



# THE SILENT

PHOTOS: MD RAHAT KABIR

# KILLER

**NILIMA JAHAN**



**In addition to the unauthorised connections, the legal ones also need thorough inspections, as most lines are decades old.**

For 20-year-old housewife Ripa, it was a usual weekend morning. Her one-year-old daughter Ayesha had woken her up at around 7 am and was repeatedly pointing to the window, wanting to go outside. Abdur Rob, Ripa's husband, who worked at a nearby garments factory in Jamgora, Ashulia, told his daughter that he would take her out for a morning outing after breakfast.

Rob stepped out from the room to go to the bathroom of their rented ground floor flat of the two-storied building. "My husband stepped out and I saw my mother-in-law coming to my room, and then all at once, I heard the sound of something exploding. Within seconds, my husband and my mother-in-law caught on fire and started screaming. My father-in-law ran to extinguish the fire, but he caught fire too," recalls Ripa, lying on a bed in the intensive care unit (ICU) of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

"I was dumbfounded, and with my baby on my lap, I rushed to my husband. But he didn't let me touch him, and asked me to keep the baby safe. At one-point, he opened the main gate, ran out to the nearby field and started rolling around on

the ground desperately, with his whole body burning. But, that too, couldn't save him from the fire. Meanwhile, my baby and I were still inside," recalls Ripa.

The rest happened at the ICU of DMCH. Ripa's husband and parents-in-law died one after another, in front of her. Her baby is still fighting for her life having suffered third-degree burns. Having undergone such trauma, Ripa seems indifferent to her own health condition with the right side of her body severely burnt. The mother and daughter are still undergoing treatment.

According to Ripa, her kitchen had first caught fire just 15 days before this tragedy, from a leaky gas pipeline. Luckily, no one was injured at that time. "When we informed the landlord about the incident, he showed up with a mechanic. The mechanic rolled some duct tape around the leakage. He assured us nothing risky would happen in the future."

Ripa's story is tragic but unfortunately not an isolated case. Six members of a family, including a child in Uttarkhan succumbed to their burn injuries after leaky gas pipes caused a fire in mid-October. A month before this incident, a

seven-year-old child died from a fire from a gas leakage in the Ashulia area, where his parents were also severely burnt.

According to the Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd (TGTDC), most gas pipeline explosions occur due to unauthorised connections taken illegally by landlords, as landlords pay hefty sums of money for such substandard and illegal connections. These above mentioned cases were due to the same. Back in 2014, an investigative report of *The Daily Star* found some 12,000 illegal gas connections given in nine unions of Sonargaon Upazila under Narayanganj district.

But what is more surprising is that there are allegations that some dishonest employees within the institutional umbrella are involved with the matter—of course, without the involvement of the syndicate, it is not possible to get an illegal connection from the state-owned gas company, claim experts.

In 2015, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) directed TGTDC to take proper steps to stop illegal gas lines, based on the complaints filed by Consumer Association of