



'NOT INEVITABLE'
Amid escalating Taliban offensive, Biden believes Afghan forces can defend their country
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TRAPPED, THEY DIE IN FIRE

52 workers, staffers of N'ganj food factory killed; blaze under control after 19 hrs

SANAD SAHA, SHARIFUL ISLAM and MUNTAKIM SAAD

At least 49 workers and staffers died in a fire at a Narayanganj factory being trapped on the third floor with its lone exit locked when the blaze engulfed the building on Thursday.

Three others died after jumping off the six-storey food processing factory and the death toll stood at 52, most of whom are women and children.

Soon after the fire broke out around 5:30pm on Thursday, those on duty on the third floor were asked by a supervisor to stay there and assured that they would be safe from the blaze and smoke as it was air-conditioned.

They were also told that the firefighters would be reaching any time soon, said survivors and relatives of the victims.

When the firefighters arrived at 6:10pm, the blaze, which presumably originated on the ground floor housing flammable materials like cartons and paper rolls, had already spread to the first and second floors.

After hours of frantic efforts, firefighters reached the third floor only to find a grim picture -- 49 bodies charred beyond recognition.

At least 10 were injured while the firemen rescued 25 from the rooftop of the Hashem Foods factory, which manufactured items of known brands such as Shezan juice and Nocilla.

"All 49 bodies were recovered from the third floor of the building today [yesterday]. They could not come out as they found its only exit locked," Debashish Bardhan, deputy director (operations and maintenance) of Fire Service and Civil Defence, told The Daily Star.

"The bodies were charred beyond recognition and it will be hard to identify them," he said yesterday.

All the recovered bodies were sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue where family members and relatives of

- All 49 bodies were recovered from the third floor of the building
- Bodies of the victims were burned beyond recognition
- DNA tests to be conducted for identification of them



Smoke billows from the six-storey factory building of Hashem Foods as firefighters try to put out the flames yesterday, hours after a fire broke out at the factory in Karnagop area of Narayanganj's Rugganj upazila. The massive blaze swept through the building, leaving at least 52 people dead. More photos on page 3.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

NIGHTMARE IN NARAYANGANJ

Factory location
RUGGANJ, N'GANJ

Fire broke out
5:30PM THURSDAY

Fire Service informed
5:42PM

Fire Brigade arrived
6:10PM

Fire unit worked
18

Fire under control
12:35PM FRIDAY

Workers rescued
25

HASHEM FOODS LTD

Ground floor
PACKAGING UNIT

First, second, third, fifth floors
PRODUCTION UNITS

4th floor
PRODUCTION, STOREROOM



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DEATHS IN MAJOR FACTORY FIRES IN LAST 16YRS

'Get us out of here. Please help!'

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and WASIM BIN HABIB

"Get us out of here. Please help!" These were the last words Liton heard from his sister-in-law Jahanara Begum when he called her on Thursday evening.

He also heard others' desperate screams for help on the phone.

Jahanara, a worker of the food factory which caught fire in Narayanganj's Rugganj, is among those missing and feared dead in the incident. Liton called her after hearing the news of the fire.

"After I heard the news around 6:00pm, I called Bhabi [Jahanara] immediately. She told me that some 47 people were on the third floor. The supervisor asked them to stay there saying the place was safe and that firemen would douse the flames soon," Liton, who went to the Dhaka Medical College morgue yesterday to find Jahanara and another relative named Fakima Begum, told The Daily Star.

"As I called her the second time, she said there were plumes of smoke on the floor and that they were having difficulties in breathing. At one point, the call got disconnected," he said.

Liton then frantically kept calling her for 20 minutes, but no one answered. By that time, he sensed something terrible and ominous had happened.

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Nazma Begum, mother of missing factory worker Ripon, wails in front of the factory of Hashem Foods yesterday. Ripon, an HSC student, started working at the factory a few months ago to support his family.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

'I hope she's just missing'

Says sister of 15-year-old worker feared to have died in the factory that employs many underage workers

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Fifteen-year-old Tuli Akter wanted to have chicken curry for dinner, and her mother had cooked the dish on Thursday evening thinking that she would have a good meal with her two daughters.

But Tuli has not come home. Having recently passed her secondary school exams, the young girl had started working at the food factory in Narayanganj.

"She thought she would start earning and save some money for her future," said Jhuma Akter, Tuli's sister.

Tuli's body has not yet been identified among the victims of the deadly fire in the Narayanganj food factory. None of the bodies could be identified as they were charred beyond recognition.

But Jhuma was clinging on to hope.

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NATIONWIDE LOCKDOWN

No govt, pvt vehicles to be allowed on ferries

Emergency vehicles exempted, says BIWTC

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Except those engaged in emergency services, no public or private vehicle would be allowed on ferries, said Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) yesterday.

Seeking anonymity, a BIWTC official said that the decision was made as VIPs, who are travelling amid the "strict lockdown", ask field officers for ferry transportation.

"We become helpless when we get phone calls to allow the VIPs [to cross the rivers]. Common people also cash in on the opportunity," the official said.

In a circular, BIWTC said transportation of all sorts of public and private vehicles is suspended as per a government decision.

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Wife of Nurul Islam, who showed symptoms of Covid-19, waits in an ambulance in front of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday to get her ailing husband admitted. They came from Cumilla for better treatment as Islam's health deteriorated rapidly.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Covid situation getting bleaker

Country sees record 212 deaths in a day; 11,324 new infections detected; 3 die during oxygen supply disruption in ICU at a Faridpur hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The record for the daily death toll from Covid-19 was broken again yesterday with officials reporting 212 deaths across the country. In the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, 11,324 new cases were detected. The number of confirmed new cases crossed the 11,000-mark for the fourth straight day.

Confirmed cases in the country crossed the one million mark yesterday. The total death toll as of yesterday was 16,004, which is around 1.6 percent of all confirmed cases. The number of detected cases rose to 10,00,543.

The positivity rate reported yesterday was 30.95 percent of 36,586 tests, according to a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Meanwhile, three Covid-19 patients died at the ICU of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical College Hospital (BSMMCH) in Faridpur when the oxygen supply was inadequate.

They died between 9:00am and 9:20am, reports our Faridpur correspondent, quoting the hospital authorities as saying.

ICU In-charge Ananta Kumar Bishwas said the tragedies happened when oxygen was being transferred from a tanker truck to the oxygen tank.

The oxygen pressure had to be reduced at the time due to technical reasons, he said.

Of the Covid-19 patients reported dead yesterday, 119 were male and 93 female.

At least 160 of them died at public hospitals, 36 at private hospitals and 16 at home, according to the DGHS press release.

Of them, 79 were in Khulna, 53 in Dhaka, 26 in Chattogram, 23 in Rajshahi, 12 in Rangpur, eight in Mymensingh, six in Sylhet and five in Barishal divisions.

Ninety were aged over 60, and 56 between 51 and 60 years.