

# Moments of shock

**FROM PAGE 1**  
"We are completely ruined. We have nothing left," wailed Kakoli, who lost twelve of her family members including her mother, brother, two uncles, aunt, three brothers-in-law, a sister-in-law and a niece. Her father passed away long ago. Now she is so much in shock that she cannot even remember who she lost in the Nimtoli fire.

"Had the rain poured last night, it could douse the fire," sighed Raj, relative of a victim, as he watched Kakoli pass. He was standing by the bodies of his elder brother Taj and his uncle.

Raj had also lost his two paternal uncles, two aunts and two sisters-in-law. After all the effort he made in finding his relatives' bodies, he lost the ability to cry.

My brother tried to get out braking the grills of a window of his shop. But he died before he could make the escape," said Raj with his silent tearless cry. He said Taj managed to break eight of a total of 15 iron rods of the window.

Taj used to run a decorator shop and it was near the building from where the fire broke out.

Raj's sister is admitted in Dhaka Medical College Hospital with severe burn injuries.

"The list of casualty will not end with this burial," said Raj while he and his other relative were putting the bodies of their relatives on a pick-up van for Azimpur graveyard. He started sobbing as these words came out.

Just beside the pick-up van, another anxious relative of a victim Nargis was pushing her way through the crowd towards DMCH. She lost her seven-year-old son Shrabon and her husband sustained serious burn injuries.

Unlike others, Nargis was trying hard to contain her grief. Silently in tears she had to walk fast along with her mother-in-law.

In the morgue, there lie seven unidentified bodies.

These bodies were burnt beyond recognition.

Probably, that's why Ghulam Hossain was running madly holding a photograph of his mother whom he could not find.

"This is my mother. This lady in white Sari," Ghulam was saying as he showed the photograph to the reporters. He lost his mother, brother, sister and two nephews. He, however, found the bodies of his nephews.

The words of consolation fall way short to these bereaved families. The only consolation was there when two members of separate victim families had eye contact between themselves. They sobbed intermittently looking at each other's faces.

## Grenade

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Saikat's accomplice, however, managed to flee.

The injured are Oliur Rahman, constable of Gendaria Police Station; two pedestrians, Habib, 12, and Kamal, 25; and rickshaw puller Masum, 26.

Deputy Commissioner of Wari Zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Towfiq Mahbub told The Daily Star that Saikat hurled the grenade at three policemen when they tried to stop his rickshaw at the check post around 6:00pm.

The grenade exploded near pedestrians injuring one policeman, two pedestrians and a rickshaw puller, he said. Policemen caught Saikat instantly, he added. His cohort on the rickshaw managed to escape arrest.

Saikat was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with minor injuries, and he was brought to Gendaria Police Station around 8:30pm, he said.

The DC said the police could not extract anything from Saikat during preliminary interrogation but suspected that he was a militant.

Gendaria police said they also interrogated the rickshaw puller who told them that the two hired the rickshaw for Babubazar from Dholaiapur.

# BDR protests BSF work on Padua border

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Indian Border Security Force's attempt at constructing a concrete structure triggers tension as Bangladesh Rifles protests by hoisting red flags on the Tamabil and Padua borders in Sylhet on Thursday.

The border guards of both sides sat at a flag meeting on Padua border, about 7 kilometers off Tamabil on Friday afternoon.

Second-in-command of 21 Battalion of BDR Major Mamun and second-in-command of Battalion -1 of BSF at Shillong SG Shukla led their respective sides in the one hour meeting.

Sources said Indian BSF guards brought some construction raw materials near border pillar 1275/1P and started building a concrete structure, close to the Tamabil land port 55km away from the city at about 4:00pm Thursday, prompting BDR to protest.

Major Mamun said the BDR had to hoist red flags as a sign of protest as any construction within 150 yards of the border line is prohibited. The Indian BSF had already moved within 120 yards of the border. Red flag is the ultimate signal before firing which compelled BSF to halt the construction work.

"We also asked them not to create obstacles for Bangladeshis nationals working on the farmlands, by the Padua borders, as our troops are still alert," Mamun said. Some Indian nationals protected by the BSF were attempting to grab those farmlands, he added.

## Fire death

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, ministers, lawmakers, leaders of other political parties and senior officials visited the victims at DMCH yesterday.

Hasina said her government will give the affected families compensation and do everything necessary for their rehabilitation.

Earlier, DC Dhaka announced the administration will pay Tk 20,000 for burial of each of the bodies. It will also ensure treatment facilities for the wounded.

At the scene, fire service had called off rescue efforts around 5:00am. But on repeated pleas from locals, they resumed the operation and retrieved six more bodies.

Locals fear more bodies might be trapped in rubble.

Meanwhile, there is still ambiguity over how the fire broke out. Officials would not say anything in this regard until a probe is done.

Locals and fire-fighters said the blaze started in a five-storey building, where an engagement function (Panchini) was going on.

On the ground floor of that building, cooks had been preparing foods since early afternoon.

For long exposure to intense heat from stoves, chemicals stored in adjacent room caught fire round about 8:45pm. Soon flames engulfed the buildings and shops.

Sparks from electric wires and gas leaks are believed to have added to the ferocity of the blaze.

Some said explosion of two transformers had started the fire, while some others said it began at a bakery and then spread to the transformers.

Brig Gen Abu Nayem Md Shahidullah, director general of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said there are four probable causes of the fire.

"It [the blaze] might have been started from an oil-fired oven or from the chemical go-down or transformer blasts or a tea stall in front of the building," he added.

There is however no doubt the chemicals swelled the flames, allowing the occupants of the buildings little time to flee the raging inferno.

Raj, brother of Taj who died on the ground floor, said the go-down had two truckloads of chemicals two days ago.

Shakil, a bank employee who was going home through Nimtoli, said, "Hearing cries for help, I stopped my bike. But as flames came rushing towards me, I sped off."

Besides heavy casualties, the fire caused extensive damage to property and valuables. Particularly, the shops were completely wrecked.

Of those who died in the shops, most were burnt alive and those who were inside the buildings died of suffocation, said witnesses and hospital staff.

Throughout the day yesterday, hundreds of people from across the city crowded into Nimtoli. While most were there to see at firsthand the ruins, many were searching for dear ones.

Immediately after the disaster struck, electricity and gas supplies were cut off and it remained that way till at 9:00pm.

Meanwhile, no case was filed in connection with the incident. Abdul Mannan, officer-in-charge of Bangshal Police Station, last night told The Daily Star they would file a case after a preliminary probe.

# A family weighed

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daughter Samira, he wanted to know about her condition.

"Where is my daughter...how is she? Please bring her to me," Shuvo asked repeatedly whenever he woke up from sleep as doctors gave him sedatives to reduce pain.

While he was totally oblivious to his great loss, his son Sunny was completing Samira's burial at Azimpur graveyard around 3:30pm yesterday.

Sunny and Shuvo's another son Shakil were left unharmed by the blaze as they were outside.

Shuvo is not even aware of the condition of his wife Shahida who got major portion of her body burnt. Shakil was attending his mother at Combined Medical Hospital (CMH).

When the fire broke out at Nawab Katra Road, Shuvo, an employee of Dhaka City Corporation, was along with his daughter and wife on the first floor of one of the eight buildings that were gutted by the fire.

Shuvo pushed his wife and daughter under a cot when flames started engulfing their flat and he himself took shelter under a table, said his niece Parul Akhter.

They were unconscious when their little girl was burnt alive.

After regaining sense at the hospital, Shuvo enquired about his daughter and wife. He was informed that they had received minor injuries and were at a relative's house.

On the same corridor lies Mamun, another ill-fated father who did not know about his seven-year-old daughter's death in the fire. He is a fruit seller at Nimtoli.

He was groaning in pain due to burns in his chest and head.

While visiting the burn unit in the afternoon, this correspondent found 12 victims lying on the corridor. Several victims alleged that doctors

were not available.

Burn unit head Dr Shahidul Bari said over two hundred victims received treatment since Thursday night, and around 26 were undergoing treatment at that time.

## Nation mourns

**FROM PAGE 1**  
souls and quick recovery of the injured.

The government will give compensation of Tk 20,000 to the families of the victims who died in the blaze, and it has taken responsibility for the treatment of the injured.

It will also arrange for the rehabilitation of all the victims of the Nimtoli fire.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced the decisions yesterday after visiting the injured at the Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Following a directive by the premier, 14 people with severe burns were shifted to Combined Military Hospital (CMH) yesterday.

CMH supplied DMCH with emergency medicines and other necessary things to treat the injured.

A three-member enquiry committee led by the additional home affairs secretary has been formed to probe the incident, and it has to submit a report within a week.

The government postponed the state programmes that had been chalked out for World Environment Day today.

The premier yesterday cancelled all her scheduled programmes. She was monitoring the situation throughout Thursday night and Friday, and coordinating all the activities of the government ministries and different departments including army, police and fire brigade, her Deputy Press Secretary Mahbubul Hoque Shakil told The Daily Star.

"We will help the affected families earn their livelihood," the premier told reporters at DMCH.

She also declared that burn units would be set up at every hospital of the country.

## BNP-Jamaat

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including hartal.

A delegation of Jamaat-e-Islami with its chief Motiur Rahman Nizami will meet Khaleda Zia, also the leader of opposition in parliament.

Both the parties are going to sit for discussion for the first time after the 2008 election debacle.

But curiosity arises among BNP activists whether Jamaat raises the issue of war crimes trial and how BNP leadership reacts to this.

Jamaat leaders have given a hint that curiosity also prevails among their party members about how the party will deal if BNP seeks direct support of them to make the anti-government movement successful.

"It is the responsibility of all to address this [trial of war criminals] issue as it would be harmful for the country if the government moves forward in this regard," M u h a m m a d Kamaruzzaman, senior assistant secretary general of Jamaat told The Daily Star, adding that an overall political situation will come into their discussion.

Asked whether they would support BNP's hartal programme, he said, "The government forced the opposition to announce anti-government movement and we consider it positively, but we will take our decision through proper discussion."

Some BNP leaders said the party leadership has no plan to seek direct participation of Jamaat into anti-government campaign.

A senior Jamaat leader also said they would not place the issue of war crimes trial on the meeting.

"It's a beginning and there is a long time to go. We want to get support from all but the time has not come yet for other parties' direct participation into our anti-government programmes," a senior BNP leader said seeking anonymity.

He said the party leadership is very much concerned about the war crimes trial issue but they don't want to take any decision right now as they think the government itself will provoke a lot of controversies and the trial of war criminals will finally plunge into a controversial political issue.

BNP standing committee member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman said BNP has already expressed its opinion about the government's move as to war crimes trial and there is nothing left to discuss the issue.

## It's one life

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can really happen," he said.

"I wasn't ready to come now. I had a travel plan for the next month," he said.

"It's one life that comes and goes. I had only one sister. She brought two children to the world and left the world, along with them."

"We had been very close to each other and shared almost everything. Now I have nobody to share with."

Azad said the death was the biggest blow to his 75-year-old father.

"What sin have we committed?"

Azad tried to rationalise the cruel things that happened to his life and said his sister was not the only one who died. She was among many. "It was like seeing your own death up close."

Azad is the youngest among five brothers, and Shilpi was seven years behind him. He comes to Bangladesh twice a year and stays for up to three weeks. The last time he talked to his sister was four days back.

Eight-year-old niece Adita was one of the most emotional points in his life. "Last time I talked to her, she just wanted chocolates."

Azad said he did not forget to buy chocolates for her. Even if he knew she was no longer alive, he was not ready to come to terms with the reality. He came to the burnt-out site because he believed he would find his loved ones.

"Chocolates are in my car."

What to do with the chocolates now?

"I will give them to her -- at Azimpur (where Adita was buried yesterday)." Azad broke down in tears.

The family Azad's sister had been married to lost many of its members.

Shilpi's sisters-in-law -- wives of her husband's two brothers -- also died in the fire. Shilpi's husband and brothers-in-law are alive, but all the children are dead.

# Building tilts

**FROM PAGE 16**  
without approval in the capital," he said.

Zahidul Haq, who runs a drug store near the building, said locals raised alarm in the morning and a fire brigade team from Tejgaon went to the scene and asked the inhabitants to evacuate.

Md Siraj Mian is the owner of the building on 1.5 katha land. The first three floors of the building on the marshy land of Hatirjheel were constructed between 2005 and 2006. Siraj then added four floors during the last few months. Construction of the sixth floor was ongoing.

Md Akbar, Siraj's brother-in-law, who is overseeing the construction work, said Siraj constructed the building with just a mason and some labourers and no engineers.

He said law enforcers in plain clothes arrested Siraj around noon.

However, Sub-Inspector Abdul Kuddus, duty officer of Tejgaon Industrial Zone Police Station, and Sub-Inspector Shahidullah, duty officer of Detective Branch, said they knew nothing about the arrest of the building owner.

The Rajuk director said a criminal case has been filed against the building owner with Tejgaon Industrial Zone Police Station.

Police have been asked to evacuate the residents immediately.

Rajuk served a demolition notice on the building owner long ago but he did not pay heed, said the director.

"We left a notice again for the owner asking him to immediately demolish the building," he said, adding, "Otherwise we will pull it down next week."

Ground floor of the building, at East Begunbari, is used commercially while the rest of the building is residential.

Razia Sultana, a third-floor resident who lives with her son and daughter, said, "I rented a flat in the building just three days ago and I will move out if it is risky but I still do not know

where to move."

At least 25 students of Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, located close to Begunbari, were among the residents.

Md Raihan, one of the students living on the fifth floor, said he came to know that the building has tilted to one side yesterday morning and he along with other students were planning to move out.

## Drogba

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Simon Rolfes, Heiko Westermann and Christian Traesch.

England had an injury setback ahead of Ferdinand's agony, as former captain David Beckham's chances of making the squad for the June 11-July 11 tournament ended in a ruptured Achilles tendon while playing for AC Milan in March.

Apart from the injured, other major players didn't make the cut for other reasons.

Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy failed to get a recall after retiring from Oranje in 2008 and Brazil coach Carlos Dunga overlooked the prominent trio of Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Adriano.

There was no place on the France squad for striker Karim Benzema and Patrick Vieira, and veterans Luca Toni and Francesco Totti were also not good enough to represent title holders Italy.

There were raised eyebrows in the host country of South Africa when coach Carlos Alberto Parreira overlooked the nation's best scorer Benni McCarthy in his final 23-player list.

Others like Sweden striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic or Russia winger Andrei Arshavin didn't even get that close, for the simple reason that their teams failed to qualify.

# Wrong fire-fighting

**FROM PAGE 1**  
"Every building should have its own fire-fighting system. That is the primary life saving apparatus in any incident of fire. Fire brigade's jobs are to rescue trapped people, contain spreading, and douse the fire," said Prof Nizamuddin of Buet. Every building should also have fire escape, he added.

"Motor cycle brigades for fire-fighting, like the ones in Malaysia, could be useful for places like Nimtoli," he said adding, but in that case the neighbourhoods must have fire hydrants.

Officials of the fire brigade said the department is not yet equipped to fight fire in dense neighbourhoods with narrow streets.

"Most of the roads are very narrow in Old Dhaka, where our vehicles cannot go," Abdur Rashid said.

Due to unplanned urbanisation some areas in newer parts of the city also have narrow roads like Kazipara, Shewrapara, Taltala, Kafur, Tejgaon, Begunbari, Pirebagh, Badda, Shajahanpur, and Sabujbagh, said another fire department official.

About the Nimtoli incident Rashid said they could go near the spot only through one side because the road on that side was wide enough, on all other sides they had to train their hoses from far due to narrow roads.

The web of wires that frequently hang low over neighbourhood streets are also an obstacle for fire trucks to reach fire spots, he said.

Asked how they fight fire in areas like Old Dhaka now, he said they first try to reach the spot with fire trucks, if the roads are too narrow for the trucks, they use nearby surface level natural water reservoirs to pump water into the blaze from far.

The shrinking number of ponds and other water bodies in the city is also making firefighters' work increasingly difficult.

Fire service officials said just 35 years back, Dhaka City had 12 water reservoirs for the firefighters, and on top of that there were many ponds and canals. But due to a lack of awareness among government departments concerned, and the population in general, most of those have been filled up over the years, they added.

On Thursday night the firefighters had a hard time finding a natural source of water after water in their trucks ran out.

Finally they used the water reservoir of a nearby mosque temporarily, and later they had to bring more water from the pond in Shahidullah Hall of Dhaka University, about half a kilometre away from Nimtoli.

Rashid said Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) should build water reservoirs and install fire hydrants at different parts of the city for easy access to water during incidents of fire.

one of the main reasons for such a large number of casualties in Nimtoli, was that the area is very densely populated.

He said planned urbanisation, and strict enforcement of building construction rules is a must for avoiding casualties in a fire.

Prof Mehdi said the practice of allowing industries and warehouses in residential areas must stop, and the government must enforce the principle strictly.

Director General of Fire Service and Civil Defence Brig Gen Abu Nayem Mohammad Shahidullah echoed the professor, adding that Thursday's blaze became so formidable because there was a warehouse of highly flammable chemicals on the ground floor of the residential building that caught the fire first.

The burning chemicals spewed out on the street in front as well, making it very difficult for the firefighters to approach the building, he said.

The burning chemicals were a major reason for such a high number of casualties, he added.

About the fire department's unpreparedness to fight fire in dense neighbourhoods with narrow streets, he said the technology available for fire fighting in such places is relatively new.

"We've been asking for light and portable fire-fighting equipment, and formation of fire-fighting teams on two-wheelers, for years now. Those equipment will finally arrive next year," he said adding that the demand for fire hydrants on city streets however has been age old.

The fire department sent an official request to DCC to install fire hydrants in the city six months ago, but the city corporation told the department that it is the job of Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), he said.

Then the department sent an official letter to Wasa requesting the same, but Wasa has yet to respond, he added.

## UK, China

**FROM PAGE 16**  
is with deep shock that I came to know the news of the fire in Dhaka which had caused death of numerous people."

Medvedev conveyed his sincere condolences to the relatives and friends of the deceased and wished fast recovery of the injured.

Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Yang Jiechi, in his message to Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said, "I am profoundly shocked to learn that a serious fire broke out in Dhaka, and claimed so many lives and injured so many people."

He expressed his deepest condolence for the victims and most sincere sympathies to the bereaved families and injured persons.

Meanwhile, acting British High Commissioner in Dhaka in a message said, "We are very saddened by this tragic incident, my thoughts and prayers are all with those who have been affected."

grandfathers served as prime ministers. The son of a businessman, Kan graduated from the Tokyo Institute of Technology's science department.

He began his political career as a civic activist in the 1970s and ran for office three times before winning a lower house seat in 1980 with the now-defunct Socialist Democratic Federation.

Kan, along with Hatoyama, was one of several members in 1996 to found what eventually became the Democratic Party of Japan.

"I grew up in a typical Japanese salaryman's family," Kan said Thursday. "I've had no special connections. If I can take on a major role starting from such an ordinary background, that would be a very positive thing for Japanese politics."

In a written candidate's statement yesterday, Kan identified economic recovery as the biggest challenge facing Japan, whose economy will almost certainly be overtaken in size by China this year. While exports and factory output are rising, unemployment and deflation are worsening.

"I will tackle and pull Japan out of deflation through comprehensive measures from the government and the Bank of Japan," he said in the statement.

## Runa's dream

**FROM PAGE 1**  
and joy, Jamil and Runa were dreaming of a new life.

But their dreams turned into a nightmare when a fierce fire broke out in the area.

The flames allegedly sparked from makeshift burners installed for preparing dishes for the function.

Yesterday, Runa's hands were coloured with henna, but tears were rolling down her cheeks.

She lost eight members of her family and relatives. Her mother Fatema, 55, aunts Afroza, 33, and Sajeda, 35, cousins Jyotsna, Anika, 12, Anik and Sayem and also Jyotsna's son Mukit died in the worst fire incident the capital has ever seen.

Groom Jamil, 28, lost his mother Shahzadi, 58, aunts Wahida, Waqar Fatema, 52, Fatema Begum, 50, brother Shimul Hossain, 26, Shimul's three-year old son Kumail, and relatives Hasan Ali Sirazi, Nusrat Begum, and Afroza Begum.

Runa and her elder sister Ratna had gone to a local beauty parlour half an hour before the blaze started. Their brother Faisal too survived as he was on the street to welcome the guests.

Jamil was at his home. Runa's cousin Alamgir, who also accompanied Runa, said, "As we saw the fire plumes from the beauty parlour at Sat Rawza, half a mile away her residence, Runa made a phone call to Faisal who said their house caught fire."

"We started running but could not reach the house. The blaze had engulfed the entire area."