

SAVAR TRAGEDY 18 Tangail workers missing

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Tangail

Eighteen garment workers, hailing from seven villages under Mirzapur upazila in Tangail, remain missing since the Savar building collapse, much to the agony of the bereaved family members and relatives.

Several hundred men and women from Warshi, Bortia, Deolipara, Moizdoi, Nagarpura, Kohela and Deoli villages in the upazila work at different RMG units located at Savar, on the outskirts of Dhaka, said Warshi Union Parishad member Atiqur Rahman Atiq.

At least 30 used to work at different RMG units at Rana Plaza in Savar.

Of them, around 10 injured workers were rescued alive and admitted to different hospitals and private clinics, Atiq said, adding that at least 18 workers of the areas were still missing.

"My husband Sajal Khan of Kohela village, who used to work as a junior machine mechanic at an RMG unit on the fifth floor of Rana Plaza, is still missing," Sajal's wife Pushpa Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

Their eleven-year-old son had been asking for his father, she added.

At the house of missing worker Abu Hanif at Warshi, his parents were seen sobbing and blaming the fate of their son.

Hanif's father Afaz Uddin said his son was supposed to marry in the next month.

Meanwhile, four dead in Savar building collapse were buried in Tangail in the last two days.

The deceased are Jahurul Islam of Govindasi village in Bhuapur upazila, Nargis Begum of Dhuburia Munshipara village, Sathi Akter of Dhuburia Purbopara village and Shahinur Islam of Solimabad village in Nagarpur upazila.

2 owners

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The official refused to disclose anything further.

Earlier, Mahbul Hoque Shakil, special assistant (media) to the prime minister, told The Daily Star that the premier's order had already been sent to all agencies concerned.

The move follows widespread criticism that the government was reluctant to take action against Rana, a leader of Savar municipality unit Jubo League. The collapse on Wednesday morning has left at least 315 garment workers killed and scores injured.

Later that day, Savar police filed a case against Rana, his father and four factory owners, but failed to capture any of them.

Rana went into hiding shortly after he was rescued from the rubble of the nine-storey building.

Our Manikganj correspondent reports: Law enforcers picked up two relatives of Rana from their village home in Manikganj early yesterday.

Shawkat Ali, officer-in-charge of Harirampur Police Station, said they handed over the detainees to Savar police in the morning.

Inspector General of Police Hasan Mahmud Khandaker said police were making their utmost efforts to arrest the accused.

Jubo League insiders said Rana was hiding in a house in the capital's Mirpur area.

Using political influence, Rana had grabbed 56 decimals of land at Savar Bazar bus stand area and built the high-rise there flouting related laws.

Altaf dies

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A firefighter, who went to rescue Altaf, however, could not go for any drastic measure fearing further collapsed.

Altaf even implored journalists to go and talk to rescuers, out of a belief that they would listen to news-men and act a miracle.

Altaf's relentless appeal came to a final halt yesterday around 6:00am. His body is still stuck in the debris.

No steps in 2yrs

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The disaster management bureau should take initiative to give DCC the legal power for such job, said Jahangir, adding that they had repeatedly raised the issue in meetings with Rajuk and the bureau, but to no avail.

Iqbal Habib, an architect and joint secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, said the DCC and municipalities around the city were approving building constructions without consulting technical persons. This, according to him, is one of the main reasons for so many building being at risk.

He alleged Rajuk was not carrying out its responsibilities.

The DCC and Rajuk pointed fingers at each other after each building related disaster, but they did not

take measures to identify all the risky buildings in the city and take proper action, said Iqbal, adding that the number of vulnerable buildings should be much greater than 321.

He suggested the government form a taskforce to identify all the risky structures and take proper actions about it.

The architect said the buildings that would be possible to retrofit could be given a chance for remedy but the rest among the vulnerable must be knocked down.

Besides, the buildings that had approval from municipalities or been erected unapproved needed to be brought to Rajuk's attention to make the city safe from incidents like that had happened in Savar, added Iqbal.

Rescued

FROM PAGE 1

to improvise. They brought a hand saw, tied both her legs and hands, held her tightly so that she could not move and then cut off her hand from above the elbow.

"I somehow managed to bear the pain when they were cutting my flesh. But when it reached my bone... I don't know how to describe the pain," she told The Daily Star at Enam Medical College Hospital in Savar. She then fainted.

The 25-year-old sewing operator was working on the third floor when the building crumbled like a pack of cards on Wednesday morning.

"It was around 8:20am. I just started sewing. Power went off and the building collapsed in no time. My right hand was trapped."

Her battle to hold on to life began. With the entire building almost sandwiched and thick dust all around, she was suffocating. "But it was all right in the first few hours."

However, as the day wore on, she thought her heart would stop for want of oxygen. There was no air.

With time she grew hungrier and thirstier still. "I could not take it any more. So at one stage I drank my urine," she said.

Brave souls

FROM PAGE 1

They entered the building by breaking the walls, and pulled out people -- dead or alive, while law enforcers were just busy controlling the crowd.

One of the brave men managed to rescue a pregnant woman alive. Another rescuer, without any medical knowledge, untangled a garment worker from the debris by cutting her leg.

SHAHALAM

A local electrician, Shah Alam joined the rescue operation on Wednesday morning. He said he pulled out 23 bodies and rescued 12 people alive.

He rescued several people who had somehow found themselves tied with electric cables. There was no cutter, so he cut the cables with his teeth.

"There was no light, no equipment. But we did not stop for a second," he told The Daily Star.

ABU BAKAR HAZRA

A 23-year-old BBA student of Pirojpur Government College, Abu Bakar Hazra joined the rescue effort on Thursday morning.

"I could not hold myself back when I saw the footage on TV. So I decided to come to Dhaka to join the rescue operation as I have experience of working with a rescue team in Bagerhat during the Cyclone Sidr [in 2007]," he said.

He entered the crumbled building through a small hole where no one, even the trained firefighters, dared to go.

"A female garment worker was bleeding inside. I was continuously calling for a doctor who can stop the bleeding, but no one dared to go inside," Abu Bakar said, adding that he then pulled out the worker himself from a pool of blood.

SALMAN

"Allah is great...no worries. I'm going down, please answer back when I call for help. I shall bring him out Inshallah," Salman told the other rescuers as he entered the building on hearing

The mother of a nine-year-old son thanked the rescuers for bringing her back to her son and husband, a car driver.

She alleged it was their immediate bosses who forced them to work in the risky building and said that she had even been forced to work till late night every day without any weekly holiday over the past one month.

In the garment factory where she worked, she used to earn Tk 4,700 a month. But with one of her hands now gone, how she would support her family is a thought she cannot bear to think.

Israel to stop using white phosphorus

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's army has announced it will stop using munitions containing white phosphorus, for which it was internationally condemned during a military operation against Gaza in 2008-2009.

Shells containing the chemical "will no longer be used," the army said in a statement released late Thursday.

someone screaming from the rubble.

Salman, a student of Natun Bazar Jamia Madania Madrasa at Baridhara in the capital, went to Savar on Wednesday evening along with his classmate Nazrul Islam.

"Actually I came here to donate blood, but they did not take my blood due to insufficient blood transmission equipment," Salman said, "Having failed to donate blood, I decided to join the rescue operation to save as many lives as possible."

US ready

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as a "terrible tragedy," and said it was ready to help.

"Our initial look is that there are a number of different companies that were in this very large factory."

"I'm not yet able to share details one way or another whether there were any American companies," said deputy State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell, noting a Bangladeshi probe was ongoing.

"But it does underscore that there's a need for the government, owners, buyers and labour to find ways of improving working conditions in Bangladesh."

Only British low-cost fashion line Primark and Spanish giant Mango have so far acknowledged having products made in the collapsed factory bloc, while a host of brands including Wal-Mart and France's Carrefour are investigating.

The accident is the worst such tragedy in the history of Bangladesh. It has revived concerns about labour standards in countries like Bangladesh, the world's second largest textile manufacturer.

"We do regularly note our ongoing concerns," Ventrell added, noting Washington has raised those issues with Bangladeshi authorities via the US embassy and travelling officials.

ASSAULT OF STUDENTS

JU suspends 8 BCL men

JU CORRESPONDENT

Authorities of Jahangirnagar University (JU) yesterday suspended seven BCL activists of the university unit of the student body for different periods in connection with the assault of two female students.

The decision came following an emergency syndicate meeting of the university at its Senate Hall.

Of them, Anisur Rahman and Tanvir Hassan were suspended for two years and fined Tk 10,000 each while Mushfiq Md Abdullah and Mahabbat Hossain were suspended for one year and fined Tk 5,000 each.

Saddam Hossain and Nuruddin Mahmud were suspended for six months and fined Tk 3,000 each. Another BCL activist Mahmudul Hassan was suspended for two months and fined Tk 2,000.

Besides, two BCL men got warnings and a BCL leader was asked to leave the campus soon and was fined Tk 5,000.

Earlier on April 19, some BCL men assaulted two female students following an altercation over pouring coloured water on two female students during a procession on the campus marking Pabla Baishakh.

In another incident, three JU assistant proctors resigned from their positions over assaulting a JU teacher by a BCL leader yesterday, stating that there was no congenial atmosphere on the campus to continue their jobs.

On April 6, some BCL activists were locked into an altercation with some teachers as they [teachers] tried to control an untoward situation in front of the campus during hartal hours.

Nurul Haque, teacher of economics department and also a JU Senate member, was assaulted allegedly by Razib Ahmed Rasel, general secretary of BCL JU unit.

Demanding resignation of JU Vice-chancellor Prof Anwar Hossain for not expelling the BCL leader, Jahangirnagar University Teachers' Association yesterday announced to go for an indefinite strike from today.

Contacted, VC Prof Anwar Hossain said a probe report on the incident would be published soon and action would be taken on the basis of the report.

Frantic search

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"Bring my mother back. I won't let her go back to work," wailed Kajali's only son Srabon aged six.

Her mother Bimala Rani has stopped taking foods since she heard about the accident.

Bimala and her husband came to their daughter's house in Majidpur, Savar from Dharmraion Wednesday.

Even Kajali's parents-in-law have joined the family from Mirzapur, Tangail. Everyone is waiting anxiously for some news about Kajali.

Hundreds of families of the missing people are going through the same ordeal.

Several hundred people queued up in the school ground to look for their loved ones among the bodies of the victims. Every time an ambulance arrived there with bodies, anxiety rippled through the area.

Following the accident, four relatives of Nasrin Begum went missing. She along with 18 relatives and friends joined the efforts to find the missing four.

Of the 18, three became sick from exhaustion and were admitted to a hospital.

On Thursday, the body of Nasrin's cousin Nupur was found in the ground of Adharchandra High School.

Yesterday evening, Nasrin's nephew Siddiqui and cousin Murtoza were found undergoing treatment at Combined Military Hospital in Savar.

However, her other cousin Champa, 22, remained missing till last night.

Fight for life

FROM PAGE 1

Since yesterday morning, news of more survivors spread among the relatives who gathered at Savar Bazar bus stand.

Many of the rescuers, risking their own lives, thrust themselves into certain points on the scene with whatever they had -- shovels, hammers and cutters.

The building came crashing down on around 3,000 garment workers on Wednesday morning, a day after some cracks developed on a few pillars and floors. The building's owner, Sohel Rana, a leader of the ruling Awami League's youth wing Jubo League, had dismissed the risks and kept the building open for business.

In the immediate aftermath, the locals spearheaded the rescue work. They were later aided by the army, police, Rab, BGB, Fire Service and Civil Defence personnel.

General people's lead in the rescue operation was noticed even on day three.

Meanwhile, Shahinur Islam, director of Inter-Services Public Relation, said, "Our first priority is to save the lives as per the government's instructions. We will carry on our operation until the last person is pulled out."

"All necessary equipment is at our disposal. We are trying to make intelligent use of our resources," he added.

He was speaking at a press briefing at the spot around 4:30pm.

The ISPR director said 2,348 victims -- 304 deceased and 2,044 alive -- have so far been pulled out of the rubble. Of the bodies, 281 have been handed over to the families, he added.

The government's probe committees visited the spot yesterday.

On the site, a strong stench of decomposing bodies made the rescuers' work even more challenging. Many were seen spraying air freshener to remove the acrid smell.

The temperature soared to 36 degrees Celsius yesterday making life more difficult for the rescuers

and of course, for the people trapped inside alive.

A few of the survivors were lucky to get water and food but many survived miraculously.

A woman was pulled out after being buried under the rubble for 45 hours. She was seriously dehydrated and had to drink her own urine to survive.

Shamim Islam, one of the rescuers, told The Daily Star that he along with two others hammered their way into the third floor around 7:40pm where they provided saline, bananas and bread to 26 entrapped people.

"Apart from providing food and water, we supplied oxygen through a pipe to these trapped people. They are now well and we hope to get them out," said Shamim, a driver by profession who joined the rescue operation on day one.

Another rescuer Sumon said they saw many people alive but they could not reach them. "It's so close yet so far," he said.

Many distraught relatives continue to rush to the scene searching for their near and dear ones, crying and frantically enquiring about their relatives. Many still wait in front of collapsed building with the hope that their loved ones will come out alive.

Relatives of victims continue to wait at the Savar Adharchandra High School playground, where the bodies are usually brought to.

A group of 40-50 people brought out a procession at the school around 10:30pm yesterday demanding the bodies of the deceased. Police later took control of the situation.

Mosi Uddowla Reza, assistant superintendent of police of Savar Model Police Station, told The Daily Star that their sources told them that Jamaat men led the procession but they were not sure.

Agitated relatives of the victims and locals also staged a demonstration around 10:30am in front of the collapsed Rana Plaza alleging slow rescue efforts.

They were involved in a

scuffle with law enforcers involved in the rescue operation, which forced them to resort to rubber bullets.

At least 20 people, including some journalists of television channels, were injured yesterday morning when they rushed out of a building next door to Rana Plaza following a rumour that that building was collapsing.

Help pours

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From a makeshift shed in front of the collapsed building, social organisation Work for Life distributes bread, biscuit, juice, cucumber, banana, mineral water, saline, packets of biryani and khichuri among the rescuers and others.

People and other organisations have brought those food items. Some doctors, with medicines and first-aid kits, have also joined in.

Hundreds of water bottles are stacked at different points on the road.

"Saline here, it's free," chanted young boy Shafiq, who along with four others were volunteering with a drum of saline on a rickshaw van just beside Enam Hospital.

Half a kilometre away, another youth says, "Please have lemon juice. It will be of great help."

Some organisations are doing similar jobs.

Students from different schools, colleges and universities have also come up with voluntary service and aid.

Near the Enam Hospital, Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies has set up a temporary shelter so that people could take rest. It announces names of the survivors admitted to Savar CMH, Dhaka Medical College Hospital and Pangu Hospital.

Inside Savar Adharchandra High School, where the corpses are lined up, a huge number of people distribute food and water among the relatives of the victims. Even burial clothes are available there.

Meanwhile, without break, Enam Medical College and Hospital has been giving free treatment to the survivors. Around 800 medical students including interns are working round the clock.

Save RMG industry

FROM PAGE 1

(BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) met the premier at Gono Bhaban.

"We informed the prime minister about the six decisions we had made during a meeting with labour leaders earlier," Atiqul Islam, president of BGMEA, told The Daily Star after the hour-long meeting.

"We have requested her to give orders to arrest the owners of the building and the garment companies it housed."

"We also talked about the law and order situation because we believe the building collapse is not the only issue here. Brands such as KFC, Pizza Hut or Hush Puppies were targeted, which have nothing to do with the sector or the incident," he said.

Salim Osman, president of BKMEA, said the prime minister assured them of all possible assistance to help the sector overcome the crisis.

Meanwhile, pressure continues to mount on the government for arresting the owners of Rana Plaza and five garment factories after a number of ministers, lawmakers, business leaders and rights groups called for their immediate capture to prevent workers from going berserk.

At a meeting at the headquarters of BGMEA in the evening, garment industry leaders and the labour rights groups urged the government to take some visible action to end the ongoing vandalism by workers protesting the collapse of the building in Savar.

Israfil Alam, chairman of parliamentary standing committee on the labour ministry, said the country must salvage its image as the apparel sector is highly dependent on the interna-

tional market.

He also called for immediate arrest of the owners of the building and the factories.

Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said if there was no stability in the country, Bangladesh would lose the apparel market to countries like Myanmar.

"There is no alternative to arresting them," he said.

AK Azad, former FBCCI president, said the workers have not joined the industry to die. If the owners could not give them adequate security and proper work environment, they should quit the business.

Begum Monnujan Sufian, state minister for labour, said, "The owners of the building and the factories and other people responsible for the collapse should be arrested as early as possible."

Local Government and Rural Development & Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam said the prime minister had already ordered the arrest of the owners of Rana Plaza and the five garment factories.

"Of course, the people, who had kept the factories open knowing that the building was at risk, have to be arrested. There is no ambiguity in it," he said.

The LGRD minister also warned that there could be more disasters in future as about 70 percent of the country's buildings are unplanned and unauthorized.

Jahanara Begum, president of Bangladesh Garment Workers Federation, said, "In the case of Tazreen Garment fire, we have seen that many injured workers did not receive promised compensation and treatment. How can there be workers' confidence in factory owners if the level of

commitment is like this?

"BGMEA has also forgotten about its promise to make arrangements for better treatment for injured workers and their rehabilitation," she said.

A daunting

FROM PAGE 1

Contacted Rab's Legal Wing Director Wing Commander Habibur Rahman said, "Firefighters are trained for such rescue operation. The Rab, army and other agencies are mainly trying to maintain law and order on the spot."

Contradicting with this, Director of Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) Shahinur Islam yesterday at a press briefing in Savar claimed that the rescue operation was being conducted by the army in cooperation with other agencies.

He said the army team deployed there were equipped with light and heavy machinery, but they were conducting the rescue with discretion and caution to avoid further unnecessary casualty.

But according to locals, the rescue could have been much faster and could have saved more lives had the army team been active with their equipment.

During spot visits, it was noticed that the rescue operation was being carried out in an uncoordinated manner with many locals cutting walls and searching for victims.

For instance, no medical team was seen present on the spot when victim Rikta Begum, who got trapped on the third floor, was rescued from debris by severing her hand with a saw yesterday around 5:00pm.

Lying on a bed at Enam Medical College Hospital in Savar she gave the horrific account of how her right hand had to be amputated without any anaesthesia.

BUILDING CRACKS

Rajshahi mall closed for 3 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Rajshahi

The largest shopping complex in Rajshahi city -- RDA Market -- has been declared closed for shoppers until tomorrow after cracks were found at several points of the market building yesterday.

Fearing collapse of the building, its extension work was kept suspended and police were deployed at the market's main gate to avert any untoward incident.

Rajshahi Development Authority (RDA) Market Businessmen's Association announced the closure after some businessmen complained about the cracks, said Farid Mahmud Hasan, general secretary of the association.

Rajshahi Mayor AHM Khairuzzaman Liton and lawmaker Fazle Hossain Badsha visited the complex and as per their advice, the decision to close the market was taken, he said.

Businessmen complained that a few days ago at least 10 cracks had developed in pillars, beams and a roof of the market, which houses some 2,000 shops.

They traced a long crack in the roof of the first floor and a number of cracks in two pillars and several beams of the market yesterday morning.

The businessmen alleged that the market was originally designed as a two-storey structure.

But the association extended it to a three-storey one two years back. Further extension work was started three months back to make the building a four-storey structure, they added.

Experts from the Public Works Department, Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology, RDA, Rajshahi City Corporation were directed to visit the complex and find out whether there had been any illegal construction works.

CRACKS FOUND IN A MANIKGANJ MARKET

A four-storey supermarket at Manikganj bus stand has been kept closed from yesterday morning after cracks were detected in its third floor.

AKM Mostofa Kamal, upazila nirbahi officer