

It all points to accumulated gas

Experts suspect 2 possible sources of gas after blast at 7-storey building left at least 20 dead, over 100 hurt; police file unnatural death case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Accumulated gas is the likely cause of Tuesday's explosion that left at least 20 people dead and over 100 injured on North South Road in the capital.

There were two possible sources of the gas that got trapped, experts in police said yesterday, requesting anonymity.

Seven days before the blast, a pipeline for cooking gas was repaired next to the seven-storey building in



Siddikbazar, they said after visiting the site, adding that gas might have escaped through a leak and accumulated in a confined space.

Another possible source of gas could be a poorly plugged gas pipeline to a restaurant on the ground floor of the building, said the experts. The gas supply to the restaurant was recently disconnected.

A leak from the plug could have created a gas chamber underneath the building, they said.

Rescuers also reported that after the explosion, members of the government's gas transmission authorities went there and replaced the blown-off plug.

Maj Moshir Rahman, chief of the Bomb Disposal Unit of Rab, also said this gas line could be a possible cause for the explosion.

However, Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited said there was no evidence that gas was the cause of the explosion.

"The gas riser device in the building is intact. The evidence we collected using a gas detector also does not indicate it was an explosion due to gas," said Salim Miah, director (operations) of the company.

The explosion rocked Siddikbazar, a major commercial area in the capital, around 4:45pm. It happened in the basement of the seven-storey building. The top four floors are residential while the rest are commercial.

Rabul Islam, president of Bangladesh Pipe and Tube Well Merchants Association, said that there



SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Law enforcers and firefighters working in front of the building on North South Road at the capital's Siddikbazar which was rocked by a powerful blast on Tuesday. Left, firefighters leaving the scene with a body recovered nearly 24 hours after the explosion.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON, PALASH KHAN

BUILDING FIRE HAZARDS

A city strewn with ticking time bombs

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The risk of explosions and fires lurks everywhere in the megacity of over two crore due to unplanned urbanisation, blatant violations of building codes, and a lack of fire safety awareness.

Within a few weeks, three such incidents have claimed at least two dozen lives -- one fire in a posh area, one in a commercial area, and the latest in a crowded area in Old Dhaka -- suggesting that the problem is not confined to some neighbourhoods.

And things are getting worse.

In 2018, there were 19,642 fires. The number rose to 24,102 last year, fire service

data shows.

The recent incidents are similar to other cases seen over the years. The causes were electric short circuit, accumulation of gas in a confined space, and poorly maintained air conditioning units.

"We don't follow anything. We don't care about the rules and regulations. We just scream after every incident, yet we don't try to ensure that we never need to cry for the loss of our loved ones," Brig Gen Md Main Uddin, director general of Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are only to blame for such tragedies -- from Rana Plaza to the FR Tower fire, from the Nimtoli inferno to Churhatta blaze, and the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

DMCH TEAM

Stepping up in the hour of need

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

When ward master Riaz Uddin received the first three patients injured in the Siddikbazar explosion around 5:00pm on Tuesday, he had no idea that he was going to see over 100 more.

Within about 10 minutes, the corridor of the emergency and casualty ward at Dhaka Medical College Hospital was almost filled with 20-25 seriously injured patients, according to Riaz.

"It left us at a loss for

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Almost 24 hours after the explosion in Gulistan, firefighters at the site noticed a swarm of flies above a particular spot in the debris.

The rescuers sent in their K-9 unit to take a look. The cadaver dogs, who are exceptionally trained at sniffing out dead bodies, began madly pawing at the spot -- there was a body there.

Since the rescuers could not go in with any heavy machinery as the building was deemed too risky by the authorities, the body had to be dug out manually.

This was how the body of Md Robin Hossain was found yesterday evening.

It took a painstaking two hours for the firefighters to remove the debris before they reached two bodies buried in the basement.

Robin's body, which had borne the brunt of seven whole stories crashing down on it, was crushed beyond recognition.

The man, hailing from Shariatpur, had gotten married just two months ago and



"We have not lost hope," said brother of Mehedi Hasan Swapan, who is still missing after the Gulistan blast.

lived in Jurain with his new wife, while working at the sanitaryware shop as a salesperson.

The other body was that of Momin Uddin Sumon, Robin's colleague.

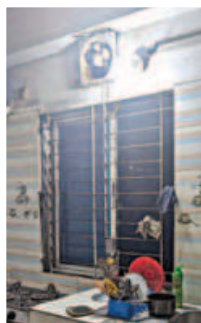
Momin's friend Mohammad Arif was found desperately looking for him in the morning. In late afternoon, he found his friend dead.

Speaking to The Daily Star before the bodies were found, Arif said, "After hearing the news of the explosion, I kept calling him [Momin]. The calls went through but he never picked up. The mobile phone kept ringing till 9:00pm yesterday [Tuesday]. Later, the rescuers found the phone. But

SEE PAGE 7 COL 4

HOW TO KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE

There could be an explosion if there is a gas leak or if gas has accumulated inside a closed space or room. Even 5 to 12 percent gas in the air of a confined space could be enough to cause an explosion, said experts from Fire Service and Civil Defence and law enforcement. They suggest:



Always keep doors and windows of kitchens open so that gas can dissipate.

After entering a home, unoccupied for a while, open doors and windows first.

In case of returning home after several days, do not switch anything on immediately.



Always keep a passage in septic tank and water tanks so that gas can escape.

Call authorities immediately if there is any sign of gas leakage.



Always check gas burners and properly switch it off, especially before going to bed.

Natural gas detectors can be installed at home, workplace.

Service air conditioners periodically, especially after it has not been used for a while.



Over Eight Hundred Marginal farmers get Krishi Loan via Smart Card from AB Bank at Rangunia



AB Bank Limited Auditorium, Rangunia. Honorable Minister of Information and Broadcasting Ministry Dr. Hasan Mahmud, MP joined the program through digital platform as chief guest. Dr. Prakash Kanti Chowdhury, Additional Divisional

Commissioner, Revenue, Chattogram, Great Freedom Fighter Swajan Kumar Talukder, Chairman, Rangunia Upazila Parishad were present as special guests. Mr. Ataul Goni Osmani, Upazila Executive Officer, Rangunia, Mr.

Sahjahan Sikder, Mayor, Rangunia Municipality, Mr. Shafiqul Islam, Vice Chairman, Rangunia Upazila Parishad and president of Bangladesh Krishok League, Northern District, Chattogram were present as special guests

over and above with Mr. Tarique Afzal, President and Managing Director of AB Bank Limited presiding. Senior officials of AB Bank and local dignitaries were also attended the program.