

BAILEY ROAD BLAZE 'Gas cylinders were scattered along staircase'

Fire official says building
lacked safety measures

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Green Cozy Cottage Shopping Mall, where a devastating blaze killed at least 44 people last night, lacked multiple fire safety measures.

Firefighters said the seven-storey building on Bailey Road had only one staircase and no fire exit. The building also lacked proper ventilation facilities.

"Only one staircase in such a commercial building is unacceptable. This is a major flaw in fire safety protocol," Lt Col Razaul Karim, director (training, planning and development) at the Fire Service and Civil Defence told The Daily Star.

"The building housed several restaurants, and gas cylinders were scattered along the staircase, which helped spread the fire quickly," he said.

Speaking to reporters on the spot, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Habibur Rahman said a case would be filed over the incident.

It would be investigated whether the building authority followed the Rajuk plan and had all the required fire safety measures in place, he added.

Teacher suspended for forcibly cutting hair of 9 students

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

A teacher was temporarily suspended for forcibly cutting the hair of nine seventh graders for not wearing the hijab in Syedpur Abdur Rahman School and College in Munshiganj's Sirajdikhan upazila on Wednesday.

The suspended teacher is Runia Sarker, a biology teacher of the school.

One of the students' parents said, "I noticed my daughter was upset last night [Wednesday night]. When I asked her what happened, she told me her teacher cut her hair for not wearing the hijab. She was in tears and said she doesn't want to go to school anymore."

"If my daughter made a mistake, the teacher could've complained to me instead of taking such a step."

Speaking to The Daily Star, Sabbir Ahmed, Sirajdikhan upazila nirbahi officer, said, "We learned about the matter around 9:00pm [on Wednesday] and instructed the

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PHOTO: COLLECTED

A carnival for pets

NUSRATH JAHAN

A city of surprises, Dhaka is set to bring forth something completely out of the box and truly wholesome on March 2, 2024 with the "Pampered Paws Bangladesh PAW CARNIVAL 2024", powered by Whiskas and Pedigree.

Hosted by Pampered Paws Bangladesh -- the beloved pet grooming salon, pet hotel, accessories and pet food company -- this day-long extravaganza promises to be a perfect bonding experience for pets and their owners.

"The idea is to build a community that welcomes innocent animals into their lives," stated Saif Ridoy, sourcing manager of Pampered Paws and one of the event's organisers.

Imagine a day filled with wagging tails, furry friends, and endless activities designed to celebrate our pets, while raising awareness about animal rights. Pet events themselves are pretty rare in our country, and Paw Carnival 2024 is a one-of-a-kind celebration that combines fun, community spirit, and a heartfelt dedication to our furry companions.

Starting from 10am until 7pm at Shaheed Zayan Chowdhury Maath of Banani, this carnival is set to welcome at least 500-1,000 pet enthusiasts from all walks of life.

Kicking off with a grand inauguration by renowned members, influencers, and celebrities of the community, the carnival will feature an array of exciting activities for the pets throughout the day.

From pet service-related stalls offering vet consultations, gourmet pet food and stylish accessories to a dazzling Pet Fashion Show -- showcasing



the latest trends in pet couture by the renowned designer pet clothing line, Trendy Paws, there's something that will undoubtedly plaster a smile on everyone's face.

Planning a day with the youngest members of the family is not easy. We rarely find something that they will enjoy just as much as us. However, a carnival-like this is perfect for such a day out. Live pet caricatures and face painting will absolutely make this a day to remember for the kids.

On the other hand, attending a workshop on animal welfare presented by specialists in the field will instil the idea of proper treatment for animals while nurturing a love that will grow over the years to come.

Whether you want a friend for your

pet or bring home your first pet, you can browse the adoption wall curated with photos of dogs and cats in need of loving families. Attendees will also have the opportunity to sign a petition advocating for dogs to be allowed in national parks and learn about the importance of supporting animal welfare initiatives.

Several stalls offering delectable snacks and refreshments are also likely to keep the spirit up throughout the day.

According to Saif Ridoy, Pampered Paw Bangladesh has been feeding over 100 cats and dogs for the past two years -- a simple act of kindness that has already made a huge difference. So, on March 2, let's make a day to celebrate our furry companions and make a difference in the lives of the ones in need.

BHASAN CHAR CYLINDER BLAST 4-year-old becomes fifth victim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A four-year-old girl died at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) on Wednesday night after suffering burn injuries in a gas cylinder blast at a Rohingya camp in Noakhali's Bhasan Char on Saturday.

The victim, Rashmina, was undergoing treatment for burn injuries in her respiratory tract at the pediatric ICU at CMCH, said Rafique Uddin Ahmed, head of the burn and plastic surgery unit at CMCH.

He said the death toll from the fire incident now stands at five. All the victims are children aged six or below.

Two other victims are currently undergoing treatment at the hospital, he added.

On Saturday, nine people were injured when a gas cylinder exploded at a Rohingya camp in Bhasan Char. Of them, seven were taken to CMCH for treatment, where Russel, 3, succumbed to his injuries on that day, said police.

Mubashshera, 4, and Robi Alam, 5, breathed their last on Monday at the hospital.

Meanwhile, six-year-old Sohel died on Wednesday morning.

Madrasa teacher sent to jail in rape case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A Panchagarh court sent the headteacher of a madrasa to jail yesterday for allegedly raping three of his students at Munshipara in Debiganj upazila.

Judicial Magistrate Ashrofi Binte Khair passed the order in the evening when Mizanur Rahman, 42, of Bhabaniganj Goragram in Nilphamari Sadar upazila, was produced before the court, said court Inspector Jamal Hossain.

According to the case statement, in the last three months, Mizanur Rahman brought three residential students aged about 10-12 years to his room and raped them.

When the victims' guardians learned of the matter, they complained to the madrasa authority on Tuesday night in this regard.

On information, Debiganj police picked him up, and a case was filed against him early yesterday.

2-month fishing ban in Padma-Meghna sanctuary starts today

UNB, Chandpur

A two-month fishing ban on all kinds of fish, including jatka (hilsa fry), in the 70km Padma-Meghna sanctuary area will come into effect today.

The prohibition, enforced by the district and upazila task forces, aims to preserve the aquatic ecosystem and boost hilsa production.

The sanctuary spans from Shatnal in Matlab Uttar upazila to Charbhairabi in Haimchar upazila. District Fisheries Officer Golam Mehedi Hasan told UNB that 43,000 registered fishermen in Chandpur will be affected by the ban for two months from March 1 to April 30 and so they will be given 40kg of food aid per person.

Jalal Dewan and Hridoy Hossain, fishermen from Meghna coastal village, stressed the need for doubling government assistance, citing a lack of alternative income sources during this period of unemployment.

BPL's foreign players' payment

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issues in paying the players' agents in dollars, he said: "No, it won't happen because the board has a lot [of dollars in its foreign currency account]."

BCB, however, provided a different version on this issue. The BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said that a system of taking payments in local currency was in use in previous editions, but not anymore.

"In the eighth edition, the franchises used to hand us taka and we made the payments. But in the ninth and the 10th editions, we have assisted them regarding permission [from the Bangladesh Bank] and the franchises sent the money directly [to the players or their agents]," Nizamuddin asserted, also acknowledging that the dollar crisis impacts all the parties involved.

The permission is sought through the finance ministry following a nod at the inter-ministerial meeting, which then authorises the Bangladesh Bank to issue a permit to banks.

Nafisa Kamal, owner of Comilla Victorians, the most successful franchise in BPL history and one which employs quite a few high-profile foreign T20 players, tried to explain the payment mechanism of her team.

"The Pakistani players mostly accept payment in taka, but for the rest, it is in dollar which puts us in a difficult position because when we are paying in dollars, the expenditure becomes much higher," she said.

Nafisa, however, also implied that these transactions are tripartite, with the payments being made via BCB and taxes deducted from the payments too.

Comilla CEO Colonel AKM Zaki, though, claimed that payments to foreign players differs depending on how they are contracted.

"BCB deals with payment to the players that we get from the draft. The BCB monitors how much we pay either to it or to the players' accounts," Zaki claimed. "For direct signing, we pay in different ways to

their [agents'] accounts."

BPL governing council member secretary Ismail Haider Mallick, however, provided a different version.

"Franchises complete the payment of the direct signings. They also do it for the draft signings, but if any franchise doesn't complete full payment to a player, the player contacts us," Mallick told The Daily Star.

While there is no argument over the fact that the BPL sees a lot of foreign currency being deposited into foreign players' or their agents' accounts, the contrasting statements from the different franchise owners and the BCB only further mystifies the apparent secrecy behind the payment mechanism.

For clarification, The Daily Star contacted the Bangladesh Bank. Md Mezbahul Haque, an executive director and spokesperson of the bank, declined to comment on this issue. However, an official of the Foreign Exchange Policy Department of the financial regulator who did not want to be named, claimed that the central bank has not been contracted either by the BCB or any bank for issuing any permit for transferring dollars to foreign players in BPL this time around.

If this official's claim is valid -- there is enough reason to believe so given the conflicting statements provided by the stakeholders -- it must be a matter of serious concern to national economic interest.

Dr Itekhazuzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, felt there should be a serious probe done on this matter by the financial watchdogs.

"The way the BCB and the BPL franchises are trying to pass the buck on each other raises the possibility of massive irregularities involved in payments to the foreign players," said the Bangladesh head of the global anti-corruption watchdog. "While there is nothing wrong in hiring foreign players in BPL in the due process, it will be frustrating and unacceptable if the potentially multi-

level ongoing violations of relevant laws are not strictly investigated," Itekhazuzaman opined, further stating, "Dollar crisis or not, the matter should be probed particularly for potential collusive violations of the Anti-money Laundering Act and other criminalities facilitated by syndicates of black marketing and illicit financial transfers including hundi."

New cabinet

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previously served as ministers.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin will administer the oath taking of the new cabinet members. Cabinet Secretary Md Mahub Hossain will conduct the oath-taking ceremony.

The Bangabhaban has prepared to host the ceremony with approximately 150-200 guests.

No ministers, state ministers, or deputy ministers have been appointed to the labour and employment, and cultural affairs ministries. In past AL governments, two ministers usually oversaw these ministries.

Besides, there are no ministers in the ministries of commerce, information and broadcasting, and posts, telecommunications and information technology. These ministries only have state ministers.

The absence of the commerce minister, a position held by Tipu Munshi in the last cabinet, raises the possibility of a senior figure being appointed to the role.

On the other hand, the post of state ministers remains vacant at the ministries of law, home, education, planning, land, local government, rural development and co-operatives, and foreign affairs.

The current cabinet does not have any state minister to a ministry where there is a minister and any minister to a ministry where there is a state minister.

Following the AL's landslide victory in the January 7 election, Hasina formed her fourth consecutive government on January 11. In the 37-member cabinet, there are 26 ministers and 11 state ministers.

Automated fuel pricing at last

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margin, transport costs and others, as per the gazette issued by the power division last night.

The fuel price will be announced for consumers every month, said Nasrul Hamid, the state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, while introducing the new system yesterday.

The automated and periodic pricing system, introduced at the behest of the International Monetary Fund, will help overcome the harmful effects of price adjustments made over long periods of time and ensure fuel pricing at market rates, the guideline said.

The method will also lower the subsidy demand, according to the IMF.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday said that the power tariff hike will take effect from February instead of March as previously announced, meaning the consumers

will need to pay the bill for the outgoing month following the new rate.

The decision to bring forward the power tariff hike was announced yesterday by Hamid.

Just a day earlier -- and two days after the price of gas supplied to power plants were hiked by Tk 0.75 per cubic metre -- Hamid unveiled a new electricity tariff that will see the charges for retail users will go up by 8.5 percent on an average and for wholesalers by 5 percent.

With new rate, a consumer who previously paid Tk 1,000 a month will have to pay Tk 1,085 for the same volume of electricity, according to the notification from the ministry of power, energy and mineral resources.

The electricity tariff hike comes at a time when people are already battling with elevated inflation levels.

"The power prices will have to be increased as the government has to bear a good amount of subsidy to

import fuel. This is because of the higher price of the dollar as the taka has weakened against it," Hamid said when announcing the tariff hike on Monday.

When coal power plants were introduced, the US dollar traded at Tk 80. Now the cost of the dollar is over Tk 110, Hamid said.

Nearly 1.40 crore customers pay Tk 4 for per unit of electricity usage. Customers who use higher units will pay Tk 7 per unit of electricity.

But, the average generation cost of electricity is Tk 12 per unit, Hamid said.

The government has to bear the rest of the cost from the public exchequer, he said, adding that the amount of subsidy for electricity would be around Tk 43,000 crore in the current fiscal year.

In the case of petroleum, the total subsidy requirement would be nearly Tk 6,500 crore.

At least 44 killed in building blaze

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Ujjal, 23, Jobayer, 21, Omar Faruk, 43, Shakil, 22, Jewel, 30, Shezan, 22, Deen Islam, 30, and Iqbal Hossain, 24.

There were several clothing stores and restaurants including Kachchi Bhai, Khana's, and Pizza Inn at the building.

At Dhaka Medical College morgue, desperate family members gathered looking for their loved ones.

Bashona Rani, a grandmother, was seen grieving after she found the bodies of her daughter Poppy Roy and grandchildren Shampurna Roy, 12, and Sun Roy, 8.

She asked a reporter for a pen and piece of paper. "Please let me write their names on papers and put them on the bodies so that I don't lose them among so many corpses."

She said, "I spent hours outside the burning building, hoping they would



Shampurna Roy and Sun Roy

come out..."

Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun told reporters at the DMCH that police would try to handover the bodies to the families as early as possible.

Around 2:19am, the CID put crime scene tape around the building.

Fire service formed a probe committee to find the cause of the fire.

Putin warns

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creates the real threat of a conflict with the use of nuclear weapons, and thus the destruction of civilisation," said Putin.

His comments appeared to be a response to French President Emmanuel Macron's refusal earlier this week to rule out sending troops to Ukraine -- a stance that drew swift rejection from other leaders in Europe.

Nevertheless, the debate has struck a nerve in Moscow, which has long seen its conflict with Ukraine as part of a wider "hybrid war" being waged against it by Nato.

Western leaders have repeatedly criticised Putin for what they see as his reckless use of nuclear rhetoric.

After pulling Russia out of arms control treaties with the United States and previously warning he was "not bluffing" when he said he was ready to use nuclear weapons, Putin had appeared in recent months to dial down his nuclear threats.