# Slum fire ravaged everything they had

Shaheen Mollah

Rahmat Mia, 23, lives in a tin-shed room with a monthly rent of Tk 3,500 with his wife, mother, sister and niece in Mohakhali's Sat Tola slum.

Rahmat was struggling to make ends meet and had two months' worth of rent pending.

While he was already worried about how to run his family in the days ahead, the horrific fire at the slum on Monday night burnt everything to ashes.

Rahmat's family was able to save their lives but all their belongings were

The fire broke out around 11:45pm, gutting 72 houses and 26 shops.

Rakib Islam, 15, sustained burn injuries from the fire. The boy, who works as a labourer, has been undergoing treatment at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery around 2:00am since yesterday with 25 percent burns.

Firefighters suspect the fire began from an electric short circuit, while locals say it originated in a shop.

During a visit to the slum yesterday, Rahmat was found searching for anything that could be salvaged from his burnt possessions.

Describing how he came to know about the fire, Rahmat said it occurred after they all had fallen asleep following dinner at 10:00pm. They woke up to people shouting and then saw the fire right next to their house.

"I managed to get out safely with my

Work to ensure

Serum has an

Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd to

collect three crore doses of Covid-19

agreement with AstraZeneca to

manufacture the vaccine, ChAdOx1

nCoV-19, being developed by Oxford

University. The vaccine has been

human application, Beximco Pharma

will buy each dose from Serum for \$4

and then supply it to the government

The three crore doses will be

Some 1.5 crore people will be

Besides, the government will

get vaccines from Gavi, the vaccine

alliance, under the supervision of the

preservation of the vaccines while

The vaccine must be stored at 2-8

World Health Organization.

be a challenge.

degrees Celsius.

cold-chain network.

delivered in phases with 50 lakh

doses every month, according to the

vaccinated and each will need two

Once the vaccine is approved for

vaccines from Serum.

named Covishield in India.

Pune-based

family but could not take any valuables out," he told this correspondent.

Rahmat said ever since they came to the slum 16 years back from their village home in Narsingdhi due to struggles, their home had burnt down twice, rendering them helpless and in financial ruins.

"Ten years ago, our house was first burnt. We struggled very hard to save money and buy household items. But now, everything is gone again!" he said with grief.

Like Rahmat, every victim has their own story to tell.

Beauty Rani Chandra was seen crying as she looked at the wreckage inside her home. All the belongings of her oneyear-old family, include her wedding attire, were burnt to ashes.

Her husband Dulal Chandra said that though his income dropped due to pandemic, he managed to save some money even after family expenses and house rent.

He saved Tk 40,000 to pay off a Tk 1

However, the money and his wife's gold were destroyed in the fire. "With everything else, our dreams of our future have also been destroyed. I do not know how will I be debt free," he said.

Shilpi Begum, another resident of the slum, said she lived there for ten years with her husband and two children. The fire reduced my 10-year savings to ashes," she wailed.

She and other victims of the fire sought help from the government and from those who are financially well off.



Swapna, 25, a domestic help, with her baby in her lap picks through the charred remains of her shanty at Sat Tala Bosti in the capital's Mohalkhali yesterday, hours after a devastating fire razed about 100 shanties and shops at the slum.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# Stopover Dhaka

Over the year, at least 600kg was smuggled out of Bangladesh after its arrival from India. One kg of the powder sold at Tk 1 crore.

The DNC learnt all this while probing a case filed over the seizure in September and after arresting 13 people, including six staffers of a courier service. So far the investigators found the

six were unaware that the courier service was being used for smuggling the contraband as they don't have the capacity to detect it. All of them already secured bail last month. Seven other arrestees -- Abul Kalam

Azad alias Bunty, a chemical trader in the capital's Mitford Hospital area, Junayed Ibne Siddiqui, and Bunty's associates Rezaul Haque Bablu, Nazrul Islam, Babul Mazumdar, Md Mazed and Md Bappi -- are now in jail.

Junayed, who is from Chandpur, met Chennai-based chemical trader Habib Master in Bahrain in 2018. In the Gulf country, he was running the real-estate business of his father-inlaw, who passed away the previous

"In 2019, Habib visited Bangladesh and proposed Junayed get involved in the chemical business. Habib also said they had business in the Mitford area in Dhaka and some Indians are involved in it," said a DNC official, requesting anonymity.

Junayed later met Bunty and Indian nationals Rajkhan and Satish and their operations began.

Bunty was the recipient of the consignments of amphetamine sent through the Benapole border under false declaration while Junayed would courier them to different countries after repackaging at his house. Habib Master and his associates oversaw the entire operations.

The official further said they have so far come to know that this powder used to enter Bangladesh from Kolkata. "We are now trying to

collect details whether it is available absence of modern equipment, courier in Kolkata or it comes from any other state in India." Md Mehedi Hasan, assistant

director of DNC, told The Daily Star recently that they have got some more names after interrogating the arrestees. "We are now conducting drives to arrest other syndicate members." He further said they have also

learned about some locations and identities of the people who received these consignments in different countries. "We have sought support from the CID for investigating the foreign links and we may seek Interpol assistance.'

Fazlul Haque Khan, superintendent of DNC, and also the investigating officer of the case, told The Daily Star that they have made some progress in the investigation and are now trying to get details about the smuggling process of the powder from India to

Kusum Dewan, director (operation) of DNC, told this newspaper that they have some developments regarding the investigation into amphetamine "We have also found some

involvement of Indian smugglers behind it and written to the Narcotics Control Bureau of India," he said. No response from the Indian side

reached the DNC till filing of this

SCREENING, DETECTION

the airport, it never got detected," said a high official of DNC.

"Such a consignment is difficult to find out if expert narcotics officials do not check the packages properly or an ultra-modern scanner is not used," he told this correspondent.

In some cases, some staffers at the airport or courier service might have been involved, he added.

An investigator said that in the

service offices are also unable to courier agency already got one.

consignment in September, another official said, "We suspect it was the poor packaging that might have helped law enforcers detect the amphetamine."

(Avsec), the agency which seized

Ahsan, director at Shahjalal airport,

CCTV cameras to cover every inch of the airport and are working to increase trained manpower to work more efficiently," he said.

taken to buy 11 new X-ray machines for the airport to ensure clear scanning of every package, he said. "The X-ray machines are expected to be included in the airport scanning system within

packets. As there is no 3D scanner at but this will be modern technology.

amphetamine, Group Captain Touhid said multiple agencies are working at the airport.

whenever we find any. We even sat with Biman, as they also conduct security scanning, so that we can work jointly with them whenever necessary or they find anything suspicious," he

### The Aviation Security Force EC sending staff

Abul Kalam said all citizens above 14 would get smart NID cards under the second phase of the IDEA project. But the project director, Saidul, said, "Our ultimate plan under the second phase of the project is to distribute smart NID cards among all aged above 10."

Till now, the EC has given smart

make the existing server more efficient and help the EC have a flawless voter

"We will need to modernise and enhance the database and server as the number of people and voters are increasing every day. Although the target of distributing smart NID cards was initially set at nine crore, we now have around 10.98 crore voters," said

Abul Kalam said the major operations of the project include production and personalisation of smart cards.

"We've placed a recommendation at the meeting that the NID services be brought under the revenue budget, instead of keeping it under any

including NID registration, birth and death registration, and the registration activities carried out by Directorate General of Family Planning under a

in 2011, aiming at establishing a secure, accurate and reliable national identification system in Bangladesh.

During the first phase, the commission is supposed to have personalised and supplied NID cards to about nine crore voters up to upazila level. However, it has so far personalised and supplied 6.5 crore

cards till date, said EC officials. After missing four deadlines, the first phase of the project is now set to

be completed next month. Its cost has risen to Tk 1,696 crore, up from the

in the second phase, IDEA project officials said.

### Faridul takes oath

### FROM PAGE 1

The post remained vacant for around

five months. According to the parliament's

qualification up to higher secondary certificate. Born in January 2, 1956, Faridul

Haque Khan is hailed from Islampur village in Islampur upazila of Jamalpur. He was also a chairman of Islampur upazila.

With the inclusion of Faridul

Haque Khan, the number of members in Sheikh Hasina's cabinet rose to 46. Of them, 24 are full ministers,

19 are state ministers and three are deputy ministers.

month. We have enough capacity to store them. We will, however, place proposals before our high-ups to increase the capacity if the regular vaccination programme does not get hampered," Shamsul Haque Mridha, director of the EPI programme, told The Daily Star after the signing

The health ministry has received Tk 100 crore against its proposal for Tk 318 crore for cold chain management of the Covid-19 vaccines, according to media reports.

**SURPASSING 4.5 LAKH-MARK** Meanwhile, with 2,230 people testing

positive for Covid-19 in the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the total number of confirmed cases in the country rose to 4,51,990. In the same period, 32 people

died from the virus, according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). The total number of deaths has

now reached 6,448, with the death rate at 1.43 percent.

Officials said transportation and Against 15,018 tests in 117 labs, the positivity rate was 14.85 percent. maintaining the exact cold chains will The overall positivity rate rose to

> In the meantime, at least 2,266 Covid-19 patients have recovered.

According to the deal, Beximco will collect and transport Covishield With this, the total number of vaccines to storage facilities under recoveries reached 3,66,877 and the the health directorate's Expanded recovery rate is 81.17 percent.

Programme on Immunisation (EPI) Among the 32 dead, 25 were men and seven women. One was aged Officials said the EPI has the storage between 31 and 40, seven between 41 and 50, five between 51 and 60 and 19 "They will supply the vaccines were above 60, added the release. in phases -- 50 lakh doses each

### Kamalapur station

for MRT-6 extension will frustrate its plan to turn the Kamalapur station into a MmTH.

Apart from the railways minister, Salman F Rahman, private industry and investment adviser to the PM; Salim Reza, secretary at the railways ministry; Md Shamsuzzman, director general of the BR; and MAN Siddique, managing director of the DMTCL, attended the meeting.

### DISPUTE OVER EXISTING PLAN

The latest development comes two weeks after the Sub Working Group formed by the Japanese government provided Bangladesh with alternative plan for extending the MRT-6 line up to Kamalapur.

The group said the existing design would seriously hamper the prospect of turning the country's premier railway station into a true transport hub.

It sent a letter to the railways secretary in the first week of November, giving details of its alternative plan, ministry sources said.

Besides, the Japanese ministry of land, infrastructure, transport and tourism wrote to the Public Private Partnership Authority of Bangladesh (PPPA), saying the alternative plan of the sub-working group would bring down costs, compared to that under

the existing plan. The Kamalapur hub is going to be established under public-private partnership model with government-

to-government initiative with Japan. The mass rapid transit (MRT) line-6 was initially designed as an elevated line from Uttara to Motijheel. Later, a skywalk was planned to connect the line with Kamalapur Railway Station.

Last year, the DMTCL planned to stretch the MRT line-6 directly to the railway station following the PM's directive.

Bangladesh Railway opposed the proposal and cited its plan for Kamalapur MmTH.

Railway officials said they were not against the extension of MRT line-6 up to Kamalapur, but the DMTCL's current design would upset their MmTH plan. They had asked the DMTCL to modify its blueprint.

The DMTCL sought help of the Prime Minister's Office in resolving the issue. The DMTCL plan was given the go-ahead at a meeting with PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus in

the chair on September 3. The meeting also directed the railways ministry to take immediate steps to allow setting up of MRT line-6 station and a scissors crossing at Kamalapur Railway Station.

YESTERDAY'S DECISION The railways minister said that as per the existing plan, the railway station will be shadowed by the elevated structure of MRT-6 and the loop line that allows trains to change direction.

"We had reservations about the plan. Kajima also expressed its eservations. As per the new plan, the loop line (scissors crossing for trains to change

direction) would not go towards the station, rather it would go in a different direction. "We have taken the decision at today's meeting. If the prime minister agrees to the plan, we will move

forward with it. "Once the design-related problem solved, we will sign a MoU [memorandum of understanding] with Kajima for establishing the hub," the minister mentioned.

He further said they have to shift the Inland Container Depot from Kamalapur to Dirasram in Gazipur, and a Development Project Proposal has already been prepared to that effect.

Despite repeated attempts, MD of the DMTCL MAN Siddique could not be reached for comments over his mobile phone yesterday evening.

This means that Biden's team will now

ability to meet with federal officials.

Biden's office, which hours earlier announced a highly experienced group to be nominated for top US foreign policy and security posts, said the GSA would now allow "support necessary to carry out a smooth and peaceful transfer

officials will begin meeting with federal officials to discuss the pandemic response, have a full accounting of our national security interests, and gain complete understanding of the Trump administration's efforts to hollow out government agencies," transition director Yohannes Abraham said in a statement.

The sudden break in Trump's dogged attempt to deny Biden's win came after Michigan became the latest state to certify its results and more powerful Trump supporters came out demanding that the impasse end.

**BIDEN TO SHIFT DIPLOMACY** 

Earlier, Biden announced a foreign policy and national security team crammed with veterans from the Barack Obama years, teeing up an end to the upheaval under Trump and a return to

Top of the list was former State Department number two Antony Blinken, tapped for secretary of state.

Biden also named the first female head of intelligence, the first Latino chief of Homeland Security, the first woman as treasury secretary, and a heavyweight pointman on climate issues -- Obama-

The list put out by Biden's team ahead of a formal announcement demonstrated a push to bring back

the US role of leader in multilateral alliances, in contrast to Trump's "America first" regime.

"They will rally the world to take on our challenges like no other -challenges that no one nation can face alone," Biden tweeted. "It's time to restore American leadership.

dismantling of Trump's go-it-alone policies, including rejoining the Paris climate agreement and the World Health Organization and resurrecting the Obama-crafted Iran nuclear deal. Biden named the first woman,

Mayorkas to head the Department of Homeland Security, the agency whose policing of tough immigration restrictions under Trump was a frequent Signaling the Democratic president-

profile of global warming threats, he named Kerry as a new special envoy on climate issues. And in a further message of US

reengagement with the international

community, Biden named career diplomat Linda Thomas-Greenfield for UN ambassador. Jake Sullivan, who also advised Biden when he was vice president under Obama, was named national security

Picked to manage the world's biggest economy as Treasury secretary was Janet Yellen, who will make history as the first woman in the job if confirmed. The 74-year-old was confirmed as Federal Reserve chairwoman under Obama in 2014 and replaced by Trump four years

on professionals whom Biden already knows well, in contrast to the Trump White House where officials were often picked without having traditional incompatible and departed in acrimony. Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris were expected to

formally introduce their appointments in Wilmington, Delaware yesterday. **DWINDLING OPTIONS** The president, meanwhile, has largely halted at least his public work duties,

while heading out to a golf course he owns in Virginia half a dozen times since the election. He has also not taken questions

election, however, are dwindling rapidly

in the face of repeated court defeats.

that too is bearing little fruit. More cracks appeared in the facade of Republican unity on Monday when Senator Rob Portman said it was "time to expeditiously resolve any outstanding

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, said it seems apparent that Joe Biden will be the president-elect." "My hope is that President Trump will take pride in his considerable

accomplishments, put the country first and have a prompt and orderly transition to help the new administration succeed," he said after having issued a similar if less forthright statement a few days earlier.

There was also a push from Trump's highest profile Wall Street backer, Stephen Schwarzman, head of the Blackstone private equity group, who told Axios "the country should move on.

### detect it. They have been asked by the department to buy 3D scanners and the Dhaka office of one international Asked about the detection of the

the amphetamine, refused to comment on this issue and suggested communicating with the director of Shahjalal airport. Group Captain AHM Touhid-ul

told The Daily Star on November 15 that they have already beefed up security after the seizures of amphetamine and yaba earlier this "We have installed some more

Besides, steps have already been

this fiscal year." Asked whether these are 3D scanners he said the details cannot narcotics after putting it in special be provided without seeing the papers

Regarding smuggling

"We seize illegal consignments

## Defiant Trump allows Biden transition

signaled that even he sees the writing on the wall after three weeks of evidencefree claims that the November 3 election

was stolen from him. have access to funds, office space and the

of power." "In the days ahead, transition Biden's

traditional US diplomacy.

era top diplomat John Kerry.

Blinken, a longtime advisor to Biden, will spearhead a fast-paced

Avril Haines, as director of national intelligence, and Cuban-born Alejandro

source of controversy. elect's campaign promise to raise the

The picks underline an emphasis

background for the job or proved

from reporters since the election -- a previously unimaginable silence from a president who for most of his time in office sparred near daily with the press. His options for overturning the

With Biden having won a comfortable victory, Trump's last card is to disrupt the normally routine process of state-by-state certification of results, followed by the formal December 14 vote by the Electoral College. However,

questions and move forward." Senator Lamar Alexander, a senior Republican and close ally of Senate

### Huthis launch missile attack on Saudi Aramco site

Yemen's Huthi rebels launched a missile attack on a Saudi Aramco oil facility in the Red Sea city of Jeddah on Monday, triggering an explosion and a fire in a fuel tank, officials said.

The strike occurred the day after the kingdom hosted a virtual summit of G20 nations, and more than a year after the targeting of major Aramco sites that caused turmoil on global oil The Iran-backed Huthis said they

launched a Quds-2 missile at the oil distribution facility, in retaliation for Saudi's role at the head of a military coalition that supports the government in Yemen's long conflict. The rebels have since the start of last year stepped up attacks on

neighbouring Saudi Arabia, mainly

targeting southern provinces along

their shared border. Jeddah however

lies some 600 kilometres (370 miles) from the frontier. "An explosion took place as a result of a terrorist attack by a projectile, causing a fire in a fuel tank at the petroleum products distribution terminal in the north of Jeddah,' the Saudi energy ministry said in a

statement. Firefighting teams extinguished the blaze and there were no casualties, it said, adding that Aramco's fuel deliveries were not affected by this act of "terrorism and sabotage".

The Saudi-led military coalition said the Huthis were "implicated in this cowardly terrorist attack, which does not target the national capabilities of the kingdom, but rather targets the nerve of the global economy and its supplies as well as global energy security".

NID cards to citizens aged 18 and Other targets of the second phase of the IDEA project include expansion of the NID database and updating it to

Saidul.

project," he said. Meanwhile, Planning Division Senior Secretary Ashadul Islam said the government was planning to bring all data registration activities,

single entity. The five-year-long first phase of the IDEA project was launched

primary budget of Tk 1,379 crore. Rest of the cards will be distributed

website, Faridul Haque Khan is a jute businessman by profession having

Faridul Haque Khan was elected as MP in 2009, 2014 and 2018 parliamentary elections.