

6 killed as blast rips Sitakunda oxygen plant fire

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Online Desk: Six people were killed and at least 30 others injured in an explosion at an industrial oxygen plant in Sitakunda, Chattogram, yesterday afternoon. The explosion at Seema Oxygen Plant in the Keshabpur area rocked nearby neighbourhoods around 4:40pm. The roof of the building of the main plant was blown off and large chunks of steel and iron flew in all directions, damaging numerous buildings and vehicles.

A projectile from the plant killed a 60-year-old man at a market nearly a kilometre away from the facility, said Shahadat Hossain, upazila nirbahi officer of Sitakunda. Residents of the area said there was no electricity in the area after the blast, and gas cylinders were seen strewn everywhere around the facility.

A fire broke out after the explosion and it took nine fire engines to douse the flames, said Nurul Alam Dulal, senior station officer at Sitakunda fire service, adding that three bodies were recovered from the factory by the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway. “Many houses in the area, including mine, have been damaged. Glass windows were shattered and sunshades have fallen off in my building. Everyone is traumatised,” said a resident of the area named Lokman.

Ripon Marak, 40, a mechanic at the oxygen plant, was admitted to the orthopaedics ward at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) with injuries to his back. He is one of the 17 people admitted there with serious injuries. “I was walking to the plant from the maintenance department when I heard the bang. Suddenly, everything turned black and I thought I was lifted off the ground and sucked into a void. After a few minutes, I began to see again. Then I stood up and walked back to the maintenance and saw Foreman Narayan Das lying on the ground. He told me something fell on his head. I helped him walk to the gate, from where a pickup took us to the hospital,” he said.

Ripon said he was not wearing a helmet at the time. Ambulances with the seriously injured people began to arrive at the CMCH in the evening. Director of the hospital Brig Gen Shamim Ahsan told The Daily Star that most of the injured were hit by metal objects. One of the deceased, Shamsul Alam, 60, was at a shop in Kadamarsul Bazar, about a kilometre away from the factory, when a metal projectile fell on his head.

The other deceased are Salah Uddin, 33, Farid Uddin, 36, Ratan Lokhret, 45, and Abdul Quader, 58. The body of a man in his mid-30s could not be identified yet. Tofazzel Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Sitakunda Police Station, said a police team rushed to the spot and cordoned off the area right after the blast.

Chattogram Deputy Commissioner Abul Bashar Mohammad Fakhruzzaman told The Daily Star that a seven-member probe body was formed to investigate the incident. The committee, headed by Additional District Magistrate Rakib Hasan, has been asked to submit the probe report in five working days.