



PHOTO: COLLECTED, RASHED SHUMON

RISING TO THE CALL ... Colleagues help a firefighter, *centre*, suffering from exhaustion at the Dhaka New Super Market yesterday morning. Army, police and Rab personnel help traders save their goods from the building on fire.

BRT crane tips over, injures 3

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three people were injured yesterday after a crane of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project tipped over on a road in Gazipur.

The accident halted vehicular movement on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for around one hour from 5:15pm, reports our Gazipur correspondent quoting police.

Ashraful Islam, officer in charge of Tongi (East) Police Station, said locals rescued the injured and sent them to hospital.

BRT Project's Director Mohirul Islam said, "We have already arranged treatment for the injured people."

On August 15 last year, five people were crushed to death after a segment of a viaduct meant for the BRT project fell from a crane on a car in Dhaka's Uttara.

A probe body held the Chinese contractor China Gezhouba Group Co Ltd responsible for negligence.

The contractor was not supposed to work during the day on such a busy road.

On July 15 last year, a construction worker of the BRT died after a crane fell on him in Chandana Chourasta area on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Gazipur.

DSA being used to gag dissenting voices

Say eminent citizens at webinar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is arguing that the Digital Security Act is meant for providing security to people in digital platform. But in reality, it is being used to harass those criticising the government, speakers said at a webinar yesterday.

They also demanded that the government scrap the law immediately at the event titled "Why do we want abolishment of the Digital Security Act?", organised by Nagorik, a rights organisation.

Prof Anu Muhammad said the DSA itself is vague and is being used to suppress different professionals, including journalists, teachers and researchers, who are criticising different activities of the government.

The government is also using the act as a shield against the wrongdoings of top officials of government offices, he said.

The eminent economist added that the law creates insecurity among people instead of ensuring their security as claimed by the government.

"Moreover, the government is protecting a group of individuals involved in money laundering and preventing media coverage on their activities by imposing this Digital Security Act," said Prof Anu Muhammad.

In fact, this act gives impunity to a group of influential people and enables the government to control any form of criticism

against those in power, he opined.

Prof CR Abrar, of Dhaka University's international relations department, said it has been proved that the government is using the DSA on purposes.

"If we look at the teachers, journalists and others who are the victims of the act for criticising the government, we will get the proof of the government's ill intent," he added.

"Moreover, the government is protecting a group of individuals involved in money laundering and preventing media coverage on their activities by imposing this Digital Security Act."

~ Prof Anu Muhammad

He emphasised that the act needs to be repealed immediately, as there is no possibility for amending it.

He acknowledged that we need an act to address digital security, but act like the DSA cannot ensure it.

Prof Abrar, who presided over the event, said, "We don't expect anything from the government, as they passed the act without talking to stakeholders. We will not accept

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

SUDAN IN CRISIS Paramilitaries clash with army

AFP, Khartoum

Three civilians yesterday died in battles between Sudanese paramilitaries and the regular army, which said it launched air strikes against them, sparking global calls for calm in a country which has seen decades of unrest.

The paramilitaries said they were in control of the presidential place as well as Khartoum airport, claims denied by the army, as civilian leaders called for an immediate ceasefire to prevent Sudan's "total collapse".

The doctors' union reported the three civilian deaths, including at Khartoum airport and in North Kordofan state. At least nine others were wounded, the medics said.

Violence erupted after weeks of deepening tensions between military leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy, paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, over the planned integration of Daglo's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) into the regular army.

The integration was a key element of talks to finalise a deal that would return the country to civilian rule and end the political and economic crisis sparked by their 2021 coup in one of the world's poorest countries.

Teen stabbed to death during a clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

An SSC candidate was hacked to death and three other were injured in a clash between two groups of students in Rupganj of Narayanganj yesterday.

Mehedi Hasan Sajib, 16, a student of Bhulta School and College, died after he was attacked in front of his school around 12:30pm, said Ataur Rahman, inspector (investigation) of Rupganj Police Station.

Mehedi lived in Balaikha area of Rupganj, police said.

ARSA-APBN 'GUNFIGHT' 2 killed near Ukhiya Rohingya camp

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A "gunfight" broke out between the Armed Police Battalion (APBn) and members of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) yesterday, killing a suspected ARSA member and a Rohingya woman near a Rohingya camp in Ukhiya of Cox's Bazar.

The dead are Hashim, 32, son of Bashir Ahmed of the camp, and Noor Haba, 50, wife of Nurul Islam of the camp.

The woman was killed in ARSA firing and two members of APBn were also injured, said Faruk Ahmed, assistant superintendent of police (ASP-media) of APBn's 8th Battalion.

A suspected ARSA member, Md Sadeque, 31, was arrested with weapons from the spot, he said. He said the shooting took place around 1:30pm in the hills next to the mosque in Block 17 of Rohingya Camp-18 in Ukhiya.

Another fire crushes traders' Eid hopes

FROM PAGE 1

Thirty units of firefighters rushed to the spot and managed to bring the flame under control after three and a half hours.

As of filing of this report around 8:00pm, they were still working at the site to douse the fire on the second floor of the market. However, no deaths were reported till then.

Maruf Hossain, convener of Dhaka New Super Market Bebohayee Samity (Dakshin), said that according to their primary assessment, around 500 shops were affected, of which 280 to 300 were completely burned down.

He added that products of around Tk 40-50 crore were sold every day during the last 10 days of Ramadan almost every year.

At least 29 people, including 14 firefighters, had fallen ill due to smoke inhalation, and were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Of them, 14 were admitted to the burn and plastic surgery institute for extreme smoke inhalation.

Speaking to The Daily Star, injured firefighter Taufiq Elahi said, "We fell sick from the smoke and heat. We started watering and moved from the first to the second floor, where it was too hot and smoky."

Shanto, another firefighter, said, "I entered the second floor with an oxygen cylinder strapped on. At some point, the oxygen ran out and I fell sick. My colleagues had to rescue me and bring me to hospital."

Though no valid information regarding the source of the fire was given yet, traders and eyewitnesses said it started on the second floor and then spread from there. Around 8:30am, the third floor was ablaze.

Brig Gen Md Main Uddin, director general of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said the fire came under control at 9:10am.

"But it will take more time for us to douse it completely. We are giving utmost priority to recovering the traders' goods."

Asked if this fire, along with the previous ones, gives any hint of being "subversive activities", he said they would seek the assistance of the law enforcers for an investigation.

The DG, however, pointed out that such recurring incidents are mainly due

to a lack of awareness.

Meanwhile, some traders of the market claimed the fire was caused by electrical works done on an adjoining footbridge before dawn.

Visiting the spot, Dhaka South City Corporation Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh said they are urging all intelligence agencies concerned to investigate if the fire was somehow an act of sabotage.

He also urged the media to play a responsible role in reporting whether the fire was part of any propaganda.

Terming the traders' claims baseless, DSCC spokesperson Md Abu Nasher said there was no scope to link the fire with the footbridge work.

Nasher, also public relations officer of the DSCC, said they had closed down the footbridge around a year ago because it was risky, but people continued to use it, and traders also set up stalls there.

Due to this, the DSCC appointed a contractor to work on separating the bridge from the first floor of the market on April 12. The work began around 2:00am yesterday and ended around 5:15am, he said, adding that the fire began around 10 minutes before 6:00am.

Nasher also said the spot of the fire was around 400 feet away from where the footbridge was being worked on, and no gas cutter was used there.

Dhaka Power Distribution Company officials were also present when the footbridge work was ongoing, he added.

On April 4, a fire broke out at the Bangabazar shopping complex, burning down around 3,000 shops and ready-made garments.

Shop owners claimed that goods worth around Tk 1,000 crore were damaged.

Just a week after, on April 11, a fire broke out in a ceramics warehouse in the capital's Chawkbazar.

Then on April 13, a blaze in the capital's Nawabpur burnt down at least 20 warehouses.

POLICE SMELLS SABOTAGE

Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun, inspector general of police (IGP), yesterday warned they will take stern action against anyone found involved in the recent fire incidents.

"We have recently noticed that there have been fire incidents in several markets in the capital. Police are

investigating every incident thoroughly."

IGP Mamun made the remarks while addressing an Iftar and cash distribution ceremony for the poor and destitute, organised by the Bangladesh Shop Owners Association at the Shiddeshwari School and College ground.

He urged the association to extend a helping hand as many people have lost their jobs due to the fires.

Khandker Golam Faruq, commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, urged the same.

MARKED 'RISKY', NOTHING DONE

Along with Dhaka New Super Market and Bangabazar, many other markets – Gausia, Mouchak, Rajdhani Super Market – were all earlier identified and marked "at risk of fire hazards" by the Fire Service and Civil Defence, said Lt Col Mohammad Tajul Islam Chowdhury, its director (operation & maintenance).

On April 6, the fire service, along with the National Security Intelligence and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, conducted a drive in the Gausia Market, next to Dhaka New Super Market, and announced it was risky.

Md Bazlur Rashid, assistant director of the fire service, during the drive said though there were some fire extinguishers there, proper fire safety systems were absent.

He pointed out that many staircases were blocked as goods were either kept right at the mouth of those or makeshift shops occupied the spaces. "In any market, this could hamper smooth evacuation during fire incidents."

A DSCC official yesterday told The Daily Star that during earlier drives, they repeatedly asked traders to make sure goods were not kept in front of the stores or in the lobbies of the markets.

Lt Col Md Rezaul Karim, director (training, planning and development) of the fire service, said that along with the sub-shops in the corridors, banners and posters are also hung all over inside the markets, which helps the fires spread.

He added, "The fire has not yet been fully extinguished [till 9:40pm]. Twelve of our units are still working and will do so until it is completely put out."

Meanwhile, it was announced that Dhaka New Super Market will remain closed until further notice.

A chronic plague in BFF

FROM PAGE 12

has been a recurrent and repeated problem that detracts BFF's finances'.

Although Shohag pleaded his innocence in a statement issued yesterday and has expressed a desire to appeal the 'biased and targeted decision' before the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), the ban has caused a ripple effect.

It has also served as another big blow to the BFF, which is still reeling from the controversial withdrawal of the national women's team from the Olympic qualifiers citing a financial crisis.

The cash-strapped local football body survives mainly on FIFA and Asian Football Confederation (AFC) funds. The BFF receives around Tk 20-22 crore from the FIFA and AFC per year, which accounted for more than 75 per cent of its expenses, of around 30 crore, last year, according to a top BFF official.

Apart from the Forward Fund, FIFA also provided money to the BFF under its Financial Assistance Programme (FAP) to ensure the smooth disbursement of administrative and developmental expenditures.

Football in the country is no longer a crowd-pulling sport as had been the case in the early 90s. The revenue BFF

secures from local sponsors is very little as the domestic leagues nowadays hardly draw a crowd.

However, allegations of financial mismanagement in the BFF are nothing new.

Former national striker Sheikh Mohammad Aslam said: "The disclosure of the financial irregularities and the suspension of general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag by FIFA is the truth we have been telling for a long time."

An executive committee member of the BFF from 2008 until his resignation in 2016, Aslam said that he talked about the irregularities time and again but nobody paid heed to his warnings.

"It is a matter of shame for the whole nation," said Aslam, renowned in his playing days for his prolific goalscoring.

Aslam further claimed that Shohag was only a pawn. "Shohag is not the only person responsible for the irregularities. I think a lot of people are involved. We need an independent investigation committee to unearth irregularities in the BFF."

Abdul Gaffar, another former national footballer, termed it a day of disgrace. "We have been speaking about irregularities and I'm afraid many more will come out,"

See if BNP, Jamaat are behind fires

FROM PAGE 1

Hasina was speaking at a meeting of the Awami League Local Government Nomination Board at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

She made the comments hours after a massive fire broke out at Dhaka New Super Market.

The premier asked the authorities to investigate whether the recent fires at different markets were part of conspiracy or act of sabotage to hurt the economy. She instructed them to step up surveillance at important markets across the country.

"Everyone should be more careful. Everyone has to make arrangements on their own to guard [their establishments]. All efforts by the government will continue."

Hasina, also the AL president, said that unwanted crowds must not be

allowed to gather when firemen are fighting fires. She said strict action will be taken against causing obstruction to firefighting.

The said when the first fire broke out, it was thought to be an accident.

"A couple of other fires happened at the same time when the first one broke out... the fire incidents are taking place after 6:00am. Surveillance should be stepped up and other markets have to remain alert," she said.

The PM said it has been noticed that when the fire service reaches the scene, they are obstructed by some people.

"Why will they face obstructions? While they tried to douse flame, some people carrying sticks attacked the firefighters. Who are those people?"

She said its needs to be looked into whether the last four fires are accidents or acts of arson.

said Gaffar, demanding that the parliamentary standing committee launch an investigation into the BFF's irregularities.

Most of the former footballers blamed incumbent BFF president Kazi Salahuddin for the poor state of the game both on and off the field.

Serving his fourth term at the helm of the BFF, Salahuddin has often come under criticism for setting lofty targets but fulfilling little. Under his stewardship, the men's football team has slipped from 180th in 2008 to their current position of 192nd in the FIFA rankings. Meanwhile, the domestic football league has been played in front of virtually empty stands.

The only silver lining from the famous footballer-turned-administrator's tenure is the progress of the women's football team against all odds.

However, Salahuddin told The Daily Star yesterday that he did not believe the issue would fester, saying that FIFA would continue to provide funds.

"My mandate is up to 2024 and I think there will be no problems getting funds from FIFA, who are now happy with the BFF account because they went through it from 2016 to 2020. But it is true that we may face problems roping in sponsors for football events."

"We know that some political parties are there to wage a movement after Eid, cripple the economy and oust the government. Yes, you can oust the government. But what are the faults of these ordinary people and businesspeople?"

She said that businesspeople have been the worst affected as fire hit them at a time when they looked for brisk business.

"This will not be let go easily, and we have increased our surveillance in this regard," she said.

Recalling the arson by the BNP-Jamaat clique, which unleashed a reign of terror and arson attacks during 2013-14, Hasina suspected that they might take another route to harm the economy.

"It should be properly investigated," she said.

She requested all to remain alert.