

Khaleda Zia admitted to Evercare Hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia was admitted to Evercare Hospital in Dhaka around 12:30am today.

"She was admitted following the advice of a medical board," BNP media cell member Shirul Kabir Khan confirmed at 12:47am.

Khaleda reached the hospital around 12:15am after leaving her Gulshan residence.

Party sources said she was taken there as part of a routine health checkup. Later, doctors of the medical board advised admission for observation and treatment. The duration of her stay has not yet been decided.

Khaleda Zia is currently receiving treatment under a medical board led by Professor Shahabuddin Talukder. She last visited the hospital for a checkup on August 28.

The 80 year old former prime minister has been suffering from various health complications for several years, including liver, kidney and heart related issues.



Students queue up to vote in the Chittagong University Central Students' Union (CUCSU) election at the BBA faculty polling centre yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

Seven teenage

FROM PAGE 1

Those aged 14 to 18 are considered adolescents and may be employed, but they are not allowed to perform hazardous work and cannot work more than five hours a day in a factory.

In this case, however, the teenagers worked from 8:00am until evening, with some doing additional overtime until night.

The fire broke out inside the four storey building around 11:30am on Tuesday. The blaze, fuelled by chemicals stored on the ground floor, spread rapidly, leaving 16 people dead and several others injured.

Those missing and presumed dead include Farzana Akter, 15, Marzia Sultana Alo, 18, Mousumi Akter, 18, Mahira Akter, 14, Muna Akter Samia, 16, Abdul Alim, 14, and Asma Akter, 13.

Mahira Akter, 14, and her 15 year old sister Sanjida had grown up without their father. Their mother, Fatema, moved the family from Barguna to Dhaka, finding shelter in a small rented room in Mirpur with her brother. She had been working as a domestic helper until her health deteriorated.

"Both sisters had left school to support the household. Mahira joined the factory on October 1 this year, following her sister, working as a helper for Tk 7,500 a month," said Mahira's uncle, Shafiqul Islam.

Asma Akter, 13, came to Dhaka from Netrokona three months ago to live with her aunt. She earned Tk 6,500 a month, sometimes up to Tk 8,000 with overtime. She would send money home for her family of eight. On the day of the fire, she left for work as usual but never returned.

"I told her that there was no need to work; we could manage with what we had, but she insisted she would go this month anyway," said Asma's father, Noyon Miya, a farmer, while waiting for his daughter's body at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Muna Akter Samia, 16, from Netrokona, had been working as a helper for only five days. Married six months ago and living in Mirpur, she took the job to support her husband, who works at a sweet shop. "There was another girl from our building working there; she went along with her, thinking about supporting her family financially," said Champa, her aunt.

When Marzia Sultana Alo, 18, called her father on Tuesday afternoon, she said, "The factory is on fire, and we can't get out." Her father told her to stay calm and follow others, but that was the last time he heard from her.

Alo and her 22 year old husband, Joy, had just joined the factory on October 1. The couple lived in a small tin-roofed room in Mojibor's slum on Road 12 of Rupnagar Residential Area - 300 yards away from the factory. Their village home is in Madan upazila of Netrokona.

"We identified the body of Joy, but my daughter's body is in no condition to be recognised," said Alo's father, Sutan Miya, as he took a deep, shuddering breath.

Mousumi Akter, 20, daughter of rickshaw puller Abdul Mannan, was also not yet identified. Waiting at DMCH, her brother in law, Abdul Kajim, said the identification process will require DNA testing. "She had passed SSC but couldn't continue her studies for financial reasons. She initially trained at another factory and then joined this one as an operator this month. She would live in Rupnagar's residential area with her father," he said.

Taslima Akther, president of Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati (BGSS), said although the law prohibits employment of children under 14 and limits work for adolescents (14-18) in factories, these regulations are often ignored. She added that many factories operate chemical warehouses and washing units in residential areas without proper permission or monitoring.

Karmojibi Nari, a labour rights organisation, said in a statement that the factory's exit doors were locked during the fire, trapping workers inside. It called for a swift, impartial investigation, holding those responsible accountable and ensuring measures are taken to prevent such tragedies from recurring.

It also demanded that civil society groups, trade unions, labour rights organisations, and human rights groups be involved in the investigation of the incident.

Cloud hangs over the signing of July charter

FROM PAGE 1

Made what seemed impossible possible. We'll join the ceremony on Friday in a festive mood and sign it. The nation will remember everyone's contributions with due respect."

He also said the next national election would be held in a festive manner and that all necessary measures would be taken to ensure it.

The emergency meeting was convened a day after the commission sent the final copy of the July charter to political parties.

The copy, however, did not outline any implementation process. The commission stated that its recommendations on implementation would be submitted to the government only after the charter is signed on Friday.

After two rounds of discussions with the parties, the commission drafted 84 proposals, half of which involved constitutional reforms.

The BNP and its like-minded parties issued notes of dissent on at least nine issues.

WHAT THE PARTIES SAID

BNP Standing Committee Member Salauddin Ahmed said the polls are only four months away and the election schedule must be announced at least two months ahead.

"Within the remaining month and a half or two, how realistic is it in Bangladesh's context to arrange another large-scale event like a referendum... one as big as the national election?"

He said his party believes that those who want the referendum before the polls have the right to do so, "but everyone should consider how logical it is."

"We believe this might even be an attempt to delay the election," he added.

About the notes of dissent, he said that if all the proposals had been agreed upon, there would have been no need for such lengthy discussions.

On unresolved issues, Salauddin turned to Yunus and said, "Chief Adviser, you can announce your decision today. We will always respect it."

Noting that there was no alternative to polls in February, he said the BNP supports the chief adviser, but "that support is not limitless."

"We want a historic election under your leadership... that is our condition. Our support for you is not endless; we have our limits. You have formed a cabinet committee at the Secretariat for transfers and postings... it is neither a tradition nor a rule. We are expressing our dissatisfaction."

The referendum would lose its importance if held on the same day as the election, he said, speaking to reporters after the meeting.

TIMELINE

FEB 2: National Consensus Commission formed

MAR 20-MAY 19: First-round talks held -- 44 meetings with 32 parties and alliances; consensus reached on 62 issues

JUN 2-JUL 31: Second-round talks held -- 29 meetings with 30 parties and alliances; consensus reached on 22 issues

JUL 28: Draft of the July charter prepared

SEPT 10: Final version drafted

SEPT 11-OCT 8:

Third-round talks on implementation -- 5 meetings with 30 parties; decision taken to implement non-constitutional reforms through ordinance and order, and constitutional reforms through referendum

OCT 14: Final July National Charter sent to all parties

OCT 17: Signing of the July Charter scheduled

The BNP leader said his party wants the chief adviser to maintain good relations with the defence forces. "He must try to maintain balance among all organs of the state."

"We do not want any kind of imbalance within the defence forces. We cannot afford that right now. The fallen autocrats and their allies are lying in wait to exploit any opportunity. We must not be too extreme or revolutionary."

Asked whether Jamaat would sign the charter, its Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher told reporters, "That will be known on the day of the signing ceremony."

The referendum would lose its importance if held on the same day as the election, he said, speaking to reporters after the meeting.

The tragedy has cast a spotlight on the unsafe and exploitative working conditions in the area. Most of the deceased workers lived in a nearby slum, where a pall of gloom hung yesterday.

Taslima Akther, president of Bangladesh Garment Sramik Sanghati, visited the site and described the incident as a systematic killing of workers. "Year after year, we see workers die like this. Authorities limit their role to condolences and token compensation, never ensuring real safety for workers."

In the meantime, the labour and employment ministry yesterday formed a seven-member committee to investigate the incident.

Families told The Daily Star that most of the workers in the factory earn between Tk 7,000 and Tk 7,500 a month. Many are in their teens.

Ruma, sister of 14 year old victim Asma, broke down in tears. "Just the day before, she said, 'I'll leave this factory. There's never a day off here.'

Brigadier General Md Asaduzzaman, director of DMCH, confirmed that 16 bodies had arrived at the hospital. "We will hand over the bodies to the families after DNA matching," he told reporters.

Six of the bodies underwent autopsies

At the meeting, Motiur Rahman Akand, Jamaat central executive committee member, said, "Our position is that the referendum should be held by November to give the July charter a legal foundation, and subsequent actions should be based on that."

NCP Member Secretary Akther Hossen told the meeting that some last-minute issues had raised concerns.

"The July charter draft does not clearly address the points that have notes of dissent."

These and the roadmap for implementation must be clarified.

"We have proposed that the implementation be carried out through a special order."

He suggested calling it the "July Charter Implementation Order" or the "Constitutional Reform Order."

Akther said, "We believe this order should be issued by the chief adviser in his capacity as head of the government. It is not a matter for the head of state but for the head of government to implement and issue the order."

"Regarding the referendum, the date and timing must be made clear to us and the nation. Political parties have agreed that fundamental constitutional changes cannot be sustained through mere amendments. To ensure the sustainability of these reforms, elected representatives, who will become members of parliament and hold constituent power, must be clearly empowered."

Left leaning parties -- Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Basod), Bangladesh JSD, and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Marxist) -- said they would not sign.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Basod General Secretary Bazlur Rashid Firoz said, "We will not sign the July charter because the history of the Liberation War and independence is not reflected in its background."

He also said explanations of the notes of dissent submitted by the four parties were not included in the charter.

"We objected to several provisions of the July charter, particularly the clause barring any legal challenge to it. For that reason, we have decided not to sign."

Gono Forum warned it would not sign the charter if the Declaration of Independence issued by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 26, 1971, and the Mujibnagar Government's Proclamation of Independence on April 10, 1971 -- the sixth and seventh schedules of the constitution respectively -- were dropped.

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"This election commissioner is incompetent -- we can no longer trust this spineless commissioner to conduct a fair election," Abdulllah Al Noman, general secretary of Chhatra Dal's CU unit, told reporters around 4:15pm.

There were eight complaints of rule violations against one panel, but no punishment was given, he said.

"This administration supports Jamaat, and the commission has no backbone. Even though we knew this, we participated in the election for the sake of democracy and students. But now we see that, like the Ducus and Jucus elections, this is also becoming a farce," Noman added.

Ibrahim Hossain, the VP candidate from the Shibir-backed panel Sompritri Shikkharthi Oikya, also raised several complaints.

Outsiders were seen with candidates, including the Chhatra Dal general secretary candidate from Alal Hall, inside voting centres, he said at a press conference in front of the CUCSU building. No one is supposed to enter the university without a proper ID, and the administration failed to stop the entry of outsiders.

The ink used for voting was supposed to be permanent, but we saw that it could be wiped off. The EC and the administration should have been more careful about this."

Miftahul Jannat, a law department student, discovered that someone had already voted using her name.

When asked, Kausar Hamid, assistant presiding officer, said that another person with a similar name had voted and polling agents did not object. The issue was reported to the CEC.

Additionally, election observer Touhidul Islam reported that 400 ballots at the Faculty of Business Administration lacked the election

MPO teachers threaten

FROM PAGE 1

MPO-listed teachers, a medical allowance of Tk 1,500, and a 75 percent festival allowance for staff.

Following the announcement, the protesting teachers began leaving Shahbagh and returning to the Central Shaheed Minar, where they have been observing a sit-in for five days.

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Police tried to stop the procession in front of the National Museum at Shahbagh, but the demonstrators, chanting slogans and carrying banners, broke through the barricade and took position at the intersection around 2:00pm, bringing traffic to a standstill.

Commuters suffered immensely as vehicles remained stuck for hours, forcing many to walk to their destinations. Police diverted traffic to alternative routes, while many patients heading to Bangladesh Medical University and Birdem General Hospital faced difficulties due to the blockade.

Speaking at the Shaheed Minar rally, Azizi reiterated that the government must meet all their demands.

"The 20 percent house rent

Rucsu polls today

SHOHANUR RAHMAN RAFI and NUR AHSAN MRIDUL

After several rounds of postponement and uncertainty, the Rajshahi University Central Students' Union (Rucsu) election is finally taking place today, marking the first such poll in 35 years.

A total of 28,901 registered students are set to cast their votes to elect leaders from 902 candidates: 247 candidates are contesting for the 23 Rucsu posts, 58 for the five Senate posts, and 59 for 15 hall union positions.

Polling will take place from 9:00am to 4:00pm at 990 booths across 17 centres in nine academic buildings, under the supervision of Chief Election Commissioner F Nazrul Islam.

Of the 212 teachers involved, 17 will serve as presiding officers, Nazrul said at a press conference yesterday.

Vote counting will begin around 5:00pm and efforts will be made to release results from all 17 centres within 17 hours of the start of counting.

The ballots were printed by experienced examination presses and not random printers, he said.

Security measures have been tightened across the campus: about 2,000 police personnel, six platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh, and 12 platoons of the Rapid Action Battalion will be deployed. Meanwhile, at a briefing with police personnel on the Zuberi Building field at 10:30am, Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner Mohammad Abu Sufian emphasised that no student should face harassment by law enforcers during the election, and that strict measures would be taken to maintain discipline.

allowance based on the basic salary cannot be reduced by even one percent. We will not accept Tk 1,499 as medical allowance; it must be Tk 1,500. The festival allowance for employees must be 75 percent," he said.

Teachers across the country joined the protest after police dispersed their rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club on Sunday, using water cannons, batons, and sound grenades.