Faulty probe leads

FROM PAGE 1 THEFIRE

Thursday, February 23, 2006 was like any other day for garment workers employed at the KTS factory located in the BSCIC Industrial Area of Kalurghat, Chittagong. It was dark, overcrowded and the corridors and stairways were cluttered with piles of raw materials, finished garments

and machinery. At 6:00pm, a small fire on the third floor caused by a short circuit barely caused a ripple amongst the workers. Ibrahim Hossain, who at the time worked in the dyeing room told The Daily Star in an interview in December at Chittagong last year, "There were perhaps as many as ten small fires a month. The factory seemed to be fire prone." This particular fire was easily

doused. However, an hour later a spark from welding work at a ground floor entrance fell onto a pile of clothes. The fire spread through the fabric and began to rage uncontrollably after igniting chemicals contained in drums kept by the

The company had no fire alarm though this was mandatory under the Factories Act. "We did not know about the fire until I saw smoke and red flames outside the window," said Ismail Hossain in December last year, from the fourth floor who suffered burns on a fifth of his body. There was also no fire safety plan--also required by law-the factory was dark, and internal gates within the factory were locked making movement difficult.

This exit where the fire started was the route, which all the workers normally used. In subsequent days after the fire, newspapers suggested that soon after the fire started company managers had ordered the entrance gate to be locked in order to prevent workers from stealing fabric.

It remains uncertain whether this allegation is true, but locking this gate was not in fact the reason for the deaths. Workers have told The Daily Star that the fire was so strong at the entrance that even if the gate were open, it would have been almost impossible for them to escape.

ALTERNATIVE EXIT LOCKED The reason why so many workers did die was because the only entrance at the front of the building had been deliberately locked by order of the company.

"These gates were only opened for delivering shipments of finished goods. The rest of the time they were closed," said Ibrahim. The gates were only open intermit-

Forty bodies were found just inside this second set of gates--they had been burnt, crushed or suffocated.

Other workers were tramoled to death on the stairways to the second and third floors as they collided with other workers climbing up and down the stairs to escape.

Twelve of the workers who died and seven of the over 200 injured were children under the age of 14. The employment of children in factories was forbidden under Bangladesh

The only means of escape was through the windows-either by jumping out or by climbing down ropes made from cloth. Many survived this way though others suffered serious injuries in the process. Some were impaled on the steel rods sticking up in under

construction buildings around the factory.

INQUIRY REPORTS The government and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association quickly set up

inquiries into the fire. Following a public interest litigation filed by human rights organisations, on March 16, 2006, the High Court ordered them to produce their reports before the court within three weeks. Four years have passed and no reports have been filed. The Daily Star was unable to

obtain copies of the reports. However, Amirul Hug, who was at the time a member of the government committee, in an interview with The Daily Star at his office on December 20 last year confirmed that its inquiry found that locking the second gate was the principal cause of the tragedy. And Abu Tayeeb, head of the BGMEA Committee, in another interview at his home on December 20 last year also told The Daily Star, "The incident took place solely because of the negligence of the factory authorities. It is unbelievable how

the factory so quickly."

such a devastating fire could take place and spread through

FACTORY INSPECTORATE The Inspectorate of Factories was the government body then responsible for the enforcement of the Factories Act 1965 and the Factories Rules 1979.

Following its investigation, the Inspectorate laid criminal charges in the magistrate's court against the chairman of KTS, its maintenance director, and factory manager Ruhul Quddus for "keeping the exit of the factory under lock and key". The Inspectorate alleged that "as a result [of the locked gate], the workers inside the factory could not escape, resulting in the deaths".

These men could have escaped conviction had they shown that they did not know the gates were locked or that they had acted with "due diligence" in trying to keep the gates open. Section 103 of the Factories Act 1965 also would have allowed their acquittal if they could point a finger at someone else. However, in April 2006--two months after the fire--all three men pleaded guilty at a hearing.

The defendants were also convicted of six other offences. One related to employing child workers and another related to the executives' failure to construct an additional staircase for the second and third floors, as required by the company's own design lodged with the Factory Inspectorate. The deaths on the stairs may have been avoided if this additional staircase had been built (see box for full list of convictions). The magistrate fined each

of the three men a total of just Tk 1,500 for all six offences. POLICE INVESTIGATION

The most crucial investigation was undertaken by the police.

The day after the fire, a first information report (FIR) was lodged with the Chandangaon Police Station. Sub-Inspector Md Shamsuddin Bhuiyan, who was the mobile duty officer on the night of the fire, named 20 people as responsible, including the main directors and managers of the factory, and proposed that cases should be filed against them for culpable homicide, death by negligence, and for causing grievous hurt.

The investigation was not conducted by a team of police and was not referred to the Criminal Investigation Department.

The Daily Star has compared the FIR and the charge sheet prepared eight months later by Police Inspector Md Selim Ahmed--the third police officer to have been given responsibility for the investigation. The charge sheet contains virtually no new evidence.

It concludes that four company directors -- the brothers Towhidul Islam, Wahidul Islam, Khaledul Islam and Ershadul Islam-should not face criminal charges because they were not present on the site on the day of the fire and there was "no adequate evidence against them". The company's accountant, Kamrul Islam, was similarly exonerated.

The charge sheet, however, omitted to mention that Towhidul Islam and Wahidul Islam had already admitted in court their personal responsibility for keeping the gates locked and for not building an additional staircase-admissions highly relevant to these offences.

Whilst dismissing the charges against these five men, the charge sheet did conclude that 14 men should be prosecuted. However, Police Inspector Selim Ahmed failed to set out any evidence to support its allegations, and in June 2007--only a few months after the case was sent for trial--the High Court ordered the cases to be dismissed as "there is no specific allegation against the petitioners...There is nothing on record to show that they locked the gate to prevent the

workers from coming out." It is not difficult to see why the High Court came to this conclusion. The charge sheet did not set out why any one of these people in particular should be prosecuted. It did not even refer to the existence of any of the government and BGMEA inquiry reports, let

alone set out their findings. And as with the chairman

and maintenance director, it did not mention that one of the 14 men--Ruhul Quddus, the factory manager--had already admitted his responsi-

country's overall situation is bility for locking the gate. The Daily Star showed the not good at all and deficit of charge sheet to Mohammed power and gas, price of commodities, incidences of crime Nurul Huda, former inspector general of police. "The investiare rocketing.

gation was far from adequate. The interest of investigation would have been better served had it been sent to the CID," he said in an interview at his Gulshan residence on February 3. He pointed to the lack of any "chart of evidence" setting out the evidence against each defendant.

Police Inspector Md Selim Ahmed, who wrote the charge sheet, is no longer working at Chandangaon Police Station and neither the Chittagong commissioner nor the IGP in Dhaka could tell us where he is now based.

ISPR clarifies

FROM PAGE 16

He was moved to CMH, Chittagong by a helicopter after receiving serious injuries wearing military uniform, it

Besides, without knowing correct information and data about present situation of Chittagong Hill Tracks, any comment involving sensitive organisation like Army would not be wise and may create contradiction.

The ISPR requested all concerned so that no misinter pretation was created about flawless endeavour of security forces for ensuring peaceful co-existence of Bengalis and hilly people in the hill tracts.

Bihari Camp

FROM PAGE 16

The cause of the fire, which started at 7:15pm, could not yet be known.

Witnesses said the campdwellers could not save their belongings as the fire spread

At least 12 shops of electrical goods and cellphone outlets were reduced to ashes, but the extent of damage could not be estimated immediately. Meanwhile, locals caught a

young man named Hasan, aged around 26, and handed him over to police, suspecting that he might have a hand in the fire. Quoting witnesses, Pallabi

police told The Daily Star that Hasan, who lives nearby, had threatened to set the shanties on fire following a scuffle with a group of youths at the camp.

Raid at RU

FROM PAGE 16

around 10:30 am police aided by the hall authorities raided hall unit Shibir Secretary Shariful Islam's room, which was used as Nomani Memorial Library and recovered the 'jihadi' books.

Ten Shibir-controlled rooms of the hall including the room of hall unit Shibir president Mujahidul Islam were

also sealed off during the raid. In another raid, RU Ziaur Rahman Hall authorities recovered a huge amount of iron rods, some hockey sticks, stones, sticks and leaflets from another Shibir-controlled room at noon.

In the afternoon, police also raided Amir Ali Hall and seized 500 Islamic books including some 'jihadi' books from 11 rooms of the dormi-

The law enforcers sealed off the rooms including the room of the hall unit Shibir president after two-hour long

raid ended at 7:30 pm. Meanwhile, RU unit BCL yesterday set up an effigy of a Shibir man in front of the university central library and spat at the effigy as part of a protest programme demand ing punishment to killers of BCL worker Faruque Hossain.

The government must step down for the sake of the country, she added.

Khaleda, leader of the opposition, made the remarks when parents of Abu Bakar Siddique, a student of Dhaka University recently killed on the campus, met her at her Gulshan office.

Khaleda handed over Tk lakh in cash to Rabeya Begum when Siddique's father Rustam Ali, mother Rabeya and brother Abbas Ali met the former premier.

She said the caretaker government has taken the country twenty years back and this will continue if Awami League stays in power.

"The parliament is not functioning well, and the government fails to run the country," she mentioned.

Khaleda also said the

trial court to transfer the records "There is no academic of the case to the HC within atmosphere on the campuses. seven days. The education system has collapsed due to involvement appeal with the SC challenging of the student wing of the the HC order asking for the case's ruling AL in admission trade records. and criminal activities," she said.

The apex court in the verdict on January 18 also cautioned the conviction.

some HC judges for granting

Iqbal bail and staying the order of Iqbal yesterday surrendered to the special court as per the

Hossan Clinic in the town. apexcourt's direction. men in the town.

involved in any militant activi-On January 3, the ACC filed an The injured were identified as Khalil, 30, Pintu, 22 Ibrahim, 45, Zahid, 26, Salam, regenerate, he said. 33, Anisur, 36, Ujjal, 30, Rafiqul, 28. They were under-

going treatment at Tofazzol On April 16 last year, police arrested 31 Hizbut Tawhid

Jaish-e-Mohammed operative Rezwan Ahmed, a Pakistani national, right, and his four local associates at the Rab headquarters in the city yesterday.

Jaish-e-Mohammed

Essentials prices

weeks.

essentials.

godown.

FROM PAGE 1

Mohiuddin owns the Sukanya Tower. He and his brother Salahuddin had been sheltering the militants, he added.

Rab sources said Mohiuddin, now president of Hajiganj union BNP in Chandpur, had earlier been Bengal. involved in Jamaat-e-Islami. Billal told journalists that he

vas arrested in an anti-state case in India. He also admitted that he

had a role in hijacking the Indian Airlines plane, which was flying to Delhi from Kathmandu. The hijackers forced the aircraft to land in Kandahar of

Afghanistan. The Indian authorities had to set free three militant leaders including JeM supremo

onion, garlic, oil, lentil and red

The committee chief said

garlic is selling at Tk 60 a kg

today, which was selling

between Tk 150 and 160 a kg a

few days ago. Red chilly is now

selling at Tk 120 a kg, while the

price was between Tk 120 and

per kg at different markets at

upazila and union level, said

over the phone that sugar is

selling at Tk52 which was sold at

Tk55 in the last month," he said.

has already come down to Tk 75

prices of essentials are decreas-

ing at district, upazila and union

levels but it remains unchanged

The committee asked the

Trading Corporation of

Bangladesh (TCB) to take nec-

essary steps so that people can

buy daily essentials at a fair

import adequate quantity of

daily essentials to meet the

requirements during the month

of Ramadan and Eid-Ul-Fitr,"

case filed by the Anti-

Judge AFM Aminul Islam of

On January 18, the Appellate

the Special Judge Court-1 passed

Division of the Supreme Court

upon an appeal filed by the ACC

cancelled the High Court order

granting Iqbal bail and directed

him to surrender before a trial

Assistant Director Mohammad

Ibrahim filed the case against

Iqbal, his wife, two sons and a

daughter with Gulshan Police

A special court on March 11,

The court also fined Iqbal Tk

Judge Firoz Alam directed the

The AL leader was convicted

government to confiscate his

for concealing information of his

wealth worth over Tk 10 crore in

his wealth statement and earn-

ing wealth worth over Tk 2 crore

granted Iqbal bail and stayed the

verdict of the special court upon

HC bench allowed a writ petition

filed by Iqbal and directed the

On November 22, 2009, an

The HC in different orders

from unknown sources.

petitions filed by Iqbal.

2008, sentenced him to 13 years

in jail with 10 years rigorous

50 lakh and ordered another year

in jail on failure to pay the fine.

wealthworthTk14.56crore.

On June 25, 2007, ACC

HBM Iqbal

Corruption Commission.

the yesterday's order.

court by February 28.

mprisonment.

'We have asked TCB to

akgfrom that of Tk 80.

in the capital.

Hai said.

Lutful Hai said price of lentil

The committee chief said

Onion is also selling at Tk 20

"We have been informed

Tk 150 a few days back.

chilly.

the then Taliban-ruled

exchange for passengers taken hostage. Billal said he was born in Darampur village under Sylhet

Moulana Masood Azhar in

Sadar. He is married to a woman hailing from Bashirhat of the Indian state of West He said he had tried to enter

India through Satkhira border a few months back to appear before a Bashirhat court hearing a case against him. Along with another militant group, Jaish is blamed for the

attack on Indian parliament in Delhi in December 2001. It is also suspected to have a role in the abduction and murder of American journalist

After the parliament attack, Pakistan government banned the organisation and the US

The standing committee on

food ministry at its meeting at

the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban

asked a parliamentary sub-

committee to identify causes of

price hike of essentials in three

meeting formed the three-

member sub-committee

headed by Dr Akram Hossain

Chowdhury to find out the

cause of price hike of daily

the committee, told reporters

that price of coarse rice is going

up though there is enough stock

of rice in the government

the price hike of coarse rice at

present," Muhammed Sayedul

Hoque, chairman of the com-

members of the food ministry

informed the committee mem-

bers about the government's

Border Out Post, started firing

at 3:20pm and stopped at

around 6:10pm, second-in-

command of the 21 Battalion

of BDR Maj Mamun told The

about 300 Indian villagers left

a swamp inside Bangladesh

territory after failing to catch

fish from there, the official

Kendri, Ghilatail and

Bilaimara on Jaintapur border

started leaving their homes to

safer places, said Delwar

Hossain, a trader in Jaintapur

Bazar. Over 500 gunshots had

so far been heard, he claimed.

could not ascertain the figure.

had attempted to catch fish in

the swamp several times, but

failed due to the resistance of

locals as well as the BDR dur-

their identity. At one stage the

Hizbut men attacked the

locals with hammers and left

rushed to the spot and took

the wounded to a nearby

arrested the six from different

Kushtia Police Station

Asaduzzaman told journalists

that the arrestees had admit-

ted their link with the organi-

sation but claimed not to be

On information, police

Police in an overnight drive

Officer-in-Charge of

ing the last one month.

FROM PAGE 16

the scene.

parts of the town.

The BDR officials, however

Sources said the Indians

Panicked villagers a

The firing started when

steps to arrest the prices of rice.

The minister and other

mittee, told the meeting.

FROM PAGE 16

Daily Star.

"We don't see any reason for

Chowdhury, a member of

The committee at its las

Daniel Pearl in Karachi.

State Department listed it as a terrorist outfit. JeM's main objective is to

separate Kashmir from India. Asked if Rezwan has any links with the local militant organisations, Col Matiur said

they have not yet found any. "We have just started our investigation. We hope we'll be able to come up with more information shortly," he added.

Rab officials said Rezwan had been travelling between Bangladesh and India without any valid documents.

Last year, the Detective Branch of police arrested six foreign operatives of Pakistanbased Lashkar-e-Taiba, and a number of their local associ-

Of the six, three are Indians and three Pakistanis.

Inflation

season was less than that in the previous season, and supply of paddy in the market is inadequate.

They claim that the government is showing an inflated quantity of Aman production to keep them under pressure. Besides, rice price in the global market is also high as production suffered due to drought, they say.

Strike at DMCH **FROM PAGE 1**

colleague manhandled a anaesthetists Dr Abdur Rahman Palash on Saturday as he refused to work after his duty hours for two patients, said the hospital sources.

The anaesthetists went for strike in front of Operation Theatre Complex at DMCH in protest of the attack.

Borhan Ali, husband of a gynaecology patient Asma Begum, 46, told The Daily Star, "My wife was admitted to the hospital on February 11 and doctors fixed the date for her operation today [Sunday]. But it was not done and they said to wait for next schedule."

We came from Sonargaon for her operation," he said adding the four hour-long strike delayed their probable return home within four days after the operation. "Now we don't know when we can go back where our

kids are waiting for us." However, Head of Anaesthesia Department of DMCH Shahera Khatun Bela told The Daily Star, "The operation was stopped for two hours and we made up for the last time by working extra hours."

She explained the cause of the strike that the anaesthetists were emotionally upset over the attitude of some colleagues.

There are 17 operating theatres at DMCH while 12 remain open from 8:00am to 2:00pm and rest five remain open round the clock.

Chunati forest

(REDD) mechanism under the UNFCCC and urged all to make efforts to get due share out of it.

"REDD mechanism is getting prominence in developing countries for mitigation effort. It is expected that a major share of developed countries' financial support may flow towards this "Brazil, Indonesia, India and

other nations with forest resources may get a lion's share from the REDD mechanism, However, Bangladesh may also get a share out of it in the

enabling measures in this sector," the minister added. Hasan urged all to make their best efforts to protect forests saying forests are the first line of defence against cyclones and tidal surges to reduce disas-

future, "if we take appropriate

ter risks to a great extent. The Sundarbans, already encroached upon by man, and affected by rising sea levels, could take up to 30 years to

Senior Adviser of the IUCN Dr Ainun Nishat and Assistant Country Director of UNDP Aminul Islam took part in the discussion with Sanwar Hossain, president of POUSH, in the chair.

India-Myanmar to jointly fight northeast rebels

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, **Imphal**

India and Myanmar will conduct a "coordinated operation" against northeast separatist outfits taking shelter and setting up base camps in the neighbouring country, Union Home Secretary Gopal Krishna Pillai said here.

"A coordinated operation by the joint forces of India and Myanmar would be conducted in the jungles of the neighbouring country to flush out northeast militants camps," Pillai told reporters here Saturday night after holding a meeting with top Manipur government officials.

The strategy for the joint operation was discussed with Myanmar officials during Pillai's visit to Yangon Jan 19-21.

"All camps (in Myanmar) which are acting against the interest of India would be targeted," the home secretary said refusing to divulge details about the proposed joint operation.

According to Pillai, quite a large number of separatist outfits belonging to northeast India have their camps across the border.

Pillai was here to review the law-and-order situation in Manipur and the development work being undertaken in the state.

Three northeastern states --Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram -- share a 1,643-km unfenced border with Myanmar.

"We have given detailed information about the insurgent camps with specific locations to the Myanmar authorities," the union home secretary stated.

"If any extremist outfit abjures violence, it would be a great potential for talks," he pointed out. Meanwhile, Manipur Chief

Minister Okram Ibobi Singh in his speech during the internal security meeting in New Delhi earlier this month pointed out that the almost unchecked trans-border movement of Indian insurgent groups and the continued existence of their camps in Myanmar posed threats to the internal security of Manipur and other northeastern states.

Quake kills 300

Authorities in Chile put the

official death toll from Saturday's 8.8-magnitude quake at 214, but said they believed the number would grow. They said 1.5 million Chileans were affected and 500,000 homes severely damaged by the mammoth temblor. "We think the real (death)

figure tops 300 and we believe this will continue to grow," said Carmen Fernandez, head of the National Emergency Agency. Waves well over two meters (seven feet) high crashed into the Chilean coast after the

quake struck at 3:34 am (0634 GMT) and tore out into the Pacific, killing at least five people in the remote Robinson Crusoe islands. In the Chilean port of Talcahuano, trawlers were sent

square where they lay oddly marooned next to abandoned About 50 countries and territories along an arc stretching from New Zealand to Japan braced for giant waves, five

shooting inland to the town

tsunami disaster that killed more than 220,000 people. More than 70,000 people fled vulnerable coastal areas of Japan Sunday as a tsunami slammed into the country's

years after the Indian Ocean

long Pacific coastline. 'Please do not approach the coast at any cost," Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama said in nationally televised comments as Japan, one of the world's most quake-prone nations, went on its first major

tsunami alert in 15 years. The first tsunami wave, 30 centimetres (one foot) high, hit Nemuro on the northern island of Hokkaido in the early after noon, the Meteorologica Agency said.

The massive quake plunged much of Santiago into darkness, snapping power lines, severing communications. The international airport was closed after sustaining significant damage to the terminal

Many Chileans were still in nightclubs partying at the start of the weekend when the quake struck before dawn, ripping up roads, bringing roofs crashing

down and toppling power lines. "It was the worst experience of my life," said 22-year-old Sebastian, standing outside his house in eastern Santiago.

Faruk faces

FROM PAGE 16

the shipping minister request ing him to take necessary steps so that the jetties are not demol-

Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB), a rights and environmentalist organisation, filed the petition. HRPB President Manzill

Murshid told this correspondent that the HC would hear the petition tomorrow. On January 24, the HC

directed the government to start within a month demolition of all structures within the boundaries of four rivers around the capital -- Buriganga, Balu, Shitalakhya and Turag. In line with the directive, the deputy commissioner of

Narayanganj on February 9 served a notice on the City Group to remove its structures and jetties on the bank of the Shitalakhya in Rupganj area by February 20. The City Group then filed a

writ petition with the HC challenging the DC's notice. The court rejected the petition on February 23.

But on February 22, the commerce minister sent a letter to Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan saying that the industries concerned would be damaged if the jetties are demolished.

Santiago resident Maren Andrea Jimenez, an American expert working for the United Nations. "It was scary! Plaster began falling from the ceiling." President Barack Obama said the United States "stands

ready to assist in the rescue and

recovery efforts, and we have

"Friends who were at clubs

said it was pandemonium," said

resources that are positioned to deploy should the Chilean government ask for our help." "Early indications are that hundreds of lives have been lost in Chile and damage is severe. On behalf of the American people, Michelle and I send our deepest condolences to the

Chilean people," he said at the White House. The total value of economic damage caused by the quake is likely to range between 15 billion and 30 billion dollars, a

US risk modelling firm pre-Despite officials saying up to 1.5 million homes could be affected, Chile's Foreign Minister Mariano Fernandez asked countries that had offered aid to hold off until local author-

ities could assess the emergency needs. Chile does not want "aid from anywhere to be a distraction" from disaster relief Fernandez said, adding: "Any aid that arrives without having

been determined to be needed really helps very little." The European Union said it would provide three million euros (four million dollars) in immediate assistance. Unlike Haiti, struck by a devastating earthquake last month, Chile is

one of Latin America's wealthi-

est countries. The US Geological Survey said it had recorded more than 51 aftershocks ranging from 4.9

to 6.9 since the quake. Earthquake-prone Chile lies along the Pacific rim of fire and is regularly rocked by quakes, but damage is often limited as they mostly hit in remote desert

regions. Food rationing

FROM PAGE 16

Police Lines in the capital yesterday.

families across the country will receive food rations every month. Of them, 828 will get rations from Rajarbagh Police Lines, sources said. Freedom Fighters' Welfare

About 7,838 maimed free-

dom fighters and martyrs'

Trust will monitor the distribution while police ration stores concerned will ration the food, they added.

Tajul said the government is trying to bring the rest under the food rationing facility in

He said the government has undertaken housing project for war heroes and it will also set up complexes for freedom fighters in every

upazila and district. A one-member family will get 11 kilograms of rice, 12 kg flour, 1.75 kg sugar, 2.5 litre oil and 3.5 kg pulses for Tk 39.78, two-member family 20 kg rice, 20 kg flour, 3 kg sugar, 4.5 litre oil and 5.5 kg pulses for Tk 68.96 while a three-member family will receive 35 kg rice,

oil and 8 kg pulses for Tk 113.13 a month. Secretary of liberation war affairs ministry Ujjal Biswas

30 kg flour, 5 kg sugar, 8 litres

Dutt, DMP Commissioner AKM Shahidul Hoque and Freedom Fighters' Welfare Trust Managing Director Maj Gen (retd) AKM Mohammad Ali, among others, were present on the occasion.