

Couple die in fire at Gulshan apartment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An elderly couple died from smoke inhalation and two of their domestic helps sustained burn injuries after a fire broke out at a flat in the capital's Gulshan early yesterday.

The dead are Obaidul Haque, 72, a retired chief engineer of Military Engineer Services, and his wife Jahanara Begum, 71, residents of a flat on Road-7 in Gulshan-1.

The fire originated in their flat on the fourth floor of the building when they were sleeping around 2:45am, said BM Farman Ali, officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station.

They fell sick after smoke engulfed the flat. They were rushed to United Hospital where doctors declared them dead, he said.

The bodies were sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

According to the morgue sources, the couple bore no marks of burn injuries and that they died due to smoke inhalation.

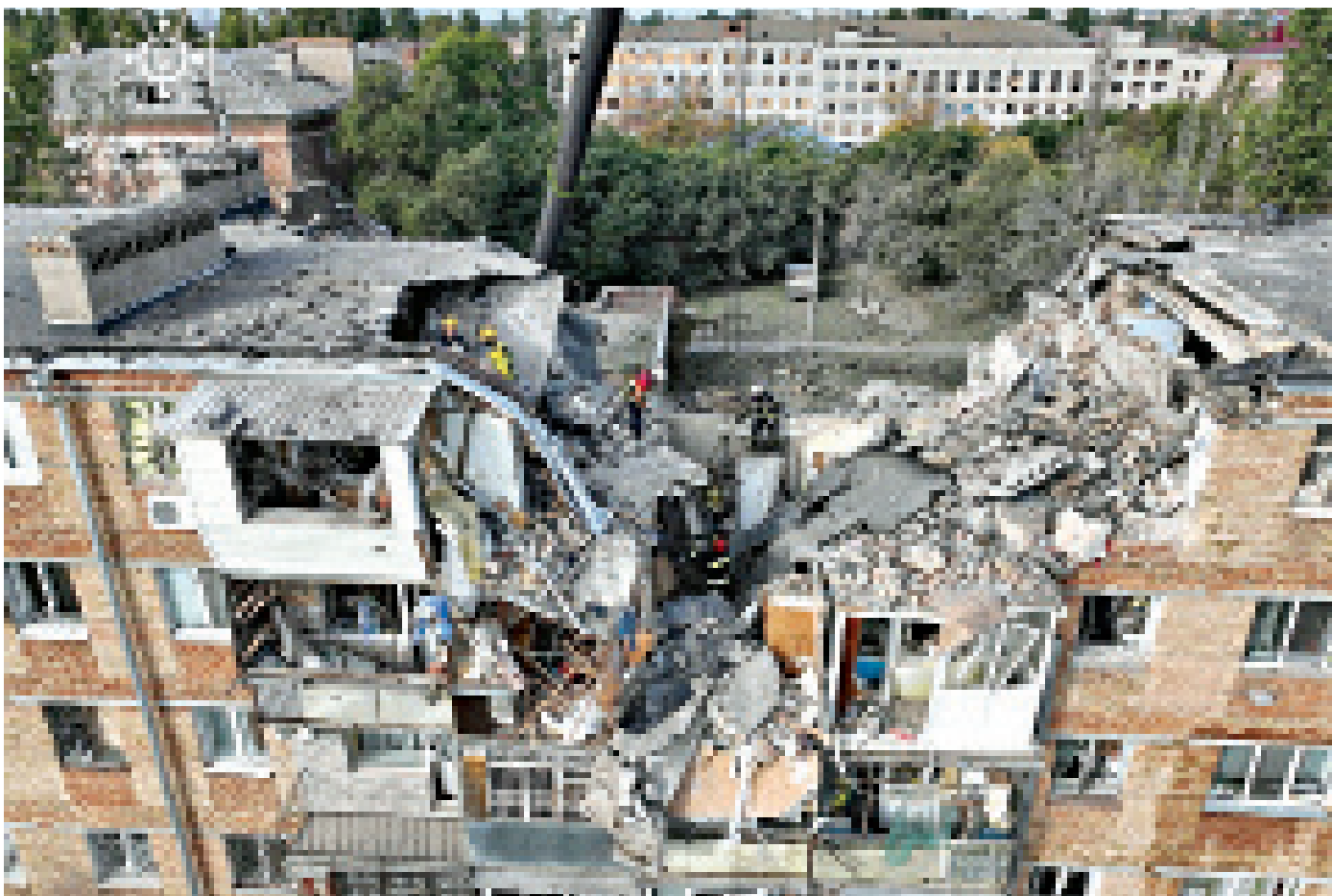
The only daughter of the duo lives in the United States, said Mukhtar Hossain, nephew of Obaidul, adding that the bodies would be buried after she reaches home.

The domestic helps -- Morzia and Dulu -- were sleeping at another room. They could not unlock the door as Obaidul had the key with him, he added.

The domestic helps were admitted to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, he added.

Rakibul Hasan, duty officer of Fire Service Control Room, said two firefighting units rushed there and doused the fire.

"We are suspecting that the fire originated due to an electric short-circuit. We are investigating it," he said.



Rescuers work at the site of a residential building heavily damaged during a Russian military attack in Mykolaiv, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US seeking to destabilise Iran

Says President Raisi; judges asked not to go soft on rioters

AFP, Paris

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi yesterday accused arch-enemy the United States of seeking to destabilise the Islamic republic, which has been rocked by nearly a month of women-led protests sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini.

Outrage over the 22-year-old woman's death, three days after she was arrested by Iran's notorious morality police, has fuelled the biggest wave of street protests and violence seen in the country for almost three years.

Young women, university students and schoolgirls have been at the forefront of the protests, shouting anti-government slogans, setting their headscarves ablaze and facing off with security forces in the streets.

Chants of "Woman, Life, Freedom", the protest movement's catchcry, were again heard overnight in the northwestern city of Bukan, where demonstrators burned the Iranian flag, in a video verified by AFP.

Protesters also rallied in the capital Tehran, Isfahan in the south, Mashhad in the northeast, Rasht in the north and in Amini's western hometown of Sajez.

Raisi again blamed the United States, its bitter foe since Iran's 1973 Islamic Revolution and chief adversary in a standoff over Iran's nuclear programme.

"Following the failure of America in militarisation and sanctions, Washington and its allies have resorted to the failed policy of destabilisation," he said, speaking in Kazakhstan.

Iran's judges have been issued orders against handing down soft sentences for

people found to be the "main elements of riots", the judiciary said yesterday.

Iran has charged more than 100 people over the "riots" in Tehran and the southern Hormozgan province alone, it said.

Gunshots and tear gas were fired on Wednesday as security forces confronted protests in a crackdown that rights groups say have already claimed at least 108 lives.

New online videos showed the public confronting security forces as they sought to arrest demonstrators, at times forcing officers to run away.

Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights said energy industry workers had joined protest strikes this week at the Asalouyeh petrochemical plant in the southwest, Abadan in the west and Bushehr in the south.

BCL leader sent to jail for killing uncle

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

A Natore court yesterday sent a BCL leader and his parents to jail for killing a man in the district's Singra upazila on Wednesday.

The dead, Chakir Sheikh, 55, was the uncle of arrestee Ashrafal Islam, general secretary of Sherkol union Ward-9 Chhatra League.

The other arrestees are Ashrafal's father Barkat Ali, and mother Rahima Begum.

Mizanur Rahman, OC of Singra Police Station, said there had been a longstanding land dispute between Ashrafal and Chakir.

On Wednesday, during a heated argument between the two, Ashrafal struck his uncle with an iron rod, instantly killin him, he added.

Chakir's wife Aleya Begum filed a case with the station, accusing seven people.

The three were produced before the court, which sent them to jail, said court inspector Nazmul Haque.

Boy missing for 3 days found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

The body of an 11-year-old boy was found in Chapainawabganj's Shibganj upazila yesterday afternoon.

Hasan Marfot, 11, an under-aged van driver and son of Hossain Ali, had been missing since Monday morning after leaving home in his van, said Chowdhury Jubaer Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Shibganj Police Station.

After being informed by locals, police recovered the decomposing body from a beel in Paranjola area.

However, they could not locate the van.

"We are not sure about the cause of death," said the OC, adding that no case was filed in this regard yet.

The body was handed over to the family after autopsy.

One more dies from Covid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One person died of Covid-19 and 445 others tested positive for the virus in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, said a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services.

The positivity rate has decreased to 8.92 percent from the previous day's 9.57.

The new cases were lodged after 4,987 samples were tested across the country during this period.

With the new figure, the number of Covid deaths has reached 29,389.

Meanwhile, 686 people have recovered from the infection, with the recovery rate now at 97.09 percent.

The deceased was a female aged between 61 and 70.

3yr project now to take 15; cost

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REASONS BEHIND DELAY

Even before physical work started, the project had to be revised in October 2014. It was supposed to be implemented on a design-build basis, meaning both the design and construction services would be provided by the same contractor.

But as design-build would cost more, the project authorities decided to do a detailed design first, leading them to revise the project for the first time, project documents show.

Thus, the project cost rose to Tk 1,106.80 crore and deadline extended to December 2016. Then, consultants prepared a detailed design.

BR in July 2018 signed a contract with two Indian companies for the main civil-engineering work of the project at a cost of Tk 1,393.78crore, which is Tk 287.78 crore more than the total project cost after the first revision in 2014.

In the meantime, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority has

asked to increase the vertical clearance of the Turag Bridge, which is part of the railway expansion project, forcing project authorities to redesign it.

Due to changes in the design, the construction cost of the bridge increased by Tk 96.30 crore which is 8.70 percent of the project cost after the first revision.

Then, Covid-19 pandemic hit the country in early 2020, hampering project progress severely due to lockdown and disruption in supply of construction materials.

The project deadline was then extended to June 2023.

However, construction of Dhaka Elevated Expressway from the airport on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway to Kutubkhali on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway appeared as the main obstacle.

The expressway, being implemented under a public-private partnership model, is being constructed over the rail track from Kawla to Kamalapur in Dhaka.

Around 75 percent of rail line expansion area in that section was occupied by expressway works until September this year, and as a result, rail expansion was halted.

If the rail authorities carry out their work, expressway authorities cannot do theirs.

Expressway authorities said they would hand over the track up to FDC gate by June 2023 in phases and it is expected that work up to Kamalapur would be completed within June 2024, according to the documents of the railway expansion project.

Rail project authorities said that in such a situation, they would require time until June 2027, including a one-year defect liability period.

Besides, at least three cases are ongoing over the land needed to implement the railway expansion project, which is another major reason behind the delay.

Rail authorities sought 13.44 acres from Bangladesh Civil Aviation Authority and 0.5 acres from

Dhaka Cantonment, shows project documents.

COST ESCALATION

In their proposal submitted to BR last month, project authorities cited several reasons behind the cost escalation.

In the detailed design of the project, the cost of bridge construction work increased by Tk 214.44 crore.

Besides, some other changes were made in the plan, resulting in an increase of Tk 706.11 crore for the track laying work.

Cost for signalling work has increased by Tk 290.36 crore while land acquisition cost has been estimated at Tk 500 crore.

Project Director Nazneen Ara Keya, however, said project cost would reduce slightly if they get the land from Caab for free as a government agency.

The Daily Star tried to contact Dharendra Nath Mazumder, BR director general, for comment but he did not answer his phone.

AL questions

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"I will humbly request the Election Commission to think about how logical, legal and realistic its decision was on halting the polls through monitoring CCTV footage from Dhaka," he said.

Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, however hoped that the EC would take appropriate measures to hold free, fair, and acceptable elections.

AL Joint General Secretary Hasan Mahmud said people are saying that the EC's decision has been called into question as it suspended the by-polls watching CCTV footage sitting about 500km away from the electoral constituency.

Hasan, also the information and broadcasting minister, said this decision proved that "elections are always held under the EC and as per its decisions and the government has no role in this regard".

That's why there is no justification for the formulas of polls-time caretaker government, neutral government or other governments, put forward by the BNP and others, the minister told reporters at his Secretariat office.

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said the EC itself withheld the Gaibandha-5 by-election after not being able to conduct the polls in a fair manner. This proved that holding a free and credible election is not possible under a partisan government, he told journalists at his hometown Thakurgaon in the afternoon.

The BNP leader once again demanded an election-time caretaker government.

Our Thakurgaon correspondent contributed to this report.

Bangladesh sees

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The report gave countries scores between zero and 100 with zero being the best.

Even though Bangladesh secured "moderate" status with its score of 19.6, it is still borderline.

According to the GHI Index, a score of 10-19.9 refers to "moderate" while 20-34.9 means "serious" status.

Scores between 35 and 49.9 are "alarming" hunger while a score below 9.9 shows hunger level is "low".

Bangladesh has made progress in the last two decades in hunger status. As per the Index, the country was in "serious" status between 2000 and 2014. It scored 33.9 in 2000 and 26.3 in 2014.

The report says, "This year's index brings us face to face with a grim reality. The toxic cocktail of conflict, climate change, and the Covid-19 pandemic had already left millions exposed to food price shocks and vulnerable to further crises.

"Now the war in Ukraine -- with its knock-on effects on global supplies of and prices for food, fertiliser, and fuel -- is turning a crisis into a catastrophe."

Russia and Ukraine account for some 12 percent of total calories traded in the world. Some 50 nations that rely on Russia and Ukraine for the bulk of their wheat imports, including Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, have been scrambling to

find alternative suppliers, it says.

"The fallout of this disruption could be devastating," it read.

When the price of food ticks upward, it does not mean simply that people must tighten their belts or pay more for their meals. For those already on the brink of famine, it could literally mean starvation.

Food inflation can unsettle markets and even precipitate the overthrow of governments, as it did in Sri Lanka, whose experience serves as a warning to the rest of the world, the report says.

Though Bangladesh made progress against undernourishment, child wasting, and child mortality, it is still lagging behind in "child stunting".

Contacted, Khaleida Islam, director at the Institute of Nutrition and Food Science, said the government has a lot of to do to address child stunting.

She said there was no possibility of famine.

"If the situation deteriorates further, the government would need to widen its social safety net programmes. The existing social safety net programmes are sufficient to address the current situation," she added.

In its recommendations, the report says governments must respect, protect, and fulfill the right to food, which should be enshrined in the law and supported by mechanisms for redressing grievances.

BERC rejects proposal

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[incomplete data], it would be unrealistic and would only bring on chaos," said BERC Chairman Abdul Jalil.

"The bulk price of electricity will remain the same as was announced in February 2020."

Replying to a question, Jalil said they took the decision considering the current economic situation of the people.

The BERC decision came at a time when people have been struggling to cope with the skyrocketing prices of essentials following the fuel and gas price hikes earlier this year.

"BERC's decision ensured justice [for the people], " said Prof M Shamsul Alam, senior vice president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh.

He also asked BERC to review the gas price as the government has stopped importing liquified natural gas from the international spot

market.

"The government hiked the domestic gas price citing the high LNG price in the global market, but it has since then stopped importing LNG."

Responding to a query about the PDB claiming a Tk 30,000 crore deficit, Mohammad Bazlur Rahman, a BERC member, said, "The data we have in hand is not enough to support that claim. What we know is that the PDB is getting Tk 17,000 crore as subsidy from the government to manage the 'deficit'."

The PDB applied for a 66 percent hike in the electricity price in January this year, which the BERC rejected as "incomplete application".

On May 18, BERC held a public hearing, after acquiring supporting documents, where its technical committee recommended a 58 percent hike instead.