

22 killed, 350 trapped

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Kalam, Jewel, Rafiqul Islam, Monirul Islam, Nesaruddin, Razzak, Rakibul, Shahin Qudus, Al Mamun Palash, Gafur, Shahid, Kayes, Sakat, Zahir and Aleya.

The rescue effort will take at least a couple of days, said the rescuers, who are trying to save those struggling to breathe under the huge wreckage. The feeble voices of those trapped inside could be heard when rescuers were pumping oxygen late last night.

The accident occurred when workers were working the night shift on three floors of the nine-storey factory, which was constructed three years ago on 26 decimals of land at Baipal near Nabingagar-Kaliakoir road in Savar industrial town.

"No fewer than 450 workers were inside the building when it started going down at around 12:45am," Ismail Hossain, knitting in-charge of the day shift of the factory, told The Daily Star.

"I heard a big sound and rushed to the eastern side to find the building was crumbling like a house of cards," said Mostafa, an electrician of the factory, who went out to take tea at a nearby tea-stall. "I yelled out to alert the people inside but do not know if they had heard me," he said.

About 25 people who were on the ground floor managed to run out of the factory, witnesses said.

"At first I thought it was an earthquake. But when I rushed out, I saw dust was rising up and other things were falling as the building was going down," said Rafiqul, a knitting employee who had gone to the ground floor and dodged a possible death.

"We saw the entire building breaking down right before our eyes and heard those who were trapped crying out," he said, putting the number of the trapped at about 350. Four on-duty security guards — Shamsul Alam, Ramjan, Anowar and Samrat Alam — were sleeping on the ground floor and did not come out of the building.

FRANTIC RESCUE OPERATIONS Locals rushed to the building immediately after the cave-in and started rescue efforts. On information from patrol police, fire fighters from Savar rushed to the scene at 1:05am, joined by Police, Rab and army personnel at 3:00am. But narrow streets are hampering rescue equipment from reaching the site, rescuers said.

Rescuers are using welding equipment to cut through the rubble to try to reach trapped victims and to pump air to anyone who might be alive. Anxious relatives joined Army and Rab men and firefighters and used their bare hands and crowbars to sift through the rubble.

The fire fighters used rotary saw, tripping hands, drill, spade, reciprocating saw and other instruments to rescue the victims.

Medical teams of Orthopaedics Hospital, Gonoshasthya Medical College, Enam Medical College and Hospital, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association-UNFP medical team, Dhaka Civil Surgeon's Office, Savar Health Complex, Dhamrai Health Complex and Bangladesh Scouts reached the spot to treat the injured.

Several ambulances were on stand by for taking the injured to the hospital.

RELATIVES ANXIOUS The rescuers cut a hole in the wall of the building to bring out the trapped as hundreds of waiting relatives kept their fingers crossed.

Earlier, the law enforcers sealed off the area as scores of relatives were waiting outside for news of their near and dear ones.

The relatives had been conducting rescue efforts themselves since early yesterday morning, until the law enforcers drove them off at around 8:00am.

Rab men set up a control room on the southern side of the building, where relatives were directed to contact them.

Only 83 of the missing were enlisted by relatives.

INSUFFICIENT EQUIPMENT

DCC cleaners remove

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Rahat Khan, acting editor of the daily Ittefaq yesterday visited the North South Road footpaths at 11.30am while the DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka visited several lanes and by-lanes of Bongsal Road in old Dhaka, the DCC's public relations sources said.

Mainul Hossain, chairman, editorial board of the daily Ittefaq and the DCC mayor are expected to visit the footpaths of the Bokshibazar area today.

When asked about the total budget of the special drive, Commander Sohel Farouque, chief conservancy officer, DCC, also the coordinator of the drive, said, "Our department will spend Tk 41 lakh for paying the cleaners and for publicity to increase public awareness".

Abu Taleb, chief estate officer, DCC said, "We are conducting a demolition drive simultaneously in ten zones of the DCC with 12 eviction teams led by respective zonal executive officers and two magistrates of the DCC".

He said illegal encroachments on footpaths would be removed under the special drive from April 10 to 24. He said the eviction team yesterday conducted a drive at Shantinagar and along Kamal Ataruk Avenue and some other roads, following an eviction list.

Without the vigilance of police it is impossible for the DCC to main-

The rescuers said the equipment is not enough for the rescue work. "If not a tower crane, we could have removed the debris quickly," said Porimal Chandra Kundu, a fire brigade instructor.

"Although all the expertise of the army, police, fire brigade and Rab has been put in, it is not enough for such a massive work," a Rab colonel engaged in the rescue work told The Daily Star.

"We don't have the experience and equipment needed for such a massive operation," Deputy Director of Fire Service Elahi Newaj Bhuiyan told reporters.

Officials of the Fire Service co-ordinating the rescue works said the rescue operations were slower than expected because the owner of the factory was not co-operating.

"If the owners give us the building plan, it would be easier for us to remove the rubble and pull out the trapped," said Rajuk Chief Engineer Emadul Islam.

SAVE THE LIVING

"Our first priority is to rescue those who are still alive under the rubble. We will try to bring out the others later," Colonel Iqbal Hossain, who was supervising the army rescuers, told The Daily Star.

The dog squad was engaged in the rescue operations in the afternoon, he said.

Rescuers dug a hole in the chunk of the wall to supply oxygen to the trapped.

Director General of Fire Service Rafiqur Rahman said, "We're trying to pump oxygen into the building. We will take all necessary measures to keep the trapped alive."

The rescuers were preparing to spread a cover over the debris to protect the site from being washed away. "They (trapped workers) are already suffering from lack of water and food and would die if water washes them," said a Rab officer.

The rescuers said they would cut the limbs, if needed, to save the trapped.

PM VISITS SCENE

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia visited the scene at 3:30pm yesterday to see the rescue operation and to console the victims' families. She also directed the authorities to gear up the rescue operations and ensure adequate treatment for the injured.

Khaleda later went to the Combined Military Hospital to see 12 of the injured there.

Earlier, Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar, Inspector General of Police, M Hadisuddin Ahmed, Rab Director General Anwarul Iqbal and Local MP Dewan Mohammad Salahuddin visited the spot.

CONDOLENCES

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina have expressed their profound shock at the loss of lives and property in the building collapse.

CONFUSION OVER CAUSE

Civil engineers blamed faulty design and construction for the building collapse.

"The building did not have Rajuk's approval," Chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha Shahid Alam told The Daily Star on the scene.

"It is not properly designed and constructed. Its construction materials and structure do not match the one required of a nine-storey building." He added that the building did not have the foundation required by an establishment in such a low-lying area.

Some law enforcers at the site, however, said the explosion of a boiler on the ground floor triggered the collapse. A top officer of the factory told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity that the boiler exploded after the power was snapped.

"After the building started going down and the upper floors crumbled, the power line was cut off and the boiler exploded. But the explosion by no means caused the collapse; it occurred well after the subsiding started," he said.

tain encroachment-free footpaths, he added.

Under the special drive 50 to 56 cleaners will work daily in each of DCC's 90 wards. Alongside the DCC's 7,000 regular cleaners, 5,000 more will work under the drive every day from 9:00am till 12:00 noon.

Shahdat Hossain, a pedestrian in Mirpur said they are facing problems as the DCC cleaners sweep the roads during office hours. He complained, "The DCC cleaners sweep the roads between 9am and 10am which creates problems for the pedestrian."

Robbers kill

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bank, said the robbers entered the bank's Rajpat branch, breaking open the collapsible gate. They could not loot cash from the vault as they failed to break it open, he added.

There is no night guard at the Krishi Bank's Rajpat branch.

Locals said the gang also looted eight different shops at Rajpat Bazaar and took away Tk 2 lakh and gold ornaments. They beat up eight shop owners, leaving them injured.

Police sent the body of Ayub Hossain to Gopalganj Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy. A case was filed with Kashiani Police Station, but the law enforcers could not arrest any of the gang as of yesterday evening.

Talking to The Daily Star, Masud Rana, a civil engineer of Dhaka Export Processing Zone, said, showing some pieces of rubble: "See these materials, these are not supposed to be used in the construction of a nine-storey building."

The pillars and rods of the building cannot take the load of such a big building, he added.

PROBE Rajuk has formed a five-member team headed by its Member Nasir Uddin to investigate the incident. The committee will submit a report in three days.

COMPENSATION The state minister for home has assured the victims of compensation.

"We will consider compensation and put pressure on the owner of the factory to compensate the victims," he said.

Advocate Mahbubur Rahman, father-in-law of factory owner Shahriar Sayeed Hossain, told The Daily Star last night that Shahriar would compensate the victims.

"He (Shahriar) will pay Tk 5,000 for the burial of each victim, Tk 10,000 to the family of each of the dead and Tk 5,000 for treatment of the injured," he said.

Probe body

FROM PAGE 1 days. Headed by Prof Abul Hasem, the committee is formed mainly with pro-Jamaat-e-Islami teachers.

Sources said widespread anger among JCD activists over nominations of three Jamaat-e-Islami-backed teachers for the VC panel boiled over in Sunday's violence, which left three teachers and 10 students injured and more than 50 offices including the vice chancellor's ransacked.

Some JCD workers however said it was their protest against the university authorities' depriving their candidates of quotas for admission to bachelor's courses as well as continued support for Jamaat and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir.

The syndicate at yesterday's meeting asked the police to identify the culprits from newspaper reports and photos and make immediate arrests. None was arrested as of filing this report at 7:30pm last night.

Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner Nayeem Ahmed, meanwhile, visited the campus yesterday. He told newsmen, "We were taken aback by the incident and the attackers got away before we could understand the situation."

RU Teachers' Association in a statement yesterday condemned the violence while different teachers' and students' organisations including Bangladesh Chhatra League and ICS demanded a fair probe into the incident.

Biochemistry and molecular biology department teachers observed a full day work abstention to protest the attack on one of their colleagues.

Highest security

FROM PAGE 16 the city, scene of religious riots in 2002.

"We want to show our visitors that they are as safe here as in other parts of India, said police officer PK Jha.

India, 2-1 up, could secure at least a share of the series but the momentum is with the tourists, who won Friday's match in Jamshedpur by 106 runs.

The teams travelled together from Mumbai and were bussed from Ahmedabad airport through a side gate as hundreds of fans waited to welcome them.

Despite Friday's loss, when India were bowled out for 213, home captain Sourav Ganguly remained confident at the half-way point in the series.

"We are still ahead in the series. It is going to be close because the wickets are going to be good in the next three matches," he said.

"Whoever holds their nerve on the day is going to win."

Pakistan hit 319-6 and skipper Inzamamul Haq added: "The series is still open if we work really hard."

MP's son

FROM PAGE 1 two-week anticipatory bail from the High Court (HC) on April 3. The HC bench comprising Justices AK Badrul Huq and Fazlur Rahman asked him to surrender before the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, after a two-week period. In accordance with the HC direction, the petitioner appeared before the court and prayed for bail.

The prosecution, however, opposed it and prayed for sending Noman to custody.

On hearing both the sides, the court rejected the bail petition and ordered to send him to Dhaka Central Jail.

The lawyer's son and six others beat up traffic constable Abdul Majid on Manik Mia Avenue on March 30 for pulling him over for defying the red signal.

The constable, who suffered severe wounds in the forehead, filed a case with Tejgaon Police Station the same day accusing Noman and six of his accomplices.

Police arrested Noman's friend Billal Ahmed Billal at his Asad Gate residence on April 2.

Constable Majid is still undergoing treatment at Rajarbagh Police Lines Hospital.

BGMEA offers

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probe the incident. The committee will investigate the cause of the accident and submit the report within five days.

BGMEA president Anisul Huq and other leaders remained for hours at the spot and also visited local hospitals and clinics to check in on the injured.

Huq told The Daily Star that a BGMEA team would remain at the accident site for the whole time on a shift basis to provide any emergency requirements.

Factory workers yesterday said the casualties would have been much lower if the owners had not forced the workers to work the night shift. The owners regularly impose night shift work against the will of the workers, they alleged.

Mohammad Ferdous Kazi, the husband of Aleya Begum, a worker trapped in the collapsed building, told The Daily Star that the factory authority withheld payment from workers who refused to work the night shift.

"My wife had come to the factory only to work that day and to collect her salary from last month. She wanted to resign from the factory because of the pressure to work the night shift," Ferdous said.

Ferdous, who works in the same factory, had asked Aleya last night at 9pm not to work the night shift because of her seven month pregnancy. But the need for money compelled her to go.

Rescuers last night confirmed that Aleya died in the accident, although her body has yet to be recovered.

"My wife would have been safe if she had not worked the night shift," a shocked Ferdous said.

BGMEA president Anisul Huq said there is no restriction on conducting night shift work, adding that the building that collapsed was a newly constructed one and had no

major fault.

He admitted that many garment factories in the country operate in old buildings, but could not say how many there are.

"Though the building suddenly collapsed, the factory which it housed performed all safety and security compliance for the Garment industry," said Ali Azim Khan.

The BGMEA mainly looks for compliance with fire safety regulations and proper outlets of buildings when it checks safety measures, he said, adding that the safety of the infrastructure is supposed to be looked after by government organisations.

Banks object

FROM PAGE 16 that he will talk about it with the NBR," he said.

"Bankers can not disclose account information of depositors in such a wholesale way," Aminuzzaman added.

Bankers said that many of the professionals, irked by the NBR move, may withdraw their deposits and transfer money legally or illegally to different banks abroad.

This will also encourage the spread of black money, they added. NBR officials on the other hand told The Daily Star that many of the professionals have crores of taka as deposits with the banks while they show very little in their possession in their tax returns.

The NBR observes that payment of taxes by some professionals does not reflect their lifestyle.

An NBR list shows that some top contractors, developers and engineering companies did not pay any taxes in the fiscal year 2003-2004. Most of the 101 enlisted developers showed zero tax returns, while many of them showed losses in their books.

Businesses concerned

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held the meeting with the top bankers that there is a global trend of high inflation coupled with high interest rates, which once used to be the reverse. Bangladesh has to be cautious in such a situation so that it can control the situation without feeling the jolt, he added.

The central bank also urged the banks to discourage import of items for which there are substantial outstanding LCs in the pipeline.

In the last eight months, deposit marked a growth of 7.3 percent while credit grew at eight percent. Some banks are facing an imbalance of liquidity and credit deposit ratio. To avoid this, all banks need to be careful about a balanced growth of assets and liabilities as per relevant guidelines, the BB said.

Nazrul defended the central bank's position on interest rates saying, "We are not doing it as per the IMF suggestion. We have been taking measures to control credit before the IMF made its suggestion."

The central bank last year asked all the banks to lower their interest rates in accordance with another suggestion of the IMF saying the rates are already too high.

Meanwhile, 10 top business leaders in a joint statement yesterday expressed deep concern over the IMF proposal to increase the interest rates.

"The business community is not the aware of the details of the proposal as the IMF mission did not care to have any discussion with it. As reported in the press, the mission wanted increase of the bank interest rate so as to control inflation. The business community strongly feels that if the press reports are true, the IMF's proposal is ill-judged and not based on any proper assessment," said the statement.

"The country's economy has already started getting the benefits of the lower interest rate regime. Production costs have declined thereby improving the international competitiveness," added the statement.

Signatories to the statement included Abdul Awal Minto, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Mahbubur Rahman of International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh, Kutubuddin Ahmed of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sayeedul Islam of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, M Anis Uj Dowla of Bangladesh Employers' Federation, Mahbub Jamil of the Foreign Investors Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Anisul Huq of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, MA Awal of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, M Ali Behrouze Ispahani of Bangladesh Jute Mills Association and Fazlul Hoque of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

The statement said industrial output has increased by two percentage points during July-October, 2004 indicating creation of new job opportunities, and there are other indicators to show reduction of poverty. "High cost of credit will negate the on-going growth process," it added.

"At present, interest rates are higher compared to those in the neighbouring countries. In Bangladesh, interest rates are in the 12-15 percent range as against 6-7 percent in India, 5 percent in Pakistan, and as low as 2.7 percent in Sri Lanka. On export credit, too, the interest rate is much higher in Bangladesh, around 7-10 percent, which is more than twice the rate prevailing in India and Pakistan," the business leaders pointed out.

The statement went on, "Historically speaking, inflation in this country has never been a monetary phenomenon alone. For instance, in the second half of the 1990s, monetary policy was made more restrictive but inflation rate continued to remain high at around 8 percent. On

the other hand, monetary policy was eased starting from 1989, when the inflation rate declined to below 2 percent despite significant expansion of credit in the economy. Major factors which contributed to price increases are budget deficits, supply shocks, production losses, decline in productivity, frequent increases in the administered prices of fuel oil, power and gas, and devaluation of the currency, and problems of law and order.

"Poor law and order conditions constitute a significant factor behind price increases. Businessmen have frequently complained that extortion by different groups of hoodlums at all stages of production, transportation, wholesale marketing and retailing raises the prices of essentials."

For controlling inflation, therefore, much depends on decisions which have more to do with law and order problems, fiscal and trade policy, exchange rate management, infrastructural bottlenecks, administered prices, and monetary policy. Raising interest rates without addressing these other problems will aggravate rather than control any inflationary pressure, the business leaders felt.

"In the present situation of the economy, there is thus a strong case for further lowering rather than raising interest rates. We, therefore, suggest that the central bank should further reduce the bank rate and refix it at 5 percent, the rate that prevailed in the mid-1990s, and induce commercial banks to lower their lending rates further. At the same time, the government needs to take appropriate fiscal and other policies that will encourage higher capacity utilisation, more investment, etc., which will bring about a downward movement of prices," the statement said.

Most garment

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The CIF has only four staff who inspected the 100 factories in the last couple of months following a directive of the parliamentary standing committee on labour ministry. The CIF, a wing of the labour ministry, submitted its survey report on March 31 to the standing committee stating that the factory workers are at serious risk of accidents.

The report says due to lack of manpower the CIF cannot take legal action against all the factory owners who are violating the safety rules.

The factory owners have to face legal procedures if their factories do not have the mandatory safety arrangements, says The Factory Rule 1979.

Most garment factories in Bangladesh are located in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Chittagong and they account for 76 percent of the total export earnings.

The standing committee at its March 31 meeting expressed dissatisfaction over the poor safety arrangements that often lead to workers' deaths. It asked the authorities and the factory owners to ensure improved safety of the workers.

According to available statistics, as many as 295 garment workers died and 2,510 were injured in 22 fire incidents in 15 years since 1990.

The latest such disaster was yesterday's building collapse in Savar that killed at least 15 workers. Around 400 others were trapped inside.

The parliamentary body also formed a subcommittee to make a report on the safety measures, salary and wages of the garment workers by the end of June.

"We will discuss the issue at our next meeting on April 24 and then recommend stern actions against the factory owners who violate the rules," Committee Chairman Mosharraf Hossain Mongu yesterday told The Daily Star.

Rescue

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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 bid to rescue the trapped.

The way the operation is progressing, it might take one week to get the debris removed, said some rescuers.

"If we had a tower crane, we might remove the debris quickly," Porimal Chandra Kundu, a fire brigade instructor said, adding that using tower crane would allow them to remove debris weighing five to six tons from around 150 yards.

Meanwhile, opposition leader Sheikh Hasina's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury visited the spot of the tragedy.

He said, "We have offered the administration our all out cooperation. Our doctors are ready to assist while many of our volunteers are already engaged in rescue operations."

Saber said they also offered specialised machinery from Unique Group to assist the rescue operation.

Writ petition

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leading to its commercial launch.

Mesbahuddin Ahmed, an associate professor of the Department of History at Dhaka University, and Nasimul Ghani, an employee of the BTTB and Organising Secretary of Telegogaj Sramik Karmachari Union, filed the writ petition with the High Court Division of the Supreme Court.

The court may hear the petition today.

The petitioners sought a rule upon the respondents to show cause as to why the transfer of the licence and allocation of the frequency should not be declared illegal. They also urged the court to stay operations of Teletalk and using the frequency allocated by the BTRC.

The respondents are Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), its chairman, BTTB and its chairman, secretary of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications and Teletalk Bangladesh Ltd.

The telecoms watchdog BTRC granted BTTB the licence to run mobile phone service and later transferred the ownership of the licence to Teletalk Bangladesh Ltd, a newly formed state-owned company, in clear violation of the telecoms law, the petition said.

The government commercially launched the cellphone service on March 31.

Police beat

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police made him an accused following a clash with drug peddlers on April 2. When contacted by telephone last night, the Kotwali police station said that Ashraf was an accused in a police assault case from April 2.

"I took bail from the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court on April 7," the businessman said, adding, "But Kotwali Police came to my shop to arrest me on Sunday night."

He also said that seven police personnel, led by Kotwali Thana Sub Inspector Aslam, came to his Agamashi Lane shop dressed in plain clothes and beat him severely before taking him to the Kotwali police station.

"When I showed the bail order issued by the court, the police became furious and did not heed my words," he added.

Police later released Ashraf when people of Agamashi Lane bought out a procession against the police and showed the bail order to the Office in Charge (OC) of the Kotwali police station.

Police also admitted that Ashraf was taken to the Police Station on Sunday night but denied the allegation that he had been assaulted.

Ashraf was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital as he received severe injuries to different parts of his body following the police assault.