

To hell and back

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"I knew about it as I am an old employee of Tazreen Fashions," said Sathi, a 25-year-old sewing operator.

"Right when the fire broke, it occurred to me that I could rescue at least 100 workers through that window."

Without waiting for instructions from the higher-ups, Sathi, who survived the deadly fire at garment factory Tazreen on November 24, immediately reached out for that secret window.

She broke the glass window and started letting out the panic-stricken workers through it.

"After letting out 20 workers through the window, I stood strong and rescued another 80. I shouted and they jumped through it."

During the conversation with The Daily Star at her home in Ashulia, a severely injured Sathi recalled the frenetic efforts of the workers for their lives that fateful night.

Although some succeeded, many lost their lives.

"The heat of the fire drained me out after a point. I got out through the window then and took the support of a bamboo I found outside to get to the ground."

Sathi passed out, her left thigh bleeding heavily, by the time she climbed down.

"Still, I can remember a few moments. Sirajul Bhai, who had joined a few months before and used to sit near me, tried his best to survive, but ultimately failed," she said.

"I had a soft corner for Sirajul Bhai as he was a simple man and our bosses always rebuked him," Sathi added.

When the fire started engulfing the third floor, a good number of male workers broke an exhaust fan to make an escape route.

Many escaped death through this way and many were burnt to ashes -- right before her eyes.

"Almost all the workers could have survived if the production manager Abdur Razzaque had told us to go out in the beginning of the fire," she said.

The collapsible gate on the third floor was securely locked, Sathi said, adding she saw many attempts to get out through the ground floor while searching for an exit in the thick black smoke.

When it dawned on her that she might also not make it out of the building, she rang her eldersister to hear her two children speak -- for one last time.

"I have so many stories to share of the tragic night that a full day is not enough," Sathi said, adding she is still in a state of shock.

During the incident a female worker jumped from the window only to impale herself on a standing rod on the ground. The rod pierced through her neck and she died instantly.

Sathi said it will be difficult for the surviving workers to rejoin the garment factory as memories of that night keep haunting their minds.

She will look for a job elsewhere since she has two children and a husband, a struggling van driver, to support.

"But life will not stop; it will go on," said Sathi, who hails from Lohagara upazila of Narail district.

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Paraguay peasant leader shot dead

BBC ONLINE

The leader of a landless peasant movement in Paraguay involved in a land dispute with a powerful politician has been shot dead.

Vidal Vega had been cooperating with an inquiry into the deaths of 11 of his supporters and six police officers.

They died last June in an operation to evict farmers from land which activists say was illegally grabbed by a late senator in the 1960s.

The President Fernando Lugo was ousted over his handling of the deadly clash.

A prosecutor investigating his murder said two gunmen arrived at his home in Curuguaty in the eastern province of Canindeyu and shot him early on Sunday.

The prosecutor said police had later arrested a suspect who matched the description of one of the gunmen, but did not speculate on a motive.

He said there was no evidence so far linking Mr Vega's murder to his role in the investigation into the killings in June.

Mr Vega, 48, was expected to testify at the trial.

His movement of landless peasants had lobbied the Paraguayan government for many years to redistribute farmland in Canindeyu occupied by late senator Blas Riquelme more than 50 years ago.

Hillary backs Czech nuke deal

AFP, Prague

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton yesterday backed a bid by US energy giant Westinghouse to build two new units at the Czech Temelin nuclear plant worth at least \$10 billion (7.67 billion euros).

"We are not shy about pressing the case for Westinghouse to expand the Temelin nuclear power plant because we believe that company offers the best option for the project in terms of technology and safety," Clinton said.

The US giant faces stiff competition from Russia's Atomstroiexport bidding together with a Russian-owned Czech company.

France's Areva, a third bidder, was ruled out of the tender but has filed an appeal against the decision with the Czech UOHS anti-competition watchdog.

Shibir activist

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to his injuries around 9:00pm on his way to Rangpur Medical College Hospital. He received rubber bullets during the clash, Matiur Rahman, secretary general of Jamaat's Dinajpur town unit, told The Daily Star.

He is the son of Khansama upazila Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ataur Rahman, added Matiur.

The clash ensued when police intercepted a procession brought out by Jamaat-Shibir supporters at Ranirbandar Bazar near Dinajpur-Dhaka highway around 6:15pm.

The law enforcers fired at least 15 tear gas canisters and 10 rounds of rubber bullets to disperse the activists, police said. The clash left at least 15 people injured including Mojaheed.

In response, the activists pelted brickbats at the police, said Md Tariqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Chirirbandar Police Station.

Due to the clash, traffic movement between Dinajpur and other districts halted for around three hours until 9:00pm.

Police detained 10 Jamaat-Shibir supporters from the spot, but later released them, said the OC.

Border Guard Bangladesh personnel have been deployed in the area following Mojaheed's death.

No rally? So Jamaat calls hartal

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Nationalist Party is extending its moral support to the hartal called by Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami," said the press release.

Meanwhile, in a pre-hartal showdown, Jamaat men yesterday set fire to a vehicle and vandalised four more in the capital's Jatrahari area. Jamaat activists also clashed with police in Dinajpur. The clash left one Jamaat man dead.

The party was supposed to hold rallies in the capital and in some other districts yesterday afternoon to press the government to release the top Jamaat leaders facing trials on charges of crimes against humanity.

The hartal announcement came around 12:10 pm through a press release signed by Jamaat's acting secretary general Shafiqur Rahman. In the statement, all units of Jamaat had been called upon to enforce the strike.

"We are left with no other choice since we were denied permission for today's [Mon-

day's] rally," said Shafiqur Rahman.

Jamaat sources said the party's senior leaders had instructed the grassroots-level leaders and workers to take preparation for making the hartal a success, even if it needed to defy police obstructions.

"We have been asked not to leave the streets in the face of police action," Amiruzzaman, chief of Jamaat Chittagong City (north) unit, told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

Meanwhile, the announcement of hartal triggered concern of street violence, as the home minister had directed police to take action against Jamaat men to foil their programme.

Although being a key component of the BNP-led opposition alliance, Jamaat has alone been taking to the streets to press their core demands -- cancellation of, what they had termed, "farical war crimes trial" and release of their party high-

ups.

In their statement, Jamaat, however, cited restoration of the caretaker government system, price hike of essentials, deterioration of law and order, misrule of the government and attack on the values of Islam as the issues for the hartal.

Jamaat is also agitating along with the opposition alliance that had already declared a series of agitation programmes for December, including a nationwide road blockade on the 9th.

The party leaders yesterday at a meeting of opposition alliance's senior leaders had sought BNP's support for the hartal, said Shawkat Hossain Nilu, chief of National People's Party, a component of the BNP-led alliance.

Liberal Democratic Party, Islami Oikya Jote, Islamic Party, National Democratic Party, Jatiya Ganotantrik Party, Bangladesh Labour Party and Khelafat Majlish -- all components of the BNP-

led alliance -- had extended their support to Jamaat's hartal, said Hamdullah Mehedi, secretary general of Labour Party.

Contacted, MA Rashid Pradhan, secretary general of Islamic Party, and Shahadat Hossain Selim, joint secretary of Liberal Democratic Party, confirmed their solidarity with Jamaat.

With the party's top leaders, including its chief and secretary general, now in detention and facing charges of crimes against humanity, Jamaat has been going through the toughest time since its resumption of activities in Bangladesh after 1975.

The party's central office in the capital has been kept closed since the police raid on September 19 last year, after its violent protest against the crackdown on its high-ups.

Since, some mid-level central leaders have been running the party over telephone and by issuing press releases. Reportedly, they

have also been meeting local party leaders of different areas in the capital to keep them actively involved in party programmes.

Jamaat insiders said the grassroots units of the party have been working to gear up political activities and boost the morale of local leaders and activists.

They said under the cover of social, cultural and educational programmes like study circles, discussions and Quran recitation competitions, they had been preparing for a "proper time" to fight back the government.

Meanwhile, section 144 has been imposed in different districts including Sylhet, Noakhali, Feni and Bogra, as Jamaat, and Awami League and its associate bodies were set to hold rallies at the same place and same time yesterday.

In the capital, Jamaat men brought out sudden processions in some areas including Bhatara, Uttara and Badda.

Compensate

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the memorandum.

Leaders of the workers' rights groups requested the world's largest retailer not to stop outsourcing to Bangladesh factories. Cancellation of orders would only add to the plight of garment workers, leaving many of them jobless.

"So, you should come to a solution and change your decision," the memorandum said.

The letter pleaded with Walmart to use its influence to ensure that the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining is respected in its supply chain.

Walmart is the largest buyer of Bangladesh's readymade garment products, purchasing items worth over \$1 billion annually.

After the fire that killed 111 workers, it said Tazreen Fashions was no longer authorised to produce merchandise for it and that one of its suppliers had subcon-

tracted work to the Bangladeshi company in direct violation of the company's policies.

Walmart also said it terminated the relationship with the supplier in question.

However, Hong Kong sourcing giant Li & Fung, which has orders placed with Tazreen Fashions, said the day after the incident that it would give \$1,200 to each of the families of those who died in the blaze.

Before submitting the memorandum, the trade unions formed a human chain in front of Govt Titumir College in the capital, demanding safe working environment for garment workers.

At the programme, Nazma Akter, president of Sommitlo Garment Sramik Federation, warned of tougher action if the demands were not met.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association

(BGMEA) with the help of labour leaders prepared a new list of workers and staff of Tazreen Fashions to give them termination benefits along with arrears.

According to the list, 990 regular workers will get unpaid salaries with benefits. The number of workers who left the factory in October and were supposed to get their salaries on November 25 is 324, said Mir Abul Kalam Azad, general secretary of Shadhin Bangla Garments Sramik Karmachari Federation.

Rafiqul Islam, a joint secretary of BGMEA, said the association hopes to clear the benefits on December 5.

He said that as the fire had ravaged the factory it would not be possible to resume its production very soon. So the owners would provide the employees with all termination benefits as per the labour laws.

According to the laws, the workers, who have worked at the factory for a year or more, will get one month

basic salary, one gratuity per year, encashment of earned leave and their due salaries.

Those who have worked for less than a year would get one month salary along with the last month's salary. The workers, who have worked for less than three months, will get Tk 1,000 along with their due salary, said Rafiqul.

Meanwhile, the garment owners kept their industrial units shut in Ashulia yesterday as angry workers continued their demonstrations demanding justice to the fire victims.

The whole thing began when workers of Windy Garments in Jamgara came out of the factory, shouting out fire. They hurled brick chips at other garment factories, demanding production suspension, said Moktar Hossain, deputy director of industrial police.

Workers of some other garments also joined the demonstration and blocked Ashulia-Baipail road for half an hour. Police fired around 200 rounds of tear shells to

disperse the protesters, Moktar said.

Picard Bangladesh Ltd, a Bangladesh-German joint venture manufacturing leather products, whose three factories came under attack from outsiders on Saturday, resumed its operation after a day of work suspension, its managing director Saiful Islam said.

At least 50 guards and workers of the export-oriented company were injured when several hundred garment workers attacked its factories in Ashulia.

Abuls claim

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Padma bridge construction.

The four-member ACC team, which launched its enquiry in September last year, will submit its report to the commission today.

And, over the report, the commission will hold a meeting with the World Bank external panel this afternoon.

The global lender's team, now in Dhaka for the second time to assess the progress in the enquiry, held talks with the ACC on Sunday. It is scheduled to visit the ACC around 3:00pm today, said an official source.

The Bank had cancelled its \$1.2 billion credit for the \$2.9 billion project on June 29, saying it had credible evidence of a corruption conspiracy involving Bangladeshi officials, executives of a Canadian firm and some private individuals.

The global lender appointed the external team following its September 2 announcement to revive the loan deal.

The panel, chaired by Luis Moreno Ocampo, former chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, made its first visit to Dhaka in October.

Its two other members are Timothy Tong, former commissioner of the Independent Commission against Corruption of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and Richard Alderman, former director of Britain's Serious Fraud Office.

The ACC sources say they have information that some quarters influenced the process of selecting Canadian consultant firm SNC Lavalin for a \$50 million job in the Padma project.

Two SNC Lavalin officials are already facing trial in a Canadian court on charges of bribing Bangladeshi public officials to get the job.

While leaving the ACC compound yesterday, Syed Abul Hossain asked his men to distribute some paper that he claimed was supplementary statement he submitted to ACC yesterday.

The statement read former state minister Abul Hasan Chowdhury along with officials of SNC Lavalin met him twice before selecting the firm.

They requested him to properly evaluate the Canadian company's documents, he claimed.

Biman first to falter

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Bangladesh Airlines was cancelled around 10:30pm on Sunday as problem surfaced in its GPS (global positioning system) soon after it started taxiing, sources said.

Within around half an hour, Biman engineers fixed the glitch, but by the time the runway was shut, and therefore, the airport authorities did not allow the aircraft to take off.

Meanwhile, due to the delay, another 314 passengers, many of who are hajj pilgrims and were supposed to fly in from Jeddah by the DC-10 aircraft, got stuck there.

Biman, however, claims that they arranged boarding at hotels and foods for the stranded passengers in Jeddah.

The flight finally left the airport for Jeddah at 6:00pm yesterday and is supposed to return to Dhaka with the stranded passengers at 9:00am today.

Asked why it was not sent to Jeddah yesterday morning, a top Biman official, wishing anonymity, said, "We could have sent the aircraft at 8:00am, but did not do so because it would have returned during the runway closure time."

The lone runway at the airport remains shut from

11:00pm to 8:00am every day from December 1 for maintenance work that will continue till April 30, 2013.

The daily airport traffic, which consists of 185 flights including 85 in international routes and handles around 15,000 passengers, will now have to be dealt within the 15-hour window.

Meanwhile, Civil Aviation Minister Faruk Khan had to cancel a scheduled press conference at the airport at 3:00pm yesterday on completion of the Biman's hajj operation this year since the pilgrims could not reach Dhaka in time due to the technical glitch of the DC-10 aircraft.

Biman sources said the hajj operation would be formally wrapped up though with the arrival of the flight, but some pilgrims will be arriving till December 8.

Although the operations in the ground handling, check-in, immigration and customs have so far been going good since the repair work started, passengers are raising complaints of unusual delay in finding luggage in the conveyer belts.

"I landed at the airport at 3:00pm, but it took me two hours to get my luggage," said Fayzul Ahmed who yesterday returned from Saudi Arabia.

Emission alarming

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of degrees, which is an international goal.

The overwhelming majority of the increase was from China, the world's biggest carbon dioxide polluter. Of the planet's top 10 polluters, the US and Germany were the only countries that reduced their carbon dioxide emissions.

Last year, all the world's nations combined pumped nearly 38.2 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the air from the burning of fossil fuels, according to a study on new international calculations on global emissions.

That is about a billion tons more than the previous year, said the study published Sunday in the journal Nature Climate Change.

The total amounts to more than 2.4 million pounds (1.1 million kilograms) of carbon dioxide released into the air every second.

programme at the Center for International Climate and Environmental Research in Oslo, Norway.

Three years ago, nearly 200 nations set the 2-degree Celsius temperature goal in a nonbinding agreement. Negotiators now at a conference under way in Doha, Qatar, are trying to find ways to reach that target.

The only way, Peters said, is to start reducing world emissions now and "throw everything we have at the problem."

In 1997, most of the world agreed to an international treaty, known as the Kyoto Protocol, that required developed countries such as the United States to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about 5 percent when compared with the baseline year of 1990.

But countries that are still developing, including China and India, were not limited by how much carbon dioxide they expelled. The US never ratified the treaty.

The latest pollution numbers, calculated by the Global Carbon Project show that worldwide carbon dioxide levels are 54 percent higher than the 1990 baseline.