

Robbery in cargo vessel in Bhola

5 crewmembers injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A gang of robbers on Friday injured at least five crew members of a cargo vessel on River Tentulia under Borhanuddin upazila in Bhola district and made away with around Tk 50,000 in cash and a dozen cell phones from them.

The injured were identified as Sirajul Islam, 48, captain of the ship, Mosharrif Hossain, 49, master of the ship, Abul Sardar, 34, Jalal, 36 and Kalam Majhee, 30.

The vessel, the Bandhu Sardar, loaded with clinker was en route to Meghnaghat from Payra sea port when eight to nine robbers attacked it, said Sirajul Islam, captain of the ship.

The robbers boarded the vessel from an engine boat (trawler) and attacked his crew with sharp weapons, he said adding that almost all of the staff members, 12 in total, were physically assaulted and the ones resisted sustained injuries.

The gang disembarked the cargo vessel with their loot and went toward Bhola by the engine boat, the captain said.

The injured later received treatment at a local pharmacy in Sener Bazar area under Bakerganj upazila in Barisal district, said local sources.

A general diary (GD) was filed with Borhanuddin Police Station.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina talks to ailing poet Syed Shamsul Haque at the United Hospital in Gulshan in the capital yesterday. She spent around 40 minutes with the poet. At one stage the poet became emotional. She also talked to his doctors and enquired about his treatment. Hasina took the responsibility of his treatment. The poet is suffering from lung cancer. The 80-year-old writer won the Bangla Academy Award in 1966, Ekushey Padak in 1984 and Bangladesh's highest civilian honour, Independence Award, in 2000 for his outstanding contribution to Bangla literature.

PHOTO: PMO

Factory inferno kills 24

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12 MAJOR INDUSTRIAL DISASTERS IN LAST 12 YEARS
TAZREEN FASHIONS, ASHULIA (NOV 24, 2012) 112 workers, mostly women, killed and scores wounded in fire
SPORTSWEAR FACTORY, ASHULIA (DEC 14, 2010) 26 people killed and 100 injured in fire
GARIB & GARIB SWEATER FACTORY, GAZIPUR (FEB 25, 2010) 21 garment workers, including 15 women, died from smoke inhalation during a fire
KTS COMPOSITE TEXTILE MILLS, CHITTAGONG (FEB 23, 2006) 65 workers killed and dozens injured in fire
PHOENIX GARMENTS, TEJGAON (FEB 25, 2006) 21 workers killed and dozens injured in building collapse
SPECTRUM SWEATER INDUSTRIES, SAVAR (APR 11, 2005) 64 people killed, 80 injured in building collapse
SHAAN KNITTING AND PROCESSING LTD, NARAYANGANJ (JAN 6, 2005) 22 people burnt to death and more than 50 injured

Department, said the fire originated from boiler explosion.

However, MA Mannan, chief inspector of boilers, claimed that the cause of the fire was not boiler explosion.

The raging blaze reduced the factory to ruins as parts of the upper floors of the four-storey building caved in.

Black plumes of smoke from the building spiralled upward, engulfing the area in the initial hours of the incident, the biggest industrial disaster since 2013 when the Rana Plaza building collapsed.

Police said about 100 people were in the factory at the time of the incident; the workers of the morning shift were taking charge from night-shift colleagues. The plant runs in three shifts around the clock -- eight hours each.

The fire, which began at 6:05am, could not be extinguished till 2:00am today.

Fire officials said the explosion was huge and the fire triggered by the blast spread quickly because flammable chemicals and oil drums were stored at the factory.

About 150 firefighters of 25 units and around 50 volunteers worked since morning to douse the blaze, but they had to struggle from outside of the building as they could not enter it.

"We could not rescue anyone alive from the building yet," Lt Col Mosharrif Hossain told The Daily Star at 5:00pm. "Locals rescued some people alive before we reached the spot."

He said the factory was risky since it was housed in a 40-year-old building. "We have not been able to enter the building as there are chemical containers in the factory," he added.

The company manufactures paper backed foils, plug wrap paper, cigarette paper, filter tipping paper and printed, metalised and laminated films for different local industrial units as well as multinational organisations.

The explosion at the factory was so strong that it caused large chunks of debris to fly in all directions, said locals. Even some windowpanes at a few nearby buildings were broken off due to the impact of the blast, they added.

"The explosion shook the entire

area," said Riyad Ahmmed, a factory official who lives nearby.

Mariam Akter Lima, who lives in a tin-roofed house to the north of the factory building, said, "We woke up to the loud sound of a blast. Within seconds, we heard some heavy objects falling on our tin roof."

She and other family members stormed out of their house and ran to safety.

"Then I saw plumes of black smokes billowing out and flames in some places. Screams were all around. It was devastating," said Mariam, a class-X student.

Rup Chan, a truck driver, said he heard the sound of explosions twice.

"The first blast caused a wall of the factory to collapse and fall on a rickshaw with two female passengers. I rushed to rescue them but then I heard another explosion," he said.

Witnesses and neighbours said 30 to 40 people were rescued alive from the factory by the locals at the initial stage of the fire. Many of the workers

were trapped inside the building and begging for help.

"Waving their hands through the windows of the factory, the workers were crying for help but those who were outside could not go near the building due to huge flames," said Gul Chan, a housewife of a nearby tin-shed house.

Selina Begum, another neighbour, said she saw a person fall onto an adjacent tin-roofed building after squeezing out of the small window of the building.

"It was around 7:00am. We rushed there and found him unconscious. We took him to hospital," she said.

But, she added, the locals could not save those trapped inside because of the extreme heat of the inferno.

Some survivors said they heard the sound of gas leaking before the explosion.

"As I finished my night-shift and was preparing to come out of the factory, I heard the sound of gas leaking at the pipeline inside," said Kamrul Hasan, a worker who suffered injuries.

Nineteen bodies were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Five were either brought dead or they died of their injuries at the hospital, according to DMCH sources.

Some relatives gathered near the factory with photos of workers not found among the dead or the injured.

Meanwhile, President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed their condolences to the families of the people who died in the fire incident.

INFERNO UNTAMED
The factory blaze also engulfed an adjoining five-storey building. Both the buildings are owned by Tampaco and situated on one compound.

There was no access to the buildings for an effective fire fighting as the compound with only one entry is surrounded by industrial and residential structures, said Jahurul Amin, deputy director of fire service, around 1:30am today.

The buildings are very long in shape and both have deposits of chemicals making fire fighting very difficult, he said.

A Buet expert team that visited the site in the afternoon said that the five-storey building too might collapse and warned the firefighters against attempting to enter it.

They were doing defensive fire fighting to ensure that the fire did not engulf any other adjoining buildings and structures, said Jahurul.

Around 50 families, including children, women and elderly persons who lived in tin-shed structures along the factory's boundary walls on both sides were seen stranded on nearby Station Road, since they had to leave their houses because of heat and falling debris of the collapsed factory

building.

"A neighbour's son died after a concrete slab from the four-storey building fell on him, and my house was smashed under another chunk," said an elderly Jahura Begum, who was among the stranded along with son, daughter-in-law and two grand children.

Autopsies on the bodies of the victims completed at DMC morgue around 1:00am today and process to hand them over to families has begun after that.

PROBE COMMITTEES, COMPENSATION

Three separate probe committees were formed to investigate the incident.

The Fire Service and Civil Defence Department formed a five-member probe body with its Deputy Director Badiuzzaman as the head. It will submit report in seven working days.

The BSCIC formed a three-member committee with engineer Md Shafiqul Alam, its regional director of Dhaka, as its head. The team has to submit its report within the next seven days, said the BSCIC in a statement yesterday.

The team has to find out the cause of the fire, determine responsibility and make recommendations.

Meanwhile, Gazipur district administration also formed a five-member probe committee led by Executive Magistrate Rehanul Islam. It will submit its report in 15 working days.

The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) also formed a three-member body, said its Inspector General Syed Ahmed. It will find out the cause of the incident, he said.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan visited the site around 4:30pm and said the government would take action against the owners of the factory and will file cases.

The probe teams will look into whether the boiler was inspected in time, said the minister.

Families of the deceased will get Tk 2 lakh each in compensation, said State Minister for Labour and Employment Mujibur Haque Chunnun while visiting the spot.

The ministry will also ensure proper medical treatment for the injured.

Established in 1978, the factory has around 350 workers working in three shifts, said workers and locals.

Some of the big names in the consumer market in Bangladesh are clients of Tampaco Foils, according to the company's website.

Tampaco Chairman Syed Mokbul Hussain was president of Bangladesh Flexible Packaging Industries Association from 1998 to 2002.

"After that his life changed. You know, he went to school again after that," coach Elshoubry said proudly.

His exploits have made him something of an Internet sensation, starting in a YouTube hit called "Impossible is Nothing" -- at youtu.be/aDdh2439hnU -- that has been viewed more than 2.3 million times.

Back in Egypt, Hamadtou is training two armless boys, aged 10 and 12, Elshoubry said.

"He wants to give those two boys the skills that no one could give him when he was small."

It's not boiler explosion

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packaging factory.

"We have gathered all information through our inspector, but we did not find any sign of a boiler explosion," said Mannan.

The inspector could not enter the boiler room due to scorching heat, but he only saw the boilers from a nearby building.

"When we can enter the room, we will be able to show you the real situation," Mannan said.

His version, however, runs counter to that of Lt Col Mosharrif Hossain, director (training, development & planning) of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

He told reporters on the scene around 4:00pm that the fire originated from a boiler explosion.

According to Mannan, a boiler explosion normally does not ignite a fire.

"There is no recorded incident of a fire breaking out from a boiler explosion in Bangladesh," he said, claiming that there was no incident of boiler explosion at Tampaco Foils until 7:15pm yesterday.

The fire broke out at the front building, where the main factory is situated and foils are produced, and there was

no boiler in the building, he said. "Boiler and cooling tower generator are in the building behind the main factory."

The fire spread out to the building that houses the boilers after lunch, he said. "A boiler can resist heat of up to 600 degree Celsius. If the heat remains between 300 and 400 degree Celsius, the main body would not melt. "We can show the body of the boilers to everyone."

One of the two boilers was overhauled last week and it is yet to resume operation.

"I talked with the operator of the other boiler today [yesterday] who told me that it was shut down at 3:00am [about three hours before the fire incident]," said Mannan.

Another operator was supposed to restart the boiler, which was overhauled in June.

"But the operator could not run it, as fire broke out before he reached the factory," the chief inspector said, adding that a boiler does not explode when shut.

"I don't know why the fire broke out, and it's not for me to find it out," he said adding: "The probe bodies will find out the actual reasons behind the fire."

Tragedy comes 3 days

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Gazipur yesterday.

"I was supposed to meet him [Rafique] at home. But now, I have to go there to bring his body," said Atiqul Islam, elder brother of Rafique.

Rafique, of Trisal upazila in Mymensingh, had been working for Tampaco Foils Ltd at the maintenance department for the six years, Atiqul said.

"Hearing about the incident, I tried to reach him over the phone but failed ... Later, I identified his body at a Tongi hospital," he added.

Twenty-four people, mostly workers, were killed and dozens more were injured in the fire. Family members and relatives of the victims thronged the site, Tongi Hospital, and Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The Daily Star talked to some of them.

Sisters Rozina Akhter, 22, and Tahmina Akhter, 20, of Ghanashyampur in Chunarughat of Habiganj had been working in garment factories for seven years and it was the main source of income for their family.

They had nothing to do with the factory or the fire but were at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Yesterday, they were on a rickshaw to go to a nearby bus stop to catch a vehicle to go to their village home. Suddenly, a wall of the factory fell on their rickshaw, leaving them and the rickshaw puller dead.

Learning about the incident, their father Abdul Hanif rushed to Dhaka. He had to identify their bodies at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

"We had a plan to get Rozina married soon and talks were going on in this regard ... But I now have to collect their bodies," he told The Daily Star at the DMCH.

Rickshaw-puller Rashed, of Sarisha in Ishwarganj upazila of Mymensingh, was the lone breadwinner of his seven-member family. He had been running his family pulling rickshaws in Tongi area for the last five years, said his sister Bedena Begum.

"The entire family's future in now

uncertain," she added.

"He [Rashed] had a plan to go home Sunday night to celebrate Eid," said Sujana, a cousin of Rashed.

Gopal Das, 25, of Baro Babri in Nababganj upazila of Dhaka, had been working as an assistant to an operator at the factory for the last four years, Brojen Das, an uncle of Gopal said.

He had been living with his mother Gita Rani Das. There were serious talks on him getting married soon. "Now there is no one to look after his mother," said Brojen.

Deceased factory worker Rafiqul Islam of Hossainpur in Kishoreganj was supposed to leave today to celebrate Eid with his family. He took his salary earlier and was supposed to get his bonus today.

He was on the graveyard shift last night.

Sakib Hossain, son of Rafiqul Islam, said he has a brother and a sister. "My brother is in class-X at a local school in Tongi."

He said as his mother was crying near the factory.

Deceased Al Mamun, 40, of Paschim Fuljhuri in Mathbaria upazila of Pirojpur, had been working at the factory for 10 years, Sagir Hossain, brother-in-law of Mamun said.

He had bought a small piece of land at Purba Arichpur in Tongi to build a home and was expected to celebrate Eid with his family, said Sagir.

Accused, held

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Station in connection to the incident.

The incident was probed thrice and the investigators pressed charges against 32 people, including Lutfozzaman Babar, former state minister for home, and Mufti Abdul Hannan, leader of banned Islamist militant outfit Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Huji). The charge framing was deferred nine times.

Of the accused, nine are still on the run, eight on bail and 14 in prison.

A class apart

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David Wetherill, and then to Germany's Thomas Rau, the wiry 43-year-old said he was elated.

"I'm just happy that I could come from Egypt to be here at the Paralympics and to play against a champion," he told AFP.

"I can't express what my heart is feeling: I'm too happy."

Hamadtou, from the port city of Damietta, was 10 when he was injured.

"After the accident, he stayed shut up at home for three years. He wouldn't go out," said his coach of the last 20

years, Hossameldin Elshoubry.

A family friend tried to put the depressed teen back on track through sport. He still had two good legs, so football seemed obvious.

"But football didn't work," Hamadtou said.

So Hamadtou tried table tennis, first by gripping the small paddle under the stump of his right arm.

"That didn't work either," he said, smiling.

Finally he attempted to clasp the racket handle in his mouth, much like someone might hold a flashlight when

their hands are busy.

Except that table tennis -- a lightning fast contest of whacking a ball back and forth over a tiny table -- is nothing like holding a flashlight.

Hamadtou, however, found a way.

Table tennis players need to throw the ball to hit a serve, so he plays without a right shoe, using his toes to scoop the ball and toss it up, perfectly positioned. He then uses his strong neck to transform his head into the equivalent of an arm and his mouth into a hand.

"It took me three years to learn," Hamadtou said.