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Helpless voices, endless wait

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Mozammel could still talk by mobile to Mosharraf, one of his two brothers trapped in the collapsed building at Mohakhali yesterday, but he was facing an uphill battle to pull the brothers free from the huge rubble.

"My brother asks me not to cry. He says he could hear the sound of rescue work and he's sure he will come out alive," Mozammel said.

Despite the brother's words of courage in the face of danger, Mozammel, a mason by profession, fails to hold back his tears.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Adding extra floors without plan may be responsible

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Construction of extra three floors on top of a building with a foundation for only three storeys and unplanned renovation works could be the reasons for the collapse of the factory building of Phoenix Fabrics.

Some local residents said the first three floors were constructed on concrete pillars about 25 years ago. "Construction of the fourth and fifth floors started around a year and a half ago using only bricks," said a local resident, Alhaj Mohammad Alamgir, also vice-president of ward no 38 unit of the BNP.

KAM Haroon, chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

BGMEA to inspect all RMG plants

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BGMEA (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association) has decided to inspect all the garments factories across the country within next one month to find out whether the units are following the necessary safety standards and other compliance issues set by the national and international organisations.

The decision was taken at an emergency board meeting of the association at Agarabad BGMEA Bhaban in Chittagong yesterday following the devastating fire at the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

PMO monitoring rescue operation

Hasina shocked at Tejgaon collapse

AGENCIES, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday directed the authorities concerned to expedite in a well-coordinated way the rescue operation at Phoenix building that tripped on Friday, plunging the capital and some other parts of the country into darkness for a few hours.

As per her directive, army, fire brigade, police, Rab and other agencies have already started rescue operation. Prime Minister's office (PMO) is monitoring progress in the rescue operation.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

16 die as 6-storey building collapses in Tejgaon

Many, mostly construction workers, feared trapped

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 16 people were crushed to death and many others, mostly construction workers, were feared either trapped or buried alive under debris as a six-storey building at Tejgaon completely collapsed yesterday morning.

Rescuers pulled out 45 people from the rubble of the building at Tajuddin Sarani. They dug three large holes to rescue trapped victims, if any in the deep of the rubble, but that did not yield any result until 1:00am today.

An army control room set up at

the collapse site said eight of the injured people died on the spot and the rest at hospitals. The injured were admitted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) and the orthopaedic hospital.

Five of the dead are security guard Bellal Hossain, 22, Dhaka City Corporation garbage cleaner Mohammad Shahjahan, 18, Nargis, 15, Pappu, 24, and Swapan, 30. The identities of the rest could not be known immediately.

Witnesses and the injured said the building collapsed around 11:00am when tiles and sanitary workers, masons and electricians

were working on four floors under supervision of contractor Rustam.

The building that housed the factory of Phoenix Fabrics a year ago was being converted into a 500-bed hospital. There were also showrooms of Phoenix Fabrics and Phoenix Electronics on the ground and first floors and a number of tin-shed rooms on the rooftop.

Experts blamed faulty and unplanned construction for the collapse.

A large number of relatives of the construction workers rushed to the scene to enquire about their near and dear ones.

"My brother Qazi Harunur Rashid joined the hospital project as a network engineer just a week ago. He came to office this morning and since the incident his cellphone remained silent," said Qazi Mamun as tears rolled down his cheeks.

A grieved mother from the slum behind the building was waiting for her son she had left home while going to work.

In a crevice, a lone grey rubber slipper lay in the rubble, a broken rickshaw wheel just beside it. Its pair was missing and might

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4



PHOTO: ANSUR RAHMAN

A bird's eye view of the collapsed six-storey building in the city's Tejgaon Industrial Area. As of 11:00pm yesterday, eight bodies were retrieved from under the debris, while another eight died at hospitals, with many feared trapped in the doomed structure.

Power shortfall nags city despite plants' restart

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The frequent power outage continues to persist despite restoration of some power plants that tripped on Friday, plunging the capital and some other parts of the country into darkness for a few hours.

The Power Development Board (PDB) yesterday supplied 3,012 MW to the national grid against a very conservative power demand of 3,900 MW a day, sources said.

But many parts of the country as well as Dhaka remained out of

power supply for hours even after the recovery of plants.

PDB control room sources said last night that the situation improved to a certain extent after resumption of power generation at Meghnaghat and Siddhirganj power plants and Ghorashal plant's unit 6. But another unit (No. 4) of Ghorashal plant is still out of operation.

Meanwhile, the 360 MW Haripur CDC station, closed for maintenance works on February 17, resumed power generation last

night.

Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (Desa) got only 885 MW power yesterday against a demand of 1,300 MW. Though the daily intake of Desa improved by a mere 135 MW from 750 MW on Friday, it is still far short of its usual availability of 1,000 MW, Desa control room sources told The Daily Star last night.

Earlier on Friday, the capital experienced a lengthy blackout as big power plants tripped one after

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Int'l workers' body warning went unheeded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation's (ITGLWF) apprehension of massive disasters in the country's garments factories came true with the devastating fire in the KTS Composite Textile Mill in Chittagong and collapse of a multi-storey building in Dhaka within a span of two days.

In an investigative report to the government last year after the Spectrum garments factory collapsed in Savar, the ITGLWF, a Brussels-based global federation of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Rescue to run for 5-7 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It will take at least five to seven days for the rescuers to clear the debris from the Tejgaon building collapse.

"We'll need the time as we can't work from all the four sides. We can't work at the rear," Brigadier General Nizam Ahmed, who is coordinating the rescue operation, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Rescuers from the army, Bangladesh Rifles, Rapid Action Battalion and the police were sending away the curious people thronging the site. "We're running the operation with utmost care, as we want to rescue any people trapped under the debris alive," the brigadier said.

Large cranes were removing the debris from the upper part of the building standing on about 15,000 to 20,000-square-foot area. "We're doing it vertically, as anyone alive inside may get injured if we work from the sides," Nizam explained.

Asked how many days the operation may need to complete, he said, "At least five to seven days. We'll continue it until there is a possibility of a single person's survival."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Darkness and dusts, hopes and despair

Harrowing tales of survivors

PINAKI ROY and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Eighteen-year-old Shamim, a plumber, was one of the few survivors of the building collapse in Mohakhali who were trapped under the rubble for about half an hour.

Shamim and two of his colleagues were working on the first floor yesterday when the building started trembling violently, prompting them to run for safety.

"I just made a few steps towards the exit and then all hell broke loose. I found myself almost sandwiched between the collapsed roof and the floor before realising what was happening," said Shamim.

As he heard his other colleagues screaming, he called out to know where he was. Then he started crawling inch by inch.

"Fortunately, we were in between two pillars when the roof caved in," he said sitting next to the

collapsed building.

Shamim received first aid for minor cuts and bruises but his two fellow workers were committed to hospital. He was fit enough to return to his workplace to enquire about the fate of other workers.

"It was pitch black there and I could not see even the face of the person lying next to me," he continued his harrowing experience.

"Moreover, it was hot and I could not breathe well amidst a pile of dust; we had a cellphone and used the light of its LCD screen to advance," he recalled.

Sheer determination for survival kept them crawling on and after sometime they saw a glimmer of light. "As we drew near the narrow opening, rescuers pulled us out of the building."

Shamim does not know what had happened to the workers on his floor. He said no less than 100 people were working inside the building.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Farmers block Khulna highway for fertiliser

Buffer stocks run dry in different districts

STAR REPORT

Fertiliser crisis continued to haunt farmers in different districts in peak boro season with the buffer stocks exhausting fast, dealers refusing to lift date-expired urea and growers barricading roads demanding immediate supply of it.

Over a thousand farmers in Dumuria upazila of Khulna put up a barricade at Chuknagar on Khulna-Satkhira highway from 9:00 am to 11:00 am yesterday in demand for fertiliser and fuel for boro cultivation, reports our staff correspondent in Khulna.

The barricade disrupted traffic movement on the highway for two hours with over 200 passenger

buses, private cars and trucks stranded. They lifted the barricade as the UNO assured them of providing fertiliser at fair price today.

The Daily Star staff correspondent in Bogra reported that in Kurigram the authorities have stopped providing fertiliser from the buffer stock for shortage of supply.

Mahbub Alam, who is in-charge of the stock, yesterday told journalists that there were only 91 tonnes of fertiliser at the warehouse with a storage capacity of 2,000 tonnes.

In Lalmonirhat, the warehouse at Mohendranagar having a storage capacity of 12,000 tonnes now has a reserve stock of only 830 tonnes of fertiliser, sources said.

The government has asked 21 dealers of Razibpur and Rournari upazilas in Kurigram to take 928 tonnes of fertiliser and other dealers of the district to take 1,253 tonnes from Mohendranagar store as allocation for February. But the dealers of Razibpur and Rournari did not lift the allocated fertiliser on February 22 as transportation cost has increased. As a result, the upazilas are facing acute fertiliser crisis, according to reports.

Most of the fertiliser dealers of the two upazilas have locked their stores as they have no stock to sell. An official of Razibpur upazila administration yesterday admitted the crisis.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

CTG FIRE TRAGEDY

13 injured critical

Owners sued; workers damage garment factories, vehicles

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A team of burn-specialists from the burn units of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) yesterday identified the condition of 13 injured workers of KTS Composite Textile Mill as 'critical' out of a total of 49 now undergoing treatment. Nine of them were sent to Dhaka by road last night in ambulances.

Hundreds of garment industry

workers at BSCIC Industrial Area in Kalurghat came out of their factories yesterday evening marching in protest at the deaths of their fellow workers in the country's worst-ever industrial fire in the KTS factory on Thursday. The protesters demanded exemplary punishment for the factory owners.

They damaged a number of garment factories and at least 10 vehicles after the police had intercepted the march and barred it

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

41 workers hurt in Ctg RMG factory stampede

CU CORRESPONDENT

At least 41 garment workers were injured, four of them critically, in a stampede following blast of an electric transformer at Sagorika Road in the city's Pahartali area yesterday morning.

Sources said the stampede occurred at 9:45am when several thousand panic-stricken workers of eight garment units housed in two multi-storied buildings tried to come out of the factories through staircases after the transformer

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Bashundhara Convention Center

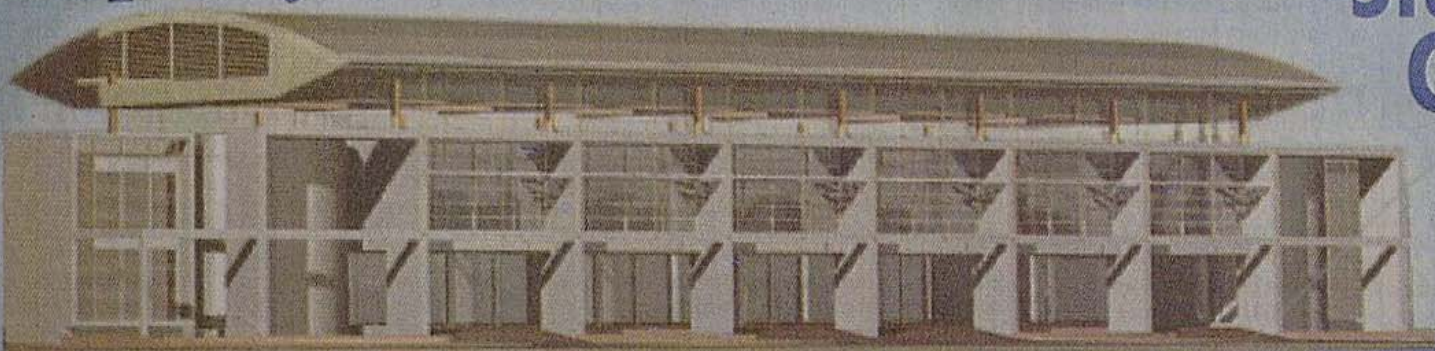
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Block # G, Umme Kulsum Road, Bashundhara R/A, Dhaka.

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