

Ahead it's all dark

Families at a loss as breadwinners die in Gazipur boiler blast

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The sole bread earner of an eleven-member family, Gias Uddin, a boiler mechanic at Multi-Fabs Dyeing Ltd in Gazipur, has been put in his final resting place following Monday's boiler explosion.

Until Monday, Gias' large family, which included his four brothers, two sisters, father, mother, wife and an eighteen-month baby girl, lived in a hand to mouth state with the monthly income of the deceased 30 year old.

"But Monday's boiler explosion has turned our world upside down with the death of my brother- the only bread earning member of our family. We are at a loss. How can we survive the sudden death of my brother?" Riad Uddin, the younger brother of Gias, told The Daily Star while taking the body to their village of Chandpur.

Riad said he had come to Dhaka two months ago and was now working as a helper at a tailoring shop where he earns a modest income.

"Apart from maintaining his own family, my brother looked after my five brothers and sisters who are school and college goers. My parents were also dependent on him as my father is not working." Riad added, his eyes full of tears.

Adding to the tragedy, Gias did not even get the chance to meet his wife,



A family photo of boiler mechanic Gias Uddin, one of the dead, with his one and a half year old daughter at his home.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

daughter or other members of his family this Eid as the factory owner didn't grant him leave.

"His little daughter was eagerly waiting for her father to visit her after Eid. But now she is alone. I never knew who will help him for the loss," Riad asked, the helplessness evident in his words.

The tales of the 12 others killed in the explosion are quite similar to Gias'. Most of them were also lone bread earning members of their respective families, report our correspondents from the spot.

Of the deceased, Ershadullah, 35, had gotten married to Sathi Akhtar just

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Rescuers and investigators go through the partially collapsed three-storey building of Multi-Fabs Dyeing Ltd in Gazipur's Noapara area yesterday morning. A boiler of the factory exploded Monday night, killing 13 people and injuring at least 50 others.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Recipe for disaster

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from a German company and installed it on the ground floor of the factory building in 2005.

He further said that he didn't feel it necessary to replace the boiler, as the lifespan of such equipment is more than 25 years.

Seeking anonymity, an official at the Office of Chief Inspector of Boilers, said the factory on June 19 applied for inspection of the boiler whose certified period expired on June 24.

"We have learnt that the boiler exploded because of excessive pressure and mishandling," added the official.

Maj AKM Shakil Newaz, director of the Fire Service and Civil Defence, said no safety measures were taken in the place where the boiler was set up.

"An RCC [reinforced concrete] wall was supposed to be around the boiler as part of safety measures. But the wall that was found to be weak," Shakil said.

He suggested that the authorities engage experts to examine the building and find out whether it can be used after the explosion.

The fire service concluded the rescue operation yesterday evening, he said.

Talking to The Daily Star, State Minister for Labour Mujibul Haque Chunni said it is obvious that there was negligence on the part of the factory authorities.

"The boiler's expiry date was June 24. Why did they operate it even after that?"

The minister said a case was filed over the boiler explosion and punitive action would be taken against those responsible.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of officials at the chief inspector of boilers' office, a government agency under the industries ministry, said they are suffering from a huge manpower crisis and it's almost impossible for the inspectors to visit all the boilers every year.

At present, only six inspectors are designated to examine more than 5,000 authorised boilers across the country.

It usually takes an inspector a day to complete inspection of a boiler, which means it would take them 840 days to complete one round of inspection. And this doesn't include around 20,000 unauthorised boilers.

The agency is comprised of the chief inspector of boilers, a chief inspector

three deputy chief inspectors, and six inspectors – three in Dhaka, two in Chittagong and the other for Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur regions.

Besides, there is a crisis of trained boiler operators in the country.

Earlier on April 19, at least 17 people were killed and 30 others injured in a boiler explosion at Jamuna Automatic Rice Mill in Dinajpur.

WITNESSES' ACCOUNTS

Joyal Abedin was transporting goods on a trolley on the third floor of the three-storey factory building on Monday evening.

Suddenly, there was a loud bang and the building started shaking. Plasters began falling from the ceiling and shards of glasses were all around.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself lying on a hospital bed with several parts all over his body.

Labourer Ismail Hossain was working near the main factory gate at that time.

"I heard a loud bang, and then the place got covered in dust within moments. I could hardly see anything."

Then I ran to the nearby garment building," said the 38-year-old man who was hit by shards of glass in legs.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (revenue) of Gazipur Mahmud Hasan said they handed over six bodies to

He later phoned his brother who took him to a local hospital.

Ismail said there was not much open space on the factory compound. "Many would have been killed if the garment factory was operating fully at the time of explosion."

He said around 6,000 people, including staffers and labourers, work at the garment factory on a regular day. But on Monday evening, around 200 factory staffers and workers were there as most of the sections remained closed because of Eid.

Talking to this newspaper, Md Aktheruzzaman, deputy assistant director of the Fire Service and Civil Defence, said they recovered three more bodies from the debris yesterday evening.

"To my knowledge, nobody is missing," he said.

The 13 dead are Salman Shah, Al Amin Hossain, Mujibur Rahman, Biplob Chandra Shil, Mahbubur Rahman, Abdus Salam, Ershadullah, Monsur Ali, Nazrul Islam, Masud Rana, Amiruzzaman, Giasuddin and Arshad.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (revenue) of Gazipur Mahmud Hasan said they handed over six bodies to

their families.

At least 51 people were wounded in the explosion.

Dr Khan Md Sharif, director of Konabari Sharif General Hospital Private Ltd, said that of the injured, 35 were under treatment at the hospital while the rest were treated at Konabari Clinic and Diagnostic Centre.

Meanwhile, the Fire Service and Civil Defence formed a three-member committee led by its assistant director to find out the reason behind the blast.

Multifabs Chairman and MD Faruqi claimed the Office of the Chief Inspector of Boilers inspected the boiler every year and that his factory was certified by the Accord, the inspection, remediation and monitoring agency of more than 200 European retailers and brands, in January this year.

In reply to an email from The Daily Star, Rob Wyles, Accord's executive director for Bangladesh operations, said Multifabs Ltd is an Accord-covered factory.

"It was initially inspected for fire safety on 9th April 2014."

"On the day of the boiler explosion, 77 percent of the required fire safety remediation items had been verified

by Accord as completed. 82 percent of the overall remediation items had been verified as completed," Wyles said.

As per the Accord's fire safety inspection, boiler rooms at the factory needed to have fire separation system. The factory had completed this remediation and this was verified by the Accord engineers on 26 October 2016, he mentioned.

"Please note that the fire separation is to contain a fire in the event one occurs in the room the boiler is located. A fire separation (fire rated construction with fully protected and sealed opening) does not address the issue of a boiler explosion."

"The Accord will continue to work with the factory and our signatories to fully remediate the Multifabs facility," Wyles added.

Following the explosion, the management closed the factory for an indefinite period. Five other factories in the area were also shut.

The labour ministry will give Tk 5 lakh and the factory authorities Tk 3 lakh in compensation to each of the families of the dead.

[Our Gazipur Correspondent contributed to the report.]



Farhad Mazhar holding his wife and daughter outside the capital's Adabari Police Station yesterday. He was taken to the police station after being rescued from Jessor on Monday night. Afterwards, he was produced before a metropolitan magistrate court for recording his statement. Later, his family members took him to a hospital.

completely traumatised after the incident and he could not remember many things during interrogation.

Farhad told police that he woke up early in the morning for doing his writings like other days. He went out of his house around 5:00am to get medicine for his dry eyes from a 24/7 pharmacy in front of Sulhwaray Hospital.

He was picked up when he reached near Shyamoli intersection, the police official quoted him as saying. "They kept him on the footwell between two rows of seats on the microbus and hurled abusive words during the journey."

Tracking his phone, police found his presence in six areas --Gabol, Manikganj, Aricha, Faridpur, Jessor and finally in Khulna.

"Before releasing him around 7:30pm near Khulna Shabri area, the abductors gave him a bus ticket and asked to go back to Dhaka. They said they would be following him."

Farhad then went to a restaurant near Khulna New Market to have a meal before boarding the Hanif Paribahan bus.

Meanwhile, Khondoker Rafiqul Islam, commanding officer of Rab-6, said Farhad Mazar told the elite force that he was tied up in a sack for some time during the microbus.

"CCIV footage in Dhaka shows him leaving Dhaka on a microbus. The vehicle is yet to be traced," he told The Daily Star.

Farida Akther had filed an abduction case on Monday night saying her husband was kidnapped by unknown persons. DB Joint Commissioner Abdul Baten said they would investigate the case based on the judicial statement.

Hours after Farhad reportedly went missing, his wife at a press conference at their house said she got a phone call from his number around 6:21am, "He called me from his 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 him. The last one was at 7:30pm, she said.

Demands

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the crisis. We are trying to act mature and resolve the matter."

Gabriel, who visited Saudi Arabia on Monday, said he saw signs emerging of a threat to invest in "internationalised" industries in the discussions and to get all sides involved in the dispute around the negotiating table.

The UN Security Council has told Qatar to sort out its differences with its Gulf neighbours. China's ambassador said Monday, that the top US body would not get involved in the dispute.

Qatar Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani met with Security Council members on Friday to discuss the rupture in ties with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt.

Chinese Ambassador Liu Jieyi, who heads the council presidency this month, said "the best way would be (that) the countries concerned work out a solution through dialogue and through consultations among themselves, because we don't see any other alternative to that."

"Whatever the countries can do to mend the fences and to get back to good neighbourly relations, that would certainly be welcomed by China," said Liu.

Al-Jazeera reported that the foreign minister had asked Security Council members to urge Saudi-led nations to lift restrictions on the use of airspace and other transportation links with Qatar.

Meanwhile, Qatari vowed to go ahead with its gas production yesterday. The country is the world's leading producer of Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) and yesterday the head of state-owned Qatar Petroleum said it was planning a significant production increase over the next few years.

Saad Sherif Al-Kaabi told a press conference that the emirate intends to produce 100 million tonnes of natural gas a year by 2024, up 30 percent from current levels.

"This new project will strengthen Qatar's leading position," Kaabi said. "We will remain the leader of LNG for a very long time."

Some officials have suggested if Qatar does not cooperate Riyadh and its allies could tell foreign companies to choose between doing business with them or with Doha.

'Blindfolded, taken away on microbus'

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Metropolitan Magistrate Ahsan Habib recorded his statement. His wife Farida Akther and other relatives were present at the courtroom.

The family took him to Birsden Court from the court as he was feeling sick. Farida's sister Sayida Akther told The Daily Star around 9:00pm.

A joint team of Rab-6 and Abhoyganj police in Jessor found Farhad on a bus in Jessor around

11:30pm on Monday, more than 18 hours after he reportedly went missing from outside his home.

Later, he was immediately taken to Phulmoni Police Station in Khulna and from there to Adabari Police Station in Dhaka around 8:00am. He was shifted to the office of Detective Branch where top officials interrogated him.

The writer was at the DB office from 10:00am to 2:30pm before being sent to the Metropolitan Magistrate's Court.

Farhad's statement before the magistrate and police officials, however, contradicts a statement of Khulna Range DIG Didar Ahmed that he was travelling alone and apparently in his foot.

A mid-ranking police official, who interrogated Farhad in DB office, told The Daily Star that the writer was carrying a bag which had it in an extra shirt, towel, mobile charger, some cash and other necessary things people usually carry during a journey." Didar told journalists around Monday midnight.

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