

DINAJPUR BOILER BLAST 8 more victims die after 4 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Eight more people, including a third brother, succumbed to their injuries in the last 24 hours following a boiler explosion at a rice mill in Dinaipur sadar upazila on the night of April 19, bringing the death toll to 12. Of the remaining 18 people who were also severely scalded, nine are in critical condition in Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH). Except one, all of the victims worked on day-to-day contracts at Jamuna Automatic Rice Mill in Gopalganj village. The mill's manager, Ranjit Saha, 40, and Delwar Hossain, 32, passed away at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Of the others, Udoy Chandra Roy, 30, Shafiqul Islam, 20, Mukul Chandra Rai, 46, Munna, 32, and Dulal Chandra Roy, 38, died at RMCH and Ripon, 29, at M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital. Earlier, Delwar's brothers Rustam Ali, 40, and Mokshed Ali, 45, and

Anjali Rani Roy, 40, and Ariful Haque, 30, died at RMCH. Meanwhile, workers under the banner of Chatal Mill Workers Welfare Union formed a human chain in front of Dinaipur Press Club in the afternoon and handed over a memorandum to the deputy commissioner. Terming the deaths "murders", they demanded that the mill's owner be handed down exemplary punishment for negligence and Tk 5 lakh be provided to each victim as compensation. They also expressed concern over a case not being filed. Talking to The Daily Star, the mill's owner Subal Ghosh claimed that the boiler had been approved for use by the authorities concerned. A six-member probe committee of the district administration led by Additional District Magistrate Mahbubur Rahman yesterday got three more days to submit a report. They have already visited the spot and talked to some workers.

Fighting tobacco

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wholesalers and retailers. "From February the price is at its best," says Mozaffar. "It usually decreases slightly by the middle of May." Mozaffar currently realises a net profit of Tk 10 lakh per annum from lemons. In addition, he sells lemon saplings, 4,000 last year for up to Tk 20 each. "They will yield fruit once they reach three years of age," he says. His efforts to inspire others have met with success. According to local agriculture officials, over the last several years many tobacco farmers have switched to lemons; and lemons from Ramu are now supplied to markets in Comilla, Chittagong and Dhaka. "We have been discouraging farmers from growing tobacco," says Ramu upazila's agriculture officer Abu Masud Siddiqui. "Mozaffar Ahmed is a role model farmer in this community. He has personally initiated a 'green revolution' against tobacco cultivation, and throughout the district many regard him as an agricultural 'hero'." According to Abu Masud, there are currently more than 100 lemon groves

in Ramu upazila and adjoining areas. Kauarkhop union's chairman, fellow freedom fighter Nurul Haque, says much of the tobacco cultivation in Ramu was his. "Three years ago I moved away from tobacco," he says. "Mozaffar Ahmed inspired me so I learnt how to farm lemons instead." Other former tobacco growers in Naikkhangchhari and Tulatoli villages echoed Nurul's words. "We want to recommend Mozaffar Ahmed for the Bangabandhu Agriculture Medal," says ASM Shahrar, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Cox's Bazar. "We have always supported his efforts by providing advice and assistance as we can." Mozaffar's innovative efforts are far from completed. Recently, workers in his Char Haitupi orchard have been busy transforming lemon groves into multi-crop farms, by planting brinjal, tomatoes and species of gourd between the rows of lemon trees. Mozaffar also dreams of cold storage facilities, and perhaps a processing factory for lemons in Ramu.

Rising from Rana Plaza debris

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welfare fund where apparel exporters have to deposit 0.03 percent of their annual export receipts. It is also carrying out a feasibility study for introducing injury insurance schemes for workers after the Rana Plaza building collapse in Savar on April 24, 2013, which claimed the lives of more than 1,135 workers and left around 2,500 others injured. "The workers' safety improved significantly in the garment sector after the Rana Plaza building collapse," Srinivas Reddy, country director of the International Labour Organisation in Bangladesh, told this correspondent. Structural, electrical and fire safety inspection by the Accord and the Alliance helped strengthen workplace safety, he said. The ILO official, however, mentioned that the corrective action plans need to be completed as soon as possible to avoid recurrence of industrial accidents. Inspection and remediation of nearly 2,000 factories under the national initiative should also be completed soon, he said. Reddy further said some challenges still remain in ensuring labour rights at garment factories. There is mistrust between management and workers on some issues, and this should be addressed for building healthy industrial relations. Nazma Akter, president of workers' platform Sammilito Garment Sramik Federation, said the workers' rights should be enhanced further, as many

factories don't allow trade unions. On the progress in remediation of faulty factories, the Accord, a platform of 215 retailers and brands mainly from Europe, said 75 percent of the identified safety issues have been reported or verified as fixed. After inspecting 1,600 factories, the international agency said more than 300 of those completed over 90 percent of remediation while 48 factories accomplished the task till February. In its initial inspection, the Accord found less than 2 percent factories vulnerable. The Alliance, another inspection agency of 29 North American retailers and brands, said 71 of the 676 inspected factories substantially completed their corrective action plans. This number would more than double in a few months, it said in a report last week. Seventy-three percent of all required repairs have been completed in Alliance member factories, and this includes 64 percent of all high priority repairs, it mentioned. Apart from inspection, the Alliance also trained several thousand workers on workplace and fire safety. Both the Accord and the Alliance were formed for five years, and their tenure will end in June next year. According to an estimate of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the average cost of remediation is \$500,000 at each factory. "Our progress in remediation is

more than 80 percent," said BGMEA Vice President Mahmud Hasan Khan. Talking to this newspaper, Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said, "The progress in improving the workplace is considerable." More than 1,500 factories, which are under the national initiative, should be inspected and remediated soon, he said. Besides, nearly 1,000 small enterprises, which are not members of any of the three agencies, should also be inspected and remediated in consultation with all stakeholders, Moazzem added. On the transformation of the sector, he said it experienced three types of reforms -- regulatory, support for victims, and inspection and remediation of factories. The government should take steps right now to set the remediation standards, as the tenure of the Accord and the Alliance is scheduled to end in June next year. "Bangladesh also needs to establish healthy industrial relations to address the issues of workers' rights," Moazzem said. Syed Ahmed, the immediate past director general of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, echoed Moazzem's words. He also mentioned that more than 500 trade unions are now active in the sector, and over 350 of those were registered after the Rana Plaza disaster.

CID to exhume Raudha's body today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Raudha Athif's father demands "logical and scientific explanation" for his daughter's death as the Criminal Investigation Department is set to exhume her body for a second autopsy today, 27 days after she was found dead. "I want to know the truth how my daughter died. I will believe only when the explanations are logical and scientific," Raudha's father Mohamed Athif said at a press conference held at Rajshahi Press Club yesterday morning. Athif, a physician, said he had seen strangulation marks on Raudha's neck that showed his 21-year-old daughter was killed. He also stood with a placard in hand demanding justice in front of the press club for several minutes. His daughter, a second year MBBS student of Islami Bank Medical College in Rajshahi, was found dead at her dormitory room on March 29. Raudha, who featured in Vogue India cover as a model, was buried at Hetomkhan Graveyard in the city on April 1. The CID has taken necessary preparations to exhume the body in the morning. Associate Professor Amirul Chowdhury of Forensic Department of Shaheed M Monsur Ali Medical College in Sirajganj has already arrived in Rajshahi to lead the newly formed three-member medical board for the autopsy to be held at Rajshahi Medical College morgue. Other members of the committee are associate professors Mahbub Hafiz and Hafizur Rahman. Athif yesterday told the press briefing that he was trying to include his own forensic experts in the medical board. He also described her mother's appeal for not exhuming the body as an emotional statement. "The autopsy is required for justice. Even as her father it was not easy for me to agree to a second autopsy and I am showing courage to seek explanations," he said. He termed the first autopsy done on March 31 by three forensic experts "unprofessional". The report did not mention any X-ray of her body and failed to explain many important conditions of her bones, arteries and soft tissues, he said. On forensic experts' explanation of bruises to be her birthmarks, he said, SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



Different workers' organisations, survivors and family members of Rana Plaza victims hold a candlelight vigil yesterday evening in memory of those who perished in the biggest industrial disaster in the country four years ago.

PHOTO: AKHLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

Stones hurled at minister's

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The district administration on Saturday midnight imposed section 144 in four upazilas -- Brahmanbaria sadar, Ashuganj, Bijoyganj and Sorail -- after local Awami League called hartal ahead of the minister's visit. Leaders and activists of local AL and its affiliated bodies in Bijoyganj became furious and enforced hartal after they came to know that lawmaker

Obaidul Muktadir of Brahmanbaria-3 constituency was not invited to the minister's programme. The administration deployed two platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh and members of the Rapid Action Battalion and Armed Police Battalion and additional 150 policemen in Bijoyganj for security. Additional District Magistrate in Brahmanbaria Mohammad Shahanur Alam said section 144 was imposed from



Colleagues taking Nabinagar Police Station OC Imtiaz Ahmed to safety after he was hit by a piece of stone that alleged Chhatra League activists hurled at the motorcade of Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sayedul Haque in Brahmanbaria yesterday.

6:00am to 12:00midnight as tension brewed ahead of the minister's visit. Activists of local Awami League took positions at several points in Chandura, defying section 144. When the minister's motorcade was passing by, agitated Chhatra League activists tried to bring out a procession holding up shoes, said Ali Arshad, officer-in-charge of Bijoyganj police. At that time law enforcers tried to stop them. As the protestors hurled stones, OC Imtiaz suffered injuries. Meanwhile, Minister Sayedul attended an event at Champak Nagar of Bijoyganj where he inaugurated Upazila Livestock Hospital around noon. Followers of local Lawmaker Obaidul Muktadir Chowdhury had taken positions near the clinic and staged a demonstration chanting slogans against the minister, reports our correspondent who was present there. On Thursday, they held a press conference where they announced a boycott of the minister's event and called for dawn-to-dusk hartal. The next day Chhatra League activists allegedly beat up the upazila livestock officer and vandalised his office. The central Chhatra League yesterday suspended the functioning of its Brahmanbaria unit due to its involvement in the chaos centring on the minister's visit.

Struggle on in haors

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"Around 5,000 villagers, including women, tried in vain to keep Shanir Haor from being inundated. The embankment of sacks of sand and bamboo gave way to floodwater," said Borhanuddin, general secretary of Shanir Haor Unnayan Committee. Birendra Das, a farmer of Harinakandi village in Tahirpur, said, "I thought I would be able to save crops on five acres of land in Shanir Haor. The paddy on my other land already went under water. This was my last hope." The grieving farmer added that he did not know how he would be able to feed his three children and parents without any harvest. There are 22 haors, including Shanir Haor, in Tahirpur. According to Water Development Board of Tahirpur, Boro paddy has been cultivated on around 22,000 acres of land in Shanir Haor. An unusually early flashflood struck as early as late March in entire haor region of Bangladesh's northeast and damaged Boro crops in 1.8 lakh hectares of land in Sunamganj, Netrakona, Moulvibazar and some other adjoining districts.

Conservative estimates put the loss of rice at half a million tonnes. According to statistics disclosed by the government yesterday, around 1,276 tonnes of fish and 3,844 ducks died in the haors where the level of dissolved oxygen dropped. **BAEC'S TEST RESULTS** Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) is expecting to get its test results today on possible causes of deaths of fish, ducks and other aquatics. A 10-member team of experts from the BAEC that collected samples of water, soil, dead fish and ducks, and water hyacinth from five haors and a river in Sunamganj returned to the capital yesterday. "We will be testing, among other things, presence of radioactive materials in the samples at our Atomic Energy Centre in Dhaka and hope to get the results by tomorrow [Monday]," the BAEC team led by its member (Physical Science) Dilip Kumar Saha told The Daily Star yesterday. Dilip added that in one of the five haors -- Dekhar Haor -- he measured water with a hand-held radiation

survey metre and found the water's radiation within permissible level. He said the test was not complete and results on all samples from the lab tests had to be in hand before drawing any conclusion. The samples were collected from Tanguar, Dekhar, Matian, Karchar and Halir haors and also from the Surma river -- all in Sunamganj. **PRESS BRIEFING** Addressing a press briefing in the capital yesterday, Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud told journalists that necessary initiatives, including communication with India, would be taken if it was found there are radioactive materials in the water. A BAEC team was working on it, and it would be known only after the test, he said, declining to comment any further. The issue of water contamination from a possible source of uranium came to the fore following recent public outcry across the border on exposed uranium pits in India, which are close to Sunamganj, allegedly causing death of fish in Meghalaya's Ranikor river. Our correspondents from Sylhet and Moulvibazar contributed to this report.

Still waiting for justice

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sheets -- one for murder and the other for building code violation. Of the accused, Rana, his parents -- Abdul Khaleque and Morjina Begum -- and 34 others were charged with causing the victims' death while four others were accused of sheltering Rana and helping him flee. Three government officials were also indicted in the murder case relating to the worst-ever industrial disaster of the country. The government, however, had not given permission for including them in the charge sheet. The trial was supposed to begin on September 18 last year. But the trial was yet to begin as the trial proceedings of seven accused were stayed earlier by the High Court following writs challenging the legality of the order for framing charges against them in the murder case. Additional Public Prosecutor Anwarul Kabir Babul told The Daily Star that the trial proceeding was only stayed for seven accused, but the whole proceedings remained halted. Prime accused Rana, Jamsedur Rahman and four others are in jail while

seven are absconding. Twenty-seven others including Rana's parents are on bail. In the case filed over "violation of building codes" in the construction of Rana Plaza, a Dhaka court on June 14 last year, framed charges against Rana and 17 others. But the trial could not proceed as several revisions challenging the order for framing charges were pending with two sessions courts. **Man survives** FROM PAGE 16 Years later, as he took up work and could afford meals, he found himself strangely keen on maintaining his unique eating practice, the report said. Butt, who earns Rs 600 a day by transporting things from one place to another on his donkey cart, has never fallen ill and is always looking to consume fresh wood and leaves. He said wood from Banyan, Tali and Suck Chain trees were his favourites. "He has never visited a doctor or any hospital. We are shocked how can a person not fall ill despite eating wood all these years," his neighbour Ghulam Mohammad said.

3.3 lakh poor to get relief

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with secretaries of all relevant ministries. The districts are Sunamganj, Kishoreganj, Sylhet, Netrakona, Habiganj and Moulvibazar. To support the flood-affected people, the government would need 35,000 tonnes of rice and Tk 50 crore initially, the minister added. On the other side, the government would ensure sales of rice at Tk 10 per kg and Tk 15 per kg respectively for middle-income and upper middle-class families who do not take relief. The secretaries of finance, agriculture, food, water resources, fisheries and livestock, and environment, among other officials, were present at the meeting held at the disaster management ministry with Maya in the chair. A high-powered committee has been formed headed by an additional secretary of disaster management with a joint secretary of all the ministries concerned as members. They would visit the affected areas and submit a report with recommenda-

tions in 15 days. Although the government has taken up the 100-day scheme, relief distribution would continue until the situation returns to normal and people could cultivate next year's crops, Maya said, adding that those people were dependant on one-time crops annually. He said the flash flood had affected more than 80 percent areas in one or two districts. Replying to a query, he added no such situations had been created so that the government would have to declare those districts disaster-prone areas. He however urged the leaders of all political parties to visit the affected districts and stand beside the victims. The minister also sought help from the media to publish reports based on factual data and information about the flash flood. Agriculture Secretary Mohammad Moinuddin Abdullah has meanwhile said there has been a loss of six lakh tonnes of rice in the six affected districts. But in the upland, a 0.35

percent increase in production is estimated due to raining, therefore the loss could be covered and the targeted annual production of 1.51 crore tonnes of rice could be achieved, he added. Water Resources Secretary Zafar Ahmed Khan said a scheme had been taken to see if the dams constructed in the 1960s could be upped by one metre keeping in mind the present reality of climate change. In another programme, Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud said his ministry had nothing to do at this moment but learning lessons from the disaster in the haor areas. "At this moment, what water resources ministry can do is to learn lessons from what has happened [in haor]. Apart from this, actually, [we] have nothing to do," the minister told reporters while replying to a question at a press briefing. He said certain matters should be evaluated whether the height of the embankments would have to be

increased or changes in the variety of the crops be brought after the catastrophe. Harvesting time was longer for the variety of rice -- BR-29 -- grown in haor areas, he observed. Terming the flash flood "unprecedented", the minister said the flood had occurred as the water level overtopped the dams. Although flash floods happened in this region, this time the flood hit earlier than usual, he noted. Prior to March 29, Cherrapunji in Meghalaya of India received 1,100mm of rainfall in nine days, while Sylhet and Sunamganj each received about 450mm and 500mm of rainfall respectively, he said, adding that the excessive rain was the reason for the untimely flood. On allegations of corruption in various projects of the Water Development Board in the haor areas, the minister said, "We are working on it to see if there were any irregularities in payment and other issues. If we find any allegations to be true, stern action will be taken."