

# Syndicates make

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gas connections are responsible for that."

Halim, who sits on a three-member body to probe the Chalantika fire, said it would not have become so deadly had plastic pipes for gas supply been not crisscrossed the slum.

Referring to different fire incidents at various slums in Dhaka, he said there were gas explosions in those cases and firefighters could not tame the infernos even after pumping a huge amount of water.

On February 27, two minor children died during a deadly fire at Bhasantek Bosti. Both the children drowned in a ditch inside the slum when people were fleeing from the flames.

Kazi Nazmuzzaman, deputy assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, at that time told The Daily Star that the blaze spread within seconds because of the illegal gas connections.

It took 21 fire engines about three hours to control the flames that ravaged some 600 shanties and left about 3,000 people homeless.

**SITTING ON 'GAS BOMB'**  
Home to around 1.1 lakh people in 30,000 houses, Korail Bosti is spread over 90 acres of government land in Mohakhali. The 40-acre Bhasantek Bosti houses around 30,000 people in 4,750 homes.

Chalantika Bosti is on 20 acres of khas land where about 15,000 people lived in 3,000 houses before the August 16 blaze.

Because of low rent, hawkers, shopkeepers, roadside vendors, rickshaw and van pullers, CNG drivers, domestic helps and workers from garment, construction and transport sectors live in the slum houses, mostly made of tin, wood and bamboo.

On average, they pay Tk 500 for electricity and Tk 700 for gas per month.

The syndicates connect stainless steel pipes to the main lines of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company, and distribute gas to the slum houses with GI pipes and even plastic or hose pipes.

"To tell the truth, the way the illegal gas lines are installed," said Mofizur Rahman, councillor of Dhaka North City Corporation's ward-19, where the slum is located.

"Some corrupt staff of Titas Gas are involved in providing the illegal connections in Korail Bosti in exchange for money," said Mofizur, also president of ward-19 AL.

In recent visits, these correspondents saw slum dwellers using gas burners inside their tiny rooms, sized around 10 feet by 8 feet, where at least four to five people live. Many of those rooms don't have any windows.

Besides, burners were found in the doorways.

Some pipes were precariously hanging overhead while some were also seen haphazardly lying on the ground in places.

"I know the way I am using gas is seriously dangerous. But I have no option. It will cost Tk 130 per day if I use kerosene," Rahim Uddin, a tea-stall vendor at the Chalantika slum, who uses a stove that gets gas through a rubber pipe, said.

In Korail, at least 20 syndicates, allegedly led by local Awami League men Junaid, Nayeab Ali, Sohag, among others, are involved in providing 15,000 illegal gas and 20,000 power connections to slum dwellers. This newspaper couldn't reach any of the three to get their comment.

In Bhasantek, at least three syndicates are involved in providing around 1,500 gas and 4,750 electricity lines to slum houses, sources involved in the illicit trade told this newspaper.

Insiders say Md Monir, Jahangir and another man run the syndicates. However, none of them could be

reached for comments.

In Chalantika, DNCC ward councillor and local AL leader Rojjob Hossain and Jubo League leader Mohammad Dulal reportedly run the syndicates.

There are 1,500 gas and 3,000 power connections in Chalantika Bosti, several slum dwellers said.

Contacted, Rojjob denied his involvement in providing illegal gas and power supplies to the slum. Dulal is on the run since the August 16 fire, said locals.

The slums are also crisscrossed by substandard electric wires supported by bamboo and wooden poles and having multiple joints in places. A number of such poles remain tilted dangerously.

From the main utility poles, electricity is transmitted to slum houses through those illegal wires. Any leak can lead to accidents, especially in the rainy season.

However, a few houses of the three slums were given electricity connections legally through setting up electric meters on poles, several slum people said.

"These electric wires may snap anytime and fall on a slum house, which can cause a disaster," said Abidur, a rickshaw puller living in Chalantika slum.

Nurul Haque, a former deputy director at the fire service, who headed a number of committees to probe fire incidents, said slum fires mostly originate from electric short-circuits because the wires are of very low quality and installed in an undisciplined way.

Besides, gas burners kept running for long to dry clothes also lead to fire, he said, adding that in some cases, slums are set on fire deliberately.

Kamruzzaman Khan, director (operation), Titas Gas said they don't provide any gas connections to slums.

Another senior official of Titas said under the existing law, they cannot supply gas to the slum people as the land where they are living on is khas land and the slum houses have no holding numbers.

Wishing anonymity, he also said the government should provide gas cylinders to slum people at lower prices.

On Tuesday, the Titas Gas authorities launched a drive to disconnect illegal gas connections in part of the Chalantika slum, locals told this newspaper.

Sources from Bhasantek Bosti said the authorities also conducted a drive at the slum on Sunday to sever illegal gas lines.

Several slum dwellers said they saw such drives in the past but the situation usually goes back to square one within a few days.

Contacted, Noor Mohammad, executive director (operation) of Dhaka Electric Supply Company (Desco), claimed there is no illegal connection of electricity in any slum in the capital.

When told that these correspondents saw illegal power lines at Korail, Bhasantek and Chalantika slum, he said Desco formed a monitoring committee after the recent fire at Chalantika and found no illegal connection at the slum.

He said Desco supplied electricity to different slums, where roads are in good shape, by setting up meters on poles.

He, however, admitted that the way electric wires are connected to different slum houses is risky.

Talking to The Daily Star, Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said, "We have no specific information that a section of police members cooperated with vested quarters in providing illegal gas and power supply in slums in exchange of money."

"Police will take action if any police members are found involved in such illegal activities."



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina uses a napkin to wipe her tears away as she addresses a discussion at the city's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre yesterday, marking the National Mourning Day.

PHOTO: BSS

# Make sure

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their lives and all other possibilities after the killing of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"We have restored those hope and possibilities for the people of the country. Let those hopes and possibilities not fall into the hands of those Hyenas again."

She said the conspirators had tried to distort the history of the country and its struggle for freedom by killing Bangabandhu and his family members.

Responding to BNP leaders' claim that how could their party be termed "the party of killers" although it did not exist during the August 15 events, Hasina said Ziaur Rahman was involved in the conspiracy and established the killers socially, politically and gave them opportunity in business activities.

She alleged that Zia, founder of the BNP, was a murderer who kept the killers of Bangabandhu with him and did everything. "Then there is nothing to claim that this party is not the party

of killers."

The PM said Khaleda Zia had awarded the killers of Bangabandhu and the four national leaders after coming to power. "My question is what kind of party is it if not a party of killers?"

Hasina said the post-August 15 governments had tried to make the defeated forces of 1971 happy by turning Bangladesh into a failed state.

"Their objective was to thwart the dream of Bangabandhu by preventing the people of the country from getting a developed and prosperous life."

She said the goal of her government is to take the country forward. "We have achieved that by the grace of Allah. From here, nobody will be able to pull down Bangladesh."

The PM said the father of the nation is not alive, but his ideology is there. "If anyone wants to be successful in politics, that person must follow the footsteps of the father of the nation."

Dhaka North AL President AKM Rahmatullah presided over the meeting.

## Rohingya man held with 10,000 yaba pills

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Members of Rapid Action Battalion yesterday held a Rohingya man with 10,000 yaba pills in Kutupalong Refugee Camp of Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

The arrestee is Shafiul Alam, said Mahmudul Hasan Mamun, assistant director (media) of RAB-15.

According to the Rab official, they conducted a raid in the camp area on information that a group of drug peddlers gathered there.

During the raid, Rab found Shafiul roaming around with the yaba pills in a shopping bag, he claimed, adding that they later handed him over to Ukhiya Police Station.

Abul Monsur, officer-in-charge of Ukhiya Police Station, said a case was filed with the police station in this connection.

The accused was also sent to jail yesterday, he added.

## JP leaders see no rift within party

Join prayer meeting marking Ershad's chehlum

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Although there is a rift within the main opposition Jatiya Party over its leadership, senior party leaders shared the stage of a prayer meeting in Bandar upazila yesterday.

JP Chairman GM Quader, Co-chairman Raushan Ershad, Secretary General Moshirur Rahman Ranga and Ershad's son Saad Ershad attended the programme, seeking blessings for the departed soul of party founder HM Ershad who died last month.

Speaking at the event, Ranga said, "After seeing today's attendance, would you think there is a division within the Jatiya Party? We see division in newspaper reports. Why do you [journalists] write about division? Do you want to see the Jatiya Party split into two factions?"

He said there was no split within the party and there would not be one in future as all the leaders were united.

On July 23, Raushan in a press release said she didn't accept Quader as the party chairman. However, the release was not signed by her.

Yesterday, GM Quader said Ershad had been involved in politics for a long time and he contributed a lot to politics.

"All the major development work in the country was done by Ershad. He had dedicated his life to ensuring welfare of the people," he added.

JP leaders urged the people to stay with the party to take forward the country's development activities.

Selim Osman, lawmaker from Narayanganj-5, organised the programme on the occasion of Ershad's chehlum.

## 3 madrasa students

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mosque, said Ahsan Habib, assistant superintendent of police (Matlab Circle).

"It is a very mysterious case," he said, adding that police did not find any sign of suffocation or smell suggesting the cause of their deaths.

Police are interrogating the imam, said Swapan Kumar Aich, officer-in-charge of Matlab Dakshin Police Station.

"We are investigating the cause of their death," he told The Daily Star.

The bodies were sent for autopsies.

## Extortionists

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Mozaffar told him that he would harm his family, said Officer-in-Charge Abdur Rashid of Rangpur Kotwali Police Station.

Mohan informed Mozaffar's father about Mozaffar's conduct on Thursday. The two families then sat together in Textile Mills area of the city to settle the issue. The boy was fatally injured when he was returning home from there with his aunt, the OC said.

He added that police were looking for the suspects who had fled the area. Police handed over Rashid's body to his parents after an autopsy at the medical college.

The boy's father Shahidar filed a case yesterday afternoon accusing six men, police said.



Holding up photographs of victims of enforced disappearance, their relatives join a programme at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday demanding safe return of the victims.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Ukraine denies reports of prisoner swap with Russia

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine yesterday denied reports that a prisoner swap with Russia was underway.

"The process for the mutual release of prisoners is continuing. Information about its completion is not true," the Ukrainian presidency said in a post on Facebook.

Speculation has spread in recent days that a prisoner swap was imminent and reports surfaced overnight that it had begun.

Some of the reports were based on

a repost on Facebook by Ukraine's new prosecutor general suggesting the swap had started.

"This is not the first time we have seen information chaos caused by... unconfirmed information," the presidency said, warning against "misinformation" and urging people not to "play with society's emotions".

Russian new agencies reported on Thursday that Oleg Sentsov, a Ukrainian filmmaker serving a 20-year jail term in Russia, had been moved to Moscow ahead of a possible prisoner swap.

## August sees

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weather conditions could be ideal for breeding of Aedes.

Sanya mentioned that they would conduct a survey to know about density and pattern distribution of Aedes outside the capital.

"We will start from Chattogram," she added.

DGHS Director General Prof Abul Kalam Azad said there had been an increase in dengue cases in September and October in the previous years.

If it doesn't rain in the next two months, there is a chance that the number of dengue cases would come down, he said.

"We will give training to health service providers in and outside the capital so that they can properly deal with dengue patients," added Kalam.

Prof Kabirul Bashar, an

entomologist at Jahangirnagar University, stressed the need for continuing mosquito control drives.

"The authorities concerned as well as people will have to carry on cleanliness activities at least till October," he said.

### ONE DIES IN CAPITAL

A 52-year-old woman died from dengue at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday morning.

Munni Begum, wife of Ashraf Ali from Keraniganj, had been admitted to the DMCH with high fever on Wednesday, hospital sources said.

With this, at least 124 people died from dengue this year.

The DGHS, however, put the number at 52.

The first dengue case was recorded in the country in 2000 when at least 93 people died of the disease and 5,551 were hospitalised.

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yesterday, marking the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances.

"I cannot answer when Sazzad's little daughter ask me when her father will return... I don't know how long we will have to wait for him," she added.

Like her, about 70 family members of enforced disappearance victims came from different parts of the country to join the programme at the Jatiya Press Club. A number of them were themselves victims of enforced disappearance, but later returned home, organisers said.

"Mayer Daak" (Mother's Call), a platform of family members who lost their loved ones since 2012 to enforced disappearance, arranged the discussion.

Many families allege law enforcers are behind their disappearance, but the government denies this.

According to Ain o Salish Kendra, at least 544 people have fallen victim to enforced disappearance from January 2010 to July 2018.

Speaking at the programme, Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua said those who are arrested in line with certain law have at least the chance to get some sort of legal assistance. But the victims whose detention is not acknowledged do not even have that opportunity.

Hasna Islam Raisa, daughter of BNP leader Sajedul Islam Sumon of Tejgaon, said she was in fourth grade when her father went missing in 2013.

"Six years on, there is no trace of my father. I couldn't find him anywhere," said a weeping Raisa, now a class-nine student.

Sumon's sister Marufa Islam said their mother Hazera Begum had been attending similar programmes over the last few years. Now old and sick, she could not come this year.

"Her only wish is to see her son come home safely," she added.

Shakil, the younger brother of Chhatra Dal leader Mahbub Hasan Sujan of Basabo, said some people identifying themselves as law enforcers picked up Sujan from their neighbourhood on December 7, 2013.

Mahbub was among several dissent voices who were picked up ahead of the parliamentary election of 2014. They never came back home, Shakil said.

"If someone is guilty, they should be tried in line with the law," he added.

Speaking at the discussion, Prof Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University said enforced disappearance was a heinous crime and that demand for justice for the victims should get louder.

The civil society has to play its due role here, said Prof Asif, who teaches law.

Nagorik Oikya Convener

Mahmudur Rahman Manna said people must protest against such crimes whenever possible.

Alleging that the government was formed through widespread vote rigging, Manna said those in power have become deaf and their hearts are made of iron.

"They cannot feel the cries of the family members of enforced disappearance victims," Manna said, demanding formation of an independent commission to deal with the matter.

In some cases, there are evidence that fathers handed over their sons to either Rab or police after being assured that they will return safely. But the state agencies have a tendency to cover up those incidents, said rights activist Nur Khan.

Rights activist Nasiruddin Alan and Gonoshasthaya Kendra Founder Zafrullah Chowdhury, among others, spoke at the programme.