

‘No regrets if I died that day’

Bangladeshi worker saves children from burning building, makes headlines in Singapore

THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN

Bangladeshi construction worker Shakil Mohammad was at work at River Valley Road in Singapore when he heard screams next door.

Seeing a shophouse on fire and children standing on the ledge on the third floor, he rushed to help them.

Speaking to The Straits Times a day after the incident on Wednesday, Shakil, 35, said, “The children wanted to jump. I told them, ‘Don’t jump! I will help you.’”

Then, he and several of his fellow workers took a ladder from the construction site to get to them.

Tomato Cooking School, which runs cooking lessons and camps for children, is located in the shophouse.

Shakil, who has been working in Singapore since 2018, was second on the ladder, with another worker above him grabbing children and passing them to him.

He said: “There was one girl, when she was passed to me, her eyes were closed. I held her in my arms, but she was not moving.

“The fire was so hot. I would have no regrets if I died that day. I just needed to save the children.”

Shakil thinks they saved 10 of them.

Choking up, he added, “There were three more children inside, and I wanted to go inside to save them, but I couldn’t. The fire was too intense. I cannot explain how [painful] my heart is.”

The fire left a 10-year-old girl dead and 21 others injured.

She died after being taken to the hospital, said the police. The 22 casualties included six adults aged between 23 and 55 and 16 children aged between six and 10.

Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade confirmed the girl who died was an Australian.

Recounting the ordeal of that day, Zainal Zin, another worker, said when he arrived at the furniture store where he worked, he saw some children with burns running out crying, while others were carried out unconscious by firefighters.



Rescuers use metal scaffolding and a ladder to rescue those trapped in the burning building on River Valley Road in Singapore City on April 8. Inset, construction worker Shakil Mohammad (right).

PHOTO: THE STRAITS TIMES

Some children sat by the roadside, looking shell-shocked.

Zainal, 56, said: “I’ll never forget the look on their faces, and I cannot get the scene out of my head.

“One girl was lifeless as a firefighter carried her out. Her eyes were closed. Paramedics were rushing to do CPR on her.

“Another boy, who looked like he was around four years old, had his head and arms wrapped in bandages, and he was clinging tightly to a paramedic.”

Members of the public, including construction workers, used metal

scaffolding and a ladder to rescue those trapped on the third-storey ledge.

Zainal said, “It was a terrible thing to witness. This girl had burns all over her left arm. When she turned around, I saw burns on the left side of her face, too.

“I couldn’t sleep last night, thinking about the children. I can’t imagine how their parents must feel.”

Dani Rahmat, 25, owner of a nearby barber shop, praised the migrant workers. He said: “I think they were super selfless. What they did was really inspiring.”

At around 12:50pm on April 9, SCDF officers arrived for investigations.



Several bouquets of flowers were left at the scene, which has been cordoned off.

SCDF spokesperson said it is contacting those who helped evacuate the victims to present them with the SCDF Community Lifesaver Award.

The girl who died in the blaze is the fourth fire fatality in Singapore in 2025.

In January, a family of three died after a Hougang five-room flat caught fire.

According to SCDF’s annual statistics, five people died in fires in 2024, up from three in 2023.

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Exporters brace for impact

FROM PAGE 1

Still, the sudden Indian move has raised concern. “It does hamper potential, especially the intraregional potential,” said Rubana Huq, former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). However, she said since Bangladesh has traditionally focused on direct shipping rather than transshipment, the immediate impact may not be severe.

Government officials echoed a similar tone. Mahbubur Rahman confirmed that cargo to Nepal and Bhutan via Bhomra land port remains unaffected by the Indian ban imposed on April 8. He added that Bangladesh will respond to the Indian decision diplomatically, while continuing domestic reforms to maintain export competitiveness.

Yet for many exporters, especially those serving fast-fashion clients with short lead times, the loss of Indian airport access is a blow. Now, increased shipments through HSIA are expected to stretch its already-burdened infrastructure. In some cases, suppliers will rely more on alternatives, including routing goods through the Maldives for onward shipping.

WHY EXPORTERS CHOSE INDIAN AIRPORTS

One of the main attractions of Indian air transshipment was the cost. While sending a kilogram of apparel from HSIA to Europe typically costs \$2.90–\$3.20 during off-peak periods (and up to \$4.50 in peak season), shipping through India costs about \$2.60 per kg, even after accounting for overland transport to Indian airports.

Major international buyers like Inditex (Zara’s parent company), which maintains a distribution hub in Delhi, preferred this route for speed and efficiency. Local suppliers relied on it to shorten lead times and optimise delivery schedules.

By contrast, exporters have long complained about bottlenecks at HSIA. The airport’s cargo village has a maximum capacity of 300 tonnes,

but it handles over 800 tonnes daily even in the off-season, and up to 1,200 tonnes during peak periods. Ground handling inefficiencies and mismanagement have plagued the Dhaka airport for years. Shipments have reportedly been left exposed to the elements.

Ground handling fees are another sticking point. Dhaka charges 29 cents per kilogram compared to just five cents at Delhi airport. Combined with slower service and a lack of modern equipment, these high costs have driven exporters to seek alternatives abroad.

Fuel costs also play a role. A \$1-per-gallon difference in jet fuel prices between Dhaka and Delhi gives Indian airports a further edge.

The airport cost is driven by the high price of jet fuel, which is about 30 percent higher in Dhaka than in India. “Jet fuel accounts for 40 percent of an airline’s operating costs,” Biman spokesperson Bushra Islam said.

“If that’s the reality, then why wouldn’t a businessman prefer Delhi over Dhaka for exporting cargo?” another Biman official said. “The government should seriously look into this.”

“On average, 1.75 lakh tonnes of cargo are exported annually from Dhaka airport, and Biman carries 16 to 17 percent of that total,” Bushra told The Daily Star. She added that Biman also provides ground-handling facilities to various airlines that transport this cargo.

Bushra, general manager (public relations) at Biman, said the airline’s cargo handling capacity will double once the third terminal becomes operational. Currently, Terminals 1 and 2 have a combined space of 19,600 square metres dedicated to export-bound cargo, with an annual handling capacity of two lakh tonnes of goods. The new third terminal alone will offer 36,000 square metres of space for exporters, with a handling capacity of 5.46 lakh tonnes per year.

A senior cargo department official at Biman said several charges, such

as overflying, landing, and parking fees, are imposed by the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), not Biman. “We only provide ground handling services to foreign airlines,” he said, requesting anonymity.

There are also infrastructure-related challenges. For instance, a cargo aircraft that exceeds the prescribed weight limit cannot land at Dhaka airport because of the runway’s limited strength.

Additionally, Dhaka lacks world-class retail brand stores, which means there’s little to no incoming cargo business. In contrast, when cargo aircraft land in India, they can bring in goods for stores in Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, and other major cities, making the return trip economically viable.

“That’s why the operating cost of cargo aircraft is lower in India – they can carry goods both ways,” he added.

The official said a meeting was held with Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin on Wednesday night to discuss ways to resolve the issue. “We hope for a positive outcome soon,” said the official who attended the meeting, declining to give further details.

Unlike passenger services, the cargo business operates on a demand basis. When demand rises, exporters often charter freighter services, jointly deciding with importers how and where to send goods. When demand is low, airlines carry cargo in the belly of passenger aircraft.

Emirates, Cathay Pacific, Qatar Airways, Turkish Airlines, Ethiopian Airlines, and several other carriers currently operate dedicated cargo flights from Dhaka.

“We are opening Sylhet for cargo operations on the 27th of this month, and Chattogram will follow shortly,” said Air Vice Marshal Monjur Kabir Bhuiyan, chairman of CAAB. “With the third terminal and its increased capacity, plus a fully automated system, we’ll be able to handle our own cargo. That will also boost our revenue.”

charge of the Banglabandha Land Port.

Some goods were meant for India and some for Nepal, he said.

However, no goods were exported to Bhutan from Bangladesh through the port in the last two days, he said.

Akhaura Land Port in Brahmanbaria saw around 70 tonnes of various goods shipped to Tripura, said Mahmudul Hasan, assistant director of the port.

At Burimari Land Port in Lalmonirhat, some goods were shipped to Bhutan, said Mehedi Hasan, assistant director of the port.

He also said it was business as usual throughout the day..

[Our correspondents from Jessore, Brahmanbaria, Lalmonirhat, and Nilphamari contributed to this report.]

Event generates interest among foreign investors

FROM PAGE 1

ShopUp merged with Sary in a \$110 million funding deal in another noticeable achievement of the event.

However, BIDA, the key investment agency, said the target of the summit was not to secure immediate investment but to generate a pipeline of potential investments that will be followed up at specific intervals to encourage the investors.

“We will address their problems so that they can get the real information and do not face any issues in launching their investment here,” said Nahian Rahman Rochi, head of business development at BIDA, at a closing press briefing held at InterContinental Dhaka yesterday.

The summit began on April 7 with visits by a team of investors to the Korean Export Processing Zone, the National Special Economic Zone in Mirsarai and the Bangladesh Special Economic Zone in Narayanganj to explore investment opportunities and see the facilities for themselves.

There were opportunities for business-to-business and business-to-government meetings at the summit.

In response to a question regarding the types of problems investors identified, Rochi said the issues have

remained the same for years.

Investors blamed the complex certificate and approval processes for obtaining resources. The government’s “priority agenda” is to simplify all approval procedures.

Policy continuity is also necessary for doing business in a planned way, as frequent policy changes hamper progress, he said.

Corruption was also identified as a longstanding problem by the investors.

The government will try to address all these issues so that investors feel encouraged to invest, Rochi said.

However, the success of the summit should not be measured solely by immediate investments as its main goal was to showcase the potential of various sectors and facilitate matchmaking with local investors, he said.

Bangladesh needs high-value addition-based manufacturing companies in the garment sector, and the investment by Handa will contribute positively.

Many foreign investors are also showing interest in the pharmaceutical sector, particularly in setting up active pharmaceutical ingredients production facilities.

“We will make a roadmap to track all the interested investors so they can be

monitored and encouraged to invest in the country,” he added.

At the summit, there were special events on apparel and textiles, digital economy, pharmaceuticals, agriculture and agro-processing, renewable energy and youth entrepreneurship.

Kihak Sung, chairman of Youngone Corporation and a pioneer in Bangladesh’s garment and textile sectors, was awarded honorary citizenship of Bangladesh yesterday for his outstanding contributions to the industry and the country’s economy.

Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun, executive chairman of BIDA, addressed investors and presented the potential and prospects of investment in Bangladesh.

There were several side events, such as the World Bank’s release of the Bangladesh Country Private Sector Diagnostic, which identified four sectors – green garments, housing for the middle class, paint and dyes, and digital financial services – as having strong potential to attract investment and generate millions of jobs.

A policy dialogue was held on Bangladesh’s trade and investment strategies in the post-LDC era. Another event focused on responsible business conduct for decent work.

2008 MUMBAI ATTACKS

Key suspect extradited to India from US

AFP, New Delhi

A Pakistan-born Canadian citizen wanted for his role in the deadly 2008 Mumbai siege landed in New Delhi yesterday after his extradition from the United States, Indian law enforcement said.

Tahawwur Hussain Rana, 64, arrived at a military airbase outside the Indian capital under heavily armed guard and will be held in detention to face trial.

India accuses Rana of being a member of the Pakistan-based Lashkar e-Taiba (LeT) group, designated by the United Nations as a terrorist organisation, and of helping to plot the attacks.

The National Investigation Agency said it “secured the successful extradition of... Mumbai terror attack mastermind Tahawwur Rana from the US”.

The extradition took “years of sustained and concerted efforts to bring the key conspirator behind the 2008 mayhem to justice”.

US President Donald Trump announced in February that Washington would extradite Rana, who he called “one of the very evil people in the world”.