

**WEATHER FORECAST**

**YESTERDAY'S TEMPERATURES**

|                                 |                                      |                                      |                                  |                                    |                                   |                                  |                                    |                                       |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>DHAKA</b><br>H 31.0   L 17.2 | <b>MYMENSINGH</b><br>H 28.5   L 17.8 | <b>CHATTOGRAM</b><br>H 30.0   L 20.4 | <b>SYLHET</b><br>H 29.3   L 17.2 | <b>RAJSHAHI</b><br>H 30.6   L 13.6 | <b>RANGPUR</b><br>H 26.0   L 15.5 | <b>KHULNA</b><br>H 32.0   L 20.0 | <b>BARISHAL</b><br>H 29.0   L 20.6 | <b>COX'S BAZAR</b><br>H 30.0   L 20.8 |
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Weather may remain dry with temporary partly cloudy sky over the country in next 24 hours till 6pm today, UNB said quoting the Met office. **The sun sets in the capital today at 5:58pm and rises tomorrow at 6:27am.**



## HONOURING THE MARTYRS OF 1952

Wearing black and white and holding flowers, people of all strata of life thronged the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka to pay homage to the Language Movement heroes yesterday. Imbued with the Amar Ekushey spirit, children along with their parents, and students walked barefoot towards the Shaheed Minar, adorned with flowers, to pay their respect.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



## Provide proper treatment to fire victims: PM

President urges all to stand by them

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday ordered the authorities concerned to provide proper treatment to the Chawkbazar fire victims while President Abdul Hamid urged all to extend helping hand to the families of those killed and injured in the incident.

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said the prime minister expressed profound shock at the loss of lives.

She conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family members of the deceased and prayed for eternal peace of the departed souls.

President Abdul Hamid urged all to stand beside the families of the victims.

His Press Secretary Joyanal Abedin said the president expressed deep shock and sorrow at the loss of lives in the fire incident.

He conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family members of the deceased and prayed for eternal peace of the departed souls.

**GOVT TO PROVIDE COMPENSATION**

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said the government will provide compensation to the fire victims.

Investigation will be carried out into the incident and necessary legal measures would be taken after the probe, Quader, also general secretary of ruling Awami League, told reporters while visiting the spot in the morning.

The government will take steps for the rehabilitation of the fire victims' families, he said.

"We've taken lessons from this incident and necessary

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## CHAWKBAZAR FIRE DMC air heavy with wails

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Yusuf Kazi was sitting on a broken chair near the Dhaka Medical College morgue around 9:45am yesterday. He was wailing and talking on the phone.

"Why did I keep him with me?" he sobbed.

He said his cousin Kazi Enamul Haque, a graduate who stayed with him at his home in Chawkbazar, was burnt to death when he went to a dentist at a clinic near Hazi Wahed Mansion on Wednesday night.

The blaze that burnt to death at least 67 people and injured over a dozen left hundreds of their near and dear ones in total shock. Some could not be traced.

The ambience at Dhaka Medical College premises was heavy with the sounds of bawling.

Family members were sitting or standing

around the morgue and crying to see the remains of their loved ones -- a scene that would move even the most cold-hearted.

Some could identify the charred bodies of their relatives, but most could not.

A staffer at the morgue asked the relatives not to stay inside for long. But it was difficult for him to control the rush of inconsolable people.

At one stage, the morgue became so overcrowded that police closed the door, asking all to stay outside. Yet they desperately tried to have one last look through the window.

As the day went on, more and more family members of the Chawkbazar tragedy victims gathered at the morgue premises, further crowding the place. Most of them wanted to take the bodies of their loved ones without autopsy.

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WASIM BIN HABIB and MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

He was sitting against a wall about a hundred yards away from the Chawkbazar fire spot. Clad in soot-covered firefighters' overalls and with bloodshot eyes, he looked utterly exhausted. He seemed perplexed when The Daily Star correspondents asked his name.

"We have worked the whole night dousing the devastating fire. [I] can't explain how uphill the task was. The fire spread so fast... it made our job difficult," said Abdus Shahid, senior station officer of Lalbagh Fire Station.

He was one of the first responders to rush with a team of six to the spot around 10:40pm on Wednesday, barely five minutes after the fire broke out at the densely-populated Churihatta intersection in Chawkbazar.

"We could see the flames from a mile. Within a moment, I called the control room [fire service] for help," said Shahid.

He said when their team reached the spot, what they saw was total chaos. People were screaming and shouting for help. Chemical fireballs rained down and set vehicles and rickshaws ablaze. The pedestrians engulfed in flames were running for their lives.

"Yet, we reached near the fire," said Shahid. He paused to catch a breath. "I am not feeling well, can't really talk much."

As they started working, several other teams joined in. Apart from the firefighters, the role of locals was commendable as they tried their best to put out the fire with whatever tools they had.

"Everyone tried their best to help," said Abul Alim, a resident of the area.

"But the way fire crews were doing their job is unbelievable," said Mohammad Ibrahim, a local.

In fact, the combined role played by the firefighters and local volunteers had helped prevent further spread of the inferno, which could have caused more casualties.

People vacated the streets to allow fire vehicles to enter the spot. Locals also joined the rescue operation, witnesses said.

Firefighters firstly started evacuating people from the spot. Then they sprayed water on the adjacent buildings so that fire does not spread.

During the operation at Hazi Wahed Mansion, repeated explosions of the body spray cans rocked the building amid raging

## The first responders



Firefighters in a rescue operation at Hazi Wahed Mansion in Old Dhaka's Chawkbazar area yesterday morning.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Even though chunks of plasters were falling off and parts of walls collapsing, firefighters continued to spray water to douse the blaze, risking their lives.

Md Abdul Halim, senior station officer of Hazaribagh Fire Station, had just completed his dinner when he heard about the incident from the control room.

"The 14 of us headed for the spot at 10:45pm [Wednesday]," he told this newspaper.

He said first they used water from household reserve tanks and then started collecting water from Wasa point, which was far away from the spot. "In addition, we had to hold on to the fire hoses for hours."

"If the blaze was not caused by chemicals, we could have brought it under control within the soonest possible time. The entire night we fought to bring the fire under control and in the morning we were finally able to do so."

He said they returned to their station around 1:10pm yesterday.

Hasibur Rahman, a fireman, said they had made every possible effort to prevent the fire from spreading to other buildings.

"Suddenly, I saw two people seeking help, stretching their hand from the collapsible gate of Wahed Mansion. My colleague and I immediately broke the lock and rescued them. Further away, I saw two others caught on fire, but I had to backtrack," he said.

Brig Gen Ali Ahmed Khan, director general of Fire Service and Civil Defense, said, "It is the nature of our job. We would have been satisfied, if we could save all the lives."

"Our firefighters were exhausted... the water source was not close by. We had to collect water 800-900 yards away from the spot. It was strenuous," he told The Daily Star.

"We encircled the area. Our first priority was not to allow the fire to spread. We were able to contain it in a limited scale," said Khan, who was at the spot since the beginning of the operation.

## Condolences pour in for victim families

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Condolences poured in to the bereaved families of those killed in the deadly blaze at Old Dhaka's Chawkbazar on Wednesday night.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen expressed his deep sympathy towards those who had lost their loved ones to the fire, wished eternal peace for the departed souls and quick recovery of the injured.

Law Minister Anisul Huq extended his condolences to the mourning families.

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, also leader of the opposition in parliament, expressed shock at the huge loss of lives in Chawkbazar fire incident, reported UNB.

In a statement, he also demanded that the government take prompt actions against those responsible.

British Secretary of State for International Development Penny Mordaunt expressed

deep shock over the loss of lives.

"I am deeply saddened to hear of the terrible loss of lives following the chemical warehouse fire in Dhaka, a city I visited earlier this week," she tweeted yesterday morning. "My thoughts are with those families who have lost loved ones."

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also extended her condolences on her twitter account.

"Saddened to hear about the tragic loss of lives because of the devastating fire in Bangladesh. My heartfelt condolences to the grieving families. We wish the injured a speedy recovery," she wrote in a tweet.

India's Ministry of External Affairs also conveyed condolences following the tragic incident.

Raveesh Kumar, official spokesperson for the ministry, said in a twitter statement, "India is saddened by the loss of lives as a

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## Ekushey in books

SAYYED MOHMUD ULLAH

Imbued with the spirit of love for their mother tongue, people from different walks of life thronged Amar Ekushey Grantha Mela yesterday, marking the International Mother Language Day.

Most of them clad in black and white, with flags drawn on their cheeks and hands, entered the book fair on Bangla Academy premises and adjoining Suhrawardy Udyan as soon as the gates opened at 8am.

The crowd got bigger as the day progressed. While the number decreased a little around the afternoon, the gathering increased again in the evening.

"We paid homage at Shaheed Minar in the morning and now we're looking for a book on the Language Movement, as the new generation should be introduced to the glorious history of Ekushey February," said Lamia Chowdhury Labonno, who brought her 12-year-old son along.

She later bought a book titled "Chotoder Bhashabir o Muktijoddha" by Asadullah from Ekattor publication for her son.

Publishers said there was a huge demand for books on the Language Movement yesterday, but they felt that the number of available titles were insufficient.

According to Bangla Academy information centre, only 11 new titles on Language Movement have been released at the fair out of 3,363 new arrivals so far.

Among these include "Bangla Lokshongskritite Bhasha Andolon o Muktijuddho" by Mamun Tarafdar from Ria Publication, "Bhasha Andolon Kothe" by Gulshan Ara from Asia publication, and two books titled "Sirajganjer Bhasha Andolon" and "Bhasha Andolon Chhatra League" by Abdul Alim from Agami Publication.

"We were unable to publish more books on the topic due to lack of good content,"

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## Oikyafont's public hearing today

UNB, Dhaka

Jatiya Oikyafont will hold a public hearing in the capital today to depict the "real scenario of vote robbery" in the 11th parliamentary election, before the country's people and international community.

The hearing will be held at Supreme Court Bar Association auditorium from 10am and continue till 4-5pm with a one-hour break from 1pm.

There will be a seven-member panel, led by Dr Kamal Hossain, the convener of Oikyafont, during the public hearing.

The hearing was originally scheduled to be held on February 24. However, Oikyafont rescheduled it for today as they have failed to get any venue to hold the programme on February 24.

All the candidates of the Oikyafont and the left democratic alliances were invited to join the public hearing.



With its diverse collection, the book fair has something for everyone.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN