

Khaleda first laid Padma Bridge foundation stone

Says Mirza Fakhrul

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Thakurgaon

The Padma Bridge is not someone's ancestral property. It has been built with the state's initiative, and Khaleda Zia laid its first foundation stone, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said yesterday.

But no one utters the name of Khaleda, he lamented.

There was the same situation when the Jamuna bridge was built. Its name was changed, the BNP leader said, adding that in other words, whoever comes to power in this country thinks everything is possessed by them.

In a views-exchange meeting with journalists at Thakurgaon Press Club, Fakhrul made the comments in reply to a question whether the BNP would join the inaugural event of Padma Bridge if invited.

The BNP leader said attempts were being made to divert the people's attention. The crisis was not centring the bridge, the crisis was to establish people's voting rights, the crisis is filing false cases under the Digital Security Act and the crisis is not getting justice.

The government is fully responsible for the Sitakunda fire as they did not take proper safety measures, said Fakhrul.

The next national election has to be held under a neutral government. If the polls are held under the neutral government, people would exercise their voting rights and could form a government by their choice, he added.

Thakurgaon BNP President Toimur Rahman, General Secretary Mirza Faisal Amin and Treasure Shariful Islam, among others, were present.



Left, the charred loading bay of BM Container Depot in Sitakunda, Chattogram, top right, firefighters spraying water at a stack of shipping containers still on fire yesterday evening, and anxious family members at Chittagong Medical College Hospital holding photos of individuals they are looking for. Many of the bodies found at the depot were burnt beyond recognition.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN, COLLECTED

MPs slam healthcare services in constituencies

Say they have shortages of doctors, nurses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 14 lawmakers of ruling Awami League and opposition parties yesterday expressed dissatisfaction over their constituents not getting proper healthcare services from upazila health complexes and district hospitals.

Speaking during the question-answer session in parliament, they also said there were shortages of doctors, nurses and other healthcare staffers in their constituencies.

The treasury and opposition MPs also said many doctors and nurses who were posted to upazila health complexes did not stay there.

In their speeches, AL lawmakers Dharendra Debnath and Zillul Hakim said people in their areas were not getting healthcare services for lack of physicians and healthcare staffers.

Another senior MP of AL, Shahjahan Khan, said a 50-bed hospital in his area was increased to a 250-bed one. But people did not reap the benefit as the healthcare facility did not have the required number of doctors and nurses.

"Earlier in parliament, I raised the same issue before the health minister and

he assured me of providing the hospital with additional doctors and healthcare staffers. But no measures have been taken yet."

AL lawmaker SM Shahzada said he was in a big trouble as the condition of the lone health complex in Golachipa upazila in his constituency -- Patuakhali-3 -- was very bad.

The health complex was established a long time ago. Several buildings inside this health complex have been declared abandoned due to their dilapidated condition. People of Rangabali and Golachipa upazilas get treatment from this healthcare facility, he added.

The lawmaker said, "I wrote to the [health] minister two and a half years ago for a new health complex. But I haven't got it yet."

Moshiur Rahman Ranga, Jatiya Party MP and opposition chief whip, said costly equipment used in kidney dialysis and cancer treatment remains unused in a hospital in his area for years due to shortage of operators.

BNP MP Rumeen Farhana said due to the government inefficiency, the health ministry failed to spend a major portion of the money allocated in the

development budget.

AL MPs Shahiduzzaman Sarker, Moazzem Hossain Ratan, Shahiduzzaman, Bikolpodhara Bangladesh MP Abdul Mannan, Gonoforum MP Mokabbir Khan and Jatiya Party MP Kazi Firoz Rashid also criticised the health minister.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque admitted that there was a lack of doctors and healthcare staffers in different hospitals and health complexes.

He, however, said many doctors and nurses were recruited during the pandemic, and more would be appointed soon.

QUESTION-ANSWER

During the question-answer session, Maleque told the House that the government has a plan to vaccinate 80 percent people, and all nationals aged above 5 would come under the Covid inoculation coverage.

Bangladesh has so far received 29 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccines. Of them, the government purchased 18 crore shots and got 11 crore doses under the Covax facilities for free, he said while replying to a query from Jatiya Party lawmaker Mujibul Haque Chunnun.

The depot didn't follow rules 49 deaths and counting

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"The flames kept spreading and there was an explosion while we were trying put out the fire with water," he told The Daily Star, adding that the containers with chemicals were kept with containers of other goods.

"We did not find any fire extinguishing equipment at the depot."

According to the data of National Board of Revenue (NBR), Al Razi Chemical, located at Hathazari in Chattogram, exported around 9,635 tonnes of hydrogen peroxide to 12 countries in recent months using the BN Container

Depot.

Most of the consignments were shipped to Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Myanmar, Venezuela, and Singapore.

Mojibur, the owner of the depot, refused to comment on the lack of safety measures when contacted by The Daily Star.

He gave the number of an official of the company, saying that the individual would know better. But that number was found switched off yesterday.

Customs Commissioner M Fokhrul Alam told The Daily Star that a two-

member committee was formed to investigate the matter. "If any irregularity is found during the investigation, legal action will be taken."

According to Chattogram Custom House and Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association (BICDA), the depot had 1,360 tonnes of goods in 810 containers waiting to be shipped out and 7,500 tonnes of goods in around 500 containers that had been imported.

Between 80 and 90 percent of the goods were damaged, said BICDA Secretary Ruhul Amin Sikder.

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"At least nine firefighters were among the dead. Eight of them have been identified..." said Shahjahan Shikder, deputy assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

According to witnesses, after the fire broke out around 9:30pm, firefighters, depot workers and locals tried to put out the blaze with water from close proximity.

Around 10:45pm, there was a huge explosion that jolted buildings even several kilometres away. The bang could be heard eight to 10 kilometres from the scene.

Since early yesterday, firefighters and members of Gaosia Committee Bangladesh, a voluntary organisation, carried on their efforts to recover bodies from the depot amid frequent small blasts.

Faruk Hossain said fumes of toxic gas and extreme heat made it very difficult for firefighters to reach some parts of the depot.

Residents within one kilometre radius of the depot complained of the presence of toxic gas in the air.

"We could smell toxic gas in my house around half a kilometre from the scene," said Ali Akbar, a resident of adjoining Shitalpur, who went to the spot around 8:00am.

Water shortages and the spread of toxic fumes all over the depot frustrated the firefighters' efforts to put out the blaze that was still raging as of 1:00am today.

Bangladesh Inland Container Depot Association (BICDA) Secretary Md

Ruhul Amin Sikder said 16 to 18 containers carrying hydrogen peroxide were kept at the depot for export, but it is not possible to identify the source of explosions without investigation.

He further said the chemicals exported to at least 12 countries through private depots, and currently some other depots are storing the item in designated places.

Ruhul further said some depot officials were also injured. They include its Deputy General Manager Nurul Akhter, who was involved in the efforts to extinguish the fire.

Around 11:00am, a 200-member team of Bangladesh Army entered the depot to help the fire service put out the blaze and check leakage of chemicals to the Bay of Bengal through two canals.

While visiting the spot, Chattogram Division Commissioner Md Ashraf Uddin told this newspaper that the army was deployed to help the firefighters and prevent the leakage as the depot is linked to two canals connected to the Bay.

The fire damaged most of the 4,300 containers -- of which 3,000 were empty -- at the depot.

Chattogram Port Authority (CPA) Director (traffic) Enamul Karim said that in case of a fire at a depot in the port yard, they try to separate the intact containers from the affected ones and remove those fast.

But in this case, the BM Container Depot authorities could not do so till yesterday morning as most of the equipment operators of the

depot were not available, he pointed out.

CPA Chairman Rear Admiral M Shahjahan, who visited the spot around 10:30am, directed the BICDA to engage equipment operators from other container depots to remove the intact containers from the BM Container Depot.

BICDA Secretary Sikder said they started removing some containers from the depot's yard since noon but most had already been damaged by then.

He said products worth more than Tk 1,000 crore may have been damaged by the fire as most of the 1,300 goods-laden containers got damaged.

[Dwaipayana Barua, Arun Bikash Dey, FM Mizanur Rahman and Shariful Islam contributed to this report]

UP chairman

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Harun said the duo were attacked by criminals backed by Hafizur while on their way home from Santhia Bazar on Saturday night. Motin died on the spot, he said.

Harun said rebel candidate Hafizur defeated the him in the last UP polls. Supporters of Hafizur have since been harassing AL men in the area, Harun alleged.

"Primarily we have come to know that the enmity between the current chairman and former chairman might be behind the killing. We are investigating the incident," said Inspector Komol.

Before he was arrested, Hafizur denied the allegation while speaking to this newspaper.

Scenes

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director at Dhaka's fire service.

Firefighter Robin Miah, the same age as Azam, was also inside the ICU with 60 percent burns. His chest, neck, and back were completely scalded in the blaze.

Robin had gotten married only a year ago. In his village home in Manikganj's Chaturia, his wife kept fainting as she tried to come to terms with the shock of her husband's fate.

"He could not even talk. He simply looked at me and nodded when I asked if he recognised me," said Hossain Ali, Robin's father.

Mohammed Amin Sheikh, 19, had gotten a job at the depot so that he

could pay for his university admission fees, said his mother Parul Begum.

"He had gotten the job just last week for Tk 13,000 a month."

His lower abdomen is completely burned.

"Amin and six others share a room inside the depot. They heard the clamour and came out to see what was happening. He was standing in front of a shop when there was a loud explosion," said Parul.

Samanta Lal Sen, chief coordinator of the burn institute, said, "None of them are out of danger. The patients have between 12 percent to 80 percent burns. The main concern is that the inhalation of smoke has damaged their respiratory systems."

Letters show

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Richard J Evans, a specialist in German history, vouched for the authenticity of the unpublished letters, the newspaper said.

The letters show Hitler's fear of serious illness, it said. "If there is something bad, I absolutely have to know," Hitler told the doctor after their first consultation in May 1935, according to the letters.

The newspaper said the letters also showed the importance Hitler attached to his voice, which he used in speeches to whip up support for his regime.

One operation to remove a polyp was postponed

until after a speech, the letters say, as von Eicken advised Hitler he needed to rest his voice after the procedure.

In his letters von Eicken never questioned that he treated a man whose actions led to millions of people being killed in the Holocaust and World War Two, the newspaper said.

The paper said that when asked by Russian interrogators after the war why he didn't kill Hitler, von Eicken said: "I was his doctor, not his murderer."

Hitler died by suicide in a bunker in Berlin in 1945, shortly before the end of the war.

A frantic search

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asked him to get out of the situation as soon as and in any way possible. I know he tried, but he could not make it.

"The pain my son must have gone through while dying in that fire!" Majid wailed.

A day labourer from Chattogram's Banshkhali upazila, Majid had sent his son to the depot to help with family expenses in the face of price hikes.

While he was at least able to find his son's body, many were still seen frantically searching for their loved ones at the CMCH.

Md Rasel from Sitakunda could not locate his elder brother till the filing of this report at

9:20pm last night.

"My brother had been working at the depot as a covered-van driver for the last 15 years. He last called his wife on around 9:00pm on Saturday [the day the fire occurred]. We have had no trace of him since then."

He was seen at the entrance to CMCH's emergency unit pleading volunteers to let him see his brother, dead or alive, for one last time.

Kamal Uddin was looking for his younger brother -- Salauddin Sabuj, a firefighter who was one of the first responders to the fire and is believed to have died in the explosion.

"If I could just identify my brother, I would at least be able to bury him.

"My brother was so brave... I always asked him to leave this profession as it, more often than not, risked his life. Not only did he not listen to me, he was one of the first ones to rush to douse the fire and try to save the lives of others."

Meanwhile, Shahjahan, from Sitakunda's Kumira area, found his brother-in-law, a driver for the depot, writhing in pain at the hospital. He, however, could not trace his 18-year-old nephew, an office assistant in the same place.

"All the bodies are unrecognisable [from burns]. How will I identify my nephew? How will I console my sister about her son's death?"