

Workers stage

FROM PAGE 1
Production of all the units in the area remained suspended yesterday owing to the agitation.

The outburst started around 9:30am when several thousand workers of Ha-Meem Group came out on street upon a rumour that one of the group's units had caught fire. The rumour originated after sparks from an electric short circuit had been discovered on the 7th floor of the unit.

Seeing Ha-Meem workers on streets, workers of around 400 nearby garment factories joined the agitation.

At least 50 workers sustained injuries when the agitators pelted brick chips at around 25 factories to make the units suspend their production.

The agitators set fire to two motorcycles and vandalised at least 15 more vehicles. On-duty police also found themselves under attack when they came in the way.

Nuruzzaman, a driver of Sharmin Group, said his vehicle came under attack too, but he had seen several agitators in lungis who did not seem to him as garment workers.

Moktar Hossain, deputy director of Industrial Police of Ashulia, said they had to use truncheons and teargas to disperse the violent workers.

Meanwhile, the agitating garment workers demanded punishment to owners of Tazreen Fashions Ltd and its officials holding them responsible for the fire and casualties there on Saturday.

At least 111 garment workers died in the fire.

TAZREEN OFFICIALS REMANDED
Law enforcers arrested three officials of Tazreen Fashions Ltd on Tuesday night and produced them before a Dhaka court yesterday.

The court placed them on a five-day remand in a case filed in connection with the deaths of Tazreen workers.

Of the arrestees, administrative officer Dulal Uddin, 37, and store in-charge Hamidul Islam Lavlu, 32, were arrested from Dhaka while security supervisor Al Amin, 27, from Ashulia.

In the forwarding report, the investigation officer of the case mentioned that the officials had locked all the collapsible gates when the fire broke out. Had they acted responsibly, many victims could have escaped to safety, the report added.

Nafis pleads

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21-year-old Nafis pleaded not guilty to a two-count indictment charging him with attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction and attempting to provide material support to a US-designated foreign terrorist organisation, al-Qaeda.

He faces life in prison if convicted.

Nafis appeared in court wearing a tan prison jumpsuit and did not speak during the hearing.

His lawyer and a lawyer for the government, James Loonam, said discussions were being held about a possible plea negotiation.

His lawyer and a spokesman for the US attorney's office in Brooklyn declined to comment to reporters.

From Bangladesh, the suspect's father has denied his son was involved and said he was the victim of a "racist conspiracy."

Nafis was arrested on October 17 after pulling up to the Federal Reserve near Wall Street and attempting to detonate what he believed to be a van packed with explosives.

The inert explosives had been provided to Nafis by an undercover agent as part of a sting operation, federal authorities said.

A criminal complaint unsealed last month against Nafis said he travelled to the United States in 2012, and eventually moved to Queens, New York.

The complaint alleged he scouted out targets for a potential attack, considering the New York Stock Exchange and a high-ranking government official identified as US President Barack Obama.

He eventually settled on the Federal Reserve Bank, the complaint said adding that Nafis attempted to recruit others to his plan, claiming he was in contact with al-Qaeda operatives.

One of the individuals he brought onboard was an undercover agent working for the FBI, who monitored Nafis' activities and helped arm him with the inoperable explosives, federal authorities said.

Nafis is scheduled to appear next in court on January 9 next year.

Workers go on the rampage in ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Workers put barricades on the road in front of Chittagong Export Processing Zone and vandalised five vehicles yesterday evening over a rumour that a security guard had beaten an urchin dead.

The rumour spread when thousands of workers of the CEPZ were returning home around 7:45pm, witnesses said. They started smashing windowpanes at the main entrance and then blocked the road and vandalised five vehicles.

Traffic movement on the road between Berek Building Intersection and CEPZ and the airport was halted.

Police rushed to the spot and got involved in running battles with the workers. The situation came under control around 9:20pm, witnesses said.

However, Abdur Rashid, general manager of Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority, claimed that some workers locked in a scuffle with security guards at the main entrance over a "trifling matter" and went on the rampage.

Anindita Barua, additional deputy commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police, claimed that there were no running battles on the streets and that the rumour of an urchin's death was baseless.

Garment
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All the victims were taken to Chittagong Medical College Hospital, said Zahirul Islam, sub-inspector of the CMCH police outpost.

Later in the day, 25 of them were discharged after initial treatment while the other 25 were admitted to the hospital.

"We all panicked because we are yet to forget the Ashulia tragedy," said Nasima, a worker of Section Seven.

One of her hands was broken in the stampede, she said, adding that she saw a smoke on the third floor and started to run.

Factory Supervisor Khalilur Rahman said the smoke emanated from a motor line but was immediately doused by the factory staff.

Mesbah Uddin, senior executive of the human resources department of the factory, said although the incident took place on the third floor, workers from other floors were also injured as they all ran to escape.

In Dhaka, at least 10 workers of Star Light Knit Wear at Elephant Road were injured in a stampede when more than a thousand workers ran for life on seeing a coil of smoke.

The smoke was caused by a boiler explosion around 2:30pm, said Mahabubur Rahman, an official of the factory owned by Nasa Group.

"There were 1,200 workers at the factory when the incident happened. The workers tried to get down through the staircases hurriedly, when some of them were hurt," he added.

Of the injured, five were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The condition of one victim -- Rupa, 22 -- was stated to be critical.

Meanwhile, two workers of a Ha-Meem Group factory in Ashulia fainted when they heard the factory caught a fire. The two were given treatment at a nearby clinic.

One worker said he panicked after he heard an explosion around 9:30am and saw a plume of smoke coming out. He then alerted his colleagues and they all ran towards the ground floor.

But Rafiqul Islam, a quality controller of the group, said there was no fire in the factory and that the workers took an electric short circuit for a blaze. The lights went off on the seventh floor due to the short circuit.

Workers said the memory of the Ashulia fire that claimed at least 111 lives was still fresh in their minds. So they really got scared when they heard of a fire.

The court also directed



Shahnaz Begum jumped from the fourth floor of burning Tazreen Fashions factory in Ashulia Saturday night. The jump might have saved her life but she broke her spine and both legs.

No fault of fate

FROM PAGE 1
beyond recognition.

"So I have decided to take my son Siam to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for a DNA test," said a distressed Ruhul yesterday, after he had heard that the government sought DNA samples from the relatives of the missing workers.

A match with the DNA of the 58 bodies buried at a Jurain graveyard in the capital on Tuesday could at least tell the families where the graves of their dear ones are.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ruhul reminisced on how years of friendship and then romance between him and Merina finally led to wedlock five years ago. And then Siam came to the world, giving Ruhul and Merina, of Thakurgaon, all the happiness they did not have in their lives before.

Merina Begum, 22, worked with Tazreen since its beginning in 2010 as a sewing operator. She never got the facilities she was supposed to get as an employee.

On Saturday, she left Siam in the care of her mother-in-law Aleya Begum and went to the factory in the hope that she could draw salaries of the three months when she was on maternity leave.

The authorities of Tazreen Fashions did not pay her the arrears but asked her to join work, Ruhul said, standing in front of their rented house in Nishchintapur.

"If I don't work according to their will, they [the authorities] will not give me the money," he quoted Merina as saying.

Merina wanted to leave the workplace at 5:00pm on Saturday. She requested the floor-in-charge to let her go as it was time to feed her newborn baby.

But the supervisor snapped at her and told her to get back to work, Ruhul sighed, citing Merina's co-workers.

"For the last two days, my mother has been feeding him [Siam] Lactogen powder milk," said Ruhul, a quality controller working with another garment factory in Ashulia.

"I do not know how to raise him without his mother,"

In Bangla, Nishchintapur, where Ruhul lives, means a village with no worries but it now seems to be a place of grief. Many tin-shed houses have sprouted in Nishchintapur, Narshingapur and other adjacent villages in recent years to meet the demand of garment workers. The majority of these houses saw one or more persons lost in the blaze and are now struggling to come to terms with their irreparable losses.

One of Merina's neighbours, Shahnaz Begum, also a sewing operator, was working on the fourth floor of the factory during the fire incident. She managed to save her life by jumping off a broken window.

Lying down with injured ankles, limbs and knees, Shahnaz yesterday said she could see nothing in the black smoke. All she remembers is that she followed some fellow workers to that window and jumped.

"Later, I woke up to find myself at a clinic in Savar."

Shahnaz's husband Ukil Mandal, a plumber, borrowed Tk 35,000 to pay the clinic's bill. The doctor told her that she needed to stay in the hospital for 15 more days but she left as it would be a matter of huge expenses.

"We do not have a single penny. Only two kilograms of rice are left. In these circumstances, the doctor tells me to change the dressing every alternate day."

Shahnaz's one month's salary is pending and her husband could not work for the last three days.

Khayrul Hasan, a quality controller of Tazreen Fashions, said he had managed to flee the blaze by

climbing down a bamboo pole.

He wonders what to mourn for -- the colleagues he has lost or the job which was his only means of livelihood. Like him, more than two thousand others are left with the challenge of feeding themselves and their family members.

India not looking at isolating China

Says Indian envoy to US

PTI, Washington

India does not subscribe to the idea of "isolating" China while dealing with the Asia-Pacific region, and would rather engage the country with which it shares a thriving trade relationship, into more cooperation, Indian envoy Nirupama Rao has said.

"We are not looking at isolating China in this whole narrative of building better relations with the Asia-Pacific," Rao said while observing that India has always regarded the United States as a Pacific power.

"We see the need to engage China. We see the need to develop more and more habits of cooperation with China," the Indian Ambassador to the US said responding to a question at a forum yesterday on 'All eyes on Asia: Perspectives from our allies' organised by Foreign Policy Initiative, a Washington-based think tank.

Rao, who was India's Ambassador to China before becoming the Foreign Secretary, however, said India would like to have "rule-based" security architecture in the region that is bedevilled by territorial disputes between China and its neighbouring states like Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Where to be born

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Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). The worst place to be born next year is Nigeria.

The European country is followed by Australia and Norway while Canada ranked 9th among the 80 countries surveyed, says EIU -- a unit of The Economist.

Among the South-Asian countries, Bangladesh ranked 77th position, while Sri Lanka 63rd, India 66th and Pakistan 75th.

Afghanistan, Nepal and Bhutan failed to make it to the list.

Angola (76th), Ukraine (78th) and Kenya (79th) are among the bottom five countries.

The other Top-10 countries are Sweden (4th), Denmark (5th), Singapore (6th), New Zealand (7th), Netherlands (8th) and Hong Kong (10th).

Russia landed on the 72nd position, while Egypt 60th, Iran 58th, China 49th, Mexico 39th, Saudi Arabia 38th, Malaysia 36th, Spain 28th, France 26th, Japan 25th, Italy 21st, Israel 20th and Finland 11th. The USA was on 16th place, with Germany sharing the same slot.

The index was prepared

over 11 indicators including crime, trust in public institutions and health of family life, and some fixed factors such as geography. Some factors which change very slowly over time, such as demography, social and cultural characteristics, were also measured.

The EIU's economic forecasts for 2030 were also used since the children born in 2013 will reach adulthood by then.

Despite the global economic crisis, times have in certain respects never been so good. Output growth rates have been declining across the world, but income levels are at or near historic highs, observes Laza Kekic, director of country forecasting services at the EIU.

Life expectancy continues to increase steadily and political freedoms have spread across the globe, most recently in North Africa and the Middle East. In other ways, however, the crisis has left a deep imprint -- in the euro zone, but also elsewhere -- particularly on unemployment and personal security. In doing so, it has eroded both family and community life, adds Kekic.

Sea levels rise

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projected that by today, the rise would be 2 mm (0.078 inches) per year.

The new figure converges with a widely-shared opinion that the world is heading for sea-level rise of around a metre (3.25 feet) by century's end, co-author Grant Foster of US firm Tempo Analytics told AFP.

"In low-lying areas where you have massive numbers of people living within a metre of sea level, like Bangladesh, it means that the land that sustains their lives disappears, and you have hundreds of millions of climate refugees, and that can lead to resource wars and all kinds of conflicts," he said.

"For major coastal cities like New York, probably the principal effect would be what we saw in Hurricane Sandy."

"Every time you get a major storm, you get a storm surge, and that causes a major risk of flooding. For New York and New Jersey, three more feet of water would be even more devastating, as you can imagine,"

Foster added.

The investigation, led by Stefan Rahmstorf of Germany's Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), gauged the accuracy of computer simulations that the IPCC used in its landmark Fourth Assessment Report in 2007.

The new study gave high marks for the document's forecast on global temperature, saying there was a "very good agreement" with what was being observed today, an overall warming trend of 0.16 degrees Celsius (0.28 degrees Fahrenheit) per decade.

But it said the IPCC's projection for sea levels was much lower than what has turned out.

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Costly neglect

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permission to operate,"

asked Sultana, executive director of Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK).

The HC directive to ensure workers' safety in factories came in 2001 after ASK filed a writ petition in 1997 over a fire accident that killed at least 24 people at a factory in Mirpur.

The human rights organisation also filed three writ petitions, including one linked with the fire at Tazreen Fashions, demanding punishment of the people responsible.

Sultana believes that the government's lax attitude towards workers' safety has allowed recurrence of such incidents in garment factories.

She said the government's negligence in complying with the HC directive is unforgivable.

Had the culprits been punished, this type of accidents would have not happened, she said.

In its 2001 verdict, the HC asked the government to form a national committee to supervise the setting up of garment factories and their operation to make sure that they comply with the rules and regulations.

The court also directed

with some big foreign brands preferring to set up their own fire-safety initiatives with Bangladeshi suppliers," reports The Wall Street Journal.

PVH Corp that owns Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein and several other brands agreed in March to join the fire safety programme. Germany's Tchibo GmbH also decided to join in September.

But US-based Gap Inc declined to join the programme in September saying it would go with its own fire safety programme. The US company's decision was harshly criticised by the Clean Clothes Campaign.

"These brands have known for years that many of the factories they choose to work with are death traps. Their failure to take action amounts to criminal negligence," Ineke Zeldenrust of the Clean Clothes Campaign told the International Herald Tribune, speaking of leading international companies that buy apparel from Bangladesh.

Bangladesh that earns 80 percent of its total exports from the garment sector makes headlines in the global media at times for deadly fires in garment factories.

"But the programme has yet to get off the ground,

CARETAKER GOVT
Matia rejects Khaleda's demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury yesterday dismissed opposition leader Khaleda Zia's demand for the restoration of the caretaker government, saying the next general election would be held in conformity with the constitution.

"The Awami League will counter any threats by the opposition leader," Matia, also an AL presidium member, said, referring to Khaleda's threat yesterday that the government would be compelled to restore the caretaker government system through mass movements.

The opposition leader has presented "old information" in a new style during her speech at a rally of the BNP-led 18-party alliance in the city's Nayapaltn, Matia yesterday told The Daily Star.

The agriculture minister castigated the opposition leader for having Jamaat-e-Islami by her side on the same days during the grand rally yesterday.

By doing so, Khaleda has proved once again "that she does not want the war crimes trial," said Matia, adding the opposition leader has brought upon herself the responsibility for the recent violent demonstrations of Jamaat and Islami Chhatra Shibir.

Khaleda Zia has resorted to downright lies, Matia remarked, citing the former's statements on power, gas and prices of essentials during her speech. "People are the real judges and they will judge her speech."

About a claim that Khaleda struggled for the independence of the country, Matia said the opposition leader was a guest of the Pakistani army generals during the liberation war. People know about Khaleda's contribution during the war, she added.

No more

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Fashions, who were burnt to death in the worst garment tragedy in the history of the country.

The graves of the workers were lined up in three rows. The soil on the graves was still wet, and so were the eyes of the spectators.

"How cheap our lives are," murmured Amena Khatun, around 40 years of age. She had come from Sutrapur Bazar to have a glimpse of the place where the workers had been laid to eternal rest.

Like her, some locals and a few others came to offer their prayers for the departed souls of the dead. Some others, just as sombre, came to see the graves. They were not related to the deceased. Yet they came.

Class-V student Shafiq Hasan of Faridabad High School was one of the silent observers there. He came to the graveyard with two of his classmates after taking the day's primary terminal examination.

"I felt miserable when on television I saw the news of so many deaths and the burial here. That's why I came," he said.

A little distance way, a mother, her two children and a relative were talking about the tragedy. "Whenever such an incident occurs," said the mother, "the government offers compensations without being strict about the safety standards of garment factories." She had come to pray for her dead husband.

"What is the use of the compensation, be it Tk 20,000 or 1 lakh? When people die, we cannot bring them back," she added.

Mohammad Ali, who is in charge of security at the graveyard, said tags with serial numbers of the bodies would be put up next to each grave so that the bereaved families could identify their dead once DNA tests were done.

Around 2:00pm yesterday, some gravediggers were seen giving the final touches to the graves. "We did not get enough time [on Tuesday] because of huge crowds. We'll tend the graves regularly," said a gravedigger.

The only question the onlookers seemed to have in their minds before leaving the graveyard was: will these bodies remain unclaimed forever?

Rising waters

Sea levels going up 60 percent faster than previous UN climate panel forecasts, scientists report Wednesday

Largest cities exposed to risk by 2070

Most vulnerable to surge-induced events, by projected population

