

## Blaze ravages Kunipara slum 1,200 made homeless

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fire ripped through a slum in Kunipara of the capital's Tejgaon Industrial Area last night, ravaging nearly 300 shanties.

There were six two- or three-storey wooden structures with corrugated iron sheet roofing that housed, on average, 50 shanties each.

Around 1,200 people were rendered homeless and were forced to spend the night under the open sky.

"After a two-and-a-half-hour frantic effort, fire fighters of 12 fire engines brought the blaze under control around 10:10pm. The fire began around 7:50pm," said Ershad Hossain, duty officer at Fire Service and Civil Defence headquarters.

Several times during the operation, firefighters ran out of water and they were struggling to manage water from nearby sources, witnesses said.

At one point, Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority's (Wasa) vehicles brought water to help extinguish the fire and even, locals were seen bringing water in buckets, they added.

Fire officials said the narrow roads and the large crowd of onlookers slowed down their efforts.

Lt Col Md Tajul Islam Chowdhury, director (operations and maintenance) of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said, "There was a lot of combustible material surrounding the slum that helped the fire spread.

"Besides, the shanties were built out of wood, and bamboo. On top of that adequate water supply was also scarce."

Meanwhile, no casualty was reported in the incident and the cause of the fire could not be determined till the filing of this report.

Ayesha Begum, a slum dweller, told The Daily Star that the fire started in a three-storey structure. She said she lived on the ground floor of that building.

Kamrul Hasan said he lived on the second floor of a different house with his pregnant wife and sister-in-law. They were unable to get down because of the fire in the staircase.

Then they broke a window and jumped onto the adjacent roof of another two-storey house.



Firefighters and locals battle against the fire that broke out in a slum at Kunipara in the capital's Tejgaon Industrial Area last night. PHOTO: COLLECTED

## ‘Fierce’ battles rage in central Bakhmut

Russian, Ukrainian forces report mounting casualties; China's Xi could visit Moscow next week

AGENCIES

Moscow and Kyiv both reported fierce fighting in the war's bloodiest battle over the eastern city of Bakhmut, while Chinese President Xi Jinping is planning to visit Russia as soon as next week, people familiar with the matter said yesterday.

A visit by Xi next week, days after he secured a third term as China's leader, would come sooner than previously expected. Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has already publicly invited Xi to Moscow without specifying a date, would be likely to portray it as a show of support for Russia's war on Ukraine.

The sources briefed on the matter

declined to be identified given the sensitivity of the issue. China's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment and the Kremlin declined to comment.

On the ground, both sides described relentless fighting in Bakhmut, a small ruined city in eastern Ukraine that has become the main focus of a Russian winter campaign involving hundreds of thousands of freshly conscripted reservists and mercenaries.

Kyiv announced last week that it had decided to defend Bakhmut rather than withdraw. Russian forces led by the Wagner private army have captured the eastern part of the city but have so far

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## Five killed as microbus catches fire in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Five people, including two women and a child, were killed and four injured after a microbus caught fire and crashed in Mymensingh's Trishal upazila early yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Akkas Ali, 50, Dolena Khatun, 40, Zarina Khatun, 40, Rezia Khatun, 42, and 13-year-old Ashik.

Md Abu Bakar Siddique, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Trishal Police Station, said the victims were on their way to Dhaka from Mymensingh's Dhobaura upazila.

The microbus caught fire around 2:00am from a suspected gas cylinder

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## Note leads to ‘missing teen’s skeleton’

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Police in Pirojpur yesterday recovered a skeleton which they suspect to be of an 18-year-old girl who went missing along with her husband around four months ago.

The victim is thought to be Lamia, daughter of Nazrul Islam in Chithalia village of Nazirpur upazila, said Humayun Kabir, officer-in-charge of Nazirpur Police Station.

On Sunday night, someone left a note at the front gate of Lamia's maternal grandfather's house giving the location "where the body was buried".

Following the tip, Nazipur police recovered the skeleton in a sand-filled area in Shatkachima village of the upazila in the afternoon.

## Man jailed for life in drugs case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

A Chapainawabganj court yesterday sentenced a man to life imprisonment in a drugs case filed in 2019.

The convict, Md Badsha, 42, was also fined Tk 10,000, in default of which, he will have to spend six more months in jail.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Rabiul Islam also acquitted Badsha's wife Rozina Begum in the case.

On September 18, 2019, the Department of Narcotics Control raided Badsha's house in Mal Bagdanga village and recovered over 1kg of heroin.

On the same day, DNC Inspector Raihan Ahmed filed a case against Badsha, his mother Sagori Begum, and his wife Rozina Begum under the Narcotics Control Act.

## Bus driver arrested over three deaths in Ctg road crash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police arrested the bus driver over the death of three people in a road accident in the port city's EPZ area on March 6.

Khorshed Alam, 30, was arrested from Fatikchhari upazila.

Md Hasan Chowdhury, superintendent of Chattogram Railway Police said, the railway police with the help of local police arrested Khorshed in the Datamara area of Fatikchhari upazila on Sunday night.

On March 6, three people, Azizul Haque, 30, a pointsman of Bangladesh Railway, and two passengers, Md Asaduzzaman, 30, and Miton Kanti Dey, 25, were killed when a bus overturned after hitting an oil-laden wagon on Newmooring level crossing around 9:30pm.

## It's now all over the country

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"We generally tend to think the Buriganga is the most polluted river in the country. But we have found some others in Dhaka division, which are in a worse state.

"What is alarming is that plastic and polythene pollution was prevalent in all 56 rivers that we surveyed."

Of the 56 rivers, 19 are located in Dhaka division, and all of them are severely polluted.

Apart from those, seven rivers are in Khulna division, five in Sylhet, eight in Chattogram, two in Rajshahi, 11 in Barishal and four in Rangpur.

He added that river pollution has been seriously impacting the local communities, especially people living near the water bodies.

According to the study, some rivers outside Dhaka, where there are no big factories, the DO levels are within the standard (4.5-8mg per litre) but the pH, COD or BOD levels are much too high, Azaz said.

The dissolved oxygen level in 25 rivers out of 56 is below 5mg per litre during the lean period, making the water unlivable for fish or other aquatic creatures, experts said.

The water of the Buriganga, Tongi canal, Shitalakhya, Dhaleshwari in Dhaka and Narayanganj; Labandaha in Gazipur; Haridhowa in Narshingdi; Sutang in Sylhet, and Kirtankhola in Barisal had DO levels lower than 1mg per litre, while it was below 2mg in Dhaka division's Balu and Turag rivers.

According to the survey report, five rivers in Barishal division, including the Bhola canal, Ramnabad, Andharmanik, Khapra Bhanga and Baleshwar, are affected by severe plastic pollution.

At least 16 of the 56 rivers in question are polluted with household and plastic wastes.

<b>DHAKA -- 19</b>	
Buriganga, Turag, Tongi Khal, Balu, Shitalakhya, Dhaleshwari, Ichamati, Meghna, Khiru, Shila, Labandaha, Loyar Banar, Old Brahmaputra, Bangshi (Savar and Tangail), Chilai, Haridhoa, Sutia (Gazipur, Mymensingh) and Karnatali	
<b>KHULNA -- 7</b>	
Pasur, Rupsa, Bhariab, Mayur, Chitra, Alaikuri and Mathabhanga	
<b>SYLHET -- 5</b>	
Khowai, Sutang, Surma, Korangi and Jadukata	
<b>CHATTOGRAM -- 8</b>	
Titas, Karnaphuli, Bakkhali, Matamuhuri, Halda, Naf, Chingri and Feni	
<b>RAJSHAHI -- 2</b>	
Atrai and Karatoa	
<b>BARISHAL -11</b>	
Sonai, Kathi, Kirtankhola, Sandhya, Payra, Bishkhali, Bholakhal, Ramnabad, Andharmanik, Khapradanga and Baleshwar	
<b>RANGPUR -- 4</b>	
Alaikuri, Ghagat, Khoksaghaghot and Shyamasundari Khal	

Meanwhile, 35 rivers were polluted by plastic, industrial waste and household wastes from municipality authorities.

Apart from only three rivers in Rangpur, all the others were victim to industrial pollution.

Earlier in 2016, a Department of Environment report stated that at least 29 rivers were severely polluted.

Professor Mujibur Rahman, a civil engineering faculty of Buet who works on the pollution in the capital, said river pollution is now affecting almost every town in Bangladesh.

"If there is a river by the town, the industries are discharging the waste into it. If not them, then municipality authorities are polluting the rivers.

"Stopping river pollution doesn't seem to be a priority for the government. Otherwise, it would strictly enforce rules in this regard."

He added, "Even considering the economic losses, the government should bring down the river pollution."

## Cops claim

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Sattar blamed outsiders for the arrests on Saturday.

The VC said the university authorities formed a five-member committee to investigate the incident and find out people responsible.

Meanwhile, two cases were filed with Motihar Police Station in this connections.

RU Registrar Prof Abdus Salam lodged a case against 500 unnamed people, while Sub-inspector Amanatullah of the police station filed another case against 300 unknown ones.

RMP Commissioner Anisur said police started investigating the cases.

## Transport master plan violated at will

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related projects in Dhaka and five surrounding districts, is reviewing and updating the RSTP.

This means the future of the eight projects hangs in the balance.

If the RSTP finds one of the projects not viable, then the public money already spent would simply go to waste.

Sources said influential civil servants posted at government agencies often take up such projects without bothering to get approval from the DTCA, complicating the already difficult transport planning for Dhaka city. There are examples of these influential bypassing the DTCA altogether.

As per the law, government agencies are supposed to follow the RSTP and take approval from the DTCA for implementing transport-related projects in Dhaka, Gazipur, Narsingdi, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, and Manikganj.

In 2016, the government approved the RSTP for 2016 to 2035 for building or widening 1,198km of roads. The roads include 126km of expressways, 310km of circular roads (inner, middle and outer), and 761km of primary and secondary roads.

Even though seven years of the RSTP have passed, only 4km of roads have been built.

**THE EIGHT PROJECTS**

The DTCA, during its public consultation meeting for the RSTP updating yesterday, mentioned that the eight projects were initiated going beyond RSTP's recommendations.

The projects are: The 258km

subway network by the BBA, Elevated Inner Circular Road by BBA, Dhaka Circular Railway by Bangladesh Railway (BR), Rayerbazar Beribadh to Postagola road by Dhaka South City Corporation, Flood Control and Drainage Development at Dhaka Circular Road (part 2) by Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Santinagar-Jhilmil Flyover by Rajuk, Dhaka East-West Elevated Expressway, and Jahangir Gate Tunnel by BBA.

Abul Quasem Siddique, deputy team leader of consultants appointed by the DTCA, told the meeting that the Elevated Inner Circular Road, Dhaka Circular Railway, Rayerbazar to Postagola road, and Flood Control and Drainage Development were initiated along the same Inner Circular Road.

Moreover, the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in June 2018 completed a feasibility and detailed design for developing the Inner Circular Road, sources at RHD said.

They, however, said BWDB is building the dam to facilitate their Inner Circular Road development work.

Quasem said BBA and DSCC are currently carrying out studies while the BR and BWDB have already completed their studies.

How much BWDB spent could not be known but the BR has spent Tk 29.72 crore.

When this correspondent asked if the DTCA was updating the RSTP only to validate these projects. And if not, who would be held responsible for wasting public money, Mohammad Rabiul Alam, director of the RSTP updating project, did not give a direct

answer.

Rabiul, also the additional executive director of the DTCA, said the RSTP recommends developing the Inner Circular Road as an urban expressway and it could be elevated, on the surface, or a combination of both.

Taking advantage of this obscurity, different agencies are now initiating projects, he said.

"We don't know why so many studies were carried out. But we will fix it through the study [RSTP updating] ...," he said, adding, "Different agencies have taken up projects from different perceptions, but we will fix which one will be suitable."

On who would be held responsible for wasting money, he said, "It is not possible for us to give this answer."

AKM Hafizur Rahman, another additional executive director of the DTCA, said the agencies should have consulted with them before taking up any projects, ignoring the RSTP.

Prominent transport expert Prof Moazzem Hossain told The Daily Star last night, "I don't think the DTCA has the capacity to monitor the work of different agencies and give them feedback. That's why different agencies are undertaking projects on their own, some of them going beyond the RSTP."

He said there is a lack of commitment from the authorities to alleviate the huge problem of transportation in Dhaka city. Lack of coordination, transparency, accountability and going ahead with projects all on one's own are just the symptoms of the lack of commitment.

## ‘No pressure will work on me

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to do anything. They may create some problems for some time, but our people will resist it."

BSS adds: The premier questioned why a person wanted to stay as the MD of a bank violating the country's law.

"There might be one benefit -- acquiring a lot of money and laundering it," she said.

About the publication of an advertisement in the Washington Post about Prof Muhammad Yunus, Hasina questioned as to why it was run in a foreign newspaper about a person who is famous and a Nobel laureate. She expressed doubts about the motive of the advertisement published before the next general election.

The PM said she cannot do anything as the head of the government. There

are laws and courts to deal with labour rights and tax evasions, she said.

Hasina said they have elected a politically conscious, patriot and dutiful person as the country's next president, under whom the next general election will be fair.

"We want the next election to be free and fair as we have struggled for democracy."

She said her government has taken appropriate measures so that the people won't have to suffer for food during Ramadan.

The PM called upon the people not to purchase excessive food at a time. She urged the people, particularly the journalists, to look into the matter so that no one can stock up.

Replying to a question, the PM said her nephew Radwan Mujib Siddiq

paid tributes to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on behalf of her marking the historic March 7 as she was in Qatar at that time. "He didn't do it with any political mission."

The PM said she and her sister have five children who have been working for the welfare of the people through Young Bangla, Centre for Research and Information (CRI), Start Up Programme, and autism campaign.

"They are working for the people and they have no ambition," she said.

Speaking about the Rohingya issue, the PM said the focus on the forcibly displaced Myanmar citizens has shifted to war in Ukraine and refugees of that country.

But Bangladesh has to shoulder its responsibilities as it has sheltered Rohingyas, she added.

First, an exploratory delegation will visit the country for assessing the situation six months before the election. Then, a long-term delegation will come, most probably two months ahead of the polls.

Finally, another team of EU election observers will come for observing the election. There may be other countries who will join the EU election missions, Whiteley added.

However, if the election is not participatory and contested, there is no point in sending the observers, he said.

Asked if they suggested the BNP participate in the polls, the EU ambassador said it was not for foreign friends of Bangladesh to make such suggestions.

"We are a helpful friend of Bangladesh. We have been saying that the elections should be peaceful and inclusive. We said it again," he added.