

# NIGHTMARE ON *Bailey Road*

Tragedy often reduces lives to mere statistics, a tally of those lost. But behind these numbers lie shattered dreams, families torn apart, and a community in mourning. The 46 persons who died in the Green Cozy Cottage Shopping Mall fire were not just names on a list, but lively individuals – students with aspirations, a teacher nurturing young minds, families reuniting over dinner – and most importantly people looking forward to the future with hopes and dreams on a leap day. These are not just numbers; they are mothers, sons, daughters, students, and friends. Below are the stories of loss, sufferings and survival through the eyes of our correspondents.



At least 46 people were killed and dozens critically injured in a fire at a seven-storey building on Bailey Road in the capital on Thursday night.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## A biriyani stop turns tragic

Viqarunnisa teacher, 23-yr-old daughter killed in fire

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

A check-up with the dentist. This is why Lutfun Nahar Lucky, a 47-year-old senior teacher at Viqarunnisa Noon School & College left home on Thursday night. She was accompanied by her daughter Jannatin Tazri, 23, a student of BRAC University.

Little did Lucky's husband Golam Mohiuddin know this would be the last time he sees them.

Yesterday, Golam Mohiuddin recalled a lighthearted joke he made with his wife just hours before tragedy struck.

"I even made fun of her, asking you want



## GONE ... TOO SOON

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Classes, labwork, exams – Lamisha Islam was supposed to be worrying about these today while living a life full of potential amongst her friends and family.

But all was lost; all that potential lost in a blaze, as the devastating fire that broke out at a building on Bailey Road took Lamisha's life along with 45 others on Thursday night.

Lamisha, 23, was a student of the mechanical engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

Alongside being on her quest to become an

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## The last supper

Five of a family dies just 18 days before fresh start

DIPAN NANDY and MD ABBAS

Only 18 days separated Syed Mobarak Hossain from his dream of taking his family to Italy, where he worked. After years of struggle as a Bangladeshi expatriate, everything was finally falling into place: his wife and children were set to join him in Europe. With visas secured and excitement brewing, the family decided to celebrate their reunion with a festive meal – kacchi biryani.

But a devastating fire at the restaurant killed all of them. His wife Shopna Akhter, two daughters Fatema Tuz Zohra Kashpia, 19, Amena Akhter Nur, 13, and eight-year-old son Syed Abdullah all died alongside him.

Syed Riad, Mobarak's cousin, narrated the story while talking to this newspaper at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

According to Riad, Mobarak, had a restaurant business in Italy, and his family used to live in the capital's Modhubag area. "Mobarak Bhai came to Bangladesh in

January to take the whole family to Italy, hoping to give them a better life. But see? It wasn't to be fulfilled. All is

last night, and we couldn't trace her," he said.

The authorities at the burn institute informed that a body



gone now," he said.

**JOURNO AMONG VICTIMS** Abhishruti Sharsti, a staff correspondent at The Report, live, is among the 46 victims of the fire at the building.

Her colleagues and friends identified the body at 12:30pm at the Sheikh Hasina National Burn and Plastic Surgery Institute, said Golam Rabbani, chief reporter of Thereport.live.

"We learned that she was at a restaurant in the building with her friend. Her phone has been switched off since

belonging to a female was at their morgue. "We rushed to the spot and identified her by seeing different bracelets on her hands," Rabbi said.

Efforts to reach Abhishruti's family have been unsuccessful, as the only contact number we have for them is switched off, he noted.

Abhishruti was a philosophy department student at Eden Mohila College.

"We are attempting to contact the college authorities to facilitate communication with her family," Rabbani said.

## Families lost in flame

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

It was a leap day on Thursday, and many decided to celebrate the day that comes every four years with dreams and promises to be in a better place in life when the next one arrives.

Twenty-six-year-old Ria Moni also decided to mark the day alongside her sister Arisa, 13, a class eight student of the Viqarunnisa Noon School & College, and cousin Nimu, 23, a City College student.

Ria, a final-semester student of fashion design at a Malaysian university, came home on February's first week on vacation and was supposed to go back on today's flight.

However, fate took a tragic turn, as the three sisters went to have kacchi at Kacchi Bhai to celebrate the day before Ria returned to Malaysia, and they were caught in the devastating fire that broke out at the seven-storey building on Bailey Road where the restaurant was located.

All three of them lost their lives on the fateful leap day.

Ria's father, Korban Ali, was seen lamenting in front of Dhaka Medical College Hospital's emergency unit morgue around 2:30am early yesterday.

When this correspondent tried to communicate with him, the grieving father was having a difficult time to express his emotions.

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## 'My family's alive thanks to them'

Survivors recall how firefighters rescued them

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Whenever there is a devastating blaze threatening the lives of people, the ones everyone looks to for saving the day are the fire service and civil defence personnel.

It was the same during the tragedy that occurred on Bailey Road on Thursday.

As harrowing stories of the inferno at a commercial building kept coming, a few survivors yesterday expressed their gratitude to the saviours – the fire fighters.

"I wouldn't be here if they didn't reach in time," said Prof Ahmed Kamruzzaman Majumder, who went to the Zesty restaurant of the building with his family to celebrate his daughter Waziha's 12th birthday.

Majumder, a teacher at Stamford University, had no idea about the ordeal he and his wife and two daughters would face in the following couple of hours.

In a conversation with The Daily Star,

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## They live to tell

DIPAN NANDY, MD ABBAS and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

"Fire! Fire!"

They heard. Some of them were having dinner with friends and family, while others were shopping. Everything changed within seconds.

There were no fire exits. Many took to the only staircase to flee the raging inferno, but the stairs were already engulfed in flames. To make things worse, there were gas cylinders scattered across the ground floor, making it a ticking time bomb.

So, they decided to go towards the rooftop. The flames followed. In the meantime, people were jumping off the building, taking their chance with fate over the risk of literally being burned alive.

To describe the situation, one may use the words "apocalyptic" or "dystopian".

At least 46 people were killed and 22 critically injured in a fire that broke out at a Green Cozy Cottage Shopping Mall Thursday night.

The survivors lived to tell the story, with the burden of dealing with a trauma that would probably last a lifetime.

Faridul Islam crawled up through the staircases, using his clothes to shield his

eyes from the heavy smoke, and reached the rooftop.

"Due to smoke, we couldn't go downstairs. Using clothes to shield our eyes, we crawled up the staircase, eventually reaching the rooftop. Despite witnessing others jumping from the building, I refrained myself," he told this newspaper.

Firefighters later rescued Faridul and several others.

**So, they decided to go towards the rooftop. The flames followed. In the meantime, people were jumping off the building, taking their chance with fate over the risk of literally being burned alive.**

**TRAPPED IN WASHROOM**

Businessman Mehdi Hasan was in the building to attend a get-together with his China-return friend Fardin Abrar at Khana's restaurant alongside his wife Umme Habiba.

Trapped by smoke, they sought refuge in a washroom, wetting their clothes for protection. "We thought it would be our last

day. After around two hours, firefighters rescued us," he said.

**FLAMES FOLLOWED THEM TO THE ROOF**

Johirul Islam, a chef at Zesty restaurant within the building, said, "Because of the smoke, I couldn't go down and went to the rooftop using the stair railing."

"Initially feeling safe, we later found out the fire had reached the top floor. We took refuge at the back of the restaurant on the roof and were eventually rescued by fire officials who broke through the restaurant wall," he recounted.

When asked about the cylinder storage, he mentioned they stored them on the ground floor along with cylinders from other restaurants.

Shakhawat Hossain, a chef on the fourth floor of the restaurant, saw smoke entering the kitchen as he was closing. He quickly went to the rooftop where he lived, finding others already there. However, smoke soon filled his room. With no escape, he attempted to descend using a plastic pipe but got stuck at the fourth-floor air conditioner for about 20 minutes. Eventually, a young boy from a nearby building threw another pipe, allowing him to climb down to the second floor and then use the building's pipe to reach safety.

At least a dozen others this newspaper talked to recalled similar details.



## Looking for loved ones at morgues

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MD ABBAS

A phone call, followed by an everlasting silence.

"Please pray, so that I can return alive. There is fire all around."

This was the last conversation between Juwel Gazi, 27, a staff of the Pizza Inn restaurant, and his wife Reba Akter, 25. Juwel died from injuries sustained after jumping off the building housing the Green Cozy Cottage Shopping Mall during a fire on Thursday night.

Reba was found looking for her husband in front of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital emergency unit around 5:00am early yesterday, with Jewel's picture on her cell phone.

"Jewel called me around 10:05pm. Both of our children were asleep at the time," said Reba.

"Jewel was breathing heavily when he called. He even wanted to talk to the children but I told him they went to sleep." Reba said the phone got disconnected

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