

## Huge explosion at China chemical plant kills five

AFP, Beijing

An explosion at a chemical plant in eastern China yesterday killed at least five people, with six more still missing, state media said.

The blast occurred at the Youdao Chemical plant at around 12 pm (0400 GMT) in Gaomi, a town in Shandong province around 450 kilometres (280 miles) southeast of the capital Beijing, according to Xinhua news agency.

Videos broadcast by the Beijing newspaper Xinhua showed a gigantic column of grey smoke rising into the sky, a fire in an industrial zone and shop windows apparently blown out by the explosion.

The disaster "left five people dead, six missing and 19 lightly injured", Xinhua said citing local officials.

Clips also showed debris strewn across a road, a car with a smashed windscreen, and dark orange flames devouring installations in the background.

Emergency services dispatched 55 vehicles and 232 first responders to the scene, the national Ministry of Emergency Management said in a statement.



Women patiently stand in line to buy soybean oil, lentils, and sugar from a TCB truck in the capital's Abdul Gani Road area in the sweltering heat. Although TCB recently raised the subsidised rates, these essential goods are still somewhat of a relief for lower-income groups struggling with high commodity prices.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## India pushes 67 more into Bangladesh

STAR REPORT

At least 67 people were pushed into Bangladesh from India, allegedly by the Border Security Force, through the Kurigram and Meherpur borders yesterday, according to Border Guard Bangladesh.

Of them, 30 were confirmed as Bangladeshi nationals. The identities of the others remain unverified till the filing of this report at 8:00pm.

In Kurigram, BGB detained 23 individuals pushed in from India around 4:00am through the Kedar, Baburhat, and Sonahat areas of Bhurungamari upazila. They are currently in custody pending identity verification, said Lt Col Md Mahbubul Haque of BGB Battalion-22.

Elsewhere in the district, BSF allegedly tried to push 14 more people across the Baraibari border in Rowmari upazila at 4:30am. BGB intercepted the attempt, and the group was later brought to the BGB camp after BSF ignored requests for a flag meeting, said Lt Col Hasanur Rahman of Battalion-35.

In Meherpur's Mujibnagar upazila, 30 Bangladeshi nationals -- including seven men, eight women and 15 children from various villages in Kurigram -- were detained after being pushed in through the Anandabash border, said BGB and police officials.

According to BGB headquarters, 902 individuals have been pushed into the country from India since May 7, including 78 through the Sundarbans' Mandarbaria area.

(Our Correspondents from Lalmonirhat and Benapole contributed the report.)

## Govt mulls

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senior secretary to the public administration ministry.

According to sources present at the meeting, an extensive discussion was held regarding section 37(A) of the ordinance, which outlines punishment for "insubordination".

This section allows severe punishment of any employee for even minor offences. A specific clarification regarding the term "insubordination" was asked to be added, said sources.

The officials, who would be working on the changes, were asked to submit recommendations to ensure female employees do not face harassment at work.

Meanwhile, several secretaries expressed dissatisfaction over the newly issued ordinance to the cabinet secretary during an informal meeting of secretaries at the Cabinet Division yesterday.

At least three secretaries who attended the meeting told The Daily Star that top officials felt a sense of unease regarding the ordinance, which prompted the recent protests by lower-tier government employees.

The protesters yesterday suspended their demonstration at the Secretariat for today following assurances from the authorities.

A secretary who joined the meeting of secretaries, on condition of anonymity, told this correspondent, "We don't understand why it was necessary to amend the Public Service Act. Around 1.5 million employees are directly impacted -- positively or negatively -- by this law. Why was such a sensitive amendment rushed through? These questions were raised during the meeting."

Cabinet Secretary Sheikh Abdur Rashid called the meeting with all secretaries around 10:00am yesterday, according to sources at the Secretariat.

During the meeting, several secretaries raised questions about the rationale behind the formulation of the ordinance. A secretary questioned the necessity of rushing the ordinance process.

At the meeting, ASM Saleh Ahmed, senior secretary to the land ministry, opined that it would be appropriate to hold talks with the protesting employees. Several secretaries supported it.

Following the discussions, a five-member committee of secretaries was formed, with Saleh Ahmed as its convener, to hold discussions with the employees.

A few hours after the committee was formed, a meeting between the committee and leaders of the protesting employees was held.

After the meeting, committee convener Saleh Ahmed told reporters that the employees demanded cancellation of the ordinance. "We will convey their demand to the cabinet secretary. The cabinet secretary will inform the higher authorities of the government, and you will be informed of the government's decision in due course."

Speaking to this newspaper, Nazrul Islam, a leader of the Secretariat employees, said, "We presented the flaws in the ordinance before the secretaries. They did not disagree with our arguments. We hope this will lead to a positive outcome."

Another employee leader, Badiul Kabir, said, "We have suspended Wednesday's [today's] protest programme. If our demands are not met, we will talk to all stakeholders and announce the next programme."

Employees from various ministries and divisions held protest rallies and processions inside the Secretariat yesterday despite a ban imposed by Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

To avoid any untoward incident, tight security was enforced in and around the Secretariat. Members of SWAT and BGB were deployed at the main gate, while personnel from the Armed Police Battalion (APBn), Rab, and police were stationed at other entrances.

Until 1:00pm, no one except Secretariat employees and those invited to official meetings were allowed to enter the premises.

## Top criminals Subrata Bain, Molla Masud

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The raid was conducted around 3:30pm by a team from the Basila Army Camp, according to a press release issued by the ISPR.

"Farid Ahmed Babu, 56, is a top-tier criminal wanted in over 15 cases filed with various police stations across the capital. The charges against him include murder, illegal arms possession, abduction, extortion, and land grabbing," the ISPR stated.

Intelligence reports suggest that Excel Babu acted as a godfather figure for several notorious juvenile gangs -- namely, Teenage Tornado, Dark Strikers, and Red Volcano.

He is also believed to be linked to the infamous shooter Anwar, alias Kobzikata Anwar, the statement added.

Urging public cooperation, Sami Ud Dowla said, "If anyone notices suspicious activities or has information related to terrorism, please report it to the nearest army camp or law-enforcing agency."

Reiterating the army's unwavering stance on national security, he said, "Under the clear directive of the Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman, the Bangladesh Army remains fully prepared and committed to safeguarding the lives and properties of the people."

**RISE, FALL OF THE NOTORIOUS**  
Subrata Bain was a notorious figure in Dhaka's criminal underworld during the 1990s. Although he faced a number of arrests during the height of his career, Subrata managed to secure bail and return to the life of crime every time.

According to multiple sources in law enforcement, Subrata Bain's name has resurfaced in connection with three recent murders in Dhaka's Hatirjheel and Gulshan areas. In addition to murder, he and his associates have been linked to cases of extortion and illegal occupation of land and apartments.

One police source reported that on April 21, Subrata's followers allegedly

shot and killed Arif Sardar, a local ward-level leader of the Jubo Dal, BNP's youth wing, in Hatirjheel.

Subrata is also believed to have smuggled firearms into the country via the Indian border, which his gang is allegedly using for various criminal activities.

Law enforcement agencies have detailed records of Subrata Bain's involvement in organised crime.

Throughout the 1990s, his name was frequently associated with violent turf wars, extortion rackets, and manipulating public tenders. These activities often led to incidents of murder and assault.

Despite being arrested multiple times and serving prison sentences, he repeatedly returned to criminal activities after securing bail.

Subrata Bain's full name is Trimati Subrata Bain. He was born in 1967 at Holy Family Hospital in Dhaka. Originally from Jobarpar village in Agailjhara upazila of Barishal, he lived with his mother and three sisters in a rented house in Dhaka's Moghbazar area. He was the eldest.

He began his education at Oxford Mission School in Barishal and later transferred to Sher-e-Bangla School in Dhaka, where he passed his matriculation exams.

His entry into the world of crime reportedly began during his college years.

While seeking admission to Siddheswari College, he came into contact with a political leader who introduced him to firearms. Soon after, he had his own gang in Moghbazar.

Subrata first came under police scanner in 1993, following the murder of a vegetable vendor in Madhu Bazar. He gained further notoriety during the construction of the Bishal Centre in Moghbazar, where he was accused of extortion. He quickly rose to infamy, becoming a feared figure across Moghbazar, Ramna, Karwan Bazar, and Madhubagh.

## Jamaat's Azharul cleared of crimes

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this correspondent.

This is for the first time, the Appellate Division rescinded its own judgment that upheld the conviction and death sentences handed down by the International Crimes Tribunal to any person in connection with a crime against humanity, said Mohammed Belayet Hossain, another lawyer for Azharul.

Talking to reporters, Shishir said his client got justice.

"We believe the truth has triumphed, falsehood has been defeated and syndicated injustice has been abolished," he said.

"From today, the former acting secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, Azharul Islam, is an innocent person. Previously, death sentences of six top leaders of the Jamaat and BNP were carried out. In addition, at least five others died in prison. This is almost an unprecedented persecution in the history of the world."

"With the pronouncement of this verdict, the dignity of the courts of Bangladesh has been upheld."

On December 30, 2014, the then International Crimes Tribunal-1 sentenced Azhar to death on three charges of crimes against humanity and imprisonment on two other charges.

The Appellate Division had upheld Azharul's death sentence on October 31, 2019. A four-member bench, led by the then chief justice, Syed Mahmud Hossain, delivered the verdict by majority opinion.

The full text of the verdict was released on March 15, 2020, allowing

him to file a review petition.

He filed the review petition on July 19, 2020. On February 27 this year, the SC allowed Azharul to move a fresh appeal before the court.

Azharul was accused of being the commander of the Al-Badr force and president of Chhatra Sangha, the then-student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, in Rangpur, during the war.

Yesterday, Chief Justice Syed Rezaat Ahmed announced the judgment in a packed courtroom around 10:00am, saying that by unanimous decision, this appeal (filed by Azharul) is granted.

Consequently, the judgment and order passed by the Appellate Division on October 31, 2019, are, hereby, reviewed and set aside. The judgment and order of conviction and sentence passed by the International Crimes Tribunal on December 30, 2014 are also, hereby, set aside, he said in the judgement.

The court said the conviction was occasioned by a "manifest disregard for the fundamental principles of criminal jurisprudence, resulting in a gross miscarriage of justice".

The apex court acknowledged its earlier lapse in properly assessing evidence.

It acknowledged with a profound sense of judicial responsibility that in its earlier adjudication, it failed to give due and dispassionate consideration to the evidentiary deficiencies and the broader context in which the allegations of crimes against humanity were framed against the appellant.

"The earlier judgment regrettably fell short of the high standards of

In 1991, he was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of Murad, a student leader from the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal.

Subrata also maintained close political ties. During the 1991 elections, he worked for the BNP in the Moghbazar area and became close to the then home minister. His birthday celebrations were reportedly attended by top BNP leaders, earning him the nickname "celebrity gangster".

Later, he clashed with Liaquat of the Awami League's youth wing, Jubo League, over territorial control in Moghbazar.

The infamous "Seven Star" was an organised criminal syndicate that was jointly led by Subrata Bain and Amin Rasul Sagor, alias Tokai Sagor.

The Moghbazar-based gang gained widespread notoriety in 1998.

Molla Masud, Arman, and Tikka were among the top members of the gang.

In 2001, an Interpol Red Notice was issued against him, which remains active. Following the notice, he fled to Kolkata, where he continued his criminal activities. Kolkata police arrested him in 2008, but he later escaped to Nepal, only to be arrested again.

His most recent known arrest occurred in Kolkata in 2012. It's not clear when he returned to Bangladesh.

But following the fall of the Awami League regime in August last year, Subrata suddenly resurfaced and reportedly began meeting his old associates in Moghbazar, Mohakhali Wireless Gate, and Madhubagh.

After his return, it didn't take long for him to get involved in criminal activities, leading to his name popping up in several cases.

To evade arrest, he reportedly stayed in the capital's 300 feet area and later moved to Patuakhali for some time before his eventual arrest in Kushtia yesterday.

scrutiny and fairness mandated in criminal proceedings of such grave nature," the chief justice said.

The apex court also acknowledged with considerable regret that due consideration was not accorded to the broader context of the alleged crimes against humanity together with the evidentiary weaknesses inherent in the prosecution's case.

"In light of this, and in the interests of justice, the conviction and sentence of the appellant cannot be sustained."

"Let an advance copy of this order be sent expeditiously to the jail authority for immediate compliance," the CJ said.

Meanwhile, Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said Azharul was acquitted as he was proven innocent, and credited the July uprising for paving the way for justice.

In a post on his verified Facebook page, Prof Asif wrote that the verdict nullifies both the previous International Crimes Tribunal sentence and the Appellate Division's earlier ruling that upheld that sentence.

"The credit for creating the opportunity to establish justice goes to the fearless leadership of the July mass uprising. It is now our collective responsibility to safeguard this opportunity," he added.

Jamaat leaders Motiur Rahman Nizami, Abdul Quader Mollah, Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, Mir Quasem Ali, and BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury were previously executed following SC verdicts for crimes against humanity in 1971.

## GDP growth lowest

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The overall investment-to-GDP ratio was 29.38 percent, which was 30.7 percent last fiscal year, according to BBS's provisional figures. Of the amount, private investment was 22.48 percent of the GDP, which was 23.96 percent last fiscal year.

The agriculture sector faced significant challenges in the first quarter, primarily due to severe flooding, the WB report said.

"In the industrial sector, export growth provided some support, particularly in the ready-made garments (RMG). However, industrial activity outside of the RMG sector remained sluggish."

High inflation dampened consumer purchasing power, the WB said, adding that the Bangladesh Bank continued its tight monetary policy stance in the first three quarters of the fiscal year and raised the policy rate to rein in inflationary pressure.

Meanwhile, the ADB said the slowdown was driven by political instability, natural disasters, disruptions at factories due to worker protests and high inflation, all of which dampened demand.

In the service sector, wholesale and retail sales grew by 4.35 percent, which was 5.77 percent last fiscal year, according to BBS's provisional figures. The transport sector grew by 4.37 percent, which was 5.15 percent in fiscal 2023-24. Real estate activities

were almost the same at 3.19 percent.

Electricity production grew 6.32 percent, which was 1.55 percent last fiscal year. The gas sector growth, however, worsened.

The size of the economy stands at \$462 billion, up from \$450 billion in fiscal 2023-24. The per capita income was \$2,820, which was \$2,738 last fiscal year.

The GDP size and per capita income should be recalculated as those are still "manipulated and inflated", said Raihan, who was part of the 12-member committee that prepared a white paper on the state of the Bangladesh economy.

"We raised a question in the report that there were big methodical problems in the national accounts as those were calculated on wrong assumptions and methods, without updated data."

The white paper said Bangladesh's economic growth has been overstated since 1995 and the practice of making inflated estimates rose after fiscal 2012-13.

"Bangladesh was seen as one of the fastest-growing economies but its growth became a paradox to many during the tenure of the previous government. The development narrative was underwritten by cooked-up GDP growth figures."

He demanded an independent data commission to identify the loopholes in national accounts, as recommended by the white paper.

## Unveil roadmap

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BNP chairperson's office in Gulshan, Mosharraf also said the statement issued by the advisory council after the meetings between political parties and the chief adviser lacked clarity.

On Saturday, Yunus met with BNP, Jamaat, and NCP leaders, followed by talks with 19 leaders from other political parties the next day.

"Excuses are being made to delay the elections. One excuse is that the trial [of Awami League] must be completed before the elections."

"We want the same thing. During the Awami League's autocratic rule, there was nothing they didn't do to try to wipe us out. Even after that, why would the question arise as to whether we want [AL's] trial or not?"

He, however, stressed that the trial of the Awami League must take place through an independent judiciary.

"If we demand an independent judiciary but also say the trial must be completed within a specific timeframe -- these would be contradictory statements. That's why we're saying the processes of reform, election, and justice are entirely separate. All three can and should proceed simultaneously," he said in response to a journalist's question.

Mentioning that December is the most suitable time for the polls, he said, "Ramadan is in February, followed by the monsoon season, then the SSC and HSC exams."

All previous elections, he noted, have been held in December or January, he added.

## Please forgive us

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He said during Sheikh Hasina's autocratic rule, 11 senior leaders of the party fell victim to "judicial killing" through "rigged courts and false witness" testimonies. Former chief justice SK Sinha mentioned this in his book, he added.

During the trial, "safe homes" were set up to torture Jamaat leaders, and there were places to keep people who

gave false testimonies, Shafiqul said.

He referred to the entire judicial process of the tribunal that prosecuted 1971 war criminals as a "genocide of the justice".

At the end of the press conference, the Jamaat leader did not take any questions. He merely said, "Today, we will not answer any questions. For us, this moment is not like any other."