



DAY AFTER THE FIRE

Counterclockwise from top, a cordoned off FR tower yesterday. Law enforcers stand guard on the ground floor. Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqur Islam visiting the area. A police official trying to control the crowd gathered on Kemal Ataturk Avenue. An aerial view of the street.

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

Getting a second chance at life

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and JAMIL MAHMUD

He dodged death miraculously despite falling from the 19th floor of the Banani high-rise FR Tower while escaping Thursday's devastating fire that claimed at least 25 lives and left scores injured.

Soon after the fire broke out, Rezwan Ahmed, 33, an official of Quasem Industries Ltd on the 21st floor, took shelter at a corner there with some colleagues.

As the fire was spreading rapidly below -- generating smoke and heat -- Rezwan's colleagues decided to go to the rooftop through the stairs.

One by one they left. Rezwan somehow failed to follow. By that time, the staircase was getting engulfed by smoke. So, Rezwan took an alternative way and escaped the floor through an open window.

However, he could only climb down a couple of floors, using cables and grabbing parts of outdoor air conditioners. Due to excessive heat, he got stuck on the 19th

floor.

Desperate, Rezwan tried to hold on to a part of an AC, but as it was extremely hot. "My hands were burning," Rezwan told this newspaper at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday.

He said he could not hold on to the AC's metal part and subsequently fell from there. Luckily, there were more overhead utility cables above ground, and Rezwan hit those before falling to the ground, which lessened the impact as he hit the concrete.

He was rescued immediately and taken to nearby Kurmitola General Hospital for treatment. He was later shifted to DMCH.

Partha Sankar Paul, resident medical officer of DMCH's burn unit, said Rezwan's legs and left hand were fractured. He also sustained seven to eight percent burn injuries.

His brother Irfan Hossain at the hospital said, "It's sheer luck that he is still with us." He said their family is from Sirajdikhan of Munshiganj.

"My brother is communicating with us normally."

Like Rezwan, another survivor of the devastating fire is Rezaur Rahman, 48, chief executive officer of a private company on the 11th floor.

Rezaur said he climbed down to the ninth floor through an open part of the building.

For some time, Rezaur and some other survivors, who were stuck on the floor, tried to get help from fire fighters. "It was quite difficult for them to reach us because of excessive heat and smoke," he said. Rezaur is being treated at DMCH.

"I looked for other options, and luckily could find a passage to the adjoining building using cables and ACs," he told The Daily Star.

Finally, he was able to escape. "It's like getting a second chance at life," said Rezaur.

At least 23 injured persons were found taking treatment at different hospitals yesterday.

Six of them were admitted to DMCH, two at Kurmitola General

Hospital and 15 at United Hospital, according to sources at the hospitals.

United Hospital sources said their patients were out of danger.

Brig Gen Quazi Rashid-Un-Nabi, director of Kurmitola General Hospital, said 41 persons received treatment at the hospital. Two of them were still admitted last evening. Their condition is stable, he said.

Meanwhile, visiting the victims at the hospital, Jatiya Party lawmaker GM Quader said the Banani fire and casualties could have been averted if authorities concerned had performed their duties earlier.

The blaze exposed that government departments, which were supposed to monitor whether such high-rises maintained building codes, did not do their jobs properly, he told reporters on the hospital premises.

Those officials should be held accountable for such negligence, Quader added.

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MATHEWS CHIRAN

It was lunchtime on Thursday and Polly Begum's phone was ringing. It was her husband Atiqur Rahman.

Seeing her husband's number, she received the call, expecting a casual conversation as couples do.

But her husband's voice sounded different -- shaky with panic. Polly had no idea what was happening on the other end but sensed that something was not right.

Her husband finally said these words: "I don't think I'll survive. Forgive me, if I have ever done anything to hurt you unknowingly."

Polly's world came to a standstill as her husband tried to describe the horrific situation he was in. He was surrounded by fire and thick smoke, and could not locate any exit to come out of the office on the 10th floor of FR Tower in Banani.

It was the last time she spoke to Atiqur. The call was abruptly cut off. She tried to call him several times but in vain.

Thursday's blaze in Banani took the life of Polly's husband who had been working at FR Tower for the last 15 years.

At 8pm, Polly received that call every family dreads -- informing her of her hus-

band's death, and asking the family to take his body from Dhaka Medical College Morgue.

Polly and Atiqur have two children.

The 25 unfortunate souls who met their end in the fire included spouses, parents and friends.

Monzurul Hasan, who had to walk with the help of a cane, was stuck on the 21st floor. He was an accounts officer of Quasem Industries Ltd.

While other employees of the company managed to climb to the roof and jumped onto adjacent building to save their lives, he could not.

Sumon Karmakar, his colleague, said, "We were panicked; smoke was everywhere. We all ran for our lives. While we managed to climb out of the building, he unfortunately failed to keep up."

Sumon informed that Monzurul has a son and a daughter. His 19-year-old son recently joined the air force. The deceased's body was received by the family at 11pm on Thursday from United Hospital.

Monir Hossain Sardar, 52; Abdulla AL Mamun, 40; and Maksudur Rahman, 32, were colleagues at a travel agency

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

The last call



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Boy with the right attitude

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

On Thursday, when fire fighters were struggling to douse the fire at FR Tower in Banani due to a scarcity of water, they often had to pause their efforts. One of the onlookers, a boy, noticed that a hose being used by the fire fighters was leaking, wasting water when each drop mattered.

The boy, Nayeem Islam, a 10-year-old from Korail slum, immediately collected a polythene bag, covered the leak and held it for around 20 minutes, applying all the strength he could muster.

In real world terms, his efforts may not have made a vast difference, but it magnificently demonstrated humanity. While many in the crowd that gathered on Kemal Ataturk Avenue were seen taking photos of the disaster, the 10-year-old made a sincere effort to help the fire fighters -- in a way he could.

His effort was lauded by many, and the photo of him holding the hose went viral on social media.

Dr Kamal for nat'l commission to ensure building safety

UNB, Dhaka

Jatiya Oikyafront Convener Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday recommended forming a national commission to find out whether there is negligence in ensuring construction of safe high-rise buildings in the country.

"We should form a national commission to assess whether there's any lack of law in ensuring safety since high-rise buildings are being built every day," he said.

Dr Kamal, also president of Gono Forum, came up with the remarks while talking to reporters in front of the fire-ravaged FR Tower in Dhaka's Banani.

At least 25 people were killed and over 70 injured in the devastating fire

PHOTO: STAR



on Thursday.

Dr Kamal said the FR Tower fire is a wake-up call for ensuring construction of safe buildings, maintaining proper designs and the building code. "It must be ensured that every building has emergency fire exits."

Dr Kamal said laws regarding the construction of buildings and ensuring public safety must be maintained and enforced.

He also said actions will have to be taken against those violating laws. "It's the duty of the state to strictly monitor everything to avoid such accidents."

The Gono Forum chief said the

Supreme Court Bar Association has formed a probe committee to look into the FR Tower fire and identify whether the state is performing its duty well and the authorities concerned are properly approving building designs.

He urged journalists to help the probe body by providing them with necessary information in this regard. "A national investigation is necessary, not an ordinary one, to find the actual reasons behind the fire."

Dr Kamal along with his party's senior leaders went to the spot around 10am and talked to on-duty police officials about the tragic incident.



EXPO

4th Food & Agro Bangladesh International Expo 2019

Venue: International Convention City Bashundhara

Time: 10:30am

SCREENING

Our Shorts Their Shorts
Featuring 8 short films curated from Bangladesh, Malaysia, India and Iraq

Venue: Jatra Biroti Auditorium

Time: 7:30pm

EXHIBITION

Anwar Hossain Photo Exhibit

Venue: Alliance Francaise de Dhaka

Time: 9am

PERFORMANCE

Mic Testing S1- Stand Up Dhaka

Impasto

Venue: Impasto, Building 39, Dhanmondi 2

Time: 5:30pm

THEATRE

Hamlet

Venue: National Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy

Time: 7pm

THEATRE

Happy Days

Venue: Nat Mondol, Dhaka University

Time: 5:30pm