

# Two killed in chemical container explosion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people were killed in an explosion near a welding shop on the Dhaka-Khulna highway in Jessore's Kismat Noapara area last night.

The blast happened around 8:00pm when some workers were welding on a covered van, loaded with chemical containers, parked near the shop, said Parimol Chandra Kundam, assistant director of Jessore fire service.

The explosion occurred probably because vapour of the chemical came in contact with sparks from welding electrodes, he added.

The identities of the victims could not be confirmed till filing of the report at 1:30am today.

Azmal Huda, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said the workers were repairing the vehicle.

Another covered van, two trucks and a car were burnt in the fire caused by the blast. Following the incident, traffic was disrupted on the road till 11:00pm, said the OC.

## Assistant pry

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of the movement, told The Daily Star.

After offering the teachers water and juice, the minister announced that the problem would be solved through discussions and the teachers would have to present the rationale of their demand in the discussions. Then he would sit with the higher authorities of the government to solve the problem, he added.

His announcement, however, triggered a furore among a number of teachers who demanded that the minister make a specific declaration regarding their demand from the Shaheed Minar. Mostafizur left the place immediately.

Asked about the stance on this group of teachers, Shahinur said general teachers have been aggrieved over many other issues.

"The teachers' organisation made the decision [calling off of the strike] unanimously. If anybody still wants to continue the agitation, it will be their personal matter."

An hour later, the agitating teachers left the spot.

Under the banner of "Bangladesh Primary Assistant Teachers' Grand Alliance", several thousand assistant teachers of the government primary schools began their strike on Saturday with a one-point demand -- fixing the trained assistant teachers' grade next to the trained head teachers' grade.

There is a three-tier gap between the wage grades of assistant teachers and head teachers. The trained assistant teachers get salary under the 14th grade of the wage board whereas the trained head teachers get salary under the 11th grade.

At least 40 teachers, including some female teachers, fell sick in the last three days and some of them were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said leaders of the alliance.

"It is because of the bureaucratic red tape that created the wage discrimination. We were a step behind the headmasters several years back, but now we're three steps behind the headmasters," said Tapan Kumar Mandal, another leader of the alliance.

"We want an end of this discrimination. We want the government to reduce the wage difference between the teachers."

Leaders of some political parties expressed solidarity with the agitating teachers yesterday.

Since the country's independence till 2005, the difference between the wage grades of assistant teachers and headmasters were only one-tier. But it started to increase afterwards, the teachers said.

And without solving the problem, the Directorate of Primary Education has recently forwarded a proposal made by the Public Service Commission to the primary and mass education ministry for elevating the headmaster's grade to 10, they added.

The agitating teachers said if upgraded to the 11th grade, the basic salary of assistant teachers would increase to Tk 12,500 from Tk 10,200 in the 14th grade.



A stretch of the newly constructed Dhaka-Chittagong expressway at Mohipal in Feni. Construction of the country's first six-lane expressway was completed six months before schedule. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate it through a video conference on January 4.

PHOTO: ABU TAHER

# 'Safe water' in jar mostly unsafe

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The study found 1 to more than 1,600 MPN (most probable number) of E. coli in a 100-millilitre sample of drinking water. According to BSTI standards, it was supposed to be zero, says the paper of the study conducted by Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (Barc).

This is the first time that Barc tested the nutrition quality of bottled and jar water under a project styled "Qualitative Assessment of Bottled Drinking Water and Evaluation of Pesticides Residue at Raw, Washed and Cooked Vegetables."

Water samples were collected from 35 branded bottled water and 250 jars manufactured by 150 brands -- BSTI certified and non-certified --from 24 points of Dhaka from April to October this year and tested at SGS Bangladesh limited, a globally-accredited inspection, verification, testing and certification company.

Nothing harmful was found in any of the samples of bottled water.

Barc collected the samples from districts, including Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Barisal, Comilla, Rangpur, Pabna and Mymensingh. The water samples from the capital were taken from Farmgate, Karwan Bazar, Elephant Road, New Market, Chawkbazar, Sadarghat, Dhanmondi, Jatrabari, Motijheel, Malibagh, Mohakhali, Mohammadpore etc.

"E. coli was found in 98 percent jar water samples we collected from 24 points of the capital. Actually people are buying poison with money in the name of drinking water," Barc Director (nutrition) Md

Monirul Islam told The Daily Star.

He said such water is not properly treated and on many occasions, the jar water is produced by unauthorised companies.

The study paper also says almost all the jar water producers don't put any label -- indicating the level of minerals -- on the containers.

| ELEMENT                                       | BOTTLED WATER | JAR WATER  | BDS STANDARD |
|---|---------------|------------|--------------|
| TDS (mg/l)                                    | 8-280         | 62-474     | Maximum 500  |
| Chloride (mg/l)                               | 1.97-55       | 3.99-91.97 | Maximum 250  |
| Coliform (MPN/100 ml)                         | >1.8          | 17-1600    | Zero         |
| Fecal Coliform (MPN/100 ml)                   | >1.8          | 11-240     | Zero         |
| pH  | 6.36-7.70     | 6.73-7.75  | 6.4-7.4      |
| Nitrite (mg/l)                                | ND            | ND         | Zero         |
| Nitrate (mg/l)                                | 0.17-0.22     | -          | Maximum 4.5  |
| Lead (mg/l)                                   | ND            | ND         | Maximum 0.01 |
| Chromium (mg/l)                               | ND            | ND         | Maximum 0.05 |
| Iron (mg/l)                                   | ND            | ND         | Maximum 0.3  |
| *ND (Not Detected) MPN (Most probable number) |               |            |              |

Health experts said consumption of E. coli-contaminated water can also cause diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases.

Ruhul Amin Miah, professor of microbiology and immunology at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said, "E-coli are harmful for human body. They can infect the gastrointestinal tract of human body."

"People can face diarrhoea, stomach upset and acidity problem because of the bacteria. Those who have a weak immune system might have their blood infected with E. coli and it can turn serious," he said.

The demand for jar water is on the rise because of the growing population and proliferation of business centres, hotels and restaurants.

Taking advantage of this, a number of dishonest businessmen have installed home-based water purifying units in various parts of the city and across the country. Most of them

don't have the mandatory BSTI approval.

A water producing, bottling and marketing company requires licences from the BSTI, WASA, commerce ministry, environment ministry, labour ministry and city corporations concerned to run the business.

Zulfikar Ali, proprietor of United Enterprise, said, "Companies having BSTI certificate cannot sell unsafe water. But there are many companies which are selling water without any treatment. The government should take action against them".

He also said it would not be possible for any authentic company to sell

a jar of water for just Tk 20 to 30. The minimum cost would be Tk 70, which is much higher than the available price.

Mohidus Samad Khan, assistant professor of Department of Chemical Engineering, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), said, "In most of the cases, jar water is simply the water collected from WASA's pipes. In the last few years, jar water business has mushroomed in the capital and there is no monitoring of the system."

"Fecal E. coli is dangerous as it is found in toilet and dirty water. It is seriously hazardous for health."

Talking to this correspondent, Khairul Islam, country representative, UK-based WaterAid Bangladesh, said, "Water is a basic human right. However, a complete chaotic situation is prevailing regarding the jar water business. Except a few ones, all the jar water producing companies are not checking quality of the water, which is injurious to health."

He also said BSTI should first earn the trust of the people that they are doing their work properly."...most importantly, BSTI should ensure that the jar water companies have their own mechanism to check the water quality regularly."

Contacted, SM Ishaque Ali, director of certification marks of BSTI, said they have so far issued certificates to around 300 companies to sell water in PET bottles and jars.

"We regularly monitor the quality of water after collecting samples from the market. We fine the companies and cancel their licences whenever we find low quality water," he said.

## Police admit

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"It's a sensational issue and police were supposed to take it more seriously."

The observations came amid the allegation that officer-in-charge of Karnaphuli Police Station had refused to record the case against suspects.

Asked about the allegation against OC Sayedul Mostafa, the DC said, "I will inform the CMP commissioner of my findings."

Harun claimed that the plaintiff, brother-in-law of three of the victims, went to the police station two to three days after the incident and informed the OC of the robbery verbally without mentioning the incident of rape. He also mentioned the name of his village Borauthan.

The OC asked him to go to Patiya Police Station as Borauthan village was under the jurisdiction of that station, the DC said.

DC Harun also said, "We are yet to get the victims' medical test reports. However, doctors told us that evidence of rape was found on two of the victims."

"When I asked the victims about the rape incident, they told me that they had taken baths and washed their clothes the next morning. People do not know that evidence of rape should be preserved."

Replying to a query as to why police did not seek remand for the arrestees, Assistant Commissioner (Karnaphuli zone) Jahedul Islam said they preferred to hold Test Identification (TI) Parade before seeking remands for suspects as it helped them glean information.

At yesterday's briefing, Arefin Jewel, additional deputy commissioner (port zone) of the CMP, said police were investigating the case and that they needed time to find out the culprits. "And you [journalists] should help us in this regard."

Contacted, complainant of the case yesterday told The Daily Star that Karnaphuli police had showed negligence in recording the case when they first went to the police station.

But he refrained from answering the question whether he had mentioned his village name properly during his first visit to the police station.

In the early hours of December 13, four women -- three expatriates' wives and their sister-in-law -- were raped by four robbers in Shahmirpur village of Karnaphuli upazila. The criminals also took away Tk 87,000 in cash and gold ornaments worth Tk 3.5 lakh from the house.

Family members of the victims and local lawmaker alleged that OC Sayedul Mostafa refused to record the case twice and was forced to record the complaint four days after the incident following the intervention of local lawmaker and State Minister for Land Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed.

Police have so far arrested three suspects in connection with the incident.

Of the three, Md Sumon alias Abu has been identified by the victims. His TI parade will be held on December 28.

Locals of Karnaphuli had held demonstrations, demanding removal of the OC for his "negligence".

# Dev frenzy wakes a lonesome land

FROM PAGE 1

and everything has to be built which is a big challenge.

Kalapara is on the two-lane road from Barisal to Kuakata via Patuakhali. The power plant site in Dhankhali is connected to Kalapara by a narrow 14km-long unpaved road.

Although the roads are currently in bad shape, earth filling was going on to expand the road to a dual carriageway.

About 1,000 acres of the power plant area has been fenced off with wall topped by barbed wires and special security has been implemented at Key Point Installations.

A herculean work is going on inside where about 1,500 Chinese engineers and workers, including

women, work. About 2,000 local workers, including those affected by the land acquisition for the hub, have also been given jobs there.

The ground has been raised by seven meters at places by earth filling and the filling is still going on.

The structure of the first power plant has been completed where the machineries will be set up. Work on the construction of a silo to store the imported coal was going on.

Nasrul Hamid said five power plants would be set up inside the 1,000-acre area and those would produce about 6600MW. The remaining plants would be built in the vicinity.

A joint venture company, Bangladesh-China Power Company (Pvt) Ltd (BCPCL), has been formed

with North-West Power Generation Company Ltd (NWPGL) of Bangladesh, and China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC), for producing 1320MW of power.

The company was formed in March 2016. Land development work started that year and the construction work started in April.

Nasrul Hamid said for producing 9,000MW, around \$12 billion would be spent, which was equal to the cost of constructing four Padma bridges. He said this would be the biggest power plant hub in the country.

The state minister said when the Padma Bridge is complete, the economic activities sparked by it would require about 12,000MW of electric-

ity in the south-east area and the majority of it would be supplied from the Payra hub.

He said the power plant would use imported coal. They were in negotiations with Australia and Indonesia for importing coal. An expert had also been appointed for importing environment-friendly coal at a low cost, he said.

The state minister said the coal would be kept in the silo so that it did not pollute the local environment.

Construction work of the nearby port is still at the primary stage and when asked how the coal would be brought in, he said they would offload coal from ships on their own jetty.

He said the cost of electricity, to

be produced by the coal-based power plant, would be much cheaper, around \$.08 equivalent to Tk 6.40 kW/h.

The \$1.6 billion cost of the plant includes 20 percent equity and 80 percent loans. The Chinese Exim Bank will finance the project.

Nasrul Hamid said China and Bangladesh share 50-50 equity.

He said a big challenge in setting up the power plant was resettlement of the displaced people. For each displaced family, a house and a pond are being built. They will be trained so that they can get jobs in the project area. Educational institutions and medical facilities will also be built for them, the state minister said.

# China, Russia oppose UNGA resolution

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Despite an agreement signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar, more Rohingyas arrived almost every day since August 25.

Sunday's motion was passed by the 193-member General Assembly after its Fifth Committee (Budgetary Questions) approved funds for the new position of UN special envoy to Myanmar.

The United States, on December 21, imposed sanctions on 13 "serious human rights abusers and corrupt actors" including Myanmar general Maung Maung Soe, who oversaw this year's brutal crackdown against the Rohingya Muslim minority.

The US government, applying penal-

ties for the first time under a law passed last year, also targeted 39 other individuals and entities with sanctions that block their assets under US jurisdiction, bar most Americans from dealing with them and largely cut them off from the global financial system.

The military operations since August 25 "led to the systematic violation and abuse of human rights" of Rohingyas in Rakhine State that forced more than 655,000 Muslim minorities to flee Myanmar and take shelter in Bangladesh.

Myanmar authorities insist the campaign was aimed at rooting out Rohingya militants who attacked police posts on August 25.

The UN, US and international right

bodies have already described the Rohingyas as the most persecuted community in the world, calling the situation in Rakhine similar to "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing."

Earlier on November 16, the General Assembly's Third Committee, which focuses on human rights, voted 135 in favour and 10 against with 26 abstentions on the draft text that also called upon U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to appoint a special envoy on Myanmar.

China, Russia and eight other countries had also opposed the draft text.

For 15 years, the Third Committee annually adopted a resolution condemning Myanmar's human rights record.

The UN Security Council earlier also issued a statement calling on Myanmar to "ensure no further excessive use of military force in Rakhine state".

Last week, the UN special rapporteur for Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, said she had been banned from the country and that the government had cut off all cooperation with her.

Only in its first month, the crackdown killed some 6,700 Rohingya Muslims, including more than 700 children, according to Doctors Without Borders.

UN member states said on December 5 that Myanmar was likely committing "crimes against humanity" against its Rohingya minority,

while the UN rights chief voiced alarm over possible "elements of genocide".

Following a special session of the UN Human Rights Council, the nations overwhelmingly voted in favour of a resolution expressing grave concern over widespread abuses committed against the largely Muslim minority.

Thirty-three of the council's 47 members backed the text listing a long line of horrific abuses, including summary killings of children, rape, torture and large-scale forced displacement, which it said indicated "the very likely commission of crimes against humanity."

The resolution, brought forward by Bangladesh, also called on the govern-

ment to ensure justice for victims and access for UN investigators and aid workers.

It passed by 33 votes. Nine countries, including India, refrained from voting, while three others -- China, Burundi and the Philippines -- voted against it.

Addressing the special session, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini said Myanmar's security forces may be guilty of genocide against the Rohingyas.

Earlier this month, in an interview with BBC, Zeid said he would not be surprised if a court one day ruled that acts of genocide had been committed against the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar.