

687 buildings vulnerable to collapse

SULTANA RAHMAN

Urban planners have classified at least 687 buildings mostly in Old Dhaka as vulnerable to collapse, with 165 of them as creakiest from age and decay.

The Urban Planning Department (UPD) of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) tagged the buildings as risky after it wrapped up a survey on 10 DCC zones in early November.

Mild earthquakes or heavy rains may knock down the most vulnerable 165 buildings in Siddique Bazar, Shankhari Bazar, Tanti Bazar and Sutrapur.

Some of them may cascade down on impact if heavy trucks blast their way near these age-old buildings, Sirajul Islam, DCC's chief town planner, said of the vulnerability of the structures.

The building No. 81 in Shankhari Bazar that caved in killing more than 11 people and injuring about 40 others in early June was among the risky buildings. The incident echoes the collapse of the house No. 10 in Shankhari Bazar that killed seven people in 1982.

The deaths of neighbours frightened thousands in Old Dhaka as most are living in age-old buildings. Although they are willing to replace old buildings, they are in a dilemma as each building has a number of owners.

After the July incident, the government took the issue seriously and formed a secretary committee on vulnerable buildings, which includes DCC, Rajuk, deputy commissioner and land, law, public works and housing and finance ministries.

Rajuk and Dhaka District Commissioner's office are carrying out two more surveys to identify the risky buildings.

"Most land owners tend to construct buildings at a low cost, which often makes the structures fragile," an engineer said. "Rajuk



An age-old structure in Old Dhaka weighing fear of collapse, yet occupied by many with sentiment attached.

is the authority to check the situation but ignored it for long."

The 1983 Dhaka City Corporation Ordinance authorises the DCC to demolish vulnerable structures and ask owners to bring the structures down. If the owners do not comply with, the DCC will then destroy them and the owners have to pay the cost of

demolition with annual tax.

The vulnerable structures are between 30 and 350 years old and vary from one-storey to multi-storey buildings. Some modern multi-storey buildings were found vulnerable as well.

"Most buildings in Dhaka hardly have space between them. If a vulnerable structure col-

lapses, it could prompt a chain reaction with adjacent buildings at high risk. It could have catastrophic consequences," a DCC official said.

"Many structures are very old and seemingly vulnerable, but the quality of engineering, soil and geological conditions kept them strong," said the chief town

planner.

"We will submit the survey to the mayor soon and the secretary committee on vulnerable buildings will decide on the next step," Sirajul said.

Town planners said old buildings are the heritage of a nation which should be protected as the other countries do. "Dhaka's old

buildings are about 200 years old and could be part of our national heritage and tourism," said a senior architect in the Architects Institute of Bangladesh (AIB).

AIB will organise a presentation on old buildings on November 9 at the DCC, with a spotlight on the importance of old buildings and its aesthetic aspect.

Imported clothes flood markets ahead of Eid



Foreign clothes have caught the fancy of most customers in many city markets and shopping malls.

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Local clothes especially fancy attire for men and women are outclassed by imported clothes that have invaded the bustling markets in the city ahead of Eid.

Foreign clothing mostly imported from India, Pakistan and China have flooded most of the markets in which middle and upper income groups have access to.

Apart from a few well-known sari stores that sell local handloom saris, most of the sari shops have shelved a wide range of Indian and Pakistani saris -- chiffon, crepe, zardousi, kundan work or even expensive kanjibharam -- to allure the womenfolk.

Posh markets like Eastern Plaza, Rapa Plaza, Prince Plaza and Sunrise Plaza are catering to the customers' craze for imported saris and lehengas that cost up to Tk 1.25 lakh. Even the

Dhanmondi Hawkers' Market, crammed with people, offers plenty of Indian saris.

Local salwar kameez or dress materials can hardly be found in Chandni Chawk Market. "We imported 600 pieces of three-piece (salwar kameez and dupatta) for the Eid market," said Nadiuzzaman, a salesperson at 'Libas' in Chandni Chawk. His store houses unstitched Indian and Pakistani salwar kameez ranging from Tk 600 to Tk 10,000.

In some of the city markets, imported punjabi, kurta, sherwani, angakha are irresistible attraction for men. "These are quite expensive, but there are certain class of shoppers who opt for these," said a salesperson at a shop in Vishal Centre in Moghbazar.

Asked why they are not selling local clothes, most traders said they sell imported clothes as the customers demand it most. "Or else why would we import them

bearing all the hassles," said Nazmul Haque Prodhan of 'Look and Like' at Basundhara Shopping Mall.

Monirul Alam, a salesperson at Gausia Market said they import dresses just to sustain the business. "I have been in the business for last 12 years and we always import products from neighbouring countries. We import more before Eid to do a brisk business."

Most traders said they are compelled to sell imported clothes as customers always find it of better quality. "We can not blame them as most of our local products are really bad," said Hamiduzzaman, another salesperson.

He said local products that are of good quality are expensive and beyond the reach of middle-income group.

"I can get a decent looking salwar kameez of better texture at Tk 600 if I opt for the imported

one, whereas local products that suit my taste is available only in the fashion houses costing far more," Sharmin Mustareen, student of a private university said.

Some of the traders commented there should be a change in the taste of customers if local dresses are to be promoted. "They are simply glued to all those Hindi serials and trying to follow the style of those actresses ending up buying similar designed foreign clothes," said Khairul Anam, a trader in Eastern Plaza.

The dress shops are in a competition, not between the local and imported ones, but between varieties of foreign clothes. "Now markets at every neighbourhood offer imported dresses. Why would a customer turn to us enduring harassment like traffic jam and high conveyance," said Tabibul Islam, a cloth trader at Chandni Chawk.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.



"Terming Bangladesh as corrupt country is conspiracy against the Asian culture. Government or opposition, nobody can support it. It is a miracle that 14 crore people move within the area of 55,000 square miles. But there is no social conflict even after this dense population"

-- Saifur Rahman
Finance Minister

Said in parliament answering a question by opposition chief Whip Abdus Shahid on the report of Transparency International on corruption index, on November 2.
Source: Prothom Alo

"Nobody can kill Sheikh Hasina because of the Allah's mercy. Many grenades were hurled at her but all missed the target. She was, no doubt, saved by the grace of Allah"



-- Nazmul Huda

Communications Minister
Said on November 3 in a statement cancelling Awami League's demand of SSF to ensure security for the leader of the opposition and Awami League chief.
Source: Prothom Alo



"We do not want to see women ruling the country. We want a man. Is there a man apart from me?"

-- H M Ershad

Former President and Chairman, Jatiya Party
Said on November 4 at a public meeting in Kurigram.
Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"They (police) are tired due to fasting. They do not want to dishonour the spirit of Ramadan by beating up detainees"

-- Nizam

Detainee at Mirpur Police Station
Said on November 6 expressing his reaction when the police provided the detainees with iftar.
Source: Prothom Alo

"At that time I could not find another meritorious person like him"

-- Aftab Ahmed

Vice-Chancellor
National University
Told newsmen on November 5 reasoning a person he recruited with third division defying the recruitment rules.
Source: Prothom Alo

Mobile Mela creates a stir

MANISHA GANGAPADHYAY

The GrameenPhone sponsored mobile phone fair 'Mobile Mela' has created such unprecedented excitement among prospective customers that the organisers announced that special show prices would be available throughout the country, a week and half ahead of the forthcoming Eid-ul-Fitr.

Following Friday's mad rush, organisers decided to extend the four-day fair by a day, which would have seen it finishing on Sunday. But at the last moment they dropped that idea thinking that the

Mela's popular SIM card offer could be more accommodating for everyone if sold through retailers.

There was such frenzy for SIMs on Friday that booths had to be set up on the driveway of the Mela's venue, the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre. The pressure and commotion inside had threatened to get out of hand as visitors scurried for GrameenPhone SIMs at a mere Tk 350, the lowest price ever offered by any cell phone company in the country.

"I have bought several for my family members," said Jinia, who lives with her parents.

The convergence of customers was so massive on Friday that a huge decorative board at the entrance and some of the booths inside the fair came tumbling down by the onrush of crowds.

Many could be found in groups on the floor of the Centre busily filling out forms for SIMs. When asked why they had come to the fair, almost no one mentioned the Mitsubishi Lancer, which was among the many attractive prizes that could be won at the fair.

According to an executive at Windmill, the fair's event manager, and at least 40,000 people purchased entry tickets over the

four-day event. Another estimated 20,000 entered without tickets. Some vendors claim that a total of 28,000 SIM cards were sold on just on Friday.

"There were even some customers who required help in filling out the forms because they were unable to read or write. I met a chotpoti wallah who bought a SIM card for his phone to take home to his wife."

The gathering was a bit more controlled and relaxed on Saturday with access being limited and crowd control strengthened by reinforcement of security guards.

Although gates of the fair had

remained closed for most of Saturday, thousands waited outside for hours and patiently queued at the ticket counter and then again in line to get in.

"We have come not only to take advantage of the special offers but also to see what the fair is all about," said Suman Abdul Aziz, a student.

Another customer said he was already an Airtel subscriber but still found the GrameenPhone offer too good to resist.

"I want to take advantage of Grameen's minute offer. I will keep my Airtel phone at home as I do not have a TNT connection and use the Grameen line when I

go out because its per minute rates for calls to other GP phones are half the usual rate," said Salahuddin Ahmed.

Booths at the fair primarily included those of local mobile set and SIM card distributors and international mobile set manufacturers. The sale of SIM cards was so high that most companies, including Nokia, limited sales to SIM cards only.

Half of all proceeds from entry ticket sales Tk 20 per person will go to Grameen Shiksha, while the other half will go to the construction of the Ahsania Mission Cancer hospital to be built in Uttara.



The four-day mobile Mela organised by Grameen Phone attracted many, young and old, rich and poor alike.