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9-STOREY GARMENT BUILDING CRUMBLES AT SAVAR 23 killed, 350 trapped

SHARIFUL ISLAM and SHAMIM ASHRAF

At least 23 people died and some 350 others are trapped, many of them feared buried alive, under debris after a nine-storey factory building at Savar crumbled with a bang in the early hours of yesterday.

As many as 89 others were pulled alive from underneath the rubble of the building which housed Spectrum Sweater Industries Ltd, with authorities saying the building's construction on a filled-in pond was faulty.

The victims were employees of the sweater factory and working on the night shift.

Rescuers from the Fire Service, the Army, Rab (Rapid Action Battalion), as well as police and civilians pulled the 89 alive and dug out 22 bodies until 1:15am today. The body of the other victim, Aleya, could not be retrieved although rescue work ran early into the morning under search light.

They feared that more bodies would emerge when the one-storey-high rubble is cleared and termed it the biggest ever such collapse in the country. The dead have been identified as

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Rescuers sift through the rubble to pull workers trapped under the remains of what was a nine-storey building at Savar early yesterday morning.

Half garment units lack safety measures

Govt inspectors find 48 out of 100 at fault

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government factory inspectors have recently visited 100 garment factories and found 48 of them are operating without basic safety arrangements for their workers.

According to rules, garment factories must have such arrangements including alternative staircases to facilitate emergency exit of workers at the time of fire or any other accident.

As the office of the Chief Inspector of Factories (CIF) does not have adequate manpower, it selected the factories on random basis out of around 4,000 garment units.

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Faulty construction caused collapse

Owner skipped Rajuk approval, case to be filed today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nine-storey sweater factory that crumbled yesterday at Savar did not have approval from Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk).

"The building was not properly designed and constructed. The owner of the building did not even take Rajuk's approval before its construction," Rajuk chairman Shahid Alam told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the area was under the jurisdiction of Nabinagar Union Parishad and came under Rajuk's jurisdiction about six to seven years ago.

According to rule, the design of a building should be approved by Rajuk before its construction. "Still many constructors in the area do not seek Rajuk's approval," Alam said.

He also said the building was poorly built and the construction materials used were unsuitable for a nine-storey building.

"The columns of the building are not strong enough to bear the burden of a nine-storey building," the Rajuk chairman pointed out and added that the building was constructed in a low-lying area and

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BGMEA offers treatment cost, compensation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) will pay Tk one lakh as compensation to the families of each dead in the building collapse in Savar yesterday.

The BGMEA leaders found 28 persons seriously injured and admitted to different hospitals and local clinics, and another 100 who were released from those hospitals after first aid. The association will bear the treatment cost of all.

In addition, BGMEA has formed a five-member investigation committee, headed by Ali Azim Khan, chairman of BGMEA's sub-committee on safety measures, to

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Rescue goes slow on lack of equipment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inadequate equipment has slowed down the rescuers from pulling those trapped under the rubble of the collapsed building at Baipail in Savar.

"We do not have equipment to carry out such a massive rescue operation," Selim Newaz Bhuiyan, deputy director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, told reporters.

About 1,500 rescuers from the Fire Service and Civil Defence, the army, the Rapid Action Battalion and the police, who were conducting operations with insufficient equipment, seemed helpless as the screams of trapped workers emanated from beneath the debris.

Following the collapse, which left no less than 23 people dead and some 350 trapped, three hundred workers are now busy with spades, axes and hammers at the site. Even a good number of locals have joined hands with the rescuers.

The sobbing and wailing of the relatives of the trapped garment workers filled the air around the spot, while the rescue workers could do little in salvaging.

Fire fighters and rescuers were using three excavators, cranes, rotary saws, tripping hands, drills, spades, reciprocating saws, chipping hammer drills, manual cutters, gas cutters, and other instruments to cut the slabs and machinery in a

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Agonising wait

EMRAN HOSSAIN

It scared the life out of them, but they did not lose heart. They struggled and came out alive from piles of the rubble, said Monaem who along with six others cheated death in a nine-storey building collapse at Savar yesterday.

"At first I could not get what happened. All I could see was the ceiling coming down as people

around me were going down," said Monaem, a knitting supervisor of the factory.

He and his co-workers were trapped for 20 minutes inside the huge wreckage.

"I opened my eyes but could not see anything as the room had plunged into darkness. Lack of air and water inside the wreckage all the more worsened the situation," he

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Robbers kill bank officer

Loot Tk 2 lakh from shops

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gopalganj

An officer of Krishi Bank's Rajpat branch in Kashiani upazila of Gopalganj was stabbed to death and his field supervisor injured by a gang of robbers in the early hours yesterday.

Police said second officer Ayub Hossain, 55, and supervisor Arun Sarkar, 45, were inside the bank after midnight and busy updating the loan accounts ahead of the Bangla New Year.

At about 1:30am, a gang of 40 entered the bank, breaking open the collapsible gate. They tied up the bankers and asked second officer Ayub Hossain to give the keys of the strong room. As Ayub refused to give the keys, the gang stabbed him. He died on the spot. They also beat up supervisor Arun Sarkar and took away his gold ring and chain. He is now undergoing treatment at Gopalganj Sadar Hospital.

When contacted, Forkan Ahmed, Gopalganj regional manager of the

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RAISING INTEREST RATES Businesses concerned at BB advice to banks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday advised all commercial banks to increase interest rates in line with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) latest prescription while the country's top 10 business chambers and associations expressed deep concern over it, saying the interest rates should rather go further down.

The BB at a meeting with top executives of the commercial banks suggested that the banks may gradually increase the rates on deposits, consumer lending and credit for commercial imports.

Talking to newsmen later, BB Deputy Governor Nazrul Huda said high credit growth in the recent months has supported high import growth, creating high pressure on exchange rate of taka. "Increase in inflation eroding real interest rates has impeded deposit growth and accelerated lending growth, creating an imbalance," he pointed out.

"This is why the banks have been

suggested to be cautious in their lending activities," Nazrul added.

BB Governor Fakhruddin Ahmed.

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Relatives of the missing workers wait anxiously for the news of their near and dear ones. (More pictures on page 2)

COP BEATING MP's son denied bail, sent to jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Kamrul Kadar Noman, the son of BNP lawmaker Ali Kadar, was sent to jail yesterday after a court refused him bail in a police assault case.

Judge Mohammad Momin Ullah of the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the order after Noman along with his lawyers appeared before the court and petitioned for bail yesterday.

In the bail petition, the defence lawyers said that Noman obtained a

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RU RANSACKING Probe body to place report within 15 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi University (RU) authorities yesterday formed a committee to probe Sunday's violence, which left a number of teachers and students wounded and a trail of destruction on the campus.

The RU syndicate in an urgent meeting last evening set up the seven-member committee and asked it to report back within 15

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Mob beats 3 cops for toll collection

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mob yesterday beat up three policemen and turned them over to Shyampur police after they had gone in plain clothes to collect illegal

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