

# No fire safety in 63pc of 1,818 high rises in capital

Finds Rajuk survey

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 63 percent of the 1,818 buildings in the capital, 10 storeys or higher, lack fire safety measures, the housing and public works minister said yesterday citing Rajuk findings.

Of the buildings surveyed by the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk), only 539 were found to have fire extinguishers, fire alarms, hoses, pipes, and fire hydrants, said Minister SM Rezaul Karim during a press conference at the Bangladesh Secretariat.

The ministry organised the press conference to make public the probe findings on the FR Tower fire tragedy of March 28. The minister revealed a summary of the Rajuk findings.

Following the tragedy in Banani, Rajuk launched a drive with 24 teams to inspect high-rises to determine if they had proper fire safety and approvals.

Of the 1,818 buildings, 566 were

found to have no emergency fire exits, 721 had faulty emergency exits, and 786 were found to have appropriate fire exit staircases, the inspection summary claimed.

Rajuk teams surveyed buildings in 1,528sqkm area of its jurisdiction. At least 431 building owners, and the authorities of 44 government-owned buildings failed to produce approval documents, according to the survey.

At least 1,136 buildings had Rajuk approved plans while 207 had approvals from other authorities even though they were within Rajuk's jurisdiction.

A total 309 buildings were made deviating from the approved height and 309 more were using parking space for other purposes, the inspection summary claimed.

Hundred and twenty-four residential buildings were being used for commercial purpose.

## 39 Rajuk, ministry officials

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Md Yakub Ali Patwary of the public works ministry, held the officials responsible, Housing and Public Works Minister SM Rezaul Karim said yesterday, citing findings of the committee.

He said all the officials would be brought to book and added that the building did not have approval for more than 18 storeys.

Six Rajuk officials, including then chairman Humayun Khadem, have been held liable for approving the building's 18-storey plan in violation of the building rules in force then.

Other Rajuk officials held responsible are a Rajuk board member, the then town planner, chief engineer, authorised officer, and assistant authorised officer. The lease holder of the tower's plot no-32, Syed Md Hossain Imam Faruq, too has been held responsible.

Rajuk, despite knowing in 2007 that the FR Tower had illegal floors and had deviated from the approved plan, turned a blind eye to the issue and remained silent, said the report.

The probe committee further identified Rajuk's two chief building inspectors and 18 inspectors for failing to prevent the illegal constructions and ignoring the approved plan.

According to the findings, the 15-storey multipurpose commercial FR Tower building plan approved in 1990 was fine.

But the approval of the 18-storey residential-slash-commercial building plan in 1996 was in violation of the buildings rules as 2.5-metre open space on two sides and the rear was not kept and it went beyond the 155-foot height limit set by the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB).

For the 18-storey building, Rajuk approved 193 feet.

The 23-storey building plan submitted by Rupayan Housing Estate Ltd in 2005 was illegal, said the probe report, adding that despite the building owners' application for removal of illegal floors beyond 18, the Rajuk authorities did nothing.

Ministerial permission and Rajuk's approval for mortgage against the top three illegal floors were inappropriate.

The report has also held nine Rajuk officials, including two authorised officers and an executive engineer, responsible for negligence of duty.

The committee recommended removing the building's illegal portion not permissible by the CAAB or sealing it off permanently and taking legal actions against those responsible, including authorised officers, building inspectors, and the then Rajuk chairman.

On then Rajuk chairman Humayun's instructions, Authorised Officer Mokbul

Ahmed, who had expressed reservation about approving the plan under the old rules of 1984, approved it after the enactment of 1996 rules, a member of the probe committee said earlier.

Humayun, who is now over 80 years old, went into retirement more than 20 years ago.

He is suffering from dementia and Parkinson's disease, his son Raiyan Khadem had said, adding that his father could neither speak nor recognise people.

Contacted again yesterday, Raiyan said his father's condition remained the same.

"I have nothing to say," he said, adding, "I am only curious how far my father is really liable for this building anomaly because it is unbearable for me that my father's name is being slurred in the last days of his life."

On March 28, at least 27 people were killed in a fire at the FR Tower.

## RAPE OF RMG WORKER 4 transport workers get life term

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A Tangail court yesterday awarded four transport workers with life imprisonment for raping a garment worker in a moving bus in the district's Dhanbari upazila in 2016.

Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal Judge Khaleda Yasmin passed the order and fined the convicts Tk 1 lakh each.

The convicts are: Habibur Rahman Nayan, 28, Rezaul Karim Jewel, 38, Md Khalek Bhutto, 23, and Md Ashraf, 26, all hailing from Dhanbari upazila.

Ataur Rahman Azad, general secretary of Bangladesh Manobadhikar Bastobayon Sangstha, said Nayan, Khalek and Ashraf were present at the court when the verdict was delivered and Rezaul was tried in absentia.

The court heard nine witnesses including plaintiff, police, doctor and magistrate before delivering the verdict.

The victim's husband filed a case with Dhanbari Police Station on April 2 last year, a day after the incident happened. Later on April 6, the convicts surrendered before a magistrate court and has been in jail since then.

Sub-Inspector Khan Mostofa Hasan, investigation officer of the case, submitted a charge sheet to the judicial magistrate's court in Tangail on May 11 in connection with the case.

## Govt doubles duty to 55pc

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to 25 percent from 3 percent and introduced 5 percent advance income tax on rice imports.

The move came amid public outcry as prices of paddy dropped so low that many farmers were unable to recover production costs.

The government estimates production cost of a kg of boro paddy to be Tk 24.83 but the grains were selling for almost half that in some regions.

The Department of Agricultural Marketing (DAM) data showed that average wholesale price of coarse paddy was Tk 12.97 per kg on May 20. The lowest was Tk 10.25 in Nilphamari, a major rice producing district of the northwestern region.

Prices of the staple plummeted due to good harvests of crops this season and the previous three as well as higher private and public stocks. Imports made the stocks even greater, said rice millers and traders.

The NBR said 3.03 lakh tonnes of rice was imported in the first 10 months of the current fiscal year (2018-19).

NBR Chairman Md Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan said, "This compels farmers to sell their produce below production costs. As a result, farmers are suffering huge financial losses."

He said the revenue authority hiked the import duty in line with the directive of the prime minister.

Bangladesh is expected to hit a new high in rice production this fiscal year after growing 3.62 crore tonnes in fiscal year 2017-18 thanks to favourable weather and various government support, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension.

Lalit Kasara, a rice importer of the northwestern region, said imports of the cereal would stop after the duty hike.

He said imports declined substantially because of good production at home and the 28 percent duty imposed at the beginning of the fiscal year. "Fine grains such as Kataribhog were mainly imported this year."

Nirod Boron Saha, president of the Naogaon Dhan O Chal Arathdar Babshayee Samity, an association of rice wholesalers and commission agents of the district, said the duty hike would not have any major effect on prices the farmers are now selling for.

"Prices of fine and aromatic rice may rise ahead of Eid," he said.

Prices of rice dropped to nearly a three-year low, according to DAM and Food and Agriculture Organisation data.

Torikul Islam, a farmer in Jessore, expects that the move would benefit growers. "Immediately, there may not be any impact but the prices may increase after some days," he said.



A woman peruses gold ornaments at a shop in Karnaphuli Garden City Shopping Complex in the capital's Kakrail recently. Eid shopping has begun around the country, with most malls wearing a festive look to attract customers.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## 10 yrs on, 60pc schools

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seats of learning.

"The authorities of educational institutions do not keep the sexual harassment issue on their priority list. They take the issue lightly," said Mahtabul Hakim, programme analyst of UN Women Bangladesh.

"They think if such complaints become public, it will be a matter of shame for the victim as well as the institution," he told The Daily Star recently.

The HC in May 2009 ordered forming a committee at every educational institution and workplace to deal with complaints of sexual harassments, conduct investigations and make recommendations.

An education ministry circular on April 22, 2010 asked all educational institutions to form such committees within three weeks. But it got a lukewarm response at the time.

The death of Nusrat Jahan Rafi, a student of Sonagazi Islamia Senior Fazil Madrasa, prompted the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) to issue another directive on April 18 this year to set up anti-sexual harassment committees in line with the 2009 HC directive within a week.

A group of youths set Nusrat on fire on April 6 allegedly for refusing to withdraw a sexual assault case against madrasa principal Siraj Ud Doula in late March. The incident triggered a widespread public outcry.

The DSHE also asked the authorities to inform it about the committees and upload names of committee members on their own websites.

"So far, what we have found is some 40 percent schools and colleges

have sexual harassment complaint committees," a top official of DSHE told The Daily Star.

There are about 30,000 school, college and madrasas in the country.

"We will need some time to say exactly how many educational authorities have formed committees as the authorities are still sending reports to us," said Prof Shahedul Khair Chowdhury, director (administration) of DSHE.

DSHE Director General Professor Syed Md Golam Faruk thinks not all the educational institutions have felt the necessity to form such committees due to a lack of awareness.

"We will send a letter to all educational institutions after Eid-ul-Fitr regarding the matter. We will also increase monitoring of the institutions," he added.

The situation at the universities is also not pleasing.

Some 35 public universities and 53 private universities have sexual harassment complaint committees, said Mauli Azad, deputy secretary of University Grants Commission.

There are 45 public and 103 private universities in the country.

According to UN Women Bangladesh's 2013 situational analysis in eight universities, 76 percent of female students had faced incidents of sexual harassment by campus-related people like students, teachers and management staff.

"The overall situation at universities has not improved that much now," said Mahbatul Hakim recently.

A study of ActionAid Bangladesh on 30 students of several universities in January 2019 also found that 84 percent of them were not aware about

a sexual harassment committee in their university.

Taslina Yasmin, researcher of the study, thinks a lack of will and awareness are the reasons behind nonchalance of the authorities to form the committee.

Advocate Wahida Idris Iqbal, director of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association, said the government should play an active role in forming the committees and monitoring their activities.

On May 6, the High Court expressed dissatisfaction over the failure to implement the 2009 directive.

Bangladesh is much ahead of many other countries in terms of women empowerment, but negligence in constituting the committees at the educational institutions and workplaces is disappointing, the HC said.

Following another writ petition, the HC on May 14, 2009 issued a set of guidelines defining sexual misdemeanours to prevent any kind of physical, mental or sexual harassment of women, girls and children at workplaces, educational institutions and other public places, including roads, across the country.

The HC directed the government to make a law on the basis of the guidelines, and ruled that the guidelines would be "treated as law" until the law was made.

The court directed the authorities concerned to form a five-member harassment complaint committee, headed by a woman, at every workplace and institution to investigate allegations of harassment of women. Majority of the committee members must be women, it ruled.

## 9-year wait for MPO set to end

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of the election as well as other issues.

The MPO is the government's share in the payroll of non-government educational institutions. Under the scheme, non-government teachers get their basic pays as well as some monthly allowances from the public fund.

Currently, more than 4 lakh teachers and employees of 26,340 secondary schools, colleges, madrasas and technical institutes enjoy the benefit.

The BNP government had suspended the scheme in its 2001-06 tenure.

In 2010, the AL government had reinstated it, bringing 1,624 more institutions under the scheme. But since then, no more new institutions got the benefit.

The then Finance Minister AMA Muhith, a major critic of the system, slammed the education ministry on many occasions for not reforming the MPO policy despite his insistence.

"The MPO scheme is a bad policy. I wanted it reformed, but it did not happen. This is why I stopped giving MPOs," he said in January last year.

According to him, the scheme

benefits only the teachers, and not the education system as a whole.

Citing an example, he had said that during a visit to a primary school he once found five teachers teaching students of different classes in a single room.

Several thousand teachers and employees of government-recognised educational institutions have been demanding MPO for long.

They held demonstrations and observed hunger strikes in the capital to press home their demand.

Many lawmakers also raised the demand in parliament before every budget.

There are 5,242 non-MPO educational institutions where around 80,000 teachers are working without any pay, some for more than a decade, according to non-MPO Shikhya Pratishthan Shikhyak Karmachari Federation, said of the government decision.

But he demanded that the government bring all the 5,242 non-MPO institutions under the scheme.

"There are many teachers who have continued teaching without any salary for over a decade. So we will not accept if some institutions get the benefit while some do not.... We will go for a movement," he said.

## Shakib back at the top

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in ODIs, Tests and T20Is, making him the gold standard as far as modern-day all-rounders are concerned.

Having beaten out the likes of Ian Botham, Kapil Dev and Imran Khan to become the fastest to the double of 3,000 Test runs and 200 Test wickets in November last year, Shakib now stands on the cusp of becoming the fastest -- by far -- to the ODI double of 5,000 runs and 250 wickets, which he stands to achieve at the earliest in his 199th match when Bangladesh take on South Africa. If he does achieve the mark on June 2, he would have beaten the next best on the list -- Pakistan's Abdul Razzaq by a whopping 35 matches. Shakib missed the tri-series final because of back spasms, but that just means that he is set to bring up the special record on the grandest stage of all -- not unlikely for a player who has risen to the occasion more often than not.

Shakib's brief slip from the top was because of a glut of injuries in the recent past. A finger injury forced him to miss the entire tour of New Zealand

earlier this year, while a flare-up of an older finger issue caused him to miss three ODIs against Zimbabwe and part of the Asia Cup last year. However, three matches in the Ireland tri-series -- which preceded Bangladesh's World Cup campaign -- where he scored 140 runs with two half-centuries and took two wickets, was enough for Shakib to reclaim his spot at the top. He now has 359 points to Rashid's 339.

Shakib is not resting on his laurels. In Leicester, where Bangladesh concluded an optional training camp yesterday, Shakib was one of the busier players, spending almost an hour in the centre wicket honing his batting. Judging by the rifle-shot echoes of his shots ringing out through the Leicestershire County Cricket Club, practice was going well for the all-rounder.

Having already gotten the immense confidence boost of winning their maiden multi-team ODI trophy -- that too undefeated -- Bangladesh will now head to the World Cup knowing that they have the world's best all-rounder in their ranks, officially.

## Nigerian bandits kill at least 20: police

AFP, Kano

Bandit gunmen have killed at least 20 people in separate attacks in northwestern Nigeria, police said Wednesday, the latest violence in the restive region of Katsina.

Armed bandits on motorcycles stormed into a farming village on Tuesday, spraying the people with gunfire, Katsina state police spokesman Gambo Isah said.

"They killed 18," Isah said.

That attack happened on at Yargamji village in Batsari district, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) from the state capital Katsina.

A self-defence militia from another village then chased the bandits, ending in a gun battle in the forest.

Police said the bodies of two militia members shot dead were brought back and buried from that fight, but residents said more people were killed.

"We lost 11 people who went to fight the bandits in the bush," resident Sada Iro said.

BOGURA-6 BY-POLLS

## Khaleda won't bid to contest

Says one of her aides

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Although BNP leaders yesterday collected nomination form on behalf of party Chairperson Khaleda Zia for the upcoming Bogura-6 by-polls, she said she won't bid to contest the election, according to one of her aides.

"The nomination form was sent to Khaleda Zia, but she did not sign it. She said she will not join the polls," Khaleda's personal secretary Abdus Sattar told The Daily Star yesterday.

The former prime minister, now serving jail sentence for graft, also expressed anger at the party's decision to join the by-election on June 24, said BNP sources.

BNP leaders in Bogura collected the form from the district's returning officer yesterday morning. Later in the day, the form reached Khaleda through the official channel, the sources said.

They said Abdus Sattar sent the form to the jail authorities who forwarded it to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Medical College Hospital where the BNP chief has been undergoing treatment since April 1.

A party source told this paper on receiving the form, Khaleda wanted to know who took the decision to take part in the by-polls and why she had not been informed about it earlier.

With her reservation about the decision, BNP's participation in the election has now become uncertain, the source added.

Bogura-6 constituency fell vacant after BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, who won the seat in the December 30 national election, did not take oath as a member of parliament within the stipulated 90 days from the date of the first meeting of parliament.

In the general polls, the BNP won six out of the 300 parliamentary seats. The Gonoforum, a partner in the BNP-led Jatiya Oikyafront, bagged only two.

On many occasions, including on the election day, the alliance rejected the election, demanded fresh polls and said they would not join parliament.

Khaleda had filed nomination for three seats, but the applications were scrapped since she was convicted in graft cases.

On Tuesday, party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman, now in London, held a meeting with Bogura BNP leaders at the party's Nayapalton headquarters through video conferencing and decided to take part in the by-polls, said party sources.

The meeting also decided that five party leaders, including Khaleda, will file nomination papers for the election, they said.

Syru Kabir Khan, an official of Khaleda's press wing, however, said Tarique had agreed on collecting the form on behalf of Khaleda at the request of the party leaders in Bogura. After Khaleda decided not to run for the MP, Tarique agreed with that as well, he said.

Party sources said BNP leaders GM Siraj, Mahbubur Rahman, Rezaul Karim Badshah and Jaoyunul Abedin Chan would file their nomination papers today, which is the last date for that.

Most of the senior BNP leaders are not interested in joining the by-polls as they fear possible irregularities in the election, said party sources.

"We boycotted the [recent] upazila election, then why should we participate in the by-polls?" one of them asked while talking to this reporter.

Meanwhile, talking to journalists at the Nayapalton office yesterday, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, senior joint secretary general of the party, also said they were yet to decide on joining the election.

Khaleda landed in jail in February last year after she was sentenced to five years in prison in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. The High Court later extended her jail term to 10 years.

In Zia Charitable Trust graft case, she was jailed for seven years.

## 'Drug dealer' killed in 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A suspected drug peddler was killed in a "gunfight" with the Detective Branch of police in Meherpur early yesterday.

Obaidur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Meherpur DB, said one of their teams raided Gangni upazila's Karamdi village around 3:30am on information that a gang of drug peddlers was holding a meeting there.

Sensing the presence of the DB personnel, the criminals opened fire on them, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate with gunfire, he claimed.

"At one stage, the attackers fled but we found a body on the spot," he said.

The dead was later identified as Nazmul Hossain, 27, who was facing five cases, including four related to narcotics and one over an attack on border guards in Lalmonirhat's Burimari, he said.

The OC also claimed to have recovered a gun, a kg of marijuana and a motorcycle from the scene.