

FR Tower not safe for use now

Experts find cracks in columns, slabs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
The 23-storey FR Tower is not safe for use now... Cracks have developed on its columns and slabs," said Mehedi Ahmed Ansary, professor of the Civil Engineering department in Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), yesterday.
Prof Ansary made the observations after he and five other members of a committee, formed by Rajuk, visited the building to ascertain whether it is risky and vulnerable.

The BUET professor said they will conduct some tests within a couple of days to make an initial assessment.
"We have set a timeframe of 150 days to conduct a detailed engineering assessment [DEA]... The building might be made usable after the assessment if all fire safety measures and the compliance of the building code are ensured," he said

"There was no staircase separated from the main building. Even that is a violation. They have to set up separate fire exits beforehand," he said.
The decision regarding the illegally erected top floors will depend on the findings of the DEA, he said while replying to a query on whether they would recommend breaking the floors.
"There were fire safety equipment but there were no trained staff members to use those...the building authorities never conducted a fire drill either," he said, adding that such incident will recur despite having modern fire safety equipment if the staffers were not trained.

Another member of the committee and also a professor in BUET, Raquib Ahsan, said, "We found that the fire exit doors in some floors were locked. It cannot be termed as a fire exit as it is merely a staircase."
"It is all the same whether such staircase exists or not in the building," he said.

Rajuk Chief Engineer Abdul Latif Helaly, who is also in the committee, avoided answering any questions from journalists about Rajuk's negligence in ensuring the implementation of the building code and fire safety measures at the FR Tower.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2



Election officials and polling agents sitting languidly as no voter turned up until the afternoon at their polling booth in Konaur Government Primary School in Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar during yesterday's upazila election.

PHOTO: MASUK HRIDOY

Low turnout, yet again

FROM PAGE 1
from the AL, according to the EC.

Of the 492 upazilas in the country, 480 are scheduled to go to election in five phases this year. Polls were held in 78 upazilas in the first phase on March 10, 116 upazilas in the second phase on March 18, and 117 upazilas on March 24 in the third phase.

The EC secretary said elections in 30 to 40 upazilas will be held on June 18 in the fifth and final phase.

Yesterday, The Daily Star correspondents visited around 120 polling stations in 22 upazilas.

In Munshiganj, two persons, including a rickshaw-puller, suffered bullet injuries in a factional clash among AL men in Sadar upazila's Dewanbazar.

The two are Md Faisal, 32, supporter of the AL rebel candidate in the upazila, and Ruhul Amin, 45, a rickshaw-puller.

Supporters of the AL-nominated chairman candidate and the party's rebel contender clashed a few minutes after voting ended.

At one stage, a supporter of the AL candidate fired shots at a follower of an independent candidate, but missed

the target and hit the duo, Jayedul Alam, superintendent of police in Munshiganj.

They were in a critical condition and sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said Shaibal Basak, emergency medical officer at Munshiganj General Hospital.

In Gazaria upazila of the district, miscreants snatched ballot papers and boxes during voting at three polling stations.

In Narayanganj, an independent chairman candidate, three vice-chairman contenders and three female vice-chairman contestants boycotted the polls, bringing allegations of vote rigging by supporters of AL candidates.

At least 10 people, including two policemen, were wounded in Brahmanbaria as two AL factions clashed over casting of fake votes at a polling station in Sadar upazila's Sarail Prata Bazar area around 3:45pm.

Several shops were vandalised and looted.

In a separate incident, miscreants blasted cocktails at Brahmanbaria Government College centre in Sadar upazila around 11:00am, creating panic among the voters. No one was

injured.
Visiting Konaur Government Primary School centre in Nabinagar upazila, it was found that only 196 of the 2,029 votes were cast till 12:00pm.

At the same polling centre, Amjad Hossain, polling agent of the AL-nominated candidate in the upazila, alleged that he was barred from entering the centre.

In the meantime, a presiding officer was detained over negligence in duty at Kandapota Government Primary School centre in Dhamrai Upazila.

The presiding officer, Abul Bashar Badsha, is head teacher of Amshimur Sheshif Model High School in Dhamrai and also Jatiya Party-backed vice chairman of Saturia upazila parishad in Manikganj.

Executive Magistrate Pranab Kumar Gosh said Bashar did not inform the returning officer concerned that one of the polling officers at the centre was absent during voting.

Besides, it appeared that there were some anomalies in casting of ballots at the centre, mentioned the magistrate.

Taking all these into consideration, the presiding officer was detained and handed over to the local judicial mag-

istrate concerned, he told The Daily Star.

The polling centre was found to be almost empty around 2:00pm.

Seeking anonymity, one of the polling officers said 600 to 700 votes had already been cast at the centre that has 1,200 voters.

In Tangail, nine people, including an election official, were detained by law enforcers at different polling stations for their alleged involvement in casting fake votes.

The polls official, Assistant Presiding Officer Parvin Sultana, was discharging duties at Basail Dakkhinpara Government Primary School centre in Basail upazila.

In Patuakhali, a mobile court sentenced three persons to seven days' imprisonment for their involvement in vote rigging at two polling stations in Mirzaganj upazila.

Elections were held peacefully in Jashore, Feni and Noakhali amid low voter turnout, report our correspondents.

Many voters suffered due to technical problems in electronic voting machines at several centres in Feni Sadar upazila, as the machines could not recognise their fingerprints.

Fire damages shed of fire service office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A shed of Demra Fire Service and Civil Defence office in Dhaka was partially damaged by a fire originating from a gas line near its boundary wall last night.

Abdul Mannan, senior station officer of Demra Fire Station, said they doused the fire around 1:05am.

No one was hurt in the fire, he said, adding the fire broke out around 11:55pm.

Four units of the fire service office worked to douse the fire, he added.

"We have managed to bring the fire under control but gas is still coming out of the pipeline," said Mannan.

The Titas gas authorities are now working to repair the gas line, he added.

3 suspected

FROM PAGE 1
Sensing the law enforcers' presence, the criminals opened fire. Police returned fire in self-defence, triggering the "gun battle", the OC said.

At one stage, the criminals escaped and the law enforcers found the bullet-hit bodies of Mahmudur and Absar on the spot.

They were taken to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex and later shifted to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital for better treatment. They died there around 8:00am, the OC said.

Police claimed to have recovered six locally made firearms, 18 live cartridges and 10,000 yaba tablets from the spot.

The OC said three policemen "sustained minor injuries" in the incident.

Mahmudur and Absar stood accused in several cases, including drug-related ones. They had been absconding, the police official said.

He said Absar ran his yaba trade in Hoaiyang area and Mahmudur in Hnila area.

A case was filed in connection with the "gunfight".

In another incident, a suspected female drug peddler was killed in a similar incident at Omarkhal area along the Naf river around 4:30am yesterday.

The victim, Rumana Aktar, 20, was an inhabitant of an unregistered Rohingya camp in Leda of Teknaf, said BCB.

Maj Shariful Islam Jomaddar, acting commanding officer of BCB Battalion-2 in Teknaf, said acting on a tip-off that a large consignment of yaba pills would be smuggled in from Myanmar, a BCB patrol team took position along the river.

When some Rohingyas carrying yaba pills in a boat were trying to enter Bangladesh through Omarkhal point, BCB men chased them, the BCB official said.

The drug peddlers attacked BCB men with sharp weapons and also fired shots in the air, he said.

The BCB members retaliated in "self-defence", said Shariful.

As the criminals fled the scene, BCB men found the bullet-riddled body of Rumana on the spot, he claimed.

The BCB men came to know about her identity later, said Shariful.

Around 10,000 yaba pills and two sharp weapons were recovered from the spot, he claimed.

OC Pradip said BCB lodged a case with Teknaf Police Station in this connection.

Saudi team

FROM PAGE 16
Saudi source said was probably a powerful sedative.

A bag was then placed over his head, and Khashoggi screamed: "I can't breathe, I have asthma. Don't do this." According to the Post, he died soon after.

The transcript describes a buzzing noise, perhaps an electric saw used to dismember the journalist.

According to Ignatius, who said he interviewed more than a dozen American and Saudi sources who spoke on condition of anonymity, some members of the Saudi Rapid Intervention Group received training in the United States.

"The CIA has cautioned other government agencies that some of this special-operations training might have been conducted by Tier 1 Group, an Arkansas-based company, under a State Department license," he said.

"The training occurred before the Khashoggi incident, as part of ongoing liaison with the Saudis, and it hasn't been resumed."

He said several other US-Saudi security exchange programs also have been suspended.

No need

FROM PAGE 16
Titas and Sundarban have demanded 208 percent hike for gas consumed by power plants, 211 percent for fertiliser companies, 96 percent for captive power plants, 132 percent for industries, 41 percent for commercial entities, and 50 percent for CNG-run vehicles.

They are seeking 80 percent rise in monthly gas bill for both single-burner and double-burner cooking stoves, from Tk 750 to Tk 1,350 and from Tk 800 to Tk 1,440 respectively.

Design deviation in 90pc buildings

FROM PAGE 1
including land development, selling flats, plots, and even on constructing flyovers, rather than on monitoring.

Rajuk should take up a massive plan to rebuild Dhaka ensuring fire safety in each building, widening city streets, creating volunteer force for disaster management and installing hydrants at various points, they said.

Rajuk Chairman Abdul Rahman told The Daily Star that they have now identified the buildings that have deviated from their designs.

"We will issue letters to the owners for taking measures to correct the deviations. We will monitor it regularly and if we find that they have not taken any measure, we will take legal steps," said Abdul Rahman.

However, Housing and Public Works Minister SM Rejaul Karim told The Daily Star, "Most of the buildings made minor deviations from their designs."

"For example," he explained, "some houses did not have garage space and some built two rooms on the roof without permission. It is our expectation that the owners will correct those deviations on their own. Our drive is

BUILDINGS IN VIOLATION OF APPROVED DESIGNS			
Areas	Total buildings	Designs ignored by	Percentage
Ashulia, Gazipur	8,874	57	0.64
Uttara, Tongi	68,561	27,412	39.99
Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Pallabi	50,119	47,493	94.76
Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, Niketan, Tejgaon	15,738	13,207	83.92
Dhanmondi	17,716	15,903	89.77
Rampura, Motijheel, Khilgaon	21,656	21,088	97.38
Lalbagh, Sutrapur, Keraniganj	10,700	9,258	86.52
Bhulta, Narayanganj	19,132	507	2.65
Total	2,04,106	1,34,925	66.11

going on and it will continue."
About the under-construction buildings, the Rajuk chairman said they were seeking support from government agencies in this regard.

"Yes, some new buildings were built violating the designs. People's awareness is crucial because it is not possible to monitor everything all the time. But now we have requested other service

providers, including electricity, gas and water authorities, not to provide connections if they find design violations."

Regarding allegations that Rajuk is ignoring its regulatory role and is more focused on development work, the chairman said, "It is not true; the development wing and the regulation unit are separate. Everyone has their own responsibilities."

'RAJUK IN DEEP SLEEP'

Iqbal Habib, urban planning expert and an architect, said, "This survey report proves that Rajuk was in deep sleep. A building was not constructed in one day. These irregularities happened in front of our eyes. When the city is already on the verge of destruction, Rajuk woke up. Rajuk should be ashamed."

Rajuk is more occupied with the business side, including land development and sale of flats and plots that benefit a section of people, he added.

"This has made the mega city vulnerable. Liveability is at stake. In such a situation, there is no alternative to reorganising the city. Rajuk should take up a massive plan," said Habib, adding that the government could learn from how discipline was brought to the RMG sector.

Reputed urban planner Nazrul Islam said, "This report proves that Rajuk failed to carry out its regulatory job. The organisation engaged in development work more."

He suggested that Rajuk be refrained from development activities and focus more on its regulatory job.

Brexit in meltdown

FROM PAGE 16
politics since the 2016 referendum, it was still uncertain how, when or even if the United Kingdom will ever leave the bloc it first joined 46 years ago.

A third defeat of May's divorce deal, after her pledge to quit if it was passed, left one of the weakest leaders in a generation grappling with a perilous crisis over Brexit, the United Kingdom's most significant move since World War Two.

Parliament will vote on different Brexit options today and then May could try one last roll of the dice by bringing her deal back to a vote in parliament as soon as tomorrow.

"There are no ideal choices available and there are very good arguments against any possible outcome at the moment but we are going to have to do something," said Justice Secretary David Gauke, who voted in the 2016 referendum to stay in the EU.

"The prime minister is reflecting on what the options are, and is considering what may happen but I don't think any decisions have been made," he told BBCTV.

Many in May's party, though, have lost patience. The Sun newspaper

reported that 170 of her 314 Conservative lawmakers had sent her a letter demanding that Brexit take place in the next few months - deal or no deal.

The United Kingdom was due to leave the EU on March 29 but the political deadlock in London forced May to ask the bloc for a delay. Currently, Brexit is due to take place at 2200 GMT on April 12 unless May comes up with another option.

'IT IS A MESS'
The labyrinthine Brexit crisis has left the United Kingdom divided: supporters of both Brexit and EU membership marched through London last week. Many on both sides feel betrayed by a political elite that has failed to show leadership.

Parliament is due to vote at around 1900 GMT today on a range of alternative Brexit options selected by Speaker John Bercow from nine proposals put forward by lawmakers, including a no-deal exit, preventing a no-deal exit, a customs union, or a second referendum.

"We are clearly going to have to consider very carefully the will of parliament," Gauke said.

With no majority yet in the House of Commons for any of the Brexit options, there was speculation that an election could be called, though such a vote would be unpredictable and it is unclear who would lead the Conservatives into it.

The Sunday Times said May's media chief, Robbie Gibb, and her political aide Stephen Parkinson were pushing for an election against the will of her chief enforcer in parliament, Julian Smith.

The Conservative Party's deputy chair, James Cleverly, said it was not planning for an election. But the deputy leader of the opposition Labour Party, Tom Watson, said his party was on election footing.

Labour's foreign affairs spokeswoman, Emily Thornberry, said it could try to call a vote of no confidence in May's government.

"We don't know if she is going to remain prime minister, if we are going to get somebody else, who that other person is going to be - it is a mess," Thornberry said.

Opponents of Brexit fear it will make Britain poorer and divide the West as it grapples with both the

unconventional US presidency of Donald Trump and growing assertiveness from Russia and China.

Supporters of Brexit say while the divorce might bring some short-term instability, in the longer term it will allow the United Kingdom to thrive if cut free from what they cast as a doomed attempt in European unity.

4 Rohingyas

FROM PAGE 1
Rahman added.

"Indonesia is actually their transit. They wanted to go to Malaysia," he said, adding that the passports they were carrying mentioned they hailed from Comilla, Feni and Dhaka.

"We have informed the matter to the higher authorities. They [Rohingyas] will be sent back to the Rohingya camp, but a high-level committee will be formed to investigate how the Rohingyas have been able to obtain Bangladeshi passports," the ASP said.

Over one million Rohingyas, including 740,000 who fled to Bangladesh after a military crackdown in late 2017, are living in Cox's Bazar.