

## ACCIDENTS IN FACTORIES

# Dife is too weak to ensure safety measures

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD

Lack of safety measures is a constant threat for some 5,000 factories in Chittagong as the Department for Inspection of Factories and Establishments (Dife) lies in a miserable state.

Dife, responsible for ensuring safe working conditions and bringing order in the factories and industrial units in Chittagong division, is designed to man with 12 inspectors.

Of the 12 posts, five have been lying vacant for long. They are supposed to work in three categories - general, safety (engineering) and medical.

The Chittagong divisional office is now left with only two inspectors to deal with the safety standard and compliance issues of 4809 factories and industrial units in the port city. Of them, 667 are garments factories.

The post of Deputy Chief Inspector of Factory is lying vacant since January. MA Samad, one of the two assistant chief inspectors, now takes care of the post in addition to his work.

One of the three posts of factory inspectors (engineering) for taking care of the safety compliances has been vacant for over two years.

An assistant inspector (engineering) is on leave as he is ill, sources said.

Two posts of factory inspector and assistant inspector (medical) have been lying vacant for three years and over a year respectively, sources said.

One of the three posts of factory inspectors (general), responsible for looking into violation of laws relating to factories, workers' wages, and

licence of factories, has also been lying vacant for long, they said.

The poor state of the Dife came to light after the country's worst-ever factory fire left over 50 garments workers burnt alive and injured over 100 at KTS Composite Textile Mills at Kalurghat BSCIC industrial area in the city on February 23.

Dife Deputy Chief Inspector (acting) MA Samad said the

**The poor state of the Dife came to light after the country's worst-ever factory fire left over 50 garments workers burnt alive and injured over 100 at KTS Composite Textile Mills at Kalurghat BSCIC industrial area in the city on February 23**

factory developed two staircases up to the first floor and only one of them led to the third floor.

"We issued a letter to the mill authorities on February 10 asking them to develop two staircases up to third floor of the building, which obtained a licence as a two storied one," he said.

"We also asked them to report us within 15 days in this

regard and the accident occurred just before expiry of the given time," he said.

"The staircases, however, were sufficiently wide and casualties could have been far more minimised or almost to zero if both the gates were kept open or if they were not narrowed down by the stockpiled products and machineries installed in a most unplanned and congested way," he said.

Samad said the high casualty at KTS could have been averted through keeping the factory under constant monitoring and inspection.

"But, we could not do that with such a poor man power," he added.

Besides, two factory inspectors (engineering) at present are engaged in an UNDP funded project, he said.

The project is being implemented by the government with the technical assistance of International Labour Organisation (ILO) for the development of safety standard and friendly working environment in ship breaking industry, he said.

On the other hand, Fire Service and Civil Defence the authority to provide clearance for workshop warehouse licence after inspecting measures to combat fire in a factory, also lacks manpower.

Rashedul Islam Majumder, Fire Service Deputy Director of Chittagong region, said they have only three inspectors to see measures of a factory for fire fighting.

With this manpower it is impossible to conduct proper inspection in some 5,000 factories and industrial units in Chittagong, he said.



A colourful fountain is one of the main attractions for the visitors at the Chittagong International Trade Fair at Polo ground in the port city while visitors crowd an Iranian stall, top right, and a Thai stall, bottom.



## Int'l Trade Fair attracts huge visitors

NUR UDDIN ALMAGIR

The 14th Chittagong International Trade Fair-2006 at the Railway Polo ground in the port city has gained momentum with huge visitors crowding everyday.

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CCCI) organised the month long fair with a view to promoting local products and creating new markets abroad.

"Though the fair could not draw visitors up to our expectation for the first few days after the inauguration on February 14, the crowd is now quite satisfactory," said Ershad Ullah, chairman of the fair committee.

"At least seven to eight lakh visitors turned up at the fair until Saturday, 19th day into the fair," he said.

A total of 330 stalls and 29 pavilions are participating in the fair this year.

The pavilions are categorised with different titles such as Premier Gold, Premier, Standard Mini Mega, Premier Mini and Mini Pavilion.

Thailand is participating as the

partner country for the fourth consecutive year and having 53 stalls of arrays of different Thai products in special Thai Zone.

An exclusive 'China Block' with several Chinese stalls and a 'Pakistani Pavilion' with Pakistani stalls have also been built in the fair.

Besides, business farms from the United States of America, India, Iran and New Zealand are also participating in the fair displaying their products.

The business farms from home and abroad showcased wide range of products, including handicrafts, computer and computer accessories, consumer products, food items, home appliances, garments, leather goods, garments made by the tribals, electronic cables, electronics, ceramics, aluminium, jute products, herbal medicine, silk goods, building materials, marble and tiles, transformer, wooden and steel furniture, plastic goods, utensils and cosmetics in the fair.

Mohammed Mohsin, a student, said, "I visited the fair several times and price of the items at the fair is reasonable compared to markets."

"The stalls at the fair offer us goods directly from the foreign producers and sometimes at a discount rate," he added.

Rabi Uddin Mahmud, an employee of the Little Furniture Private Limited, is happy as the number of visitors is increasing everyday.

"We have already received orders for our products of Tk 2 lakh," he said.

The New Zealand Dairy is selling their powdered milk of popular brands Anchor and Red Cow, as well as other products at a retail price at the fair.

"We have sold powdered milk of over Tk 2.50 lakh until Thursday," said Zakir Hossain - an executive of the New Zealand Dairy.

While visiting the fair with his family Mohammed Jamil Uddin, a government official, was disturbed to see the used disposable cans and packets littering the fair premises.

"In an international fair the authorities are expected to take care of everything to bring in a good impression from the participants and the visitors, particularly those from

abroad," he said.

Several stall owners said they are facing problems in bringing their products, as unlike previous occasions, the labourers are not allowed inside the fair premises without tickets.

"I cannot bring even our high officials in my stall without ticket," said an employee of a new telephone operator on condition of anonymity.

Besides, "We are facing power crisis, which causes sufferings to the visitors putting them into embarrassing situation," he said.

Ershad Ullah said negligence of the sweepers might have caused inconvenience for some times immediately after the inauguration of the fair and we have instantly taken measures to address it.

He dismissed the allegation of charging ticket fares from those carrying goods for the stalls saying no complaint is reported to the committee in this regard so far while the initial crisis of power is already solved.

## theweekthatwas

### Safety measures at RMG factories demanded

Samajtantrik Mahila Forum leaders at a rally on Saturday demanded favourable and hygienic environment for work and safety measures in the garments and textile factories.

The Forum leaders also formed a human chain in front of the Chittagong Press Club protesting indifferent attitude of the Ready-made Garment (RMG) owners on ensuring congenial environment in the factories.

Later, the Forum organised a rally with its Chittagong unit convenor Syeda Parveen Akhter in chair, Principal of Fulki Shila Momen, Prof Ferdous Ara Alim, women activist Jasmine Sultana Paru, Dr Bappi Lushai, Advocate Akhterunnisa, Advocate Akhter Kabir Chowdhury, journalist Sharifa Bulbul, Sramik Front president Namash Nandi and forum leader Naima Khaled Monika addressed the rally.

They urged people of all walks of life to help the injured workers. The leaders also called for raising mass movement to resist such incident in future.

### Marketing confce held

Annual Marketing Conference of United Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals was held in the port city on Thursday.

Director of the company and publisher of the Daily Purbokone Jasimuddin Chowdhury inaugurated the conference at a local hotel. He urged the officers, staffs and employees to work with determination in order to enhance the goodwill of the company gradually.

Managing Director Dr M Ramiz Uddin Chowdhury, Advisor Kallol Roy Chowdhury and Sales Manager Yusuf Ali Talukder also participated in the discussion.

Later, awards were distributed among the promotional officers for their contribution in the work place.

### Cricketers visit physically challenged children

Bangladesh Cricket Team Captain Habibul Bashar said the physically challenged persons are not disabled at all as they can also show their talents if get opportunities.

He was addressing as chief guest a reception ceremony for the Bangladesh cricket team organised by Centre for Disable Concern (CDC), Chittagong unit on Thursday.

The team visited the CDC office at MM Ali Road in the city.

The players along with team manager Faruque Ahmed and coach Dev Whatmore spent sometime with 200 physically challenged children.

The disabled children presented some handicrafts made by them to



Artist Monsur Ul Karim explains about a piece of water-colour at a painting exhibition of 24 young artists at the Alliance Francaise auditorium in the city on Saturday.

the players. They also performed a cultural programme.

The players answered to many queries of the children, mainly about the ODI and the test matches against Sri Lanka.

The children also handed over a crest to Habibul Bashar.

Eminent scientist Prof Dr Jamal

Nazrul Islam presided over the programme while sports injury specialist Dr Shahadat Hossain, Rashida Khatun and CDC executive director Selim Nazrul and director Md Kamal Uddin also spoke at the function.

### Norwegian

### envoy visits Ship Breaking Yard

Ambassador of Norway to Bangladesh Aud Lise Norheim visited the Chittagong Ship Breaking Yard at Sitakunda on Monday.

She also visited the local office of Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), a non-government organisation, to get an impression about its activities ranging from human rights to hardships of shipyard workers.

Shaheen Anam, Team Leader of Manusher Jonno, and its

programme manager Shila Hoque accompanied her.

Earlier, the envoy participated in a discussion titled "The activities of YPSA and ship breaking" at YPSA office.

YPSA Chief Executive Md Arifur Rahman, Convenor (Programme) Mahabubur Rahman, Convenor (Finance) Palash Chowdhury, Consultant AMM Toha and Md Sirajuddin Belal also spoke at the meeting. Programme officer Md Ali Shahin presented the keynote paper.

Lise Norheim in her speech emphasised the need for treatment and compensation for the injured workers and maintaining the law on child labour in the sector.

Shaheen Anam said, "There is no doubt that the rights of the workers at ship breaking yards are being violated and ignored."

### 'Education a must for women's empowerment'

Former Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury MP said education is the most important tool for women's empowerment.

They need knowledge, skill and confidence in order to participate in the development process of the country.

"Development at desirable level will be possible if we can create scope for proper education for women and children. The more women get education the more they

will be able to get access to the job markets and achieve empowerment."

He was addressing as the chief guest the inaugural ceremony of the Silver Jubilee anniversary of Agrabad Girls' School in the city on Friday.

District Education Officer Kazi Salimullah, Agrabad Women's College Principal Anwara Alam and female ward commissioner Afroza Kalam were present as the special guests. Vice president of the school committee Mozammel Hoque and Headmaster Sunil Chakrabarti also spoke at the function.

### Minister for science-based agri system

Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman emphasised the need of science-based agricultural system with a view to raising the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and making the country self-reliant in food.

He urged the agriculturists and scientists to invent new technologies suitable for our agriculture.

He was addressing as chief guest the Conference-2005 of Agriculturist Association of Bangladesh (AAB), Chittagong unit at the Chittagong Veterinary University auditorium.

Agriculturists Javed Iqbal, Kabir Ahmed Bhuiyan, AKM Hedayet Ullah, Reajul Hoque Jashim and Md Enayet E Rabbi addressed the conference with Agriculturist Md Fazlul Hoque in the chair.