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## SIDDIKBAZAR EXPLOSION

# Investigators yet to find where gas accumulated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It has been a month since the Siddikbazar explosion but investigators are yet to ascertain from where the gas accumulated in the multi-storey building that led to the incident, leaving at least 25 people dead.

Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) said an explosion occurred due to the accumulation of gas in the building.

A CTTC team of DMP yesterday visited the spot to find the source from where the gas accumulated. Officials from Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited were also present at the time.

The CTTC team went to the spot around 10:30am and examined the site for two and a half hours.

During the visit, CTTC officials spoke with Titas officials about the gas connection line. Later, the investigation team dug up the line with some local workers.

Mishuk Chakma, deputy commissioner of the special action group of the CTTC unit, said, "We are now trying to find the exact source of the gas."

"There used to be a commercial gas connection on the ground floor of that building. We are digging up the underground gas connection to see if the gas accumulated from the previous connection," he added.

Engineer Moshirur Rahman of Titas Gas, however, said no leak was found in the connection line set up by Titas.

He also said the explosion might have taken place due to the accumulation of gas from the toilet line.

"There was once a commercial gas line under the

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Ambassador of France to Bangladesh Marie Masdupuy paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Gono Bhaban yesterday. Climate change, Rohingya crisis and other issues were discussed during the meet.

PHOTO: BSS

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## BANGLADESH-FRANCE

# Ties inching to strategic partnership

### Says PM

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed satisfaction over the growing relationship between Bangladesh and France, saying it has extended further towards the objective of a strategic partnership.

"France is always a trusted partner of Bangladesh. The relation has extended further towards the objective of a strategic partnership guided by our common goals of sustainable development," the premier said.

The premier made the remarks when newly-appointed Ambassador of France to Bangladesh Marie Masdupuy paid a courtesy call on her at the PM's official Gono Bhaban residence.

## Why is 'Joy Bangabandhu' not part of nat'l slogan?

HC asks govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a rule asking the government to explain why it should not be directed to include "Joy Bangabandhu" along with "Joy Bangla" as the national slogan in the gazette notification of the government.

Secretaries at the ministries of cabinet division, law and education have been made respondents to the rule. They have to reply in four weeks.

The HC bench of Justice KM Kamrul Kader and Justice Khizir Hayat Liza issued the rule following a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Mohammed Abdullah Al Harun Bhuiyan Russel, seeking necessary directives.

He submitted the petition as a public interest litigation to the HC in November last year, saying that a gazette notification has been issued containing "Joy Bangla" as a national slogan in compliance with its directive, however, the slogan "Joy Bangabandhu" was not included in the gazette notification.

Petitioner Mohammed Abdullah Al Harun Bhuiyan Russel himself moved the petition while Deputy Attorney General Abdullah Al-Mahmud Bashar represented the state during yesterday's hearing.

## MONEY LAUNDERING

# His occupation computer operator, net wealth Tk 9.94cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has found evidence of money laundering of Tk 13 crore against Nurul Islam, a former contractual computer operator who used to work at Teknaf land port.

Investigators said Nurul, who used to get a daily wage of Tk 130, became the owner of crores after getting involved with illegal narcotics trade and currency-counterfeiting.

CID filed a case under the money laundering act with Adabar Police Station last Friday against Nurul and his wife Razia Islam.

Md Moniruzzaman, an inspector of CID's financial crime unit, confirmed the development to The Daily Star yesterday.

"Nurul and his wife tried to legalise their illegal earnings by submitting tax returns against three companies that only exist on paper," he said.

Moniruzzaman said they are now conducting a drive to arrest Nurul and his wife Razia, who are currently on the run.

Sources said Nurul took the job at the land port in 2001 and left it in 2009.

After resigning, he allegedly formed a racket of brokers, got involved in narcotics smuggling, and amassed crores over a decade. His criminal activities first came to the fore after Nurul was arrested by Rapid

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**Nurul and his wife tried to legalise their illegal earnings by submitting tax returns against three companies that only exist on paper.**

MD MONIRUZZAMAN  
Inspector of CID's financial crime unit

## 683 buildings storing flammable items in basements

Finds Rajuk's survey in eight zones

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), the capital's building-regulation authority, has found that 683 buildings in eight zones of the capital are using their basements to store flammable items, violating building-construction rules.

Rajuk asked its eight zone offices to conduct a survey soon after the blast in Gulistan's Siddikbazar, which left 25 dead on March 8. The report was submitted to the Rajuk chairman yesterday. The eight zones of Rajuk inspected a total of 2,204 buildings.

This newspaper has obtained a copy of the report with the survey findings. It mentions that 683 buildings are using their basements as storehouses of various flammable goods, while 750 are using basements for purposes other than parking.

"During the inspection, owners of 1,944 buildings could not show their building design. Around 1,163 buildings are using their basements as parking spaces," the report finds.

However, when asked about the numbers not adding up, a Rajuk official involved with the survey said they are trying to sort the issue.

Tonmoy Das, member (development control) of Rajuk, said they received the report.

"We have already started issuing

notice to the building owners to remove the flammable goods on an emergency basis. We will allow them a maximum of a week or two to comply with our notice. If they fail to comply, we will launch drives against the building owners," he added.

**We have already started issuing notice to the building owners to remove the flammable goods on an emergency basis. We will allow them a maximum of a week or two to comply with our notice. If they fail to comply, we will launch drives against the building owners.**

TONMOY DAS  
Member of Rajuk

Tonmoy also said the drive against shopping centres using their basements to store goods will be conducted after Eid, as they don't want to create panic during Ramadan when the Eid shopping spree is gaining pace.

Adil Mohammad Khan, a faculty member at urban and regional planning department of Jahangirnagar University, told The Daily Star that the

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## 'Irresponsible, anti-people'

### Stakeholders protest ministry's statement on hajj package prices

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Stakeholders in the hajj sector have come down heavily on a statement of the Ministry of Religious Affairs on the hajj package price, terming it "irresponsible" and "anti-people".

The ministry on Sunday said this year's hajj package is the cheapest considering the overall issues.

"There has been a problem regarding renting hotels this year due to the recent global situation and the demolition of various hotels near Haram Sharif in Saudi Arabia. That is why the hotels are being rented for more money...The cost of hajj packages will increase further in the coming years," said the ministry's statement.

Leaders of Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (HAAB) and Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB) yesterday criticised the statement and urged the government to take steps to reduce the hajj cost.

The stakeholders stressed that many aspirants will be unable to perform hajj this year due to the huge cost of the packages.

ATAB Secretary General Abdus Salam Aref said the religious affairs ministry's decision to increase hajj cost is unfair.

"If the Saudi government reduces transportation costs, visa fees, cost to travel to

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**The stakeholders stressed that many aspirants will be unable to perform hajj this year due to the huge cost of the packages.**



New Market is yet to see its typical rush of customers even though Eid is right around the corner. Traders are assuming that this decline may be due to the overall rise of commodity prices.

PHOTO: STAR

## NEW MARKET

# High prices dampen Eid shopping spirit

### Traders, customers link low turnout with rise in cost of living

MD ABBAS

With only 18 days left until one of the biggest religious festivals in the country, sales are yet to pick up at New Market, the largest clothing market in the city. Traders have reported a decline in customers compared to previous years and attributed this to the high prices of all things, including raw materials.

Shahidul Alam Shaheed, owner of Fariha Boutique at New Market, stated that although Eid shopping has begun, it has yet to gain momentum. He hopes to see the proper flow of customers after the 15th day of Ramadan.

This correspondent noticed Md Lal Miah, a staffer at Shari Gallery, sitting at the entrance of the shop. When asked

about the sales, he expressed concern about the low turnout of customers. He also gestured towards other shops adjacent to his, where no customers were present, and stated that the market used to be so crowded during this time of the year that they couldn't move. However, this year, on the 11th day of Ramadan, they were not experiencing a good customer flow.

Explaining the reason behind the low turnout, Mohammad Rasel, a staffer at Kashfia Fabrics, said, "Most of the people who come to the market are from middle and lower-middle-income groups. If they have extra money after buying essentials, only then people buy clothes."

Traders at various shops in the New Market area echoed this sentiment and

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**PRAYER TIMING**  
APRIL 4

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4:40	12:45	4:45	6:21	7:45
JAMAAT 5:15	1:15	5:00	6:24	8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

**SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING**

RAMADAN	APRIL	SEHRI	IFTAR
12	04		6:19
13	05	4:24	6:20
14	06	4:24	6:20