



CHEMICAL BLAZE KILLS 67

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Fire leaves a trail of devastation in Chawkbazar; 12 'missing'; 41 bodies identified; nine under treatment at DMCH burn unit, five in critical condition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The death toll in the devastating blaze in Chawkbazar rose to 67 yesterday, making it the second deadliest chemical-fuelled fire in the country after the 2010 Nimtoli incident.

The toll may rise further, officials said. Five burn victims in critical condition are being treated at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Another 12 people are said to be missing since the fire broke out around 10:30pm on Wednesday.

The flames spread to five buildings like a wildfire in the packed area with narrow lanes, making it difficult for firefighters to respond faster and more efficiently.

At least three of the buildings had highly inflammable chemical warehouses on different floors, which is illegal. "The area had every element needed for a fire to burn for hours. There was gas ... a lot of body sprays," said Maj Shakil Newaz, director (operations and maintenance) of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

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Younger brother of Rohan Khan, an NSU student missing since the Chawkbazar blaze, breaks down in tears, looking at a photo of the victim on the DMCH premises yesterday. His grandfather tries in vain to comfort him. Rohan along with a friend was passing through the area on a motorbike when the fire broke out. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

The face of HORROR



In many major tragedies, the victims are reduced to mere numbers, statistics to gauge the severity of a disaster. But each of these numbers has an important story to tell, one that serves as a reminder of what has passed and why it should never have been allowed.

SEE PAGE 2 FOR SIX SUCH STORIES FROM CHAWKBAZAR



PHOTO: REUTERS

How the fire began?

STAR REPORT

Multiple accounts of what caused Wednesday's fire at Chawkbazar have been put forth by different quarters. Visiting the fire-ravaged area, Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun yesterday said a gas cylinder blast initiated the flames.

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WHAT THEY HAD SAID

The Nimtoli inferno, originated at a chemical warehouse in Old Dhaka, left 124 dead on June 3, 2010. Following the tragedy, government high-ups made statements on the actions they would take so that a fire like that never occurs again. Below are some of the statements and recommendations:

"The culprits must face stern action. Further investigation is required to find the culprits out."
Sahara Khatun, the then home minister

"If high-rise buildings are found to have been built without proper approval of the authorities concerned, legal actions will be taken and illegal parts of the

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Nimtoli to Chawkbazar

Lessons never learnt

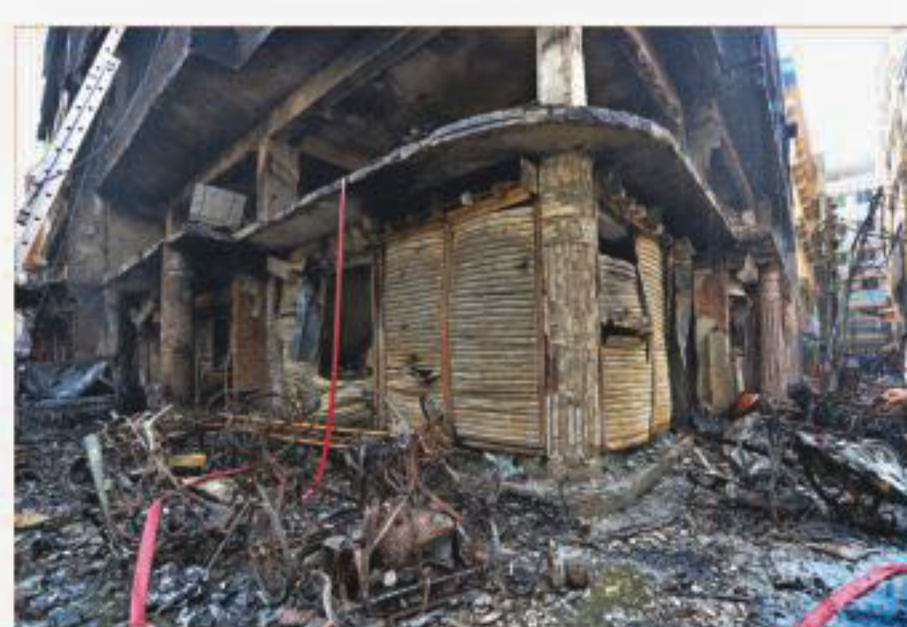
MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

On the morning of the national holiday yesterday, many people woke up to find their Facebook friends "marking themselves safe from Chawkbazar fire".

By the time they turned on their TVs, at least 50 people were reported dead in the deadly blaze that broke out in a building on a shabby alleyway in Old Dhaka. Within minutes, the toll climbed to 67.

Many must have found how strikingly similar this fire was to the one that razed a chemical warehouse in Nimtoli, also in Old Dhaka, which claimed 124 lives nearly nine years ago.

Even Health Minister Zahid Malik said, "The Chawkbazar fire incident is a repetition of the one that occurred in Nimtoli."



What could have been done to avoid such a massive loss of life and property? Has the government done the bare minimum? Why such accidents happen over and over again? Such questions remain in people's mind. Hours after the firefighters brought the

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2010 HC directives 'ignored'

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The government is yet to respond to the High Court rule and directives over the Nimtoli fire in Old Dhaka that killed 124 people and injured many others on June 3, 2010, said the lawyer who filed a writ petition in this regard.

Following the petition filed by six rights organisations and a rights activist, the HC on June 10 that year ordered the government-formed probe committee, headed by the home secretary, to find the cause of Nimtoli fire and submit a report to it within three months.

The court asked the taskforce formed to identify the unauthorised buildings, warehouses and factories where chemicals, explosives and other flammable or petroleum products (both authorised and

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Old town sends out an SOS

Urban planners call for redevelopment to save it from disaster

TAWFIQUE ALI

Old Dhaka will remain vulnerable to disasters like the ones in Nimtoli and Chawkbazar unless it undergoes redevelopment, say urban planners. The densely populated area, stretching over around 1,050 acres, is crammed with unplanned structures and many of them have chemical warehouses. Also, almost all the roads there are narrow and the place lacks fire hydrants and open spaces like playgrounds.

These increase the risks of disasters and make the firefighters' job difficult in case of a fire.

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"Afflicted with high density structures, narrow lanes, heavy commercialisation and lacking open space, the overcrowded old city is sitting on a valley of impending death."

PROJECT DIRECTOR OF DHAKA CITY'S REVISED DETAILED AREA PLAN MD ASHRAFUL ISLAM