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Your Right to Know

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"This is inconsistent with the democratic system that media workers would not get information from any hospital in Dhaka district, except from the civil surgeon."

JATIYA PARTY CHAIRMAN GM QUADER



"I made it very clear to him that the United States expects, when a ransomware operation is coming from his soil even though it's not sponsored by the state, we expect them to act..."

US PRESIDENT BIDEN PRESSES RUSSIAN PRESIDENT PUTIN TO ACT ON HACKERS



"When one side wants negotiations but the other side doesn't want to talk, is that right?"

AFGHAN PRESIDENT ASHRAF GHANI ON TALIBAN'S LACK OF INTEREST IN DIALOGUE

It's murder, not accident

Police arrest 8 including factory owners; no fire safety measures were there in the Rupganj factory

SHARIFUL ISLAM, MUNTAKIM SAAD and SANAD SAHA

The fire that killed 51 employees of a food processing factory in Narayanganj was not a bolt from the blue for the owners who, according to police, knew such a disaster was imminent but chose to do nothing.

Police yesterday arrested the owners of Hashem Foods Ltd, Md Abul Hashem, his four sons, and three others accused of burning 51 employees to death.

"They knew that the building, full of combustible chemicals and substances, might catch fire anytime, but did nothing... We accused them of killing the workers," Deputy Inspector General of Police (Dhaka Range) Habibur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

"There were inadequate fire exits and no fire safety equipment. The fire was not a mere accident," he said.

Inspector Nazim Uddin Majumder of Bhulta Police Outpost filed the case with Rupganj Police Station yesterday.

Hashem's four sons: Hasib Bin Hashem, Tarek Ibrahim, Tawsib Ibrahim and Tanjim Ibrahim were accused.

Others accused and arrested are: Sajeeb Group Chief Operating Officer Shahan Shah Azad, Hashem Foods Deputy General Manager Mamunur Rashid, and its Civil Engineer and Admin Officer Salahuddin.

Hashem, chairman and managing director of Sajeeb Group, which owns the Rupganj factory, and his sons were arrested at their Gulshan home in the capital. The three others were also arrested in the city.

A Narayanganj court placed each of the eight accused on four-day remand yesterday.

A team from the Electric Safety and Security Association of Bangladesh (ESSAB) visited the building and the members told reporters that they were shocked by the inadequate fire safety measures.

"Every basic rule was violated. There were no fire doors, no hydrants, and no evacuation plans. There's a barrier on every floor. Besides, each section is within a netted enclosure. It seems they didn't follow any plan on what to do in case of fire" he said.

Debashish Bardhan, deputy director (operations and maintenance) of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said that the firefighters gave the owners a plan to follow in case of fire and that the building had approval from the fire service.

After visiting the site yesterday, he said the roof on the fourth floor of the building had collapsed, making the entire structure risky now.

The owner of the property, Hashem, was an Awami League nominee for the

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Firefighters continue rescue operation at the burnt food factory in Narayanganj's Rupganj. A devastating fire at the building left at least 51 people dead on Thursday. The fire was completely doused yesterday and no new bodies were found.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

From toil to tail end

At least 16 children missing in Rupganj factory fire

ZYMA ISLAM

At least 16 children are missing -- and possibly dead -- in the fire at Hashem Foods Ltd. All of them were working at the factory.

To arrive at this number, The Daily Star contacted families who reported missing loved ones, and collected information from lists made by the Criminal Investigation Department of the police and the Narayanganj district magistrate's office.

Most of the children missing were aged between 13 and 16 and paid between Tk 5,000 to Tk 6,000 for their labour.

A lot of the children were school dropouts during the pandemic, and had recently taken up factory jobs because schools have been closed for over a year.

The stark irony of the matter is that the factory that these children worked at -- and possibly died in -- manufactured treats for children. This includes Nocilla chocolate hazelnut spreads, noodles, lollipops and juice boxes.

The missing children include Shantamoni, 12, Hima Akhter, 16, Takiya, 14, Tuli, 15, Nazmul, 15, Mahmuda, 14, Shahana, 16, Hasnain, 14, Swapan, 15, Farzana, 14, Fatema Akhter, 11, Champa Barman, 14, Labonno Akhter, 14, Khadija and Noman Miah.

Another child, 14-year-old Mitu Begum was missing a day after the fire, but The Daily Star could not confirm if she was found yesterday.

While we are refraining from declaring these children as dead, until it is confirmed through DNA matching, it should be noted that there are 48 dead bodies and 52 families claiming them, diminishing the odds of these missing children being found alive.

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A chronicle of corporate greed foretold

Child labour rampant; factory owners take no responsibility

NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

A tragedy unfolded last Thursday at the five-storey Hashem Foods Ltd. factory in Rupganj. The fire that has thus far claimed 52 innocent victims, most of them (pending the difficult postmortem) aged between 12-15 years, is a chronic tale of corporate greed.

The recurring cycle of events, developing around exploitation of the poorest and uneducated children, has the least to do with the financial condition of the owner or the company. There exist many similar dangerous working situations, but by focusing on the immediate catastrophe, as always, we are putting many more at

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Air heaviest with reek of death

PINAKI ROY and MUNTAKIM SAAD

The air was heavy with the stench of death. The smell of burnt plastic, packaging papers, and other factory materials was still lingering.

Only a few discarded sandals and melted plastic were left in the ankle-deep water on the third floor of the six-storey factory building of Hashem Foods in Narayanganj yesterday.

The water accumulated there after firefighters doused the flames.

The area where the charred bodies of 48 workers were recovered was being used for producing chocolates and lollipops. Piles of half-burnt packaging papers of "Milkystick" were still lying on the floor.

Suddenly a voice said, "Maybe that's a human bone." It was really hard to say whether that was a bone or a piece of melted plastic.

The area where workers took shelter on Thursday evening to save themselves from the raging blaze is just about two yards away from the second staircase of the building. But an iron grill separated the staircase from the factory floor.

"All those who died on this floor would have saved their lives if the gates to the staircases were not locked. They could have reached the roof of the building," said a firefighter.

The building was designed to be used as a store of the factory. But the authorities used it as a production unit, he said.

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Dhaka now worst affected by Delta

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Trailing behind Khulna for nearly a week, Dhaka yesterday reported the highest number of daily Covid deaths among all divisions as this wave of the pandemic continues to wreak havoc across the country.

Dhaka recorded 70 out of the 185 deaths confirmed in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, shows data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

In the past seven days, 1,277 people have died of the disease.

With this, the official Covid-19 death toll in the country reached 16,189 and the total number of confirmed cases 10,09,315, the data shows.

The DGHS data did not take into account information on those who died with coronavirus symptoms.

According to Centre for Genocide Studies at University of Dhaka, at least 2,939 people have died with such symptoms so far across the country.

Of those, at least 486 died in two weeks till July 6. The figure was 151 in the preceding two weeks (June 9-22), it said in a report released yesterday.

After the second wave of Covid-19 began in March, Dhaka division recorded the country's highest division-wise daily deaths -- 71 -- on April 17.

Khulna, which has been the hotspot of infection and death for around two weeks, reported 51 deaths yesterday.

On the first day of July, both Dhaka and Khulna divisions saw 35 deaths each. But the south-western division recorded 46 deaths on July 3 -- the highest for the division that day.

Khulna also reported the highest deaths in five out of the eight days till Friday when the Covid-19 death toll jumped by a whopping 48.66 percent compared to the previous seven days.

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England face Italy in epic Euro final

AGENCIES

England and Italy are counting down to tonight's Euro 2020 final (Monday 1:00am Bangladesh Standard Time), with Gareth Southgate's men seeking to end a 55-year trophy drought but the Italians aiming to spoil the Wembley party.

While Europe might be waiting for England against Italy in the Euro 2020 final, there was an even bigger match to look forward to for football fanatics in the country as an older rivalry between two more successful teams -- Brazil and Argentina -- had already taken on each other at the Copa America final in the morning.

Shifting focus back to Euro, sporting immortality beckons for England captain Harry Kane and his team-mates, who are desperate to etch their names in the record books by winning just the second major trophy in the nation's history.

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Sabina Akter Joya and Tusher wail near the body of their mother Jahanara Begum, 58, in front of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday. Jahanara was admitted to a Kakrail hospital after she tested positive for Covid-19. As her condition worsened yesterday morning, doctors there referred her to the Intensive Care Unit of DMCH. She died on way.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

WORLD POPULATION DAY Sylhet wakes up to family planning

NILIMA JAHAN and DWOHA CHOWDHURY

At 26, Bina Roy, a tea garden worker at Khejuri Tea Garden of Sreemangal upazila in Moulvibazar, is already a mother of four after getting married at 16.

She has had three miscarriages and could go on to have more children as she has no idea what family planning is. "Do we have any time to make any plans for the family?" asked Bina, who gets Tk 120 a day by picking tea leaves and constantly frets over how she will manage food for her big family.

Bina is not alone.

A 2019 awareness guide on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and Family Planning in 12 tea gardens in the Sreemangal and Kamalganj upazilas of Moulvibazar district paints a picture of a vicious cycle of poverty, high fertility rates and pregnancy-related health risks, reproductive health complications and illiteracy.

The study -- conducted by the Society for Environment and Human Development, the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh (CIPRB) and the United Nations Population Fund -- found that almost half of the women surveyed in 12 tea gardens in Sreemangal and Kamalganj upazilas of Moulvibazar district were married off before they turned 18 years of age.

And 55 percent of them have never used birth control. Although 45 percent of the women were found taking birth control pills, intrauterine contraceptive devices and implants, none of their husbands has ever used any contraceptive.

The situation is just the same in the haor areas of

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