the BNP work ers had been facing repression and arrest since the pre-polls

Referring to the Prime Minister's commitment for the separation of judiciary, he said we initiated the process while we were in power but could not implement it as the opposition parties suddenly resigned.

Int'l Day against Drug Abuse today

International Day against Drug Abuse will be observed in the country as elsewhere in the world today, reports UNB. Different organisations, including the Department of

Narcotics Control, have chalked out programmes to mark the day. In a message on the occasion, President Abdur Rahman Biswas called for taking a pledge to keep the future gen-

eration away from the disastrous influence of drug abuse. "The young generation is being affected most by drugs. Family ties and discipline, social solidarity and harmony are all being jeopardised by the drug problem," said the Presi-

President Biswas also observed that drug abuse and its smuggling is one of the detrimental elements that are endangering the very existence of whole human society.

To observe the day, the Department of Narcotics Control has organised a cycle race at 6:30 am from Manik Mia Avenue, a colourful rally from Shishu Park at 7:30 am and a discussion at Shilpakala Academy at 10:30 am.

United Nations Association of Bangladesh (UNAB) will hold a discussion meeting at its office where eminent journalists Santosh Gupta will be the main

Probe body From Page 1

incident, Nasima, 26, admitted to the DMCH in a critical condition, was improving, the sources, added.

Police was guarding the affected factories till yesterday. A large quantity of clothes, saved from the blaze, were kept inside the factories, po-The owners of the factories

could not be contacted till last night. Pallabi police said that a relative of the owner of one of the factories came to the spot yesterday morning. Some employees of the fac-

tories were also seen in the area, sources said. But some witnesses to the incident claimed that the guards and employees fled the scene as the fire broke out. Meanwhile, the National

Garments Workers federation has held the owners of the factories responsible for the death of the workers. "The reluctance and ignorance of the owners caused repeated accidents in the

garments factories," federation

President Mojibur Rahman and

General Secretary Amirul Haq Amin said in a joint statement. They demanded compensation of Tk one lakh for the families of those killed and Tk 50,000 for the injured.

Hasina: Secys From Page 1

of the administration and put forward some suggestions to overcome those

Later addressing the government employees Sheikh Hasina made a fervent call to the government employees to work hard to better the conditions of the common people. "You are the employees of

the Republic owned by the people," the Prime Minister said and called them for dedi cating themselves to the cause of the people Addressing the huge gathering of employees inside

the Secretariat Hasina assured

that her government would create an atmosphere where they could work independently and free from any influence. She referred to the harassment of and repression on government employees by the previous governments and said

her government would not be

partisan in dealing with them. Responding to the demand for a pay commission of the employees, the Prime Minister assured them of setting up a committee to work to this end She said. "I know prices of essentials are going up everyday and it is difficult for the fixed income groups to run

their families with such pay" We have the desire, but do not have the means. We'll try to meet your demand within the limited resources." Hasina said. She also sought time to look into the multifarious problems facing the country.

Earlier, Secretariat Employees Union leader Syed Mohiuddin congratulated Sheikh Hasina on her assumption of the office of Prime Minister and called for announcing the pay commission.

Inhanana Imamia Jananara Imam s anniversary of death today

By Staff Correspondent The second anniversary of the death of Shaheed Janani Jahanara Imam will be observed throughout the country

today. The national coordination committee for Muktijoddha Chetona Bastabayan and Ghatak Dalal Nirmul, has drawn up programmes to mark the day. As part of the programmes. wreaths will be placed at her mazar at Mirpur in the morn

A procession will be brought out from the Central Shaheed Minar at 4 pm. A discussion meeting will also be held at the Institution of Engineers at 5 pm.

National leaders will address the meeting to be presided over by Syed Hasan Imam, convenor of the com-

Economic diplomacy to be essence of foreign policy

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad yesterday said economic diplomacy will be the essence of foreign policy of the present government, reports UNB.

The government will continue to follow the charter of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and endeavour to enhance the image of the country, he said while addressing the officials and employees of the Ministry. Samad Azad said that the

government would give special importance to strengthen relations with all the neighbours under the umbrella of SAARC. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury Kaiser, Foreign Secretary Farooq Sobhan also spoke on the occasion.

FAO Asia Pacific region director meets PM Director of the FAO Asia

Pacific region A Z M Obaidullah Khan called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office yesterday, reports UNB.

During the meeting, they discussed matters of mutual interest, said an official hand-

Tamil suicide squad penetrates into Colombo

COLOMBO. June 25: A Tamil rebel suicide squad of 19 re-portedly penetrated into Sri Lanka's capital Colombo under direct orders of rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, intelligence sources said today, reports Xinhua.

Identify problems, Home Minister asks deptt heads

Star Report

Minister for Home Affairs Maj (rtd) Rafiqui Islam held a meeting with all the departmental heads under the ministry at his Secretariat office yesterday and asked them to identify their immediate problems and bring those to the notice of the ministry for necessary action, according to official sources.

The ministry has already in structed its relevant departments to chalk out an elaborate action plan to root out terrorism, the sources pointed

The departments repre sented at yesterday's meeting. chaired by the minister included Police, BDR, Ansar and VDP. Passport and Immigra tion. Fire Service and Civil Defence, Jail, Coast Guard. Metropolitan Magistracy and the Department of Narcotics Control.

Firearms, drugs recovered: 1 held

By Staff Correspondent Police arrested a woman and recovered firearms and drugs during a raid on a sweepers' colony at Ganaktuli

under Lalbagh thana yesterday

afternoon The woman was identified as Halima. The recovered items include two pistols, two pipe guns, one round of bullet one cocktail and 23 bottles of phensidyl.

Three cases have been filed with Lalbagh thana.

Women's seats

From Page 1

ganj, Keraniganj, Dhamrai and . Savar thanas. 20. Gazipur and Narsingdi districts, 21 Narayangani and Munshigani districts, 22. Rajbari and Faridpur districts, 23. Gopalganj. Madaripur and Shariatpur districts, 24. Sunamgani and Sylhet districts, 25. Moul vibazar and Habiganj districts. 26. Brahmanbaria and Devidwar. Homna, Chandina, Daudkandi and Muradnagar thanas of Comilla district, 27. Chandpur and Comilla districts without Devidwar, Homa, Chandina Daudkandi and Muradnagar thanas. 28. Feni, Noakhali and Laximpur districts, 29, Chittagong district and 30. Cox's

3 BNP MPs

Bazar, Khagrachhari, Ranga-

mati and Bandarban districts.

From Page 1

nose of the administration since June 13. Mashiur Rahman alleged that so far 22 seriously injured leaders and workers of BNP. Jubadal and Chhatra Dal of Jhenidah district had been

admitted to different hospitals.

"They were wounded in

sporadic attacks made by Awami League activists in a pre-planned way." he said. The MP said many BNP supporters fled homes fearing attack by Awami League activists who broke the legs of a former UP member of Hari-

nakunda union, Abdul Hamid

as he had supporter BNP in the election. Mashiur further said all the four BNP MPs of Jhenidah district had repeatedly requested the DC and SP to protect innocent people from such indiscriminate attacks. "But they (DC and SP) are yet to take any steps against the hoodlums.

he said BNP MP from Cox's Bazar-1 constituency Salahuddin Ahmed said the local Awami League was mounting pressure on police to lodge false case on charge of violence against him and his supporters. "While I am staying in

ers of Cox's Bazar on Monday pressed the local Officer-in-Charge to file case against me." Salahuddin added Shamsuzzaman Dudu, also an MP of the former ruling

Dhaka, the Awami League lead-

party, hoped that the new prime minister would be consistent in her word and work. "She is assuring no retaliation on the one hand, her partymen are continuing attack on BNP men on the other. They

soon after Hasina's assumption of power," said Dudu. The newly elected lawmakers urged the ruling party to refrain from making attack. harassing and filing false case against the BNP leaders and

have intensified attack on us

workers. Party leaders Haris Chowdhury, Imran Saleh Prince, Khairul Kabir Kohkan and Ilias Ali were present on the occa-

More foreign leaders greet

Hasina More heads of state and government of various countries continued to congratulate Sheikh Hasina on her assumption of the office of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, re-

ports BSS.

Deve Gowda Indian Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda has felicitated Sheikh Hasina on her assumption of the office of Prime Min-

ister of Bangladesh. In a message, he said "It gives me great pleasure to extend to you my felicitations and good wishes on your assumption of the office of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. am confident that under your leadership, Bangladesh would make progress towards greater prosperity and harmony.

Your appointment provides us an opportunity to deepen and expand the ties between our two nations.

Li Peng Chinese Premier Li Peng

has congratulated Sheikh

Hasina. In a message primer

Peng said: "the friendly relations and cooperation between our two countries will develop further and grow in strength during the tenure of your excellency." Chandrika Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga has felicitated Sheikh Hasina. In an message

President Chandrika said:

recall the cordial discussion

self to bring prosperity to the

people of Bangladesh. I now

wish you every success in your

had with you when I visited Bangladesh last year, and the lofty goals you had set for your-

endeavours in realising these objectives." King Wangchuck Bhutanese King Jigmey

Singye Wangshuck in his message congratulated the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and said "your excellency's election to this important post is a reflection of the trust and confi-

dence reposed in your excel-

lency's ability and deep commitment to serve your coun-King Wangchuck wished further strengthening the ties of friendship and cooperation existing between Bangladesh

and Bhutan.

EC president President of the European Commission Jacques Santer also congratulated Sheikh

In his message, Santer said: "I hope that under your leadership, the friendly relations between the government of Bangladesh and the European Commission will be further

strengthened." Japanese envoy

From Page 1

Ambassador Kaneko also assured that his country would continue to support democratization of Bangladesh and remain one of its most important development partners.

Earlier, FICCI President

Mahbub Jamil felicitated the

new government and said foreign investors were expecting that the government would pursue an economy driven by market forces as per its electoral pledge. Representatives from mu

ltinational and other foreign firms operating in Bangladesh were present at the meeting. Dhanmondi lake

From Page

No 24 near Abahani field". When a top official of the PWD was approached for his comment on the existence of the basti, he said, requesting anonymity, that he was not aware of it but assured that his department would "look into

It was alleged that despite employing a considerable workforce to look after the green space along the lake, the authorities have 'miserably failed' to protect environment of the area. "We have hardly anywhere

the matter"

to go to, this lake-side area was once so nicely maintained. but now there is no atmosphere for a family to have a walk. They (the authorities) do not care for us, they are after satisfying the officials with housing problem," said Nazneen, a social worker and resident of Road No 8, when asked for her reaction about the new housing units.

decision "a conspiracy" to spoil the beauty of the place while the city was already having suffocating atmosphere due to lack of open space.

Many residents termed the