

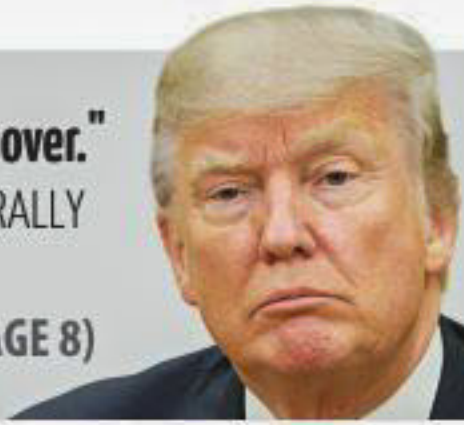
"We want to clearly say that those who were killed in the fire were not victims of any accident. These are murders ..."
PUBLIC WORKS AND HOUSING MINISTER
SM REZAUL KARIM



A national investigation, not an ordinary one, is necessary to find out the actual reasons behind the fire."
JATIYA OIKYAFRONT CONVENER
DR KAMAL HOSSAIN (PAGE 3)



"The collusion delusion is over."
DONALD TRUMP IN HIS FIRST RALLY SINCE THE END OF MUELLER'S RUSSIA COLLUSION PROBE (PAGE 8)



Nowhere to escape

Casualties would have been less if victims could use all emergency exit doors of FR Tower; death toll 25



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The emergency exit doors on several floors of FR Tower were locked, making the escape difficult for many after the fire broke out at the high rise on Thursday, said fire officials.

As the death toll from the inferno stood at 25, firefighters who combed through the 22-storey building in Banani said they recovered most of the bodies on the 10th floor and above.

And several of the victims were lying dead near the locked exit points as they got trapped.

"We found some of the bodies just near the locked exit doors," one of the firefighters told The Daily Star yesterday. "Some doors were not locked but the passages were crammed with piled up goods."

Besides, the emergency staircase of the building was only 36 inches wide, said Brigadier General Md Sazzad Hussain, director general of Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence.

"It was not adequate for a building of 22 floors," he added.

Shahjahan Sikder, a senior station officer of the Fire Service, said the FR Tower was not built according to fire safety standards. SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Grief-stricken family members of Dhaka University graduate Abdullah Al Faroque Tomal wait for his body in front of Dhaka Medical College morgue yesterday morning. Tomal is one of the 25 people who died in Thursday's fire at FR Tower, inset, in the city's Banani.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN/PRABIR DAS

YOU WILL BE MISSED

At least 25 people were killed and some 70 injured in Thursday's deadly fire that ripped through the 22-storey FR Tower in Dhaka's Banani area. All the bodies were handed over to the families and most of them buried yesterday.

Here are the details of the 25 dead:

ABDULLAH AL FAROQUE TOMAL, 32

Abdullah Al Faroque Tomal, a former student of Dhaka University, was a sales manager at EUR Service (BD) Ltd housed on the 11th floor of the building. About 90 percent of his body was burnt before he was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Faruk was the son of Munsir Mokbul Ahmed, a retired teacher originally from Chandpur's Faridganj upazila.

SEE PAGE 2

Pray for me'

Last words of a Banani fire victim haunt his family

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail



"There's a fire in our building. The flames are spreading fast. I do not know whether I will be able to get out. Tell everyone to pray for me...forgive me."

These were the last words of Nahidul Islam Tushar, 32, to his wife Mahmuda Akther when he found himself trapped in the FR Tower during Thursday's fire.

He also called his father Ihsak, mother Nurunnahar, elder brother Tuhin and younger brother Shishir and told them to pray for him in the afternoon. Soon afterwards, around 2:00pm, no one could reach him over the phone, said grieving family members in Gorai area of Tangail's Mirzapur.

Fire fighters brought out his body from the high-rise building hours later.

While talking to his loved ones over the phone, he said: "I am sorry, I am sorry." SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

HIGH RISES IN THE CAPITAL

Concern over sloppy fire safety measures

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Most high-rise buildings in Dhaka lack fire safety measures, which can cause high casualties in case of a fire, experts said.

Currently, there are about 4,000 high-rises in Dhaka, mostly in the new parts and the posh areas of the capital.

Thursday's fire at the 22-storey FR Tower, an upmarket commercial building in Banani, shows how vulnerable the new Dhaka is.

Most high-rise buildings here have been built in violation of the original design. In the original design, the owners show proper fire safety measures, but during construction, they deviate from the plan, authorities and experts said.

"We conducted a survey in 2011 on high-rise buildings in Dhaka. We found that 90 percent of the buildings did not comply with the fire safety measures," Prof Mehedi Ahmed Ansari of Buett told The Daily Star.

Of the 53 high-rises surveyed, only two hospitals

KEY POINTS

- 90pc high-rises do not follow fire safety rules
- Owners show fire safety measures in their design, but later do not comply
- Fire safety measures at high-rises are expensive -- up to Tk 1.5cr

and two hotels fully complied with fire safety measures.

Buett did not do any such study after 2011.

Fire service treats buildings beyond six-storey as high-rises.

In the last one year, about 680 designs for high-rises were submitted to the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk). About half of them were rejected on fire safety grounds as well as for violation of the building code.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Strictly follow building code

PM tells stakeholders

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for strictly following the building code during the construction of high-rise buildings.

She also asked for stepping up surveillance by the government agencies and creating awareness among the people about the building code.

Hasina, also the Awami League chief, was speaking at a party presidium meeting at the Gono Bhaban.

She said building owners and users have to take appropriate measures to prevent fire incidents and ensure other security steps.

The PM extended her sincere thanks to the fire service, armed forces, law enforcement agencies and

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

OPINION |

Are we learning?

PROF DR NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

We lost 25 office-goers last Thursday for no fault of theirs. Scores remain injured, some in serious condition.

People will die in a fire if they cannot escape through a proper route. The victims could not and so a few jumped, others overcome by smoke, and some severely burnt.

According to a floor plan of the building posted on Facebook, there are two stairs but, violating the rules, they are adjacent to each other, sharing an open lobby with the lifts. One of the staircases share its landing with the lift lobby, and is open.

This is a hazardous common feature in almost all buildings in Bangladesh with a few exceptions. The other staircase, one assumes, was locked or unusable, and no one was able to escape using it. The unprotected open staircase became a chute for smoke to engulf the entire staircase.

All stairs in a building must be of the enclosed type, so that they do not become vertical channels for smoke to spread and thereby prevent people from using it during a fire.

Stairs for escape should be suitably located as far apart as possible. If fire attacks one, people may escape by using the other. In most buildings, the situation is contrary to the rules.

Exit stairs must be enclosed by fire resistant materials (30 to 60 minutes) with self-closing fire door. Every staircase should be a compartment.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



A picture of Rumki Akhter and her husband Maksudur Rahman, both of whom died in Thursday's fire at FR Tower. The photo was taken from Maksudur's Facebook page.

A couple's dream lost forever

SHAHEEN MOLLAH with AFM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Rumki Akhter and Maksudur Rahman had fallen in love while working at a travel agency. Eventually, they got married three years ago and dreamt of owning a flat. With their savings, they bought a flat in the city's Gendaria, which was almost ready. They were scheduled to shift there within next two months.

But their dream is not fulfilled as the couple along with 23 others lost their lives in a fire at the 22-storey FR Tower in Banani on Thursday.

Relatives struggled to find them around the building after the fire broke out around 12:30pm. They could just say Rumki and Maksud got trapped in the office room of Heritage Air Express, a travel agency, on the 10th floor of the building, as

SEE PAGE 10 COL 6

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