

# Top buyers press

FROM PAGE 1  
and making fire licences mandatory before construction of buildings.

When an owner put the blame on cheap price competition that fixes prices of a pair of jeans only at five euro, Roger Hubert, vice-president of Li & Fung Bangladesh, said, "You know how negotiation is going on. You have to learn how to say no."

"There are a lot of good factories in your country. India, China, Pakistan and Vietnam are not your competitors. It is your local colleagues; you have competitors in your own house."

On the Tazreen incident, which left 111 dead and many others injured, he said, "We should do something immediately for the victim families.... We have put money in the bank accounts to disburse money to the victim families."

Hubert added the rehabilitation of victims should be unbureaucratic.

He also stressed the need for a complete revision of building code and government review of construction regulations.

Jenefa Jabbar, representative of JCPenny, recommended reviewing fire licence of almost every factory, as many factories have a shaky fire safety system.

"When a factory catches fire, workers panic and get hurt in stampede," she said, emphasising regular fire drills.

Payal Jain, representative of H&M, said there is a clear gap in electrical assessment also in many good factories.

She said the majority of RMG fire originates from electrical insulation and not only the owners are respon-

sible for such incidents, but also the monitoring authorities. Electrical earthing is also another problem.

She urged all the factories to assess power supply system every month.

Zia Ahad, director of PVH for South Asia, Middle East and Africa, said owners should seek workers' opinions about the fire safety issue.

Regarding the fire safety cell of BGMEA, a buyer said the trade body conducted training in only 1,087 out of more than 5,000 member factories since the formation of the cell in 1997.

A representative of Bestseller said the majority of trainings are given to the mid-level management, but not to the workers. "We should make a very strong tie between the mid-level management and workers for making the training effective."

Jubair Aslam, a buyer, asked whether BGMEA will penalise owners for violating fire safety regulations.

BGMEA President Shafiqul Islam Mohiuddin said they would consider all these recommendations so that the proposed taskforce can take action to resolve the problems.

"We will form the taskforce next week and we will launch a crash programme from next Saturday for improving the fire safety measures in every garment factory. If any factory fails to improve the safety measure in a given period, we will close it down," he said.

BGMEA Director Atiqul Islam said they had already made eight zones to train electricians, supervisors, mechanics and mid-level officials from the next week.

# Salary day for Tazreen workers today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, back from Ashulia

The surviving workers of razed and now-closed Tazreen Fashions Ltd at Nishchintapur in Ashulia demand their salary of four months and 13 days altogether.

As the factory authorities are set to pay the workers their November salary today, tension runs high in the area as they are adamant about their demand and said they would not accept if the authorities offer them only the month's salary.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, over 20 workers of the factory expressed their suspicion over the factory's resumption of operation anytime soon.

In Saturday's deadly fire, the eight-storey factory building was badly damaged. A banner set at the factory by police, seen yesterday, reads: "This factory is highly risky. Everyone is requested not to enter the building."

According to the government rule, a garment factory has to provide its workers with the salary of three months and 13 days if it is shut or dismisses any worker.

For the past few days, the issue of realising the salary of four months and 13 days has been in the air of Nishchintapur area where most workers of Tazreen Fashions live.

They were also in deep uncertainty of getting new jobs soon to continue their livelihood and feed their dependents.

Meanwhile, the survivors who sustained major injuries feared that they would not be able to join elsewhere immediately, and therefore, they needed the money to support their families until they recover.

Meanwhile, a small crowd of workers staged a demonstration at Nishchintapur Primary School yesterday morning when they announced that no worker would join Tazreen Fashions if the authorities offered its workers only a month's salary.

Tazreen Fashions has 1,700 employees, of whom, 1,630 are workers, according to the website of Tuba Group, which owns the factory.

Sewing operator Ratna Begum is among the injured and depressed workers. She was badly injured after jumping off the fourth floor of the building.

"We have to pay Tk 1,500 as rent for the room our four-member family is living in. I have two school-going sons and have to send money to my aged in-laws living in village," she said with anguishing pain while lying on the premises of her house at Nishchintapur.

"How can I go to work since I cannot even move now?" asked Ratna shrouded in anxiety.

The state of Rukhsana is quite different. A five-month pregnant, she survived the inferno that day miraculously. She was expected to go on her maternity leave in February next year.

"Who will give me a job now?" asked Rukhsana. "I was supposed to get the maternity leave and salary during my leave. Now I do not know how much money they [Tazreen management] will give me," she said.

# Israel pushes

FROM PAGE 1  
solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A senior Israeli official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, yesterday said that the decision was made late Thursday night to move forward on "preliminary zoning and planning preparations" for housing units in East Jerusalem, which would connect the large settlement of Maale Adumim to Jerusalem and therefore make it impossible to connect the Palestinian cities of Ramallah and Bethlehem to Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem.

Israel also authorized the construction of 3,000 housing units in other parts of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the official said.



This grocer in Nishchintapur has little business since the Tazreen Fashions fire and his business seems to be in trouble. Of the over 1,600 workers of the factory, 126 were his customers who used to shop on credit. And of the 126, only 17 have visited his shop since the fire.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# Fire takes toll beyond

FROM PAGE 20  
decisions that kill.

But Shafiqul does not say anything. Maybe he does not listen either. Because he knows all these. He also knows he is in deep trouble, for, in addition to killing at least 111 workers and injuring another 100, the fire has threatened his living.

"We've no business since the fire incident. The fire has not only killed the workers, it ruined our businesses," Shafiqul says when inquired about his sale.

Of the over 1,600 workers of the factory, 126 were his customers who used to shop on credit.

"I myself saw the bodies of my 13 customers. I do not know exactly how many of them died. Only 17 of them [126] are coming to my shop.

I've no idea what happened to the others," he adds.

According to his register book, Shafiqul sold to those 126 customers various items worth Tk2.87 lakh.

For a small trader like him that is a huge sum, and he is unsure when and how he would get at least some of the money. Given the extent of damage to the factory, his biggest fear is that the surviving workers would lose their jobs.

But Shafiqul is not the only one to be so affected in Nishchintapur. Other small businesses in the area have as well been hurt.

Abdur Rashid, a vegetable vendor, was present during all these conversations at Shafiqul's shop on Wednesday.

He said he borrowed Tk

40,000 on high interest to set up the business, but he has no business now.

"All my customers were of this factory," said Rashid, "many of them bought vegetables on credit."

Like Shafiqul, he is uncertain if he would get the money.

Fear and uncertainty have gripped the surviving workers too. Some of them have already left for their village homes with many others planning the same.

Yesterday, Mozammel was leaving for his Rangpur home for a few days "because everything here is messed up".

He wants a permanent job but says, "Hundreds of workers are practically jobless due to this accident. So it would be hard to get a permanent job at the moment."

# Shahjalal airport

FROM PAGE 1  
11:00pm to 8:00am every day.

The airport used to handle 33 flights and 5,700 passengers, more than a third of the daily passengers in all, during the nine hours. The airlines that had flights during that time have already rescheduled their flights.

However, passengers on a Dhaka-bound flight that misses the window to land could see themselves in Chittagong Shah Amanat International Airport, which has poor infrastructure compared to Shahjalal International Airport. It does not even have catering services for airliners.

Sources said airlines fear that passengers may have to endure sufferings as the rush might cause long queues at check-in desks, immigration desks and customs at the Dhaka airport, which deals with 80 percent of the country's air traffic.

"It took me around two hours to get out of the airport today. I do not know what will happen when there will be more rush," Mohammad Harun, who arrived from Saudi Arabia yesterday, told The Daily Star at the airport.

Since all the flights would be arriving and departing between 8:00am and 11:00pm, passengers to and from the airport would also have to face the notorious Dhaka traffic, some during the rush hours.

Traffic to and from the airport also gets bogged down at Banani and Biswa Road intersection where flyovers are being built.

A political procession or a rally in the capital could make the situation even worse.

Apparently not having much faith on its ability to handle the rush of passengers and considering the traffic situation, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) has urged airlines to ask their passengers to arrive at the airport five hours before their flights.

However, SM Nazmul Anam, director, flight safety and regulations of Caab, recently said they have held a series of meetings with all concerned and asked them to take necessary steps for smooth operation of the airport.

Officials of ground handling section, immigration and customs of the airport said they have taken measures like deploying more people in the day shift to

handle the rush.

A top ground handling section official of Biman said they would deploy 80 percent of their total workforce during those 15 hours. The official also said they have already purchased some additional equipment for this as well.

The official said they would be opening a control room soon to monitor the situation at the airport.

Special Superintendent (immigration) of Special Branch AZM Nafiqul Islam said they would too reinforce day shifts pulling immigration officials out of night shifts.

He said they purchased 11 computers in addition to their existing 79 for smooth operation.

Additional Commissioner Anwar Hossain of Customs said they too would be rearranging their manpower deployment as per the new schedules of airlines.

However, Caab did not tell Dhaka Metropolitan Police about excess traffic it would have to handle on Airport Road.

Deputy Commissioner (traffic) Ruhul Amin of north division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said Caab had not informed them about the matter. He, however, said if necessary they would deploy more traffic police and try to make the road to the airport congestion-free.

Interestingly, SM Nazmul Anam, director of Caab, said they did not inform the traffic department because "we are not bothered about it".

An official of Kuwait Airways, wishing anonymity, said due to the schedule change they would make a loss of around \$200 per passenger as they would be keeping them in hotels. The official said they took the safe route or else passengers could miss their connecting flights from hub airports.

Airlines officials said ground handling would be a major challenge as the section with insufficient logistics and manpower would have to handle all 185 flights of around 31 airlines in that 15 hours. Many of the planes arriving have to be turned around as well, which includes passenger and luggage unloading, refuelling, replenishing the pantry, and passenger and luggage loading. Meanwhile, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Faruk Khan said although they had

given five months to construction company Abdul Monem Ltd to resurface the runway, the company assured them of completing the work much earlier.

He said they would give additional incentive to the company if it could do the job sooner.

Asked how early, he said he was not willing to disclose it.

Aviation analyst and the Editor of The Bangladesh Monitor Kazi Wahidul Alam said such resurfacing of the runway was mandatory and every airport in the world does it but they never take such a long time to do it.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury of University of Asia Pacific and an expert, however, differs.

Prof Jamilur, who was involved in the runway resurfacing project in 1996, said considering the airport has only one runway and that it would be closed for nine hours a day, five months was the minimum time required to give it a fresh tarmac coat.

Abdul Monem Ltd was awarded the Tk 187 crore asphalt-concrete overlay work on the 10,500-foot-long runway to make it sturdier enough to handle larger aircraft. The work was scheduled to continue until April 30, 2013.

The work was schedule to start from November 1 but it was delayed by a month for smooth operation of hajj flights.

The last time the runway got a new asphalt surface was in 1996. It developed several cracks as the lifetime of surface expired six years ago, Caab officials said.

# PM donates

FROM PAGE 1  
amount.

Each of those wounded in the mishaps will receive Tk 50,000, the prime minister's Special Assistant [Media] Mahbulul Hoque Shakil told The Daily Star.

The premier yesterday approved the allocation from her relief and welfare fund.

On the night of April 24, at least 111 people were killed and 100 injured in a devastating fire at Tazreen Fashions in Nishchintapur outside the capital.

Meanwhile, 13 people were killed and 15 injured when three concrete girders of a flyover under construction at Bahaddarhat in Chittagong collapsed on a makeshift kitchen market.

# IK Gujral

FROM PAGE 1

a multi-organ failure. He was admitted to the hospital on November 19 with a lung infection, family sources said.

The former prime minister, who was on ventilator support, had been unwell for sometime. He was on dialysis for over a year and suffered a serious chest infection few days ago.

He will be cremated in Delhi today.

Gujral, who migrated from Pakistan after the partition of Indian subcontinent, rose to become the prime minister with a big slice of luck in late 1990s after he came up through the ranks -- starting as vice-president in New Delhi Municipal Corporation in '50s to later become a federal minister and then India's ambassador to the USSR.

He propounded the "Gujral Doctrine" of five principles for maintaining India's good relations with immediate neighbours.

Gujral quit Congress to join Janata Dal in the late '80s.

He became the foreign minister in VP Singh-led National Front government in 1989. As the external affairs minister, he had handled the fallout of the Kuwait crisis following Iraqi invasion of that country that displaced thousands of Indians.

Gujral had a second stint as foreign minister in the United Front government under HD Deve Gowda, whom he later replaced as prime minister after the Congress withdrew support in the summer of

1997.

He emerged as the consensus candidate after sharp differences developed among the UF leaders including Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh and others as to who will become the prime minister.

But Gujral government survived only for a few months as Congress again became restive in the wake of Jain Commission report on Rajiv Gandhi's assassination.

A suave and subtle politician, Gujral belonged to the genre of intellectuals who made a mark in the country's foreign policy.

Born on December 4, 1919 in Jhelum town now in Pakistan, Gujral belonged to a family of freedom fighters and had actively participated in India's freedom struggle at a young age. He had been jailed in 1942 during the Quit India Movement.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh paid rich tributes to Gujral describing him as a "scholar-statesman" and said the loss from his death would be felt not only in India but across the world. BSS adds: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed deep shock at the death of Gujral. In a condolence message, she recalled Gujral's contribution to strengthening bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India.

Awami League presidium member Kazi Zafarullah will represent the prime minister and the party at the funeral in New Delhi, said PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad.

# Palestinians

FROM PAGE 1

join UN agencies and potentially the International Criminal Court (ICC), where it could ask for a probe of Israeli actions, including during the recent fighting in Gaza.

Abbas said he hoped to use the status upgrade as a launchpad for renewed direct talks with Israel -- frozen for more than two years -- calling the resolution "the last chance to save the two-state solution."

The Palestinian leader, however, did not make any reference to the possibility of joining the International Criminal Court -- a major worry for Israel, which fears a possible investigation.

Palestinian envoys have said Abbas will not rush to join the court but could use it as leverage if Israel does not change its policies on settlements and other matters.

The United States and Israel immediately condemned the vote, which US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called "counterproductive."

US Ambassador Susan Rice sternly told the General Assembly that the resolution

would be "an obstacle to peace" because it would not lead to a return to direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians.

"Today's grand pronouncements will soon fade. And the Palestinian people will wake up tomorrow and find that little about their lives has changed, save that the prospects of a durable peace have only receded," she said.

Netanyahu slammed Abbas's address. "The world watched a defamatory and venomous speech that was full of mendacious propaganda," his office said.

With this major diplomatic victory, the Palestinians still face an uncertain future. For Palestinians, the idea of an independent state bears little reality on the ground, given the degree of Israeli involvement in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority and UN agencies that accept Palestinian participation could also lose hundreds of millions of dollars in financing because of the vote.

# BMA polls

FROM PAGE 1

cast this year across the country. In Dhaka, 61 percent voters cast their votes, said the election commission chief.

Meanwhile, DAB leader AZM Zahid Hossain yesterday alleged that the election commission was delaying to publish the result, as they were manipulating it.

"It should not take so much time to publish the actual results," he said.

Early yesterday, DAB leaders rejected the poll result over the allegation of rigging in different districts across the country including in Dhaka.

Swachip leader Iqbal Arslan claimed that DAB was looking for an excuse to boycott the election or to reject the result sensing defeat. It was a pre-planned decision.

Our Chittagong correspondent reports: The BMA election in Chittagong wound up in a messy situation. Supporters of two general secretary candidates exchanged heated and tore down the last ballot paper.

This last ballot paper was crucial, as according to the BMA election commission in Chittagong, Swachip's candidate Mohammad Sharif won for the post of general secretary by one vote. He bagged 1002 votes while his nearest candidate pro-Awami League rival candidate AMM Minhajur Rahman 1001.

Rahman and Sharif

blamed each other for tearing down the last ballot paper at around 12:30am, early hours of Friday, while vote counting was on.

At around 5:00am, chief election commissioner of Chittagong Kazi Shafiqul Alam declared Mujibul Haq Khan and Mohammad Sharif as the president and general secretary respectively.

So far, Swachip leaders won all 23 posts in Chittagong, election commission sources said.

Meanwhile, the pro-Awami League rival candidate Rahman rejected the poll result and announced to file a case against the election commission. He urged the commission to withhold the result.

# Prof Murshid

FROM PAGE 20  
several cardiac arrests while undergoing treatment at the hospital.

His health deteriorated since Wednesday when he faced several cardiac arrests again, added Ferdous. His kidneys stopped functioning yesterday.

On September 23, he was taken to the same hospital after he had suffered a stroke, doctors said, adding that he was then released after 17 days of treatment.

Former vice-chancellor of Rajshahi University, Prof Murshid is a trustee board member of Transparency International Bangladesh.