

7 girls burnt alive

FROM PAGE 1
this correspondent.

The death toll and the number of injured could be less if the gate could be opened, they said.

The identity of the dead could not be known as their bodies were charred. Most of the survivors may have permanent scars on faces and other parts of their bodies, sources in the hospitals said.

Of the injured, 12 were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and three to Pangu Hospital (Orthopaedic Hospital).

Those admitted to DMCH are Halima, 10, Roksana, 20, Momtaj, 11, Rabeya, 13, Halima, 13, Shamina, 11, Marium, 13, Sonia, 10, Ayesha, 9, Fahima, 8, Salma, 16 and Asma, 10.

Twenty injured students are being treated at a residence near the madrassah. Some of the injured have been taken by their parents, the madrassah authorities said. The rest are being treated at different clinics.

Fire Brigade sources said the fire might have originated from an electric short-circuit.

But Fazlur Rahman, a member of the madrassah's advisory committee, in a case filed with Demra thana alleged that the institution was set on fire in a sequel to previous enmity. But he did not name any person in the case.

There were about 400 students at the madrassah. Over 300 of them aged between 6 to 22 were staying there on the fateful night. Others went home on the weekend, its authorities said.

"I was sleeping on the first floor. I got up feeling heat, 13-year-old Nasrin Jahan Nilu told this correspondent at the residence near the madrassah. Nilu suffered serious burn injuries in her face and hands.

"The fire originated hardly 10 foot from my bed. As the fire spread, the screaming girls went to the ground floor to escape. I along with some others jumped from the first floor", she said.

Twelve-year-old Rahima, being treated there said, "I got up hearing screams and went to the ground floor along with some others." She said the girls ran here and there finding no exit.

"I saw some girls catch fire and dying in front of me. They were crying for help, but everybody was frantically trying to escape," said Rahima, who hailed from Kachua of Chandpur district.

Another victim, Shahina, also said she jumped from the first floor. Her whole face was severely burnt.

Fifteen-year-old Marium said,

Resist torture: Hasina

FROM PAGE 12

rule.

The president alliance government cancelled the holiday.

Hasina said that there was no peace and stability in the country and the economic condition is the worst ever, she called up the people to build up resistance to torture injustice.

She also urged the people to protest the present "conspiracy of distorting history" by erasing the name of Bangabandhu and tell the new generation the truth.

"The defeated forces of liberation war want to delete the history of liberation war, victory and Bangabandhu, but it is not possible to wipe out the name of Bangabandhu from people's minds."

The opposition leader maintained that the defeated forces do not believe in independence of Bangladesh and want to make Bangladesh a province of Pakistan."

"To satisfy their Pakistani masters they do not allow the children to know the truth," she said asking teachers, guardians and all concerned to enlighten their children about the truth, the true history of the country's victory and the contribution of father of the nation.

Children, colourfully dressed, joined the function and welcomed the former prime minister with a dance performance, a song on Bangabandhu. Later, Hasina distributed prizes among the children and exchanged pleasantries with them on Friday night.

A case was filed with Lalbagh thana and body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Abdur Samad Azad, cultural personality Asaduzzaman Noor MP, General Secretary of Bangabandhu Shishu Kishore Mela, Shirin Akhtar Manju and President Mia Monsob also spoke on the occasion.

Proshika
FROM PAGE 12
Chowdhury and Dr Mamun, brother of Azharul along with their lawyer Barrister Tanzebul Alam, Haq to meet the arrested persons.

Dr Kamal Hossain and Barrister Tanzebul Alam appeared in the court on behalf of the petitioners.

Omar Tareque Chowdhury and Azharul Islam were arrested on March 11 under Section 54 for their alleged involvement in 'anti-state activities', and later detained for one month.

Fatal omission

FROM PAGE 1
Shamsul Haque Bhuiyan (of DCC) lobbied for his friend Gafur Bhuiyan, owner of Surma International; and the then Chief Executive Officer Rashedul Alam lobbied for Shamsuddin and Allied Engineering," said a DCC source. The Ministry played a dubious role and awarded the work to Surma. Gafur Bhuiyan is a BNP MP.

"In our original project proposal we had plans for construction of 20 steel-frame overbridges, which are much lighter, easy to install and also easily removable," said an engineer. He explained that it is dangerous to construct such heavy overbridges in the city as a vehicle could knock down these structures any time by accident.

The DCC officials said that the moment Surma International started to construct the footbridges, they showed signs of inexperience and lack of professionalism. The company did not have proper cranes and depended on a manual jack to position those heavy slabs overhead. After jacking up those 100-ton girders, they just left those there, supported by pieces of timber, despite repeated warnings by top DCC officials, newspapers and members of the public. Those

faultily positioned slabs remained there for months.

After Thursday's tragic accident, the Mayor served a show-cause notice on DCC's Chief Engineer Brigadier General Mahmudur Rahman Khandakar and blacklisted Surma International, which has so far received a payment of Tk 2 Crore from the public coffer. The Mayor has also temporarily suspended nine officials of DCC and the project.

It could not be known whether the DCC would dismantle the half-completed structures and go for steel-frame footbridges.

"Whenever we talked to Surma officials they did not pay any heed because the owner is a ruling party member of parliament," said another official of DCC.

The project for steel-frame footbridges was rejected because those cost less and removed the possibility of making more money," he alleged.

At present, seven pre-stretched overbridges in the city, made over the years, are in service. There are 13 steel-frame bridges for pedestrian crossing and another 10 might be constructed under the Dhaka Urban Transport Project.

Bangabandhu

FROM PAGE 1

AL chief Sheikh Hasina and other leaders of her party are scheduled to place wreaths at Sheikh Mujib's portrait at the Bangabandhu Museum in the city's Dhamondi area.

The programmes including hoisting of the national and party flags, discussions, seminars, exhibitions, blood donations and cultural sessions.

In a message, Sheikh Hasina recalled that Bangladesh won independence following a prolonged struggle led by Bangabandhu.

"He had become the father of the nation because of his political wisdom and farsightedness. Bangabandhu is one of the celebrated world leaders, who led struggles for national independence and emancipation in the 20th century," said Hasina, the eldest daughter of Bangabandhu assassinated in a military coup on August 15, 1975.

AL MPs

FROM PAGE 1

their letters in the move towards en masse resignations. "We will let you know after completion of the process," he said.

A joint meeting of the AL central working committee and party MPs on Thursday took the crucial decision in protest at a government move to remove Bangabandhu's portrait from all government, semi-government and autonomous bodies and its 'misrule', as well.

Power theft

FROM PAGE 12

problem deep-rooted and observed that accountability did not improve despite the country's democratic transition.

Chairing the session, Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the rise of hooliganism in educational institutions has made them dysfunctional.

"We won't be able to compete in the market with the present education system," he observed.

Omar Haider Chowdhury, research director of BIDS, made a presentation on 'Poverty, Education and Public Expenditure' and Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, Dr Atiur Rahman and Dr Binayak Sen of BIDS participated in the discussion.

In his presentation, Chowdhury said the dismal performance of primary education vitiates the education system and contributes to the colossal systems loss in the education sector.

Dr Sen said the country has come out of the famine syndrome, which he referred to as a success.

ISPs

FROM PAGE 12

The ISP leaders told the minister that it was impossible for them to cope with such an "irrational rent hike". The BTTB, they alleged, plans to subsidise its own Internet service with the additional revenue.

The ISP leaders told the minister that the BTTB had already lowered the charge for its Internet service at the expense of the taxpayer's money.

Besides, they argued, the BTTB does not have to pay for licence, line rent and demand note charges as the ISPs do, they argued.

The ISP leaders demanded that there should be a level-playing field.

The minister assured the delegation that his ministry would not take any decision that might hinder the growth of information and communication technology (ICT) in the country, the ISP president said.

However, he did not "commit anything" about enhancement of monthly line rent for the ISPs, Manju added.

"If the thrust is to turn the country's ICT sector into a foreign currency earner, the government should not slap on the ISPs such an exorbitant tariff," he said.

Manju revealed that the ISP leaders could not endorse Post and Telecommunications Secretary Omar Faruq's request that they subscribe the E1 lines of the BTTB since there was not inadequate information on the new lines.

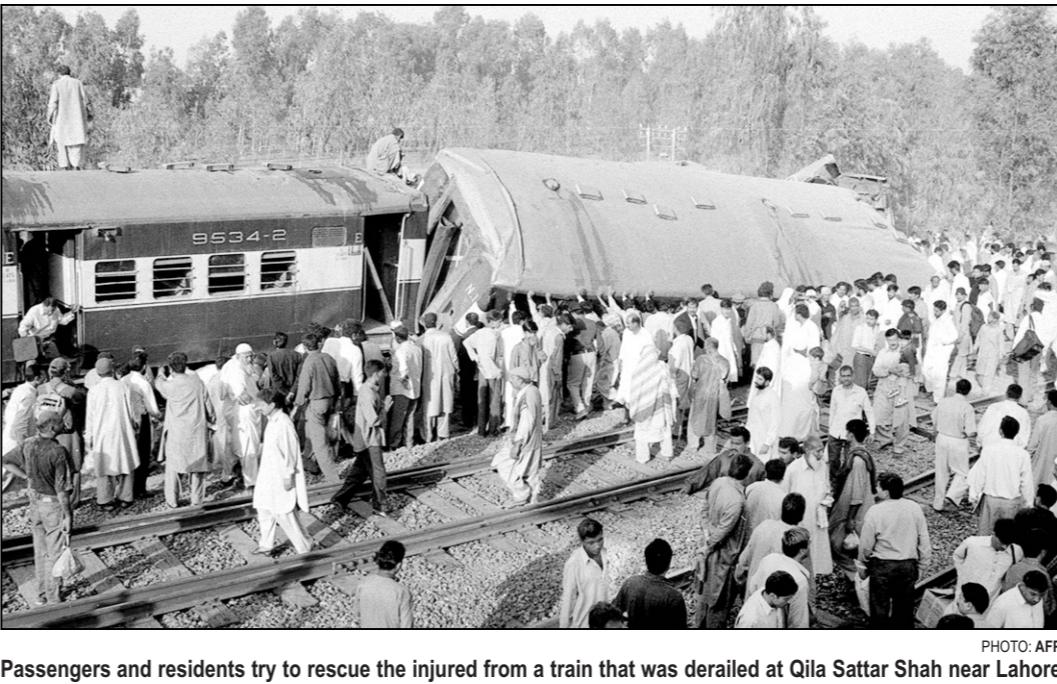
Dolphin

FROM PAGE 12

creamy white colour, long beak and a large dorsal fin atop a subtle hump made them identified as Indo-Pacific humpbacked dolphins Sousa chinensis. The species is quite familiar in the marine waters of northern Australia and throughout south and south-east Asia, but it had never been spotted in the Sundarbans or probably anywhere in Bangladesh, Rashiduzzaman said.

The expedition will continue till March 24 and the scientists hope they would be able to estimate the size and distribution of the three dolphin species, now known to be in the Sundarbans, as well as evaluate threats to their conservation. The IUCN plans to make public its report sometime in September this year.

The expedition led by Prof Benazir Ahmed of Chittagong University comprises Brian D Smith and Gill Brullif of the IUCN Species Survival Commission Cetacean Specialist Group, Dipani Sutaria from India and Rashiduzzaman.



Passengers and residents try to rescue the injured from a train that was derailed at Qila Sattar Shah near Lahore yesterday. Five passengers were killed and 14 others injured in the incident.

4,700 expelled

FROM PAGE 1

Panchagarh.

The number of expelled examinees under the Dhaka Education Board is 670, officials said.

Five teachers were expelled for helping students cheat in examinations in Kishoreganj and Jamalpur. Also arrested was one student in Kishoreganj.

One hundred and seventy-three students and two teachers were expelled in Jamalpur. Forty-five students and three teachers were expelled in Kishoreganj.

One student was expelled in Dhaka city, seven in Dhaka district, ten in Manikganj, 20 in Munshiganj, five in Narayanganj, 62 in Narisingdi, 49 in Mymensingh, 164 in Netrokona, 21 in Tangail, 40 in Sherpur, 19 in Faridpur, 23 in Madaripur, 34 in Sharifypur, 20 in Pogalganj and 22 in Rajbari.

The number of expelled students under the Jessore Education Board is 320.

Fifteen candidates were expelled in Jessore, 11 in Narail, 18 in Jhenaidah, ten in Magura, 16 in Khulna, seven in Satkhira, 142 in Kushtia, 26 in Chuadanga and 75 in

Meherpur.

As many as 508 examinees were expelled under Chittagong Education Board. Of them, 346 were in Chittagong, 43 in Cox's Bazar, 106 in Rangamati, six in Khagrachari and seven in Bandarban.

Two hundred and forty students were expelled under the Barisal Education Board.

Also expelled were two teachers from two examination centres in Pirojpur. Of them, 49 were in Bholia, 22 in Jhalakathi, 17 in Pirojpur, 33 in Patuakhali and 119 in Barisal.

The number of expelled candidates under the Comilla Education Board is 681.

Forty-six examinees were expelled in Chandpur, 86 in Noakhali, 82 in Feni, 73 in Luximpur and 39 in Comilla.

Six teachers – three in Chandpur and Comilla each – were also expelled for their alleged connivance in cheating.

Five-six students were expelled under the Sylhet Education Board. Of them, 25 were in Sylhet, seven in Hobiganj, ten in Moulavibazar and 14 in Sunamganj.

Victims of nature's whims

FROM PAGE 12

At the age of 65, Malik does not have the courage or strength to change his profession. So he keeps on tilling Boro lands, no matter it reaps a good harvest or not. But young Dilwar Hossain of the village sees paddy cultivation as a liability now.

"I have been working as a labourer at Bholaganj stone quarry for the last couple of years. Many fellow villagers followed me as it gives more earning than farming," said Hossain.

The villagers feel that if the under-construction road-cum-embankment from Dirai to Shulla is completed, farmers will be able to grow two crops a year as this will save lands from flood.

Besides, farmers need short-duration rice varieties so that they can harvest the crop before early floods.

There is virtually no road communication in the area. Rickshaw ply in some areas during dry season. Villagers have to negotiate vast sheets of water in boats during the wet season.

This correspondent had to walk

miles to reach Kashipur village from Dirai thana headquarter.

"Since Pakistani days, ministers are claiming that development is taking place. Is this the level of development that has taken place in all these years?" the UP chairman asked.

Nazrul Islam of Kashipur village is a contractor by profession. "Roads would have been constructed long ago and unemployed youths would get work had the allotments been utilised properly. Big chunks of allotments of foodgrain and money meant for infrastructure development are not utilised properly", he claimed.

The villagers also complained that agriculture extension officials never visit Kashipur because of the bad communication system.

The next generation has also no future, they said. The nearest high school is about three miles away at Krishnapur under Kalijai thana in Netrokona. Few boys or girls walk the distance in dry season or avail boats in wet season to go to a high school there, they said.

Police bar procession

FROM PAGE 1

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) commissioner authorising the Jamiyat procession.

The protesters then held a brief demonstration right at the spot where the police stopped them.

"We prefer not to violate the ban for it could prompt a police action on us and the government might blame us for creating a law and order situation," Tofail Ahmed told the protesters later. "It's a government blueprint to shift the blame for its own failure to maintain law and order on opposition shoulders."

Tofail and other AL leaders also warned of a tough agitation against the government's undemocratic behaviour.

Dhaka's Mayor Mohammad Hanif accused the government of mounting its repression on the opposition understanding that its days were numbered.

Addressing the rally at the Muktangon earlier, the AL leaders asked the riling coalition not to remove the portrait of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman from government

offices and other designated places by repealing the law in this regard.

They promised a tougher agitation if the government went ahead with the plan to undermine Bangabandhu by removing his portrait.

The AL organised the rally as part of a nationwide demonstration protesting the government move to bring down Bangabandhu's portrait from all government offices and educational institutions.

Protest rallies were also held in other parts of the country, party sources said.