

3,525
New cases in 24hrs



14,86,153
Total cases



25,846
Deaths



14,04,370
Recoveries



4,493,022
Deaths



215,760,216
Total cases



215,760,216
Total cases

GAS EXPLOSION AT MIRPUR HOUSE

Unauthorised repair, faulty line to blame

Say fire service officials; three more die from burns raising death toll to four

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The death toll from Wednesday's gas explosion at a building in the capital's Mirpur has risen to four as three more people died from burns yesterday.

Officials said cooking gas got trapped in a flat when a local man was trying to unclog a faulty gas pipe on the ground floor of the building. The tragedy struck when the man lit a stove to check if the pipe was clear, causing the trapped gas to catch fire.

Three of those who died are from a family. Three others injured in the fire are struggling for life with burns in their respiratory tracts, doctors said.

The building owner's mother Rawshan Ara Begum, 70, his step-brother Shafiqul Islam, 35, and Sazzad Hossain Suman, 40, the man who was trying to unclog the gas pipe, died at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery yesterday, according to Samanta Lal Sen, coordinator of the burn institute.

Eighty-five percent of the bodies of Rawshan and Shafiqul were burnt while Suman suffered 45 percent burns.

Shafiqul's mother Rina Begum, 50, died at the institute on Thursday morning with 70 percent burns.

Tenant of the building Renu Begum, 35, with 38 percent burns; tenant of an adjacent building Naznin Akhter, 25, with 27 percent burns; and her daughter Nawshin, 5, with 15 percent burns, are being treated at the High Dependency Unit of the facility.

The fire originated around 11:30pm on the ground floor of the six-storey building in Mirpur-11.

Owner of the building Rafiqul Islam said there was a problem in the gas line of the building and he called Suman to fix it.

"After repairing the line, he tried to check the connection and lit a stove. There was an explosion... Later, the fire spread," he said.

A team of Bomb Disposal Unit of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit visited the scene.

Rahmat Ullah Chowdhury, chief of the unit, said that gas trapped in the kitchen on the ground floor caught fire when the stove was lit.

Sumon's daughter Suraiya said, "Whenever it rains, water enters into the gas pipe. The house owner called my father to clear the pipe."

Naznin's husband, who went out of home to buy ice-cream for his daughter, was not injured in the fire.

Rafiqul's father Mahbubur Rahman said he called Titas officials at least 20 times to report the problem. "But they didn't come. We were forced to call the local technician."

Zakir Hossain, a customer service provider at Titas Gas Emergency for Mirpur Zone, refuted the allegation, saying no complaint was submitted.

Leaky gas pipes were the fourth most common cause of fires reported last year, according to Fire Service and Civil Defence data.

In late June, an explosion that claimed 11 lives in the capital's Moghbazar, resulted from accumulated methane gas from a leaky pipe, says a probe report of the fire service.

According to the fire service, at least 722 fires at gas lines were reported last year. Firefighters had to work at 485 of those sites.



Biman passengers of Boeing 737-800 flight waiting at Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar International Airport in Maharashtra to return Dhaka hours after their plane made an emergency landing there yesterday.

PHOTO COURTESY: ABDUL KARIM

Biman pilot suffers heart attack in flight

FROM PAGE 1

"All passengers on the flight are safe and they were provided meals and were taking rest at the airport lounge," read the press release sent to The Daily Star around 4:30pm.

But Abdul Karim, an expatriate Bangladeshi in Oman who was on the flight, told this newspaper over the phone around 5:00pm that they were yet to get any food.

Ariful Islam, who is from Noakhali, said all passengers were safe but they have not been given any food yet.

"Once there was a queue for food but in the end the food did not come."

Mohammad Nurul Huda, another passenger, said all kinds of shops, including that for food, were closed at the Nagpur airport due to the closure of international flight operations. "So, I did not get a chance to buy food."

He added that after the pilot fell sick, the cabin crew via the PA system asked if there was a doctor on board. "But there was no doctor on board."

He added, "Our reporting time at the airport was around 2:30am

(Muscat local time). But we boarded the flight around 4:30am and the aircraft departed at 6:30am for Dhaka."

An eight-member rescue team of Biman left Dhaka for Nagpur yesterday evening to bring back the 124 passengers, said Biman sources.

Biman's flight BG022 left Nagpur with the passengers around 10:25pm (Indian local time) and was scheduled to arrive in Dhaka around 12:40am (Bangladesh time), said a passenger onboard.

High-value fish stock depletes

FROM PAGE 1

The DoF is yet to publish the Fisheries Statistical Yearbook for 2020-21.

Dividing marine shrimps into four categories -- tiger, brown, white and others -- researchers analysed the data of industrial catches of shrimps from 2005 to look into the status of shrimp stocks.

They found that two most high-value shrimp species -- tiger shrimp and brown shrimp -- declined slowly but steadily. On the other hand, the catch of white shrimp increased sharply in 2013 after showing a downturn for several years. Then it dropped again.

"For the overall shrimp trend, the rising trend in lower-value species is offsetting the declining trends in more valuable groups," reads the survey report.

Pomfret -- another high-value fish -- is also depleting at an alarming rate. Its catch in 2009-10 stood at 50,245 tonnes. A decade later, it came down to 10,023 tonnes, nearly a five-fold drop, according to the DoF.

Indian Salmon, locally known as Lakha, seems to be the worst victim of over-exploitation. Its catch fell by a whopping 44 folds in 10 years -- from 7,733 tonnes in 2009-10 to just 177 tonnes in 2019-20.

"The marine fisheries resources are heavily exploited, with some species severely depleted and are in urgent need of rebuilding," the report said.

The overall catch of marine fish, however, increased to 6,71,104 tonnes in 2019-20 from 5,17,282 tonnes in 2009-10.

Experts said the increase in the catch of hilsha and some small fish contributed to the overall rise in the

marine fish production. For example, the total marine hilsha catch in 2019-20 was 3,04,566 tonnes, almost half the total marine catch that year. Whereas, the hilsha catch was 1,98,574 tonnes 10 years ago.

"The overall catch, all species combined, may remain the same or increase in spite of intense fishing. This may result from replacement of larger, slower growing and reproducing groups such as Indian salmon with small-sized, fast growing and reproducing species such as sardines and scads," reads the survey report.

Pointing out how overfishing puts negative impacts on the ecosystem, researchers said they noticed small and low-value fish species that used to be forage of big fish are being netted in large volumes in recent years.

"The increase in these small species reflects a significant alteration to the ecosystem structure which may or may not be reversible in a reasonable time period," the report noted.

Prof Sayedur Rahman Chowdhury of the Institute of Marine Sciences and Fisheries of Chittagong University was involved in the study.

He said some recent interventions like enforcing a ban on marine fishing for about 65-days and brood Hilsha were bringing some success.

"But to recover fish stock fully we assume that we need to wait for another 10 to 15 years," he said, pointing out that it took 45 years to recover the stock of cod fish in Europe.

LEGAL LOOPHOLES
While the catch of valuable marine fish has declined, the number of boats and trawlers fishing in the bay

increased significantly. In 2019, there were 67,889 industrial trawlers and artisanal boats, up from 45,377 in 2009.

One DoF official said industrial fishers often took advantage of the loopholes in the Marine Fisheries Ordinance, 1983, making it difficult to take legal action.

The ordinance, for example, does not specify the size of an industrial fishing trawler. As a result, when officials seek to ban fishing trawlers of a certain size they consider to be industrial, they cannot prove it in court.

"Whenever we took actions, fishing industry people challenged them in the High Court and secured injunction orders in their favour," the official said, requesting anonymity.

Last year, the government passed the Marine Fisheries Act addressing the loopholes, but the law cannot be enforced without relevant rules.

"The industrial trawlers catch a good amount of large hilsha fish from the sea. It threatens the effort to rebuild the hilsha stock. Rules are being framed to ban industries from catching hilsha fish," the official added.

Officials are also planning to set a limit on industrial and artisanal fish catch.

Meanwhile, the DoF has drafted a Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) detailing the work plan to restore the fish stock. The draft is awaiting approval from the fisheries ministry.

Contacted, Towfiqul Arif, additional secretary (planning) of the fisheries and livestock ministry, said they received the draft before Eid-ul-Adha. "We will look into it."

Nigerian gunmen free dozens of kidnapped seminary pupils

AFP, Katsina

Nigerian gunmen have freed the remaining pupils from more than 100 kidnapped from an Islamic seminary in northwestern Niger State nearly three months ago, the school's head teacher said on Thursday.

Heavily armed criminals snatched 136 pupils from the seminary in Tegina on May 30 in one of a series of mass abductions targeting schools and colleges in Nigeria since December.

Six of the pupils died in captivity and a further 15 escaped in June, according to school officials.

"The pupils have all been released. We are now conveying them home," seminary head Abubakar Alhassan told AFP by telephone.

"I can't give you an exact number now. We will have to screen them when we get home. But none of the pupils is in captivity."

He did not give any details about how the pupils were released or say if a ransom was paid.

One of the parents, Fati Abdullahi, whose 18-year-old daughter and

15-year-old son were among the captives, confirmed the pupils were free.

"We have been in touch with those bringing them home on the phone. We have been tracking their journey home," Abdullahi said. "We are anxious to see them."

Northwest and central Nigeria have seen a surge in attacks, looting and mass abductions by criminal gangs known locally as bandits. But gangs this year began targeting schoolchildren and students as a way to squeeze out more ransom payments.

Around 1,000 students have been kidnapped since December after gangs started to hit schools. Most have been released after negotiations, but scores are still being held in forest camps.

Gunmen who kidnapped more than 100 students from a Baptist high school in northwestern Kaduna State released 15 more of those hostages after collecting ransom, a representative of the families said on Sunday.

21 die as boat sinks in B'baria

FROM PAGE 1

Of the dead, 11 were identified by their family members last night. They are Afif Billah, 20; Monju Begum, 60; Farida Begum, 47; her daughter

Munni, 10; Kamala Begum, 52; Minara Begum, 50; Anjana Biswas, 30; her daughter Prihibi Biswas, 2; Jarna Begum, 45; Mayyeda Akhter, 6; and Sirajul Islam, 58.

US on alert for more attacks

FROM PAGE 1

Islamic State (ISIS), an enemy of the Islamist Taliban as well as the West, said one of its suicide bombers had targeted "translators and collaborators with the American army".

The Pentagon yesterday said that the attack was carried out by one suicide bomber, not two as earlier thought.

The attack marked the first US military casualties in Afghanistan since February 2020 - and the deadliest incident for American troops there in a decade.

It also underlined the realpolitik facing Western powers in Afghanistan: Engaging with the Taliban who they have long sought to fend off may be their best chance to prevent the country becoming a breeding ground for Islamist militancy.

The United Nations Security Council condemned the attack as "especially abhorrent" for targeting civilians trying to flee the country.

Biden said on Thursday evening he had ordered the Pentagon to plan how to strike ISIS-K, the Islamic State affiliate that claimed responsibility. The group has killed dozens of people in attacks in Afghanistan in the past 12 months.

"We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay," Biden said in televised comments from the White House.

Biden was already facing strong criticism at home and abroad for the chaos surrounding the troop withdrawal, which led to the Taliban's lightning advance to Kabul. He has defended his decisions, saying the

United States long ago achieved its original rationale for invading the country in 2001.

The US-led invasion toppled the then-ruling Taliban, punishing them for harbouring al-Qaeda militants who masterminded the Sept. 11 attacks that year.

General Frank McKenzie, head of US Central Command, said on Thursday that the United States will press on with evacuations. He said some intelligence was being shared with the Taliban and he believed "some attacks have been thwarted by them".

Most of the more than 20 allied countries involved in airlifting Afghans and their own citizens out of Kabul said they had completed evacuations.

Taliban guards blocked access to the airport yesterday, witnesses said. "We had a flight but the situation is very tough and the roads are blocked," said one man on an approach road.

Another 12,500 people were evacuated from Afghanistan on Thursday, raising the total flown abroad by Western countries' forces since Aug. 14 to about 105,000, the White House said yesterday.

Pakistani officials told Reuters that at the Torkham border crossing, Pakistani security forces had opened fire on a group of people trying to illegally enter Pakistan, adding that two Afghans were killed and two others wounded.

The Taliban yesterday said that Afghans with valid documents would be able to travel freely in future at any time, in comments aimed at calming fears that the movement planned harsh

2 judges

FROM PAGE 1

caps and offer their prayers regularly". India and Bangladesh will be the states of "Taliban" and no Hindus will be allowed to stay in these two states, said the letter.

The letter termed police a public enemy and praised the armed forces.

Five upazilas of Joypurhat will be attacked soon, the letter added.

Masum Ahmed Bhuiyan, superintendent of Joypurhat police, and Niprendranath Mondal, public prosecutor of the court, confirmed it to The Daily Star yesterday.

The SP said steps have been taken to investigate the incident after police got the letter in the name of militant group Taliban.

In a similar incident, Judge of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in Tangail Khaleda Yasmin received a letter from a "militant group" by the post on Thursday.

The letter said since the judge joined the court, she has given verdict of important cases, creating some troubles for the "militants". "So, if you have any care for your life, leave Tangail after taking transfer. Go away. If you don't listen, we will kill you," the letter said.

The letter mentioned that "militants" can throw bombs at the judge's car while it is going to court or returning home and can carry out bomb attacks in the courtroom. The letter further states that police will not be able to protect her.

Asked, Tangail SP Sanjit Kumar Roy said the judge forwarded the letter to police.

"We have taken special measures for the safety of the judge," he added.

[Our correspondents in Dinajpur and Tangail contributed to this report.]

Evacuation

FROM PAGE 1

"We are waiting for information from the Asian University for Women."

Contacted yesterday evening, AUIW Deputy Registrar Sanaul Karim Chowdhury said he had no information on rescheduling of the flight.

Meanwhile, international media outlets reported that the evacuation flights resumed yesterday morning.

Earlier on Thursday, a bomb blast near Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul killed at least 90 Afghans and 13 US troops.

Talking to this correspondent, Mahfuza Rowan, wife of telecom engineer Razib Bin Islam who got stranded in Afghanistan, said, "My husband along with others went to the airport [in Kabul] on Thursday, but left it about 30 minutes before the blast as the flight was not ready."

"Thankfully, they are safe. Please pray that they return home safely."

At least 26 Bangladeshis were staying in Afghanistan when the Taliban took control of the country on August 15.

Of them, three BRAC International officials were evacuated to Kazakhstan on August 22 under UN arrangements and two more Bangladeshis to Qatar under US arrangements.

Asked about the other six Bangladeshis in Afghanistan, Mashfee said they were safe.

The foreign ministry official, however, could not say anything about their return.

Thousands of foreigners and Afghans, fearful of the Taliban rule, began fleeing the country after the headline Islamists took control of the country.

There have been huge crowds at the airport since then. The bomb blast, meanwhile, complicated the situation.



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restrictions on freedom. Those killed on Thursday included two British nationals and the child of a third British national, British foreign minister Dominic Raab said. The country's defence minister, Ben Wallace, said the threat of attacks would increase as Western troops got closer to completing the huge airlift.

ISIS-K was initially confined to areas on the border with Pakistan but has established a second front in the north of the country.

Meanwhile, Russia yesterday called for efforts to help form an inclusive interim government in Afghanistan, saying ISIS was trying to capitalise on chaos in the country.

Up to half a million Afghans could flee their homeland by year-end, the UN refugee agency UNHCR said, appealing to all neighbouring countries to keep their borders open.

There are also growing worries Afghans will face a humanitarian emergency with the coronavirus spreading and shortages of food and medical supplies looming.

The Taliban have asked all women healthcare workers to return to work, a spokesman said yesterday, amid mounting pressure on public services as trained and educated Afghans flee the country.

Medical supplies will run out within days in Afghanistan, the World Health Organization said, adding that it hopes to establish an air bridge into the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif with the help of Pakistan.