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INADEQUATE FIRE SAFETY MEASURES

3 out of 4 city markets risky

DIPAN NANDY and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Three in four markets and shopping arcades in Dhaka city lack proper fire safety measures, according to a Fire Service and Civil Defence inspection report.

The fire service inspected 58 markets and shopping arcades last year and found nine of them to be "highly risky" and 35 "risky".

The remaining 14 had satisfactory fire safety measures in place, said the report.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the report that is yet to be made public.

The fire service classifies "highly risky" or "risky" structures based on criteria, like the number of staircases for entries and exits, space in staircases, the number of fire extinguishers present, availability of fire hydrants, and the capacity of water reservoirs.

"This is dangerous. However, awareness and coordinated enforcement efforts to ensure fire safety can improve the situation," Brig Gen Md Main Uddin, director general of the fire service, told The Daily Star.

He claimed that the risky establishments

did not follow the Bangladesh National Building Code.

During a visit to four markets over the last two days, these correspondents found them lacking enough extinguishers, fire hydrants, and fire hoses. Some had fire exits obstructed.

The three-storey Gausia Market, with over 315 shops, has seven staircases for entries and exits, but those were obstructed by piles of clothes at places.

Only a handful of fire extinguishers were found on the walls.

The fire service classified the market as "highly risky" in 2020 and then again in April 2023 as it lacked fire hydrants and an inadequate water reserve.

Rafiqul Islam, a leader of the Gausia Market Shop Owners' Association, claimed that they now have enough water in reserve and wider staircases. He said the market was only "highly risky" as it stores flammable materials.

About the piles of clothes in the staircases, he told The Daily Star, "It happens as shop owners bring in extra clothes ahead of Eid." They would be

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The rooftop restaurant in the Gausia Twin Peak tower, on the capital's Satmasjid Road, being demolished during a drive by Rajuk authorities yesterday. The drive was conducted as the building was constructed for offices and not for housing restaurants. Inset, at least 12 restaurants in the building were sealed off during the drive.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

FIRE HAZARDS Agencies spring into action, finally

Rajuk, DSCC, DMP carry out drives in capital; 12 restaurants, commercial building sealed off

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rajuk yesterday conducted a raid in the Gausia Twin Peak building on Dhanmondi's Satmasjid Road and sealed off 12 restaurants there, four days after a deadly fire in a Bailey Road building killed at least 46 people.

In a separate drive, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) closed down another building on the same road.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police also yesterday conducted a drive in the capital's Wari area and detained 16 staffers of different restaurants.

Tazina Sarwar, deputy secretary and director of Zone-3 (Rajuk), briefed reporters about the Gausia Twin Peak raid yesterday afternoon.

She supervised the mobile court operation, which started around 11:00am and went on till 4:00pm.

The restaurants were sealed off as the building was intended for offices use rather than for housing restaurants, she said.

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Exports cross \$5b for third month in a row

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Exports crossed the \$5 billion mark for the third month in a row in February, in yet another bright spark for the economy battling a persistent strain on the dollar stockpile.

In February, exports brought home \$5.18 billion, up 12.04 percent from a year earlier, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

The strong showing was led by garment exports, which fetched about 14 percent more at \$4.5 billion last month.

"That is one of the highest monthly receipts," said Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Garment shipments will continue to

grow in the coming months as inflation and bank interest rates in the major export destinations like Europe and the US are on the decline, he said. The Western retailers have almost cleared their old inventories.

Moreover, exports to non-traditional markets like Japan, India, Russia, South Korea, Brazil, Argentina, Turkey, South Africa, Australia and China are on the rise, Hassan added.

February's receipts take the total earnings from garment shipments in the first eight months of the fiscal year to \$32.9 billion, up 4.8 percent year-on-year but missing the export target by 5.2 percent.

Similarly, overall export receipts of \$38.5 billion during the period were 3.7

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US reiterates the need for upgrading labour laws

Latest call made in Biden's 2024 Trade Policy Agenda

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The US has once again called for upgrading labour laws in Bangladesh to global standards for deepening trade ties in President Biden's 2024 Trade Policy Agenda.

Throughout 2023, the United States Trade Representative (USTR), the chief trade negotiation body for the American government, engaged with the commerce ministry to press home the importance of the Biden administration's worker-centred trade policy.

The disclosure was made in President Biden's 2024 Trade Policy Agenda and 2023 Annual Report to Congress, which was

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SIRAJGANJ MEDICAL COLLEGE Teacher shoots student during exam

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Palna

A teacher shot and injured a student during a viva at Shaheed M Monsur Ali Medical College in Sirajganj yesterday afternoon.

Arafat Amin Tamal, a third-year student, was admitted to the college hospital with a bullet wound in his right thigh, police said.

Students and teachers alleged that Rayhan Sharif, a teacher of the college's Community Medicine Department, often carries a gun on the college campus and yesterday he opened fire during the exam around 3:00pm, leaving Arafat injured.

Arifur Rahman Mandal, superintendent of Sirajganj district police, said the injury was not too severe as the bullet first hit his mobile phone in his pant pocket.

Following the incident, the students confined the teacher and started demonstrating on the campus. Police later rushed there and took Rayhan into custody.

Rakib Uddin, a classmate of the victim, said the teacher often carries firearms in the classroom. Like other days, he made sure his gun was seen from his bag during the exam.

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Rayhan Sharif

Fire breaks out at S Alam sugar mill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A fire broke out at the S Alam Refined Sugar Mills in the port city around 4:00pm yesterday ruining a huge amount of sugar.

After hours of effort, the blaze could be brought under control around 11:00pm but was yet to be completely doused, officials of the Fire Service and Civil Defence control room in Chattogram told The Daily Star around 12:30am today.

They said the air force and navy personnel joined the efforts around 8:30pm.

While at the spot between 6:00pm and 9:00pm, this correspondent saw one warehouse on fire.

There were two more warehouses next to it. There was also a generator room close by.

The firefighters were trying to stop the flames from spreading to the other warehouses.

Many employees of the factory were seen fighting

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A fire broke out at a warehouse of S Alam Refined Sugar Mills in Ichhanagar area of port city around 4:00pm yesterday. As of 12:30am today, the blaze at the warehouse, where raw sugar was stored, was under control but not completely doused.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

INDOMITABLE MARCH



Members of the East Pakistan Students' Union brought out a procession to protest the police firing in Tongi. The photo was taken in Dhaka on March 5, 1971.

Mujib foresaw the end of Pakistan

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

Air Marshal (Retd.) Asghar Khan, leader of the National Movement for Solidarity party, called on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at his Dhanmondi residence on March 5, 1971. We get a glimpse of their discussion in Asghar Khan's book *Generals in Politics*: "He [Mujib] was certain that Yahya Khan had already made up his mind not to hand over power and that he would use the army to crush the East Pakistanis."

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