

BGB FIRING Probe bodies complete field visit

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Two separate probe committees, formed by National Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Home Affairs, to investigate the BGB firing incident in Thakurgaon ended their two-day visit to the district on Tuesday.

On February 12, members of Border Guard Bangladesh opened fire on dwellers of Baharampur village in Haripur upazila of the district following a scuffle that left three dead and at least 18 injured.

National Human Rights Commission has formed a three-member committee, led by former cabinet secretary and all-time member of NHRC Nazrul Islam, to investigate the incident while the home ministry has formed a five-member committee, headed by Md Mohosin Chowdhury, joint secretary of Public Safety Department under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The committees visited houses of the three dead, several injured victims and talked with locals and witnesses on Monday.

On Tuesday, they talked with the officials of civil service, police and

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Man held over 'raping' house help in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested a man from his house in the capital's West Nakhhalpara in Tejgaon yesterday on charges of raping his domestic help.

The arrestee, Sibli Sadik, 30, works at a private bank, said Abu Taiab Mohammad Arif Hossain, assistant commissioner (Tejgaon Zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

"We would produce the arrestee before court seeking remand tomorrow [today]," he said.

The victim, aged 16, is now in police custody. Police will send her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for medical examination, he added.

The girl had been working at the house for three years.

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CHAWKBAZAR FIRE Another victim dies at DMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another victim of the Chawkbazar fire lost the battle for life at Dhaka Medical College Hospital early yesterday, taking the death toll in the tragedy to 69.

Shohag, 22, breathed his last at the hospital's burn unit around 2:00am, Dr Partha Sankar Paul, resident surgeon of the unit, told The Daily Star.

He had suffered 60 percent burns to his bodies.

Shohag along with two other workers was working on the first floor of Haji Wahed Mansion in Chawkbazar's Churihatta area on the night of February 20 when the devastating fire broke out, according to locals.

They were burnt while fleeing the blaze.

Earlier around 10:30pm on Monday, another injured Anwar Hossain, 45, died at the burn unit.

Seven more victims have been undergoing treatment at the burn unit.

Chinese schools

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distinguished Tsinghua University in Beijing, started developing Bingo three years ago with his team after founding his company Ai Bingo (Love Bingo).

A father of two young children, the 36-year-old man started out his business by creating a robot to teach children at home.

Speaking to Mail Online, Dr Ming said he seldom had time to accompany his children due to busy work, therefore he thought of the idea of making a cute and educational robot for them.

He said he also believed that robots would have great advantages in helping children review the knowledge they learn from school and correct children's homework.

Dr Ming's company now has two types of Bingo robot: one to teach children at kindergartens that sells for 29,800 yuan (£3,400); and one to accompany children at home with a retail price of 1,199 yuan (£136).

China is facing a serious shortage of kindergarten teachers, especially after the central government encouraged couples to have more babies. In 2016, Beijing launched a new family-planning policy to replace the long-standing one-child policy, which allows families to have up to two children.

HC upset as post-Nimtoli suggestions gather dust

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be directed to take appropriate steps immediately for adopting effective laws and guidelines for production, storage, handling, selling and use of combustive, corrosive and explosive substances, especially chemicals and petroleum products, and to ensure complete compliance of the laws and guideline.

Officials concerned, including secretaries to the ministries of home, mineral resources, industries and cabinet division, director general of fire service and civil defence, mayors of Dhaka (south and north) city corporations, and director general of environment department, have been made respondents.

After the Nimtoli tragedy that killed 124 people, the probe committee was formed and it made 17 recommendations, including relocating the warehouses to non-residential areas, enforcing Fire Prevention and Extinguishing Rules 2003 and Bangladesh National Building Code, installing separate hydrant points in different areas and raising awareness from an early age through textbooks.

The HC bench of Justice FRM Nazmul Ahasan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader came up with the rule after they heard a writ petition jointly filed by Supreme Court lawyers -- Nur Mohammad Azami and Khandoker Md Sayadul Kawsar -- seeking neces-



An announcement is being made on the loudspeaker on behalf of Dhaka South City Corporation in Chawkbazar's Churihatta area yesterday, asking the owners of residential houses to remove all flammable chemicals by tomorrow.

PHOTO: STAR

sary order. The court said the bureaucrats had not implemented any of the 17

recommendations of the probe committee. It wanted to order the government

to give Tk 4 lakh to each of the Chawkbazar fire victims' families for immediate necessities, as the govern-

ment decided to give each Tk 1 lakh.

But Attorney General Mahbubey Alam requested the court not to pass such order yesterday, saying that he would inform the authorities about the court's desire.

The court then said it would pass an order about compensation for the victims' families after hearing the government's decision.

Ruhul Quddus Kazal and Amit Das Gupta appeared for the petitioners.

Yesterday, the same HC bench kept three other writ petitions filed over the Chawkbazar incident waiting for hearing for four weeks.

On Sunday, four separate writ petitions, including that of Azam and Sayadul, were filed with the HC over the incident, seeking compensation for the affected families and punishment for those responsible, among other things.

SC lawyer Eunus Ali Akond filed one of the petitions, seeking HC directives on the government to offer compensation of Tk 30 lakh for each of the victims' families.

He also sought an HC order on the government to form a judicial inquiry commission to find the cause of the Chawkbazar fire, identify those responsible for the blaze and take punitive actions against them.

Another SC lawyer ZI Khan Panna and Old Dhaka resident Zabeed Miah filed two other petitions.

Relocate chemicals now from old town

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At the discussion, chemical merchants and other stakeholders said there was no bar on the limit of chemical import and that no one was monitoring the storage either.

Besides, there is no single authority to oversee the import, transportation and storage of the hazardous chemicals and Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk), tasked with ensuring implementation of building codes, was turning a blind eye to the illegal use of residential houses for chemical storage and business, they said.

Though the Department of Explosives and the fire service authority stopped issuing licence to chemical business, both of them remained silent on the issue, they added.

Anayet Hossain Maruf, adviser to Bangladesh Chemical and Perfumery Merchant Association, said, "We can import any amount of chemical and



Participants at a discussion titled "Chawkbazar Tragedy: Way Forward" at The Daily Centre in the city yesterday. The newspaper organised the event following last week's fatal fire in Old Dhaka.

PHOTO: STAR

Lawyers Association (Bela), said the government must find out some administrative ways for ensuring that only the required amount of chemical is imported and stored in compliance with the safety guidelines.

Prof Syeda Razia Sultana, head of chemical engineering department at Buet, said it has never been an active consideration that chemical safety is an integral part of fire safety.

"One must not forget that chemical not only turns a fire devastating but also silently kills people with its toxicity," she said.

Maj AKM Shakil Newaz, operations director of the Fire Service and Civil Defense, said all chemicals turn dangerous in high temperature.

"If we look at the situation in Chawkbazar, there were cylinders, chemicals, plastic, cosmetics, nail polish, rubbers, cars, electric transformers, car petrol -- making it a perfect situation that only needed a trigger for a blast. Exactly that's what has happened.

"It created a chain of fire in 30 seconds," he said.

Maj Shakil said the fire service did not issue any licence to such busi-

nesses since 2010. "We launched [an] eviction drive led by the city corporation, but the local traders prevented it. Fire workers were even beaten," he said, stressing the need for mobilisation of public opinion in Old Dhaka for the relocation of the warehouses.

He suggested that there should be chemical warehouses in various industrial zones based on the requirements. For example, the chemicals required for garment factories should be kept in areas crammed with garment factories.

Similar should be the case for the chemicals required for leather industries so that the businesses have easy access to them.

New economic zones are being established and each zone could have a chemical zone with all required safety measures in place, he said.

He further said there were import and storage guidelines for chemicals but those were not being followed. Besides, he said, the businessmen need to be trained.

Maj Shakil further said trucks carrying chemicals and even LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) enter the Dhaka city,

which is dangerous. Movements of such vehicles must be made restricted for public safety, he added.

Neaz Rahman, deputy team leader of the consultants on the ongoing revision of Dhaka's detailed area plan, said, "Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha is supposed to manage Dhaka city's development but has failed to do its duty."

Prof Adil Mohammed Khan, secretary general of Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), said fire hazard could be resolved in a month if the designated authorities played their roles effectively.

Mixed land use, as is the case in the old town, does not mean allowing hazardous chemical storages and industries at residential houses, he said, adding that as per a provision of the town improvement act, a neighbourhood could be redeveloped for public safety.

Khondaker Md Ansar Hossain, former secretary general of the BIP, said Dhaka's Detailed Area Plan has earmarked red and orange category industrial zones and chemicals should be stocked accordingly.

Jalal Ahmed, president of Institute of Architects Bangladesh, said both building construction rules for Dhaka city and Bangladesh National Building Code have chapters on fire safety but those rules are not enforced while constructing buildings.

Following the Nimtoli tragedy in 2010, a government-formed probe body came up with a 17-point recommendations and one of the major one was to relocate the chemical warehouses from the old town.

The chemical-fuelled disaster had left 124 people dead.

"It's sad that the set of fire safety recommendations made in the wake of that incident has not been implemented yet," said Md Habibur Rahman, a director of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC).

"Execution of this kind of recommendations requires political will," he said. Following the recommendations, it

took seven years until May 2017 to sign a memorandum of understanding with three associations of paint, perfume and acid merchants, he said, and added that it took eight years to get a Tk 201 crore relocation project approved in July last year.

The BSCIC is now preparing for acquisition of 50 acres land in Keraniganj for setting up a designated chemical village and it would take them until 2021 to complete the project, Rahman said.

About the immediate temporary relocation, Rahman said that this authority had not yet taken any decision in this regard.

Brig Gen (retd) Abu Nayeem Md Shahidullah, former director general of Bangladesh Fire service and Civil defense, said the second, third and fourth of the 17-point recommendations involved implementation of the country's national building code, amendment to the fire safety law and also mobile court raids against breach of the relevant laws.

Different ministries were supposed to implement those recommendations, added Nayeem, who was a member of the committee.

Md Belayet Hossain, former president of Bangladesh Chemical and Perfumery Merchants Association, said that Rajuk has "basically harmed" the Old Dhaka where 80 percent of the buildings have no approval from it. Still, the authority is earning revenue from them and also without creating civic facilities, he added.

He proposed building a block-wise planned residential areas in Old Dhaka and the land owners are provided with flats based on their land size.

He then said many of the chemical warehouses have moved to various parts of the city in an unplanned way and that putting pressure on them [for immediate relocation] may turn counter-productive.

The discussion was moderated by Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

India strikes 'terror camp' inside Pakistan

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"In the face of imminent danger, a preemptive strike became absolutely necessary," Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale told reporters.

"The existence of such training facilities, capable of training hundreds of jihadists could not have functioned without the knowledge of the Pakistani authorities," Gokhale said.

Pakistan denies harbouring JeM, a primarily anti-India group that forged ties with al-Qaeda and has been on a UN terror list since 2001. In December 2001, Jaish fighters, along with members of another Pakistan-based militant group, Lashkar-e-Taiba, launched an attack on India's parliament, which almost led to a fourth war.

China, Pakistan's long-time ally, and EU urged both countries to exercise restraint as tensions rose to the highest in years.

Meanwhile, the OIC Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir yesterday held an emergency meeting at the OIC General Secretariat in Jeddah and expressed deep concern over the heightened tension in the region and called for immediate de-escalation.

Gokhale said "a very large number" of militants were killed in the strikes by French-made Mirage 2000 jets on a Jaish training camp near Balakot, a town in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The commander of the camp was Maulana Yusuf Azhar, a brother-in-law of JeM leader Masood Azhar, Gokhale said.

A senior Indian government source said that 300 militants had been killed in the strikes and that the warplanes had ventured as far as 80 km (50 miles) inside Pakistan. But no evidence was immediately provided to back up the claims of militant casualties.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Pakistan counterpart Imran Khan both summoned emergency meetings of top ministers after the attack, reported AFP.

"I want to assure you our country is in safe hands," Modi told a cheering political rally in western India hours after the raid.

"I won't let the country down," said Modi, who faces a tight election in coming months.

There has been mounting impatience in India to avenge the Feb 14 attack, which was the most deadly seen in Kashmir during an insurgency that has last three decades, and as news of the raid broke, celebrations erupted across the country.

Pakistan's top civilian and military leaders rejected India's comments that it had struck "terror camps" inside Pakistan, vowing to prove wrong India's claims and warning that it would retaliate against Indian aggression.

Pakistan's National Security Committee (NSC), comprising top officials including Prime Minister Imran Khan and army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa, said in a statement that it "strongly rejected Indian claim of targeting an alleged terrorist camp near Balakot and the claim of heavy casualties."

The statement said Khan would "engage with global leadership to expose irresponsible Indian policy". It also warned that "Pakistan shall respond at the time and place of its choosing" to Indian aggression.

"PM has directed that elements of national power including the Armed Forces and the people of Pakistan to remain prepared for all eventualities," the statement added.

Earlier the Pakistan military said its own warplanes had chased off the Indian aircraft before they could inflict any real harm. A spokesman said the Indian warplanes dropped their "payload" in a forested area, causing no casualties and no serious material damage.

"Indian aircraft intruded from Muzaffarabad sector," Pakistani military spokesman Major General Asif Ghafoor said on Twitter, referring to an area in the Pakistan-held part of Kashmir.

Ghafoor said the intruders faced a "timely and effective response from Pakistan Air Force", and "released payload in haste, while escaping, which fell

near Balakot." "No casualties or damage," he tweeted.

Ghafoor also posted four pictures of the alleged site, purportedly showing a bomb crater in a forest area but no serious damage.

Pakistani villagers in the area where the Indian jets struck said they heard four loud bangs in the early hours of yesterday but reported only one person was wounded.

"We saw fallen trees and one damaged house, and four craters where the bombs had fallen," said Mohammad Ajmal, a 25-year-old who visited the site.

Indian television networks reported the airstrikes took place at 3.30 am and involved a dozen Mirage fighter planes backed up by Israeli-equipped Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) aircraft that patrolled on India's side of the border.

Balakot is about 50 km (30 miles) from Line of Control (LoC), the ceasefire line that is the de facto border in Kashmir, a Himalayan region that has been the cause of two of the three wars India and Pakistan have fought since the end of British colonial rule in 1947.

Analysts have alleged Pakistani militants have their training camps in the area, although Pakistan has always denied the presence of any such

camps. Mohammed Iqbal, a resident of Mendhar, a long way further south on the Indian side of the LoC, told Reuters that he heard jets flying through the night.

Shelling across the LoC has occurred frequently over the past few years but airspace violations by jets are extremely rare.

Following another large attack on Indian security forces in Kashmir in 2016, India said its troops crossed the LoC to carry out a "surgical strike" on suspected militant camps in Pakistan Kashmir. Islamabad denied anything serious occurred.

Pakistani military analyst Hasan Askari called the latest events "dangerous".

"If such actions continue, it can escalate into major conflict, which will not serve any purpose but to plunge the region into serious crisis," he said.

However, Samir Saran, president of the Observer Research Foundation think tank in New Delhi said the fact that India remained vague over the exact spot it had targeted was a sign that New Delhi did not want an all-out conflict.

"This is to take the pressure off Pakistanis. We are still telling them that we don't want an escalation. Which is why we have said that we have taken a preemptive measure. You don't have to make this into a war, if you don't want to," he said.