

Fire kills 4 of a family in sleep

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg

A couple and their two daughters were burnt to death in a fire at their house in Sipahipara village of the district's Lohagara upazila early yesterday.

The dead were carpenter Abdur Rahim, 45, his wife Nasima Akhter, 33, and their two daughters Lucky, 12, and Reshmi, 8.

Mohammad Shahjahan, officer-in-charge of Lohagara Police Station, said the fire might have originated from a cigarette butt at around 3:30am and gutted the thatched house when the four were fast

asleep.

On information, police recovered the bodies and sent those to Chittagong Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsies.

Two sons of the couple were not at home on that night, Shahjahan added.

Farid Uddin Khan, chairman of the upazila parishad, said locals suspect the fire originated from the kitchen of the house.

Jasim Uddin, deputy director of Chittagong Fire Service and Civil Defence, said he did not know the matter as there is no fire station in Lohagara upazila.

Pornography

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fake Facebook account.

"At one point, I realised that as the footage was up on the internet for all to see, I had nothing more to hide. So I filed a case with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station on Wednesday morning and spoke about the ordeal I have been going through, hoping that it would help me get justice," said the victim.

DB police produced the arrestee before a Dhaka court yesterday and prayed for his remand in the case.

Rejecting the remand prayer, the court sent Sharif to jail and fixed Sunday for hearing on a bail prayer of the accused, said Mahmuda Afroze Lucky, assistant commissioner of the DB.

The accused was arrested in October last year on the same charge, only to be released on bail. Since then, the couple have been living separately and Sharif has been up to his old tricks again.

The victim now spends her days fearing harassment by people who might have seen the video footage on Facebook.

4 workers killed

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upazila for the last six days as a new culvert would be constructed there, said Kamrul Islam, an injured worker.

As they were demolishing the top slab, the culvert suddenly caved in around 8:30am, killing the four on the spot. All the deceased were standing on the slab. Though three other workers were standing right beneath the top slab, none of them died till 8:00pm yesterday. However, two of them were critically injured and were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The other injured -- Kamrul Islam -- was given first aid at Kapasia Upazila Health Complex.

Md Saber Ali, upazila engineer of Rural Transport Improvement Project, said M/s Hanif Enterprise of Faridpur district was awarded the work to demolish the 30-year-old culvert, which used bricks instead of concrete and iron rods in sidewalls, and construct a new one there.

The contractor took no safety

measures for the workers, he added.

The contractor firm, however, said that they had given the demolition job to Ramzan Ali of Manikganj district on a sub-contract.

"He [Ramzan] was supposed to look after the safety of the workers. But he has fled after the accident," said Abdul Majid, who represents Hanif Enterprise at the site.

When asked why they had not done anything for the safety, he refused to talk anymore about the incident.

Alauddin Ali, upazila nirbahi officer of Kapasia, said a five-member committee had been formed to probe the incident.

The victims would be duly compensated by the government of Bangladesh and the World Bank, the financier of the project, he told The Daily Star.

The bodies had been sent to Gazipur Sadar Hospital morgue, said Ahsan Ullah, officer-in-charge of Kapasia Police Station.

What would they deliver to people?

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The size of such population is significant. There were more than one and a half crore voters in those upazilas. And at least three crore people -- around one-fifth of the country's total population -- live there.

Denial of voting rights means their involvement in picking the leaders of the upazila administration was ignored. And their hopes, dreams and ambitions may not be reflected in the development activities of the upazila parishads.

These upazila parishads may opt for a go-it-alone policy under the leadership of those chairmen who rigged the polls. If so, this will be against the basic spirit of the local government system.

It has become a crucial issue as to how those representatives who got elected as chairmen and vice-chairmen in the 100 upazilas through rigging

will serve local citizens.

The functions of an upazila parishad are very significant for locals.

An upazila parishad is responsible for managing and delivering a range of quality services to locals, such as public health and recreational facilities and maintenance of local roads. The nature of its functions makes an upazila a government unit at people's doorsteps.

But will they care about people? They did not, after all, bother about robbing people of their rights.

It remains uncertain whether they will care about people's welfare. It is certain that people will have to pay for their salaries and other facilities. One more thing is almost certain: they will give financial benefits to their party men who ensured their victories by capturing polling stations, snatching and stuffing ballots in the polls.

Rowdy party men expect to get importance over the locals. In the view of political analysts, this may increase corruption in government administration at the upazila levels.

Even blessed by the chairmen, the ruling party men may turn more violent and engage in unlawful activities like manipulation of tenders and extortions at upazila levels. Local government experts fear they may appear as threats to law and order. Rule of law and human rights situation may face a further setback at the local level.

Like other local government bodies, upazila parishads are also expected to encourage and throw up new leadership to build the country. Many of the upazila representatives will be elected members of parliament in future. Some of them will even be ministers.

But in the rigged upazila parishad

elections the face of our future leadership has been exposed. What will they deliver when they rise to higher political echelons in future?

How will those upazila chairmen who bulldozed the people's voting rights contribute to the Awami League-led government's efforts to establish good governance as per the party's electoral pledges?

How will the AL-led government, as per its electoral pledges, proceed with its plans to strengthen the upazila parishads, with around 100 upazilas remaining under the leadership of tainted chiefs?

Given all such circumstances, the upazila parishads being constituted through the just concluded controversial elections will face enormous challenges in delivering on their mandates and in fulfilling people's expectations.



A sign hung on the gate of Arafin Enterprise reads, "Safety first". Ironically four workers were killed in an accident in the ship-breaking yard yesterday. A gas cylinder explosion inside a ship killed the workers who had no safety gear on.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Sexual abuses

CHILD VICTIMS

	YEAR 2013		
	INJURY	DEATH	AFFECTED
Rape	239	12	267
Rape attempt	19	0	24
Sexual harassment	136	2	183
Abduction	2	2	90
kidnap attempt	11	0	11
Missing	nil	2	167
Early marriage	1	2	84
Torture	130	1	264
Acid attack	10	nil	10
Trafficking	nil	nil	42

The data is based on reports of 6 national dailies

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She held this perception of the society as a key reason behind the child rape incidents.

"We need to change our social and individual perception of a girl," she observed.

Since 2011, the MJF has been preparing and sharing yearly assessment of child rights situation in the country based on news published in six national dailies -- the Prothom Alo, the Ittefaq, the Jugantor, the Samakal, the New Age and The Daily Star.

A total of 1,702 children died and 1,100 were injured in different kinds of crimes and violence in 2013. In 2012, the number of deaths was 1,697 and of injury 1,295, according to the report.

Highest 502 children died from drowning last year, with 118 deaths in August alone.

Furthermore, 335 children were murdered last year and two were injured because of their presence in the murder scenes. The number of murder incidents, however, was higher the previous year -- 414. Nonetheless, 36 other children became victims of attempt to murder last year.

Road accidents and suicide were the other major menaces for children, causing 266 and 166 deaths respectively.

"This year we have added a new category -- political violence with children. Because of political vio-

lence last year, many children lost their lives and many more were injured," said Shaheen Anam, executive director of the MJF.

As many as 41 children died and 107 received severe injuries in political violence last year, the report shows.

Besides the gloomy picture of crimes against children, the report presents some positive news as well.

A total of 1,286 reports containing positive news, including rescue of abducted children, prevention of early marriage and trafficking, achievements of children, were published in the dailies last year. The number of such reports was 1,181 in 2012.

Parveen Mahmood, managing director of Grameen Telecom Trust, stressed the need for proper coordination between the government and the NGOs to improve the child rights situation.

Abdullah Al Mamun urged the government to set up a separate directorate for children under the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to this end.

"You won't find even a single authorised person who can tell you the child rights situation in a district. The District Child Officer only looks after the cultural affairs and maintains their local office," he said, adding that a separate directorate would help improve the situation.

4 killed by toxic gas

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The Daily Star tried to contact him over the phone, but he did not pick up the calls.

Nazim Uddin, vice president of BSBA, said the accident happened as the workers did not know how to handle a scrap ship with toxic elements.

Asked if anyone from the shipyard was accompanying them, he said it was not possible to keep an eye on every outside worker.

But he added the association would take an initiative to train those who come to work at shipyards from outside.

Phul Mia, father of Jasim, one of the

dead, said the employer never provided his son with any safety gear.

Jasim, the lone breadwinner of the family, used to get Tk 15,000 a month for working as a foreman.

Zakir Hossain, deputy inspector general of the Department of Inspection for Safeties of Shops and Establishments, said, "Our inspector visited the factory and found the accident had occurred due to negligence. We will serve a notice on the owner."

The ship-breaking industry that started operations in Sitakunda in 1984 provides direct and indirect employment for about 2,00,000 people.

Around one million tonnes of steel are dismantled in these shipyards every year, sources said.

Over the past two decades, at least 1,000 workers have died in ship-breaking yards, a joint survey of Greenpeace and International Federation for Human Rights found last year.

Accidents continue to happen, as the owners hardly ensure the safety of workers. Also, the ship breakers have been polluting the environment with carbon, chromium, lead, mercury and cadmium.

The Supreme Court directed the government to formulate a set of rules by December 14, 2011, to free the ship-

breaking industry from pollution and ensure workers' safety.

Before that, the HC in December 2010 asked the government to close down the unauthorised ship-breaking yards and ensure the safety of workers.

The court also said that scrap ships must be cleaned of all hazardous materials before entering the country, and ship-breaking operations must guarantee safe working conditions for workers and environmentally sound disposal plans for wastes.

Only last month, the government closed down two shipyards as they were set up razing several thousand mangrove trees from 14.5 acres of land

Hasan new war crimes suspect

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involvement in two incidents in which three people were killed in Tarail in 1971, said prosecutor Mokhlesur Rahman Badal.

The tribunal led by Justice Enayetur Rahim also ordered the prosecution to submit the investigation progress report on May 15.

In response to a query, Mokhlesur told the tribunal that the probe against Hasan began on June 6 last year.

Prosecutor Abul Kalam Azad on

April 1 submitted a petition for the arrest before the tribunal through its registrar's office. He alleged that Hasan through his men was trying to influence the investigation.

According to the investigation agency, Hasan hails from Machihata village of Brahmanbaria but had been living in Tarail along with his family for many years.

His father Syed Musleh Uddin was the vice-president of Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP) for East Pakistan and chairman of the Peace

Committee in the then Kishoreganj sub-division in 1971.

The PDP and Peace Committee opposed the country's independence.

Hasan is not active in politics now. He was once involved with Nezam-e-Islami, another anti-liberation organisation, which was banned immediately after Bangladesh became independent but resumed its activities during the regime of late president Ziaur Rahman. Meanwhile, the prosecution have

completed cross-examining of the second defence witness in the war crimes case against Mobarak Hossain.

The tribunal yesterday adjourned the proceedings of the case until April 8 when the third defence witness is expected to defend Mobarak.

Mobarak, a former union-level leader of ruling Awami League, faces five charges of involvement in genocide, murder, abduction, confinement, torture and looting in Brahmanbaria during the war.

Power corridor given to India

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delegation at the two-day talks, said there is huge hydropower potential in the northeast. Arunachal Pradesh can alone produce 50,000MW electricity from hydropower projects.

"A number of projects are going on. When those are ready to generate power, it has to be transmitted to India and also to Bangladesh," he said at the briefing.

A PDB source said Bangladesh might get around 1,000MW of power from the 6,000MW to be transmitted via Bangladesh.

Sinha said there was scope for carrying another 25MW to 30MW power through the existing line between the two countries.

"India has agreed to supply the additional electricity that can be carried through this line," he said.

Bangladesh has already sought 30-40MW electricity from India's state-owned NTPC Vidut Vyapar Nigam to make up for the systems loss in transmission of 500MW power it imports from India.

It now actually receives around 470MW electricity from India under the power-import deal, said PDB sources.

Sinha said: "We have left it entirely to Bangladesh to procure it [power] from Indian market either through a new contract or expanding the scope in the existing contract."

At the secretary-level meeting, Bangladesh also sought 100MW electricity from Palatana power project in Tripura.

Monowar said: "We have agreed in principle to import 100 megawatt of electricity from Palatana in

Tripura."

Referring to the issue, Sinha said: "We are looking at it very positively. We have constituted a committee of experts, which will give its reports in three months."

Monowar said the Bangladesh officials also had discussions with their Indian counterparts about importing another 500MW power.

On this, Sinha said Bangladesh must upgrade the substation at Bheramara to import the additional 500MW electricity.

A technical team has been set up, and it will submit a report in three months, he said.

The Indian power secretary said everything was in place to start the work of Rampil power project, a Bangladesh-India joint venture.

He, however, didn't specify the tariff for power to be produced at the

coal-based plant.

Sinha mentioned that electricity tariff was around Tk 6.5 to Tk 7 a kilowatt at coal-based thermal power plants in India.

"The tariff of power from Rampil plant should be a little more than that," he said.

There have been positive developments on power cooperation among India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, said the senior Indian official.

The Indian foreign ministry will convene a meeting in Delhi in May, in which the four countries will take part, he added.

Bangladesh is keen to import electricity from India and other South Asian neighbours to meet its electricity demand, which grows around 12 percent annually, according to PDB officials.