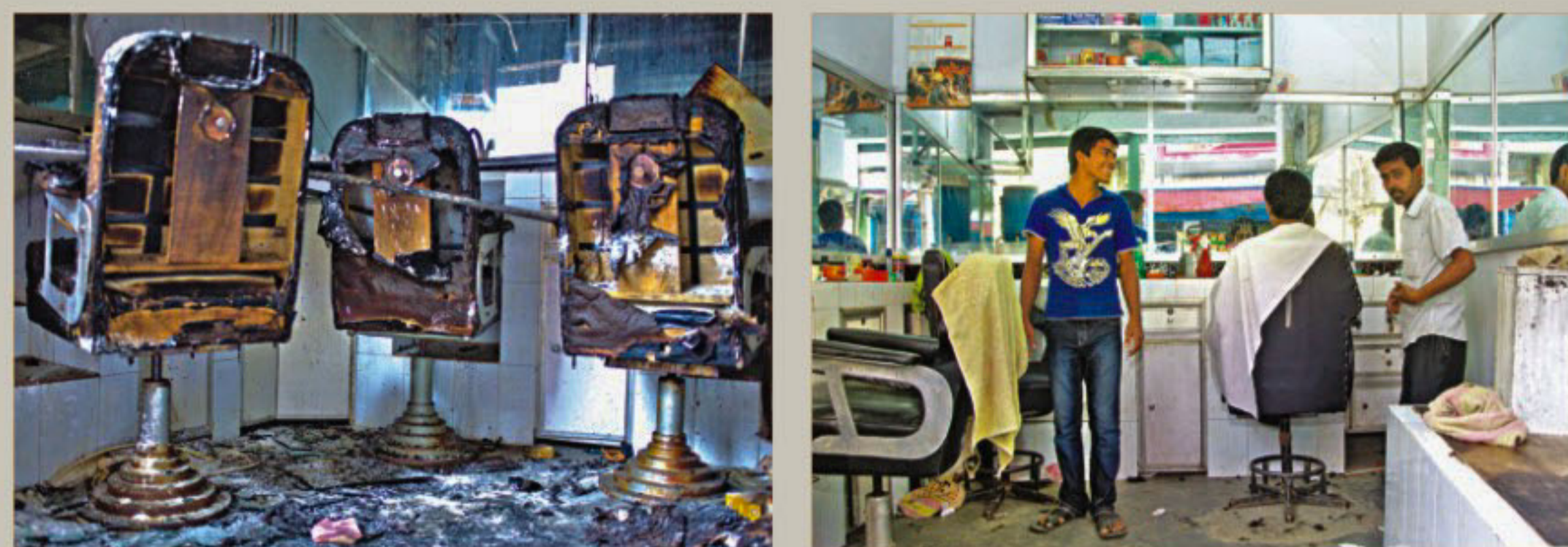


TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Nimtoli Barber Shop 1. After Fire and 2. Rebuilt Today.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Renewal at Nimtoli

ON June 1, 2010, a deadly fire in Dhaka's Nimtoli took over 140 lives. It started when flammable chemicals stored in a garage were inadvertently heated during a cookout for an engagement dinner. This released vapours which ignited, spewing flaming chemicals and creating an inferno that engulfed several buildings and roads, trapping the victims.

The Nimtoli I knew from earlier photographic trips was a lively, happy neighbourhood. When I visited after the fire, I saw it reeling from disaster. People going about their daily lives suddenly found themselves in an ocean of pain, losing not just loved ones, but also their homes and, for many, their livelihood. I met stunned survivors and photographed the devastation.

Six months have elapsed. Wanting to see how they were faring, I returned to Nimtoli recently. I was unsure of what to expect. Would it prove resilient and, like Phoenix, rise from its ashes? Or would it buckle under the pain?

My first surprise: the burnt

building where the fire originated looks new. A layer of fresh cement has replaced the charred black exterior, giving it an almost-finished look. I was told the flats will be rented out soon.

Across the street was a laundry whose blind and elderly owner had perished in the fire. His son, Mr. Arshad, has opened a Cyber Cafe in place of the laundry. That fateful evening, he had gone for a haircut leaving his father alone in the laundry. "His blindness trapped him. If only I was here I could have escorted him to safety," he lamented.

A burned barber shop has reopened. It is doing brisk business in a shiny new interior. A grocery store across the street, where the owner and two children had died, is fully stocked once again, the dead owner's brother now running it.

Next to the grocery is a restaurant. After the fire, its pots still had held charred dal and unrecognizable curry; from its ceiling dangled the spindle of a fan whose blades had melted. Today it hums along, busily serving freshly cooked food

to its customers.

A few yards from the laundry, a Bakhorkhani shop had six people inside when the fire started. They had pulled the aluminium shutter to save themselves, but it became their death trap. The house behind lost the entire family in the fire. Both shop and house wait to be restored.

I met Mr. Muslim, who lost three family members in the fire. He was lucky to have survived, but even a two-month hospital stay has not alleviated the pain from his burn wounds. Another neighbour told me proudly that chemical storage had been banned from the neighbourhood.

Thanks to help from many sources, the resilient people of Nimtoli have their livelihoods back on track. Burnt brick and concrete have been repaired, walls repainted, shops reopened. Life has found its rhythm. But... scars of the soul? They will take longer to heal.

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PM pledges quality health services to all

UNB, Gazipur

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday reiterated the government's strong commitment to ensure quality health services to all, particularly the poor.

She, however, said reaching health services to the doorsteps of people needs cooperation of people from all walks of life.

Hasina was addressing the foundation stone laying ceremony of Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Memorial Specialised Hospital and Nursing College at Tetoibari here.

Hasina and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana together laid the foundation stone of the hospital and college.

Chaired by Social Welfare Minister Enamul Haq Mostafa Shahid, the function was also addressed by Health Minister Dr AFM Ruhul Haq, Adviser to the PM Dr Syed Mudasser Ali and local lawmaker AKM Mozammel Haque.

The 250-bed specialised hospital and 50-seat nursing college will be built jointly by Bangabandhu Memorial

Trust and Social Welfare Ministry under the government's Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme.

Construction work of the Tk 215 crore project will be completed by 2012.

Hasina in an emotion choked voice recalled the contributions of her mother Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib and the sacrifices she smilingly made to support Bangabandhu in his struggle for the nation's independence.

"My mother's patience, sacrifice, patriotism and tolerance are not written in the history. But, as her daughter, I've seen how much she had sacrificed and how she patiently supported my father Bangabandhu."

She said year after year Bangabandhu had to stay in jail, but Fazilatunnesa did not abandon her struggle to help achieve the national independence and sovereignty.

"On one hand, my mother managed our family and on the other she had to always give company to Bangabandhu in his fight for liberation," Hasina said. "My mother even sold all her gold orna-

ments to meet various expenses."

She said her father and mother both loved the country's people more than their children.

She said, "We, the two sisters, had survived as we were abroad on August 15, 1975. Now our only aim is to work for the people's welfare."

She said they had donated all their inherited property for national cause. "The house at Dhanmondi 32 was more of the people, rather than us. That's why we decided to make this house a museum."

Hasina said a library and research centre will be built alongside the Bangabandhu Museum at Dhanmondi 32.

She said the Bangabandhu Memorial Trust will introduce scholarships in the city's Shaheen School where Sheikh Kamal had studied and at the University Laboratory School where Sheikh Russell studied.

Besides, she added that scholarships would be introduced at Dhaka College where both Sheikh Kamal and Sheikh Jamal had studied.



Sheikh Rehana, younger sister of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, unveils the plaque of Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Memorial Specialised Hospital and Nursing College at Tetoibari in Gazipur yesterday while Sheikh Hasina, Social Welfare Minister Enamul Haq Mostafa Shahid, Health Minister Dr AFM Ruhul Haque and PM's Adviser Dr Syed Mudasser Ali applaud.

PHOTO: PMO

**DHAKA TODAY**

**Seminar**  
South Asian Institute of Advanced Legal and Human Rights Studies will arrange a seminar. Venue: Brac Centre Inn, 75, Mohakhali, Time: 9:00am.

**Discussion**  
Dhaka University Mass Communication & Journalism Alumni Association will arrange a discussion. Venue: Senate building, Time: 10:00am.

**Conference**  
A conference on Empowerment of Communities for Adaptations to Climate Change in Bangladesh will be held. Venue: Westin Hotel, Time: 2:30pm.

**Meeting**  
Bangabandhu Academy will arrange a meeting. Venue: DRU, Time: 11:00am.

**Workshop**  
Bangladesh Enterprise Institute and British Council, Dhaka will jointly

Municipal elections a victory of democracy

Says Suranjit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) leader Suranjit Sengupta yesterday claimed victory of opposition party's candidates in many places proved that municipal polls were held in a free and fair manner.

"The government did not influence the elections and the election commission played a neutral role. The government showed a democratic attitude too," he said.

"It is the victory of democracy," said Suranjit, AL advisory council member, while addressing a discussion at National Press Club marking Bangabandhu's Homecoming Day organised by Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote Dhaka city unit.

AL Presidium Member Obaidul Quader said the elections in four divisions held so far were free, fair and credible than any other such elections.

Dismissing BNP leader's apprehension that polls would be unfair, he said BNP's claim that government would ensure AL candidates victory proved to be absurd.

He said elections at remaining three divisions would be fair too and welcomed all the winning candidates, irrespective of political affiliation.

Suranjit said the government would constitutionally recognise Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the father of the nation.

AL leader Mohammad Nasim and lawmaker Tarana Halim also spoke on the occasion.

Garments factory gutted in N'ganj

UNB, Narayanganj

An export-oriented garments factory was gutted in a fire in the BSCIC industrial area at Fatulla yesterday.

Garments sources said the fire originated from an electric short circuit at the cutting section on the fifth floor of the 8-storied building of Pritom Fashion Ware at about 1:00pm.

On information, fire service personnel from Mondolpara fire station rushed to the spot and doused the fire with the help of locals.

The authorities estimated the losses caused by the fire at about Tk2 crore.

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MEMBER REHAB

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