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Hidden 'bomb' found in Dhaka fire

AFP | Dacca, Bangladesh

Mass funerals were held yesterday for victims of a devastating fire in Dhaka -- fuelled by illegally stored chemicals -- that killed nearly 70 people, as investigators revealed that an even bigger disaster was narrowly avoided.

Hundreds of chemical drums were found in the basement of one of five blocks engulfed by the inferno in the Bangladesh capital's historic Chawkbazar district.

"A huge bomb" would have gone off had the fire spread to the basement, according to Mehedi Hasan Ansary, a professor at an elite engineering university who is a member of an official probe committee.

"The impact would have been devastating," he said.

City authorities said 46 bodies from a disaster that saw victims burned alive by fireballs in the street have been identified and handed over to families for burial.

Many were from Noakhali district in southwest Bangladesh, where funerals were quickly organised in line with Muslim tradition.

Special prayers were also said at Friday prayers in mosques across the country.

Police forensic experts were brought in to carry out DNA tests on at least 21 other bodies burned beyond recognition.

The discovery of the huge



Bangladeshi firefighters inspect a burnt building after a fire tore through apartment blocks in Bangladesh's Dhaka

consignment of drums raised new fears about the extent of the deadly danger in storerooms across the labyrinthine Chawkbazar district.

"We were just lucky," said national fire chief Ali Ahmed.

"The whole neighbourhood would have been engulfed if the fire had reached the chemicals in the basement. It would have been like a bomb and the building would have collapsed," Ahmed told AFP.

Hidden danger

The fire is believed to have

been started late Wednesday by a gas cylinder explosion which quickly spread to at least five buildings.

Victims were burned alive by exploding canisters that sent fireballs into the streets, smothering people in flames as they walked, rode in rickshaws or ate in local restaurants. Dozens were injured, including nine listed in critical condition.

The disaster was a repeat of a June 2010 fire in the nearby neighbourhood of Nimtoli in which 123 people were killed. Again a blaze ripped through

residential buildings that doubled as chemical warehouses.

While a criminal inquiry has been launched, authorities faced difficult questions over why action promised after the Nimtoli disaster was not carried out.

Dhaka Mayor Sayeed Khokon vowed to launch a new crackdown and move chemical warehouses from residential buildings to an industrial area outside the capital.

"We will sit with law enforcement agencies, do our homework and then launch the drive," he said.



Relatives of victims mourn after a fire tore through apartment blocks in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka



Rescue personnel carry the body of a victim

Kim, Trump lookalikes commit to 'peace'

Hanoi, Vietnam

Heavily bronzed and freshly coiffed, Donald Trump's doppelganger says he has come to Hanoi to meet with a Kim Jong Un lookalike to end North Korea's nuclear ambitions, and maybe play a bit of golf.

"We're working toward peace. Through negotiations, with dialogue, we want to help North Korea of course," said Trump impersonator Russell White, in a sharp suit and blue tie.

White and Kim impersonator Howard X are in Hanoi days before a meeting between the real leaders of the United States and North Korea, who will hold a second summit in the Vietnamese capital on February 27-28.

Though the agenda for the planned summit has not been released, Howard X says he has a few aims for his pow-wow with the fake Trump.

"Hopefully he can overlook all my nuclear missiles and lift the sanctions," said the full-time impersonator, who also visited Singapore ahead of the leaders' meeting last year.

The men have a few non-official agenda items this week too -- maybe a massage parlour, a round of golf and hopefully a chance to try some of Hanoi's culinary delights.

Out of character, the pair say they can make good money as impersonators -- as long as Kim and Trump are in the news.



US President Donald Trump impersonator Russel White (L) and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un impersonator Howard X (R) pose together for photographs outside the Opera House in Hanoi

"The good thing for Kim is he's always doing something interesting, also Trump," said Howard X, who charges a minimum of \$3,500 for an appearance and says he once walked away with \$15,000 for a gig.

But the work can be burden-

some. Howard X says it takes him three hours to perfect the Kim look: carefully manicured hair, thick black glasses and suits from a top tailor in Hong Kong where he is based. Though he's mastered the



The pair say they are looking for a few more impersonators to complete their band of "tyrants", calling for any lookalikes of Russian leader Vladimir Putin, China's Xi Jinping or Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro to come forward.

get-up, he's not entirely happy about it.

"Mr Kim please get a proper haircut, this s***s," he said, standing on the steps of Hanoi's colonial-era Opera House with black-clad bodyguards and a swarm of media.

As for White, it only takes him 20 minutes to bronze his face -- excluding his under eyes -- and gel his blonde hair to look like the man he says is doing a great job.

"You're doing a difficult job, keep up the good work, we're going to make America great again," the full-time, Canadian-born impersonator said.

Israel's first Moon mission blasts off

Washington, United States

An unmanned rocket took off from Cape Canaveral in Florida on Thursday night carrying Israel's Beresheet spacecraft, aiming to make history twice: as the first private-sector landing on the Moon, and the first from the Jewish state.

The 585-kilogram (1,290-pound) Beresheet, which means "Genesis" in Hebrew, lifted off at 8:45 pm (0145 GMT Friday) atop a

Falcon 9 rocket from the private US-based SpaceX company of entrepreneur Elon Musk.

Takeoff was followed live back in Israel, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu watching alongside engineers at the control center of Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).

So far, only Russia, the United States and China have made the 384,000-kilometer (239,000-mile) journey and landed spacecraft on the Moon.

25 Indian tea workers killed by bootleg alcohol

Guwahati, India

Twenty-five members of a tribe of Indian tea-pickers, including 15 women, died within hours of drinking poisoned alcohol, police said yesterday.

The deaths in the northeastern state of Assam came less than two weeks after tainted liquor killed about 100 people in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand states.

All of the latest victims worked at the Salmora tea estate in Assam's Golaghat district. On top of the dead, dozens were being treated in two local hospitals.

Most of the patients com-

plained of severe vomiting and stomach pain.

"We tried our best but failed to save them," said Ganesh Bora, a senior doctor at the Jorhat Medical College hospital. They died within hours of consuming the bootleg alcohol.

"They bought the country liquor from a seller and consumed it on Thursday night, falling ill almost straight away," Dhiraj Das, a senior Golaghat district official, said.

Fifty-five people were taken to hospital after the alcohol was consumed, and many were already dead by the time they arrived.