



The exploded boiler at a factory of Multifabs Ltd in Gazipur's Kashimpur area.

PHOTO: ABU BAKAR SIDDIQUE AKAND

9 killed in Gazipur boiler blast

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 The DC said Tk 20,000 would be given to each family of the dead.

Abdul Alim, who was working in a nearby factory of Islam Knit Designs Limited, said glass windows of his factory shattered in the impact of the blast. Fire service official Akhtaruzzaman said the boiler room was on the ground floor of the four-storey build-

ing. Plaster fell off the walls and floors over the boiler room by the impact of the explosion.

At least 17 people died in three boiler blasts from January to April this year. Of them, 13 died in a single incident in Dinajpur, according to The Daily Star reports.

A boiler is a closed tank in which water is heated. The main function of it

is to generate steam for space heating, sterilisation, drying, humidification and power generation. And the government's lack of inspection capabilities of this widely used equipment is evident in the string of fatal accidents.

For the 5,000 odd authorised boilers in the country, there are six inspectors designated to examine them once a year.

All rivers overflowing

FROM PAGE 1
 The two rising rivers inundated several hundred villages in Zakiganj, Kanaighat, Fenchuganj, Beanibazar, Golapanj and Osmaninagar upazilas in the last seven days. Besides, Goainghat and Companiganj upazilas were hit by flash floods due to the onrush of water from the hills of Meghalaya.

Some areas in Sylhet Sadar upazila also went under water, but the situation was not as grave as in some other upazilas.

Sirajul Islam, executive engineer of WDB in Sylhet, said flood water might continue to rise for some more days due to heavy rain in the Barak basin.

Syed Ahmed Chowdhury, a Met official of Sylhet meteorological department, said the district might experience heavy rain till Friday and the flooding might take an alarming turn and cause landslides in hilly areas.

Earlier this year, Sylhet suffered a huge loss as the Boro crop was damaged due to flash floods in haor areas. The district is now faced with another loss as the Aush paddy on around 3,000 hectares of land has been inundated, said district administration

officials.

At least 161 primary and 13 higher secondary schools were shut. Around 100 flood-hit families took shelter at nine shelter centres opened by the district administration.

Rahat Anwar, deputy commissioner of Sylhet, said the administration was considering the situation as a natural disaster.

A total of 128 tonnes of rice was distributed in six upazilas and Tk 2.77 was given to flood-hit families as part of the government's relief initiative, he said, adding medical teams were formed in each upazila to monitor the health condition of the victims, especially the children.

MOULVIBAZAR

The flood submerged 29 unions in the district's three upazilas.

"We've been confined to our house since the Eid day [June 26] when water entered the home," said Husna Begum, 36-year-old housewife from Bhuksimul area of Kulaura.

Misbah Uddin, 45, of the same area said locals couldn't cook food in their houses for the last couple of days as those went under water.

Like in Sylhet, Moulvibazar also saw

a similar calamity in March when the Sonai, Kontinala, Juri and Kushiara rivers swelled, causing flash floods in the district. Farmers incurred a huge loss due to the damage of Boro crops.

The latest flood has come as another blow to the growers as their seedbeds of Aus and Aman crops have already been inundated.

The government disbursed relief materials to the affected people through various disaster management programmes, but the allocation was still inadequate, said Borolekha UNO SM Abdullah Al Mamun.

AFM Kamrul Islam, chairman of Kulaura Upazila Parishad, called upon the government to declare the region as a disaster area and take immediate steps to alleviate the sufferings of the flood victims.

Abdul Alim, primary education officer in Moulvibazar, said 152 primary schools were closed in the district.

Forty-eight secondary schools were shut and eight of them were being used as flood shelters, said ASM Abdul Wadud, district education officer of Moulvibazar.

Farhad Mazhar

FROM PAGE 1
 area. They had information the writer was travelling to Dhaka from Khulna, the police official told reporters at a press briefing outside Khulna's Phultala Police Station.

Farhad was kept inside the police station. He would be taken to Dhaka as his wife filed a general diary with Adabor Police Station after he had gone missing, the DIG said.

Earlier in the day, Farhad's family claimed the writer had been kidnapped around 5:30am outside his home.

Since then, speculations ran rife over the incident.

DIG Didar said, "He [Farhad] was travelling alone and seemed to be in good health. He seemed completely alright. He was carrying a bag which had in it an extra shirt, towel, mobile charger, some money and other necessary things people usually carry during journey."

Khondokar Rafiqul Islam, commanding officer of Rab-6, said they tracked Farhad's mobile phone and got to know that he had been to a restaurant in Khulna's New Market area yesterday.

Later, the law enforcers enquired local bus operators and found out that he boarded a Dhaka-bound bus.

Asked whether he was kidnapped as claimed by his family, DIG Didar said it did not look like a case of abduction.

In reply to another query from a reporter whether the writer was staging a drama, the officer said, "Initially, it appears to be so. But we can be sure about it after investigation."

No one was arrested over the incident.

Meanwhile, Farhad's wife Farida Akter has expressed happiness over the "rescue" of her husband.

"We are waiting eagerly to meet him," she told The Daily Star last night.

Earlier at a press briefing at their Adabor home, Farida claimed that her husband was kidnapped early yesterday.

"I got a phone call from his [Farhad] number at 5:29am. He told me that some people were picking him up. He said they would kill him," she said.

Farhad again called her from his number around 6:21am and requested her to arrange Tk 30 to 35 lakh to be paid as ransom. The family received three to four more phone calls from Farhad. The last one came at 7:30pm, she said.

At the briefing, Farhad's daughter Chaumtoli Huq said, "It is a matter of concern that a man like my father has gone traceless."

Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Zafrullah Chowdhury, who was also present at the briefing, demanded his safe return.

Farida said Farhad usually gets up early in the morning and does his writings on computer. She saw him doing that yesterday as well before he went "traceless".

On being informed, police visited his house. Footage of CCTVs installed near there shows Farhad leaving the place alone and there was no one with him, said Biblob Kumar Sarker, deputy commissioner of Tejgaon division police.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed yesterday alleged that Farhad was kidnapped by the law enforcing agencies.

"The government knows about the kidnapping of Farhad Mazhar and it's the law enforcement agencies who were behind it," he said at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan central office.

He said the government "targeted" Farhad as "it fears his write-ups".

Police and Rab worked throughout the day to find him out on being informed by his family that he went missing.

Angela Merkel overshadows party ahead of September polls

AFP, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday formally launches her campaign to win a fourth term in a September parliamentary election more likely to be decided on personality than policy.

Challenger Martin Schulz of the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) is leading his campaign with "more social justice", promising reforms to tax, unemployment benefits and childcare after having just succeeded with a push to legalise same-sex marriage.

Merkel's centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has so far failed to counter its opponents' focused campaign with a unifying policy theme of its own.

Social media users last week mocked party secretary-general Peter Tauber's slogan "For a Germany where we live well and gladly", after he transformed the initial letters of the German phrase into an unpronounceable Twitter hashtag: #fedidwgugl.

Schulz, struggling to catch up with Merkel in the polls, last week shocked observers by accusing the chancellor of systematically refusing to debate him on the future of the country.

But the lacklustre CDU campaign does not appear to have hurt the re-election prospects of the veteran leader dubbed "Mutti" (Mummy) by German voters.

After a brief spell between January and March when Schulz, a newcomer on the German political landscape, surged into the lead, the former European Parliament president has fallen far behind Merkel as the preferred candidate in polls by public broadcaster ARD.

Rallying around a trusted leader is a long tradition for the CDU, whose simple "No experiments!" campaign posters for Konrad Adenauer's reelection in 1957 remain a touchstone of German political culture.

Merkel's mentor, recently-deceased former chancellor Helmut Kohl, was accused of transforming the CDU into a "chancellor electing society" during his 16-year reign.

Uttara blaze

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 Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence, said the fire spread swiftly as the restaurant had been decorated with many flammable materials.

Meanwhile, a three-member probe committee led by Deputy Director Debasish Bardhwan has been formed to investigate the incident and it has been asked to submit a report within 15 working days.

Speaking to this correspondent, Noor-e-Alam Siddique, officer-in-charge (OC) of Uttara East Police Station said that the police were at the scene with the fire service. "If the probe committee finds anyone at fault then a case will be filed," he added.

Shafiqul Islam, station officer of Fire Service in Uttara, said the hotel lacked adequate fire safety equipments. A notice was served to the hotel authorities a month ago in this regard but they did not act on it.

Manager Sohel however said they did not get any such notice.

Anwar Hossain, deputy assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence headquarters told The Daily Star that the interior decoration of the building had synthetic, wooden and plastic materials which helped the fire to spread quickly.

Unclaimed

FROM PAGE 16
 Khan Mohammad Bilal, CEO of Dhaka South City Corporation, said no one had informed him about the water logging problem at the Jurain graveyard. "I will look into the matter."

Of the graveyards in the capital, the Jurain graveyard is of 17 acres, Azimpur 33 acres, Mirpur 67 acres and Bosila 80 acres.

Mahmudul Hasan, an official of Anjuman Mufidul Islam, said the organisation had sent a letter to the DNCC on June 8, asking for permission to bury unclaimed bodies at the Mirpur Intellectual Graveyard and Bosila Graveyard.

But it did not get the permission yet. Contacted, Annisul Huq, mayor of the DNCC, told The Daily Star that the authority would allow Anjuman Mufidul Islam to bury unclaimed bodies at Bosila and Mirpur graveyards.

Asked about the letter from Anjuman Mufidul Islam on Sunday evening, Mesbahul Islam, chief executive officer of the DNCC, said, "I heard about the matter two hours ago when an official of Anjuman Mufidul Islam called me. The letter might have been received by my office, but it was not brought to my notice earlier."

On an average, Anjuman Mufidul Islam buried as many as 1,500 bodies a year between 2007 and 2015.

In desperation

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 "I went to the house of the girl. Her parents produced a cousin of her as bride in front of me. I understood they were faking it as I quizzed the girl [cousin] and asked them to produce the genuine bride," Abu Nasar said.

Bithi then told him that she didn't want to marry at this age and expressed her wish to continue her studies.

To ensure that the illegal marriage doesn't take place, the UNO then took an undertaking from Bithi's father Bellal Hossain, a day labourer at Moheshpur village of Kalihati upazila in Tangail, that he would not marry off his daughter until she reached 18.

"I also assured the family of bearing all expenditure of the girl's education," he said.

But that didn't help Bithi.

When this correspondent visited her at her house yesterday, she said her family had become very angry when she objected to the marriage.

A class nine student of Jetendra Bala Girls School at Elenga, she dreams of taking admission to a polytechnic institute after passing Secondary School Certificate exams.

"My relatives, especially [paternal] uncles, pressed me to agree to marry the next day as the UNO left the house."

When she still opposed the mar-

riage, her mother hurled abuse at her, beat her up and threw a kitchen knife at her.

The sharp object missed the target. In the heat of the moment, Bithi picked it up and cut her tendons on the left hand.

She was immediately taken to a private clinic. Following treatment, she returned home on Sunday night, family members said.

Bithi's mother Salma Begum said poverty had made them to go for her daughter's early marriage.

Konika Mollick, women affairs officer in Kalihati, told The Daily Star yesterday that she was following up the case. She had not taken any statement of the girl but staff of her office went to the girl's house.

When asked why people responsible for the incident were not punished, the UNO in Kalihati said he was not allowed to run a mobile court as a case linked with a dispute over who would be having the authority to run mobile courts was being heard at the apex court.

Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kalihati police, said police had not received any complaint in this regard yet.

"Necessary steps will be taken after a complaint is lodged."

Qatar gets two days

FROM PAGE 16
 The crisis has raised concerns of growing instability in the region, home to some of the world's largest energy exporters and several key Western allies who host US military bases.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel called for "serious dialogue" to end the crisis.

"We are worried that the distrust and the disunity could weaken all the parties concerned as well as the entire peninsula," said Gabriel, who will visit Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

TRUMP CALLS LEADERS

Riyadh and its supporters have already severed air, sea and ground links with Qatar, cutting off vital routes for imports including food.

They also ordered Qatari citizens to leave their territories and took various steps against Qatari firms and financial institutions.

It is unclear what further measures will be taken if Qatar fails to meet the demands, but the UAE's ambassador to Russia Omar Ghobash warned last week that further sanctions could be imposed.

As well as expelling Qatar from the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council, Riyadh and its allies could tell their economic partners to choose between business with them or with Doha, he told Britain's Guardian news-

paper.

Qatar has long pursued a more independent foreign policy than many of its neighbours, who tend to follow the lead of regional powerhouse Saudi Arabia.

Doha has said it is ready for talks to end the crisis. Kuwait, which unlike most of its GCC neighbours has not cut ties with Qatar, has been heading up mediation efforts.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has also called for compromise and hosted senior Gulf officials, but his efforts have been undermined by remarks from President Donald Trump apparently supporting Riyadh's position.

Trump spoke separately on Sunday with the Saudi king, Abu Dhabi's crown prince and the Qatari emir on his concerns over the dispute, the White House said.

Trump "underscored that unity in the region is critical," the statement said, but also "reiterated the importance of stopping terrorist financing and discrediting extremist ideology."

Egypt said it would host the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain on Wednesday to discuss the crisis.

The 13 demands have not been officially published, but a Kuwaiti diplomatic source confirmed yesterday that the list as it has appeared in the media was genuine.

China calls

FROM PAGE 2
 Trump, who berated Beijing over trade during the US election campaign, also "reiterated his determination to seek more balanced trade relations with America's trading partners".

While there was no mention of the warship in the White House statement, it said the two leaders discussed "a range of other regional and bilateral issues of mutual interest" and indicated the two would meet at the Group of 20 summit in Germany this week.

The recent tensions marked a sharp reversal in tone from April, when Xi travelled to Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida for a first face-to-face meeting that Trump later said had helped build an "outstanding" relationship.

Bonnie Glaser, director of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank, said it was possible that during the call Xi would agree to take

some of the steps Trump has demanded to pressure Pyongyang.

"I think that Xi is keen to keep Sino-US relations on an even keel," Glaser told AFP. "Of course, he can't appear to be making concessions or taking steps in response to US pressure."

A GROWING CHINESE PRESENCE

The latest US "freedom of navigation" exercise came as Beijing continues muscular efforts to cement its claim to nearly all of the South China Sea, parts of which are also claimed by Taiwan and Southeast Asian nations including the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam.

China has rapidly built reefs in the area into artificial islands capable of hosting military planes.

On May 25, the USS Dewey guided-missile destroyer sailed less than 12 nautical miles from Mischief Reef -- part of the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, south of the Paracel Islands.

2 'criminals' killed

FROM PAGE 16
 battle, Sohel was hit by bullets and died on the spot, Fahim added.

Rab also claimed to have recovered a pistol, a revolver and five bullets from the spot.

The body of Sohel was sent to Feni Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Ekramul, also the president of Fulgazi upazila unit Awami League, was shot and burnt to death in his car in broad daylight on May 20, 2014.

A murder case was filed with Feni Model Police Station, accusing Mahtab Uddin Chowdhury Minar, president of Fulgazi upazila unit BNP, and 30 to 35 unknown people.

Later, AL leader Jihad Chowdhury was arrested on May 25 the same year as one of the masterminds behind the murder. The arrest was made a day after Rab had said Jihad, a close aide to Feni-2 AL lawmaker Nizam Hazari, along with Abidul Islam Abid and Sohel masterminded the murder.

According to the suspects' confession, Abid, a cousin of Nizam, shot Ekramul twice from close range, while Sohel asked some of the attackers to set Ekramul's car ablaze to confirm his death.

On October 9, 2014, Rab detained Sohel in connection with the killing of Ekramul and handed him over to

police.

Sohel was released from jail on bail around one and a half months ago, said Feni Sadar Police Station OC.

In another incident, an alleged robber, Idris Ali, 32, was killed in a "gunfight with police in Rangpur's Mithapukur upazila early yesterday, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

Idris, of Mominpur village of the upazila, was accused in nine cases of robbery and snatching filed with Mithapukur Police Station, said Moazzam Haq, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Police arrested Idris on Sunday evening while he was preparing for committing a robbery, the police official said.

Cleaning information from Idris, police along with him went to recover firearms. When their vehicle reached near Joyrampur village around 3:00am, cohorts of Idris opened fire and snatched Idris, the OC said.

Police then fired back, triggering the "gunfight". After the gun battle, police found the body of Idris lying on the ground, while his aides managed to flee, the police official added.

AFP, Damascus

The Syrian army yesterday unilaterally announced a halt to fighting in the country's south that would coincide with a new round of peace talks in the Kazakh capital Astana.

The army statement, carried on state news agency SANA, said hostilities would stop in the southern provinces of Daraa, Quneitra, and Sweida.

"In order to support the peace process and national reconciliation, a cessation of hostilities took hold at 12:00 pm (midday) on July 2 and will last until midnight on July 6," the statement said.

The freeze was not expected to include fighting against the Islamic State group.

The Syrian Observatory for Human

Rights, which has a wide network of sources on the ground, confirmed to AFP that fighting "almost completely stopped" across the mentioned territory.

The army did not specifically refer to the Astana talks, which opens today and are expected to last for two days.

The areas mentioned, however, form one of the four de-escalation zones agreed upon in the last round of negotiations in the Kazakh capital in May.

Violence decreased markedly across all four zones in the first few weeks after the deal was announced, but it had recently ramped up in Daraa.

Rebels and government troops have exchanged fire in the southern provincial capital by the same name.

Syrian army declares ceasefire in south ahead of peace talks